

Pawlenty aims to score on issues, put bickering on ice

By Grant Martin

With plenty of talk of bipartisan cooperation coming from both sides of the aisle, it's almost refreshing to hear new House Majority Leader Tim Pawlenty talk about playing pick-up hockey with House Minority Leader Tom Pugh.

"We haven't yet been there together this year," said Pawlenty (R-Eagan). "But when he does show up, I've got my elbow pads ready for him."

The two floor adversaries — praised by members for their fairness and mild-mannered leadership — play hockey Sunday nights with a group called the Golden Sea Horses. Pawlenty calls it "clutch-and-grab hockey." Checking is not allowed.

However, Pawlenty said that Pugh (DFL-South St. Paul) likes to dish it out on the ice.

"He's kind of a cheap little player," he said. "He's one of the shorter players out there, and he's not the youngest player anymore. He's not adverse to a few slashes and hacks and elbows and stuff like that."

Pugh shook off Pawlenty's criticism, claiming it stems from over-exuberance.

"We lived our glory days in high school," Pugh said. "He's still trying out for the varsity team."

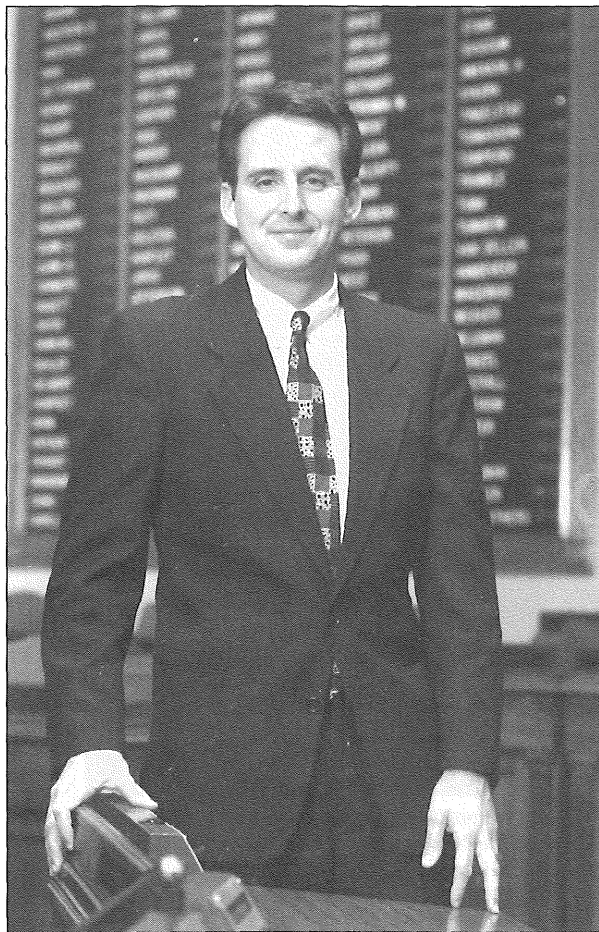
Pawlenty, the youngest in a family of five, grew up in a working class neighborhood in South St. Paul. His father worked as a truck driver, and his mother was a homemaker.

He said his background inspired him to work hard in school.

"I was a pretty serious student," he said. "My mom passed away when I was a sophomore in high school, and my dad lost his job not long after that. So I realized that I wasn't going to get a lot of financial help because I wasn't from a wealthy family. I was going to have to do it on my own. So I buckled down pretty hard."

Pawlenty attended the University of Minnesota as both an undergraduate and a law student, working several different jobs to pay for school. He said those experiences helped shape his political philosophy.

"I was working my tail off working part-time jobs, actually almost approaching full-time jobs, while going to college full time," he said. "I started to understand that there are circumstances in life where people need some help. But they also need to be accountable and



House Majority Leader Tim Pawlenty hopes to build success on the "bread and butter" issues on which he believes most people support the Republican positions.

responsible and exercise initiative on their own."

Pawlenty lives in Eagan with his wife and two children. When he's not serving in the Legislature or playing hockey, he practices law with a downtown Minneapolis firm, focusing on personnel and employment issues.

His political career began in collegé with an internship for former U. S. Senator Dave Durenberger. Later, he became active in local government, serving as chair of Eagan's planning commission and on the Eagan City Council. He was first elected to the House in 1992.

Pawlenty has been outspoken on the direction of the Republican Party. He said that polls show that while people agree with the party on issues such as taxes, education, crime, and government reform, the party has not been entirely successful courting voters.

"As Republicans we have the right product, the right approach, on these bread and butter issues," he said. "But we have a mediocre track record in terms of how people respond to us

and if they allow us to win elections in Minnesota."

Pawlenty said that Republicans must do a better job communicating their priorities to the voters, especially groups that don't traditionally vote Republican.

"We need to make sure that we have messengers and a tone and a sense of priorities that reflects where most people are at," he said.

Inspired by the need for new leadership, Pawlenty threw his hat into the ring for governor in 1998. He dropped out of the race when St. Paul Mayor Norm Coleman entered. He said he was satisfied that Coleman offered the leadership he was looking for.

When the Republicans won control of the House in November of last year, Pawlenty's peers elected him majority leader.

Pawlenty said he'll use his leadership post to enact the Republican agenda on the "bread and butter" issues. It will pay off, he said.

"If we can at the end of session say, 'We cut your taxes substantially and permanently, we cut your class sizes, we adequately funded schools, we cracked down on crime, and we cleaned up government,' that's a winning message," he said. "It's one that people in Minnesota respond to. We will be back in power, and we will retain control in 2000."

Pawlenty said that he also hopes to use his role as majority leader to keep the floor debate focused on the issues.

"My hope is that — particularly with the new era of Jesse in Minnesota — we can dial down the bickering, the sniping, the partisanship, and demonstrate to the people in Minnesota that while we have our differences — and we do have differences and they're legitimate differences — we can debate those differences in a constructive manner," he said.

However, that attitude doesn't carry over to the ice.

When asked if he's ever seen anyone take Pugh to task while playing hockey, Pawlenty said he hasn't yet.

"But I might," he said laughing.

Pugh sent the puck right back.

"If you see him after Sunday with bandages, that means I caught up with him," he said.

