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Thank you, Leah, for those kind words. To Steve Morse, your words of encouragement mean so much to me. And Keaven, your work for our company is so incredible; and to the employees who took time off from work to be here on this occasion – thank you all. I can't tell you how good it is to be among so many of my friends here this morning. For several weeks now, I have been crisscrossing the state, seeking out and listening to your thoughts, weighing my options. Others have offered advice through their emails and notes. Again, thank you all. As you can imagine, this has been a time of deep reflection and prayer as I considered this important challenge. I considered this challenge because of my sense of duty and strong commitment to a better Minnesota which comes from a wide array of life's experiences, including a wonderful childhood with exceptional parents.

From an early age, I understood my good fortune to have caring parents and a nurturing community; and I knew I had a duty to give back to my community.

I was also blessed to grow up with an older sister – Judy – who was talented and brilliant in so many ways; recognized as a child prodigy. At a very early age I noticed that Judy’s talents drew important visitors to our home, and a sense of sibling rivalry caused me to exclaim, “Why don’t they ever come to see me?!” Well, my 13 years spent in Sunday School stood me in good stead because when I studied Jesus’ Parable of the Talents, I realized that while Judy had 10 talents, I had one. Our respective jobs, then, were to double what we had been blessed with. So, the Parable of the Talents brought me peace at a tender age, and freed from the burden of competition I stopped tormenting my sister. Judy, my only sibling, has always been there for me. Well, except for the fact she’s living in Turkey, so it isn’t like I can just drop by.

Growing up, our family had all of the essentials – a comfortable home, three daily meals together as a family, good medical care. Beyond that, and so importantly, we grew up in a family that had the right kind of values.

My parents were staunch Republicans. As we all know, it was different then. In those days, thankfully, Republicans and Democrats shared a value system seeking the common good, sharing a solemn duty to future generations. We can have that civic sense again, I truly believe this. If I didn’t believe we could come together, I wouldn’t be standing here now.

My parents and the Little Falls community gave me a strong foundation. I looked forward to Sundays at Riverside Methodist Church, sitting next to Carol Larson, singing alto in the choir. Local leaders of the day, Senator Gordon Rosenmeier and Spencer Nelson, would come to meet with Daddy. I would get hustled out of the living room, but it was easy enough to listen from the top of the stairs. I recall how they talked about their plans for the good of our community, not personal pursuits. The big issues were keeping St. Gabriel's Hospital open and expanding it, and fostering local economic development. Back then, I had the odd idea that state senators always got what they wanted. (I've since learned it just doesn't work that way.) As for my father, he was a supervisor who supported his employees – helping them overcome struggles with alcoholism or mental health.

A duty to serve was laid out for me right from the start, but when Governor Orville Freeman came to our high school when I was a junior, his words inspired me and I saw the path I should take. Orville Freeman lost his bid for a fourth term in 1960, but soon he would put his values to work addressing hunger issues and helping farmers as our U.S. Secretary of Agriculture. More than ever after his speech I knew there was a way to return the good fortune I had experienced in my childhood.

In school I joined the Debate Club. My father often engaged me in the great public policy conversations of the day – he believed so strongly in human potential, but we differed on science’s ability to contain the hazards of nuclear waste. Daddy was sure it would have happened long before now, but unfortunately we’re still working on that one. My Republican father instilled in me a strong sense of fiscal responsibility. Most young people today could assume that Republican leaders were always fiscally irresponsible. But I learned from my father that government should only borrow for those things that can generate the necessary revenue to pay back the investment. Otherwise government must collect taxes to pay for society’s other needs: a good education, keeping communities safe, and essential health care.

My husband Gene’s first job opportunities after college took us away from the state. We moved back to Minnesota in 1969 because we knew that our state was the best place to raise a family. Originally, we lived in the Wedge neighborhood of Minneapolis. In fact, we bought a house from a realtor named Phoebe Franken. Another realtor had tried to discourage us by saying the neighborhood would not be a good place to raise a family. We bought that house, got active locally and helped set up a neighborhood association that really did make a difference. And I kept in touch with Phoebe over the years; we always talked about how our children were doing. Of course her son became quite well known as the comedian and writer Al Franken, but Phoebe always wished he had a real career to fall back on – she had dentistry in mind.

We've faced many family struggles. The move up to Kerrick came because we wanted to farm, and raise our children here -- even though we had no experience dealing with 75 cows, baling hay, and a house with rotting windows and a tar-paper door. Gene was away on business much of the time, and the kids and I worked our farm caring for the livestock and putting up the hay. Kerrick had its share of skeptics back then after we arrived, and I remember Marvin Shank driving up to the barn wondering about this woman trying to care for a herd of beef cattle.

Well, truth be told, those cows were looking better than when he had last seen them, Marvin told me. Like so much in life, I couldn't have done this on my own. I want to thank my dear friend and neighbor Dale Kraft for showing me the ropes -- especially when it comes to delivering calves. He showed me how you find the hooves if they don't come out along with the nose. You have to stick your arm in there, all the way to your armpit, and pull out those hooves. Thanks to Dale, we never lost a calf from our 75-head beef operation. Neighbors helping neighbors can make a big difference in people's lives.

Well, with the telling of all these stories I don't want you to begin wondering why we asked all of you to come here today. These life experiences have prepared me for another big challenge because our state is facing big challenges. It will take real leadership and a clear vision to start moving our state forward again.

We all know Minnesota can do better. And I feel strongly that it is my duty to work with all the citizens of this state to make Minnesota more competitive again. So, today... I am asking for your support... as I announce my campaign... for Governor of Minnesota!

My vision is for a Minnesota where every family has a living wage job... in a safe community... with excellent education -- not only in our K-12 schools -- but early childhood and affordable post-secondary options as well... and quality, affordable health care for all.

I will bring my public policy experience to the Governor's Office, and the proven ability to get the job done through tough negotiations and compromise. I'm proud of my strong, progressive voting record. I have a duty to stand up for those ideals, and govern this state with vision and optimism.

We have a Governor now who would rather play politics; playing word games with tax increases instead of an honest discussion. Where are his ideals? Where is his vision? Without ideals and vision, very little of value can be accomplished. It's not one bit surprising to find the Pawlenty administration has such a scant record of accomplishment on the weighty issues of the day.

In fact, the Pawlenty record has accomplished nothing more than lowering expectations. Innovations in our schools have been scrapped, replaced by larger class sizes and unreasonable participation fees.

Our nationally admired state partnership with local government is dissolving, replaced by crumbling streets and sky-high property taxes. Our Governor's idea of shared sacrifice is a pledge to cut taxes for his wealthiest friends while the rest of us are paying higher taxes and so-called fees.

Worst of all is the harsh tone that has been set by our state and federal governments. We cannot reach our lofty goals by continually relying on brinksmanship. Touting plans at a news conference but then failing to follow through, or closely tying policies to the failing Bush administration in Washington damages the Minnesota heritage established by a legacy of courageous governors.

Governor Elmer L. Andersen invested in Minnesota's people and infrastructure. Governor Wendell Anderson persevered, and brought fairness to school funding and the tax system with the Minnesota Miracle. Governor Arne Carlson responsibly raised the top income tax rate during budget deficit times and then worked with us to find consensus and enact MinnesotaCare. Sadly, we have a record of failure from the Pawlenty years which has proven former Governor Elmer L. Andersen correct when he said he couldn't endorse Tim Pawlenty and his agenda.

We accomplished some great things in the past. As a member of the first Health Care Access Commission in 1989 and then as co-author of MinnesotaCare, which passed in 1992, we made great strides forward and brought a vision for universal health care by the late 1990s. We cannot lose sight of that vision, but the health care gap keeps widening in the Pawlenty years. We brought all the players together to accomplish MinnesotaCare – businesses big and small, health care providers and consumers. It was an open process...

When the Regional Treatment Center services at Moose Lake were moved into the community, we put a plan together that not only kept the workforce in the area, but added jobs. We crafted new direction for the mentally ill and the developmentally disabled – a win-win solution – by working together in an open process...

Katie Poirer's tragic death also left a scar in our community. We set out to make all our communities safer, and we accomplished that goal. Once again, all the interested parties were invited to the table -- Republicans and Democrats, business owners, civic leaders, law enforcement – and we got much of the job done. As a legislator with 15 years of experience, I know how to bring people together to reach a solution.

Many of our biggest challenges remain unsolved. For many years now, state leadership has not lived up to Minnesota's high standards. In the Pawlenty years, more kids are growing up in poverty, thousands of them have lost quality child care while their mothers work, the number of families lacking health care has grown, and the door is closing on students who seek higher education opportunities. We are falling short on our goals for a 21st century competitive economy in Minnesota. We have a workforce that is less prepared to compete in the 21st century. To compete globally, we must make smarter investments in a failing infrastructure, encourage technological innovation and open up higher education opportunities. As our State Economist Tom Stinson has often explained, our continued prosperity depends on smart investments that will pay off in a better quality of life for our citizens. We can not rely on our location or bountiful natural resources to pull us through. Otherwise, Stinson says, we risk making Minnesota a cold fly-over state. More and more Minnesotans are realizing our state is losing its competitive edge.

National statistics bare this out. Our growth in K-12 Education investment ranks in the **bottom five** nationally over the five years most recently measured; and as more recent data becomes available during the Pawlenty years, our commitment and rank will not improve (*Rockefeller Institute analysis, 1997-2002 Census data*). Minnesota ranks in the bottom half nationally in far too many key investment measures: our total education rank is 29th; our police protection ranks 36th and fire protection is 47th. For our students, that means far too many schools have 34 kids in their 3rd Grade classrooms. As Governor, I will bring Minnesota back to a high rank in education investments, not 46th in the nation. And far too many cities have cut their police and firefighters all while local property taxes climb. The good news is that we also rank very low in expenditures for corrections and health and hospitals – but these costs are growing at an unusually fast pace (all data directly from most-recent Census rankings). These costs crowd out our ability to pay for the good things that create a competitive economy.

We know advanced technology creates good-paying jobs no matter where the expertise exists. That's why I asked you to come here to Bruno where our family firm, Nemadji Research Corporation, develops specialized software. We take great pride in our work here. My roles as a business owner include benefit design, business strategy, facility design, and some human resources activity. During the legislative interim my work includes marketing and customer relations.

We have good, living wage jobs strengthening our community. We make sure on-site child care is available so that our little ones get a good start in life -- and I always hope having the children here reduces stress on their parents. Our workers receive full employer-paid health care coverage. I know the struggles facing so many employers due to skyrocketing health care costs. For so many small businesses around this state, offering good health care to workers is an impossible task because the costs are rising so fast and so far the state has failed to respond to the problem.

In fact, we have gone in the exact opposite direction in our state policies, and so many families, businesses and entire communities are suffering greatly for it. We hear a lot of complaining about so called "welfare health care" when our goal should be a healthy, productive Minnesota. The cynical view from the Governor's Office must change.

Our small businesses are looking for state leadership as the affordability of health care coverage keeps slipping away. We all recognize the problem, but no one seems willing to compromise on their hard-line proposals calling for more market involvement versus greater reliance on MinnesotaCare with some federal backing. As Governor, I will put in place a solution that helps our business community succeed and treats our citizens fairly. Let's put a Governor in office who can achieve universal health care!

I know all the parties at the table, and work well with all of them. I have experienced the way we put together all the complex pieces so we can achieve efficient and effective quality health care that's affordable. That's what our businesses need for a competitive Minnesota economy, and that's what people expect.

For the sake of our economy, our businesses rely on the essentials government provides -- smart health care policy, adequate investment in education, good roads, transit, and safe communities.

What about taxes and our business climate? Let's tackle that one straight on. Our recent tax policies have been unfair to so many businesses and homeowners in this state. Changes we made in 2001 have most-weakened the communities that encourage business development within their borders. Many of our cities have already sacrificed basic public safety and the ability to repair infrastructure. In my administration, we will halt the tax shifts that have hit the hardest on small businesses and owners of modest homes. In Sandstone, our business took a huge tax property tax hit, and so did the other small businesses in that community. And now we have the so-called JOB-Zee Program that leaves behind whole regions of Minnesota and pits business against business. Pawlenty's Tax-Free Zones are a failure. They're only free of jobs.

A tax system that picks the winners and losers so unfairly will ultimately penalize the entire state and damage our state's competitiveness. I'm for fair taxes, not the Pawlenty system where a tax is a fee and sky-rocketing property tax increases on businesses and homes are called "no new taxes."

Our business community is suffering in another way in this state, and throughout this nation. It doesn't get reported much in the news, but it is a tremendous burden on a great many businesses and entire communities – not to mention extreme family stress.

We are so proud of our Weekend Warriors, those members of the National Guard who come home to their families and their jobs during the week. Now they are gone for months and even years. Our state and nation are weaker for it. Our Minnesota State National Guard units have been deployed repeatedly on a poorly defined mission with no end in sight. We all know that our Minnesota Guard was always intended primarily for in-state activities, but that is no longer the case. In my administration, we will work to bring our state Guard home to their families and communities where they belong. It is this nation's duty to honor those who put their lives on the line in service to our country, but we know the Bush Administration has fallen short in meeting its obligations. As Governor, I assure you our state will step up to the plate.

You probably have noticed I am talking a lot about business and a competitive economy for this state. Well, it's about time Progressives start talking business climate issues. We really own this issue when you look closely at the extreme, failed policies embraced by this White House and our own Governor of Minnesota. These have been the politics of divide and conquer, bullying and greed. My administration will answer with a clear vision for making our state better by returning to our core Minnesota values.

It will take a lot of energy to win back this office and return to those core values. It will take a strong grassroots campaign to win this office. And it will require a sharp contrast between the candidates to help voters recognize that Minnesotans simply will not accept more of the same bankrupt policies coming out of Washington and Saint Paul. Not only will the voters of this great state see clearly that Tim Pawlenty has us headed in the wrong direction, but they will see a clear, viable alternative; a vision that calls for smarter investments in Minnesota resulting in a vibrant state economy.

This is an appeal not only to Democrats. My campaign will call on the vast majority of Minnesotans to restore these great values. This campaign for Governor will reach out to Independents who understand that budget gimmicks and phony pledges will never put our financial house in order.

This campaign will reach out to the Greens who believe in my strong record and a vision for sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, conservation, and protecting our state's cherished resources. And finally, this campaign will even reach out to the many fair-minded Republicans in this state who believe in our personal freedoms and have rejected the right-wing politics of intolerance and greed. As Governor, my vision and optimism will bring Minnesotans together.

Why am I prepared, and how will I govern?

The same way our family has lived, the same way we run our business, and the same way I've worked in government: With respect for every individual, heading down the right path, delivering innovative solutions, working hard every day with a sense of duty to make Minnesota great once again.

I bring energy and enthusiasm to this race for Governor, delivering a sharp contrast in policy and style. After winning this race, we will listen... we will lead... and we will act in the best interests of all Minnesotans.

Thank you so much for coming today, and joining me in this great effort!

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