

**WASHINGTON**  
**GOP governor sends anti-tax message**

A possible White House contender in 2012 said in the GOP's Saturday address President Barack Obama and the Democrats who run Congress should lower taxes and hold down spending.

"Let hardworking American families keep more of what they earn by cutting taxes and reining in spending," said Gov. Tim Pawlenty, R-Minn. "It's just common sense."

He said Democratic president's budget will require higher taxes and unfairly loads debt onto future generations. Pawlenty also said Obama has talked about tax relief, but his budget suggests he'll be raising taxes.

"The budget that Congress is considering doesn't provide that tax relief," Pawlenty said.

**VATICAN CITY**  
**Pope marks Easter at Vatican basilica**

Pope Benedict XVI carried a tall, lit candle symbolizing Christian hope into a dramatically darkened St. Peter's Basilica packed with faithful Saturday night in the traditional start of the Vatican's vigil Mass on the eve of Easter.

A chant of "Lumen Christi" (Latin for "Light of Christ") echoed in the cavernous basilica. "The gravitational pull of love is stronger than that of hatred; the force of gravity of life is stronger than that of death," Benedict said in his homily, reflecting on the mystery of Christian belief in the resurrection.

A motif of life overcoming difficult trials figured in Benedict's Good Friday homily, as he sought to encourage survivors of Italy's devastating quake to cling to hope and take solace in Easter's joy. The temblor in the central Apennine mountain region of Abruzzo claimed at least 293 lives and left 40,000 people homeless.

From wire reports

**DRYWALL**  
 FROM PAGE A1

drywall may have been used in more than 100,000 homes, according to some estimates, including houses rebuilt after Hurricane Katrina.

"This is a traumatic problem of extraordinary proportions," said U.S. Rep. Robert Wexler, a Florida Democrat who introduced a bill in the House calling for a temporary ban on the Chinese-made imports until more is known about their chemical makeup. Similar legislation has been proposed in the Senate.

The drywall apparently causes a chemical reaction that gives off a rotten-egg stench, which grows worse with heat and humidity.

Researchers do not know yet what causes the reaction, but possible culprits include fumigants sprayed on the drywall and material inside it. The Chinese drywall is also made with a coal byproduct called fly ash that is less refined than the form used by U.S. drywall makers.

Dozens of homeowners in the Southeast have sued builders, suppliers and manufacturers, claiming the very walls around them are emitting smelly sulfur compounds that are poisoning their families and rendering their homes uninhabitable.

"It's like your hopes and dreams are just gone," said Mary Ann Schultheis, who has suffered burning eyes, sinus headaches, and a general heaviness in her chest since moving into her brand-new, 4,000-square foot house in this tidy South Florida suburb a few years ago.

She has few options. Her builder is in bankruptcy, the government is not helping and her lender will not give her a break.

"I'm just going to cry," she said. "We don't know what we're going

to do."

Builders have filed their own lawsuits against suppliers and manufacturers, claiming they unknowingly used the bad building materials.

The Consumer Product Safety Commission is investigating, as are health departments in Virginia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Florida and Washington state.

Companies that produced some of the wallboard said they are looking into the complaints, but downplayed the possibility of health risks.

"What we're trying to do is get to the bottom of what is precisely going on," said Ken Haldin, a spokesman for Knauf Plasterboard Tianjin, a Chinese company named in many of the lawsuits.

The Chinese ministries of commerce, construction and industry and the Administration of Quality Supervision Inspection and Quarantine did not respond to repeated requests for comment. Chinese news reports have said AQSIQ, which enforces product quality standards, was investigating the complaints but people in the agency's press office said they could not confirm that.

Meanwhile, governors in Louisiana and Florida are asking for federal assistance, and experts say the problem is only now beginning to surface.

"Based on the amount of material that came in, it's possible that just in one year, 100,000 residences could be involved," said Michael Foreman, who owns a construction consulting firm. The company has performed tests on some 200 homes in the Sarasota area and has been tracking shipments of the drywall.

Federal authorities say they are investigating just how much of the wallboard was imported. Shipping records analyzed by the AP show that more than 540 million pounds of plasterboard — which includes

both drywall and ceiling tile panels — was imported from China between 2004 and 2008, although it's unclear whether all of that material was problematic or only certain batches.

Most of it came into the country in 2006, following a series of Gulf Coast hurricanes and a domestic shortage brought on by the national housing boom.

The Chinese board was also cheaper. One homeowner told AP he saved \$1,000 by building his house with it instead of a domestic product.

In 2006, enough wallboard was imported from China to build some 34,000 homes of roughly 2,000 square feet each, according to AP's analysis of the shipping records and estimates supplied by the nationwide drywall supplier United States Gypsum.

Experts and advocates say many homes may have been built with a mixture of Chinese and domestic drywall, potentially raising the number of affected homes much higher.

So far, the problem appears to be concentrated in the Southeast, which blossomed with new construction during the housing boom and where the damp climate appears to cause the gypsum in the building material to degrade more quickly. In Florida alone, more than 35,000 homes may contain the product, experts said.

In Louisiana, the state health department has received complaints from at least 350 people in just a few weeks. Many of the affected homeowners rebuilt after Hurricane Katrina only to face the prospect of tearing down their houses and rebuilding again.

In another cruel twist, some of the very communities that have been hit hardest by the collapse of the housing market and skyrocketing foreclosure rates are now at the epicenter of the drywall problem.

**MURFREESBORO, Tenn.**  
**Governor tours storm-ravaged area**

Tennessee Gov. Phil Bredesen viewed damage in areas hit by severe storms that spawned tornadoes across the Southeast, killed three and injured dozens.

"My thoughts and prayers are with them. It's very sad," Bredesen said following a helicopter tour.

An initial report of the damage said about 100 homes were destroyed and another 150 significantly damaged, Smith said.

"I am astonished," Bredesen said. "Where it hit is very very intense."

Clyde Atkinson, spokesman for the Murfreesboro Police Department, said there were three to five tornado touchdowns, mostly in the northern and western parts of the city of about 100,000.

Reports of destruction were widespread across the region, with funnel clouds spotted in Kentucky and Alabama and devastating winds, huge hail and heavy rain reported in several states.

**MIDWEST CITY, Okla.**  
**Fire leaves many victims homeless**

Residents of small towns in Oklahoma and Texas have found themselves homeless, in some cases returning to find whole communities have been charred by deadly, wind-driven wildfires.

Three people died Thursday and well over 100 homes were destroyed by the fires — at least one of them suspected of being intentionally set — in western and central Oklahoma and in Texas.

Paul Cunningham, the Sheriff of Montague County in North Texas, said one couple died when fire overtook their home and another woman died after a fire spread through an unincorporated part of the county.

"We've lost communities, pretty much," Cunningham said. "Stoneburg is pretty much gone."

Parts of Stoneburg still smoldered Saturday, including railroad ties under the tracks that bisect the town. The general store was in ruins. A few miles away, the remains of about a half-dozen head of cattle were visible in a charred pasture.

From wire reports

**TAXES**  
 FROM PAGE A1

residential taxes last January on his 8-acre property, named "Tranquility," at 382 S. Beach Road.

Tiger Wood's 12-acre site on the 400 block of South Beach Road still is under construction, but his future property taxes could beat out Norman's bill in the future.

County records show Sand Turtle LLC, the entity registered as the owner of the Woods property, paid a \$70,744 tax bill in November. Woods is building a 10,000-square-foot, two-story home with an elevator, guest house, guardhouse and boat-house. The property stretches from the Intracoastal Waterway to the Atlantic Ocean.

Taxes seem a little more reasonable in Indian River County. Author and journalist Carl Hiaasen and his wife, Fenia, paid Vero Beach their \$16,988 property tax bill Nov. 5.

"I think these people, the celebrities, we do have here are very quiet about it," said Janet Vizzo, a manager at the Martin County Tax Collector's Office. "It's not very well known."

Mark David, author of realexplorer.blogspot.com, which tracks celebrity property purchases, said it's not unusual that stars buy homes in suburban areas like the Treasure Coast away from the glare of the paparazzi.

"Celebrities are regular people who want to have regular lives and moving outside hotbed areas like Los Angeles or Miami allows them live normally, go to the market normally," David said.

"In suburbia, they can at least try to provide a more normal life for their family."

Burt Reynolds paid \$48,730 in property taxes on Dec. 3. His Mediterranean-style, 12,500-square-foot, waterfront home in Hobe Sound is listed for \$8.9 million with Rob Kairalla with JIC Realty Inc.

County records show Grammy Award-winning singer Gloria Estefan and her husband, producer Emilio Estefan Jr., paid \$15,795 in property taxes for a large oceanfront estate in the north barrier island in November.

Indian River County also has its fair share of retired business executives. In 2006, Kiplinger's Personal Finance ranked Vero Beach fourth in the nation among cities with the highest concentration of the wealthiest households.

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