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## A faceoff on three issues -- and a couple of attacks

The candidates for the state's top office gave details on leadership, roads and education. They also flung some shots across the podium.

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At the end of Wednesday's debate among the candidates for governor of Minnesota, GOP incumbent Tim Pawlenty tried to put his opponents in the same boat, labeling Attorney General Mike Hatch and government consultant Peter Hutchinson "the Hutchinson boys" because they have the "same approach" — advocating more spending for state programs.

Hutchinson, the Independence Party candidate, also tied his foes together, saying they had spurned 26 debate invitations, ducking so many appearances that "they may have to form their own chapter of Ducks Unlimited."

DFLer Hatch stayed solely focused on Pawlenty, accusing him of using "dodges and gimmicks" to balance budget shortfalls. "Former Gov. ]ame Carlson calls it Enron accounting," Hatch said.

Those lines of attack accounted for some of the fresher material in a fairly polite 90-minute debate.

The debate Wednesday night before an audience of about 500 at the University of Minnesota was the candidates' third joint appearance; four more are scheduled.

Pawlenty said he was convinced that Minnesota is poised to continue its "nation-leading" status on just about everything and described his leadership style as "positive" and marked by "emotional maturity."

Hutchinson said his most important conviction, "believing in and trusting citizens," comes from a lifetime of studying public policy and some 15 years helping state and local governments reform their operations.

Hatch emphasized his career as attorney general and a lawyer who has worked tirelessly to champion the causes of ordinary people. Referring to his combative style, Hatch said, "I may have made mistakes, but at least I'm not the passive-aggressive type who doesn't speak up."

### Roads and schools

Debate Minnesota, a nonprofit with a multipartisan board, sponsored the event at the Ted Mann Concert Hall on the U.S. West Bank. Moderator D.J. Tice, an editor at the StarTribune, asked the candidates what they would do to create a "comprehensive solution" to the problem of the state falling behind on road construction and where they would get the money.

Hutchinson said, "The roads in this state are not very good" and contended that drivers on Interstate Hwy. 94 play "dodge 'em" with potholes. He blamed Pawlenty for borrowing money for big road projects to the detriment of maintenance. He said he would support a gas tax increase of 10 cents in two phases of 5 cents each.

But Hatch made no such commitment, and both his opponents accused him of sidestepping the question. He alleged that rural areas have been neglected on transportation needs and said the state has to "build trust before we talk about the revenue side of the debate."

Pawlenty argued that he was shouldering too much blame for poor roads. "It's not fair to take a 20-year backlog and say Pawlenty should fix it all in 36 months," he said.

After the first round of answers, Hutchinson, a business consultant, said, "I gotta admit, that was not very enlightening. Mike Hatch wants to admit the problem but not tell us what he's going to do" and Tim Pawlenty spent his time saying Hatch didn't answer the question.

Hutchinson said the state is on a "path to disaster." He called the planned Cross-town upgrade the most bungled project in Minnesota history.

"If we believed in accountability, we'd fire the commissioner of transportation," he said, a direct hit at Lt. Gov. Carol Mohnau, who leads the agency.

Hatch said again he won't talk about revenue until he's certain rural areas will get a fair share and he first develops "the trust of the state." Pawlenty said he supports the constitutional amendment on the ballot in November to dedicate all proceeds from the 6.5 percent vehicle sales tax to roads and transit.

When the subject turned to education, the candidates were asked to describe how they would pursue reform, accountability and competition while controlling cost increases.

Hatch said the state needs a "top-notch education system" with affordable access to college and all-day kindergarten.

Pawlenty said 95 percent of the debate in education has been about how much money to give the system. "I will continue to force the question: How do we spend the money better?"

As schools superintendent, Hutchinson said, he learned an important lesson: It really matters what you say you expect. He said the system already has competition and choice, but needs to work for every child.

In his rebuttal, Hatch decried the federal No Child Left Behind Act because it forces teachers to do "a lot of teaching to the test." But Pawlenty said student achievement must be measured.

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