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Introducing Gov. Tim Pawlenty

His State of the State speech will aim to familiarize people with his policies and address the budget.

By Patricia Lopez
Star Tribune Staff Writer

When Gov. Tim Pawlenty delivers his first State of the State address today, he'll be looking at a situation not unlike the one that confronted his predecessor a year ago: a faltering economy, a mushrooming deficit and the distinct prospect of making emergency cuts to balance the budget.

In what proved to be a rather stern address last year, Gov. Jesse Ventura warned that unless legislators took action, he

would begin cutting the budget to avoid a deficit.

Today, Pawlenty will stand before legislators in the House chamber and offer a State of the State that he has said will "define the times we live in" and serve to introduce him and his policies to thousands of Minnesotans.

But his reception by former colleagues may be less than warm, coming as it does against the backdrop of a warning issued by Pawlenty to legislators on Wednesday: They have until tonight to agree on a 2003 budget-balancing package.

Otherwise, he has said, they face emergency gubernatorial budget cuts in which they will have no say.

Charlie Weaver, Pawlenty's chief of staff, said Pawlenty nevertheless will keep his message "upbeat." The address, he said, will lay out the primary

challenge the state faces and the first test of Pawlenty's governorship, namely, how to erase a \$4.56 billion projected deficit without raising taxes.

"He's going to lay out the problem and talk about his values and goals over four years, but it's going to be positive," Weaver said.

"A lot of Minnesotans still don't know who he is or what he believes in or what his principles are," Weaver said. "This will be an introduction to Minnesotans of who this governor is and what he hopes to accomplish."

The darker message will come next week, when Pawlenty releases his detailed budget recommendations for the next two-year budget period, during which the bulk of the deficit is projected.

Pawlenty has minced no words so far in describing Min-

nesota's budget crisis, calling it "gargantuan" and the "Mount Everest" of deficits. Eliminating that deficit without tax increases, which he has pledged to do, is expected to result in huge cuts to state programs, and he has warned that little will be spared.

But he has also said repeatedly that he sees the budget problems as an opportunity to remake government, in some cases dramatically. In recent weeks he has announced his intention to scrap the state high school graduation standard known as the Profile of Learning, to tighten welfare and to redo the way human services are delivered.

Today's address, Weaver said, will center on those policy proposals, in addition to some new initiatives.

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Governor will honor survivor of Bataan

By Peg Meier
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A few weeks ago, Alf Larson was busily autographing copies of the new book about his World War II ordeal, including surviving the Bataan Death March. He looked up and saw Gov. Tim Pawlenty, ready for a handshake and a chat.

The governor must have liked what he heard. He invited Larson, 84, of Crystal, to attend today's State of the State address, in which he will acknowledge Larson's painful experiences of 61 years ago.

Larson said he's pleased and excited about the "doings" at the Capitol, but he has one reservation: "Just so he doesn't call me a hero. I'm not a hero. I

was just doing my job."

The heroes, Larson always says, are the thousands who didn't get to come home.

Army Air Forces Staff Sgt. Alf Larson was one of 7,500 American servicemen captured by the Japanese in the Philippine Islands in April 1942. The men were forced to trudge along on a weeklong hike toward a concentration camp that was being built for them. More than 3,000 fell prey to the hot sun, unquenchable thirst and hunger, jungle fevers and Japanese bayonets and rifles. Some were buried alive. For those who lived, it was the beginning of a nearly four-year struggle to survive Japanese captivity.



Alf Larson

For decades after he got back to Minnesota, Larson didn't talk about the war, not even to his wife. Eventually his generation-younger friend, Rick Peterson, wheedled the story out of him. Now it's a book, "Footprints in Courage:

A Bataan Death March Survivor's Story" by Kristin Gilpatrick, with research by Peterson (Badger Books, \$15).

Larson said he had "a nice chit-chat" with the governor and his wife during the book-signing at the St. Louis Park Recreation Center on Jan. 19.

To Larson, the mention of Bataan in the governor's speech will help educate people about the war. "People

don't even know about the Bataan Death March. Not just young people. Those baby boomers, too."

He said he and the governor agreed on something: "Freedom is not free. We have to pay a price for freedom."

So today, Larson will put on a nice shirt and sweater and help his wife, Jane, maneuver her wheelchair. They'll take their seats next to the governor's wife and hear what he has to say about the Bataan Death March.

"I never thought it would come to this," Larson said. "But I never thought it would be a book, either."

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