

## Open forum

### Great idea for officials

The caricature that appeared in the Jan. 16 Tribune cartoon exemplifies what I've said for many years, this country is becoming dumber by degrees, *college degrees*. This caricature also explains why we need good leaders. Complete freedom is great, wonderful! However, there are many who are unable to discern where their freedom ends and yours begins.

I think the last caption should read, "And all for Trump's wanting to spend your Social Security money on you and not give it to the illegal immigrants." The legal immigration system worked great for many years; why abandon it now?

Because of politicians, the U.S. has no Coast Guard. I am waiting for one of our *bright* elected officials to point out to the public that our coast line is unguarded and susceptible to attack and then blame President Trump. If we can leave our coast unguarded, why can't we leave our Mexican border unguarded? Our Canadian border is unguarded, well, almost. I have never had a problem going into or leaving Canada. I have entered and left Mexico, in the past, 1985 to 2005, with no problems. That was all before Obummer was having an adulterous affair with the citizens of the U.S.

Citizens of this great country, wake up and stop believing everything you are told



One panel of the Jan. 16 cartoon.

to believe. I hate to break the bad news to you and tell you that there are those out there who are willing to lie, not tell the whole truth, to you in exchange for *filthy lucre*.

I have a great idea that needs to be told to our elected officials. Build a wall along the coastline, tear down the Mexican wall, get rid of the Coast Guard and the Border Patrol. The U.S. could save money and let everything come into the U.S. through Mexico, as it does now, only legally.

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## Love where you live

There have been moments throughout my life when opportunities arose to move to a different part of the state of Minnesota, or even a different part of the country. Anyone who knows me, knows that I love living in southern Minnesota and that there are many reasons why I choose to stay here. As the president of Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF), I can't imagine a better way to serve this region, which has always been my home.

In 1862 my great-great grandfather homesteaded in rural Freeborn County northwest of Albert Lea on the shore of Penny Lake. Our family lived and farmed in that same area for the following three generations. My generation and my children's generation are the fifth and sixth to call rural southern Minnesota home.

As a young man I aspired to serve this region and was fortunate to do so for six years in the state Senate and 12 years in Washington. Upon leaving Congress I was determined to make a future for me and my family in rural Minnesota close to my home roots. The presidency at SMIF culminates my commitment to and passion for southern Minnesota, and I am so fortunate that the 20-county region served by SMIF is much the same as the region I served while in Congress.

As I travel throughout the area I have the pleasure of visiting with many partners and hearing their hopes and dreams for their communities. People live here because of family, work, good schools, open spaces and beautiful landscape. They stay here because there is a common vision for a future that embraces change, diversity and innovation.

This commitment to a bright future for our children, business owners, small towns, and new immigrants directly connects to the work that we do at SMIF in early childhood, economic development and community vitality. Over the past 32 years SMIF has listened to the needs of this region and aligned our resources with those needs, investing more than \$111

### Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation

By Tim Penny



million back into southern Minnesota. In each county there are loan clients, grant recipients, or program participants that we have had the honor of supporting throughout the years.

There are so many reasons why people love living here, and at SMIF we are infusing that theme into the work we do over the next few years as we embark on a \$3.5 million "Love Where You Live" endowment campaign to strengthen our region's future. We believe this theme gets at the root of everything we do at SMIF. This campaign will allow us to support more entrepreneurs, prepare more children for their future, and increase financial investments in our communities, putting SMIF in a position to continue making this region a place people want to call home.

I can't believe how lucky I am to have served this region for so much of my life. I love where I live because of the people. You are what make southern Minnesota special.

You can find more about our new campaign at [smifoundation.org/lovewhereyoulive](http://smifoundation.org/lovewhereyoulive).

As always, I welcome your comments and questions. You can reach me at [timp@smifoundation.org](mailto:timp@smifoundation.org) or 507-455-3215.

*Tim Penny is the president and CEO of Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation. He represented Minnesota's First Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1982 to 1994. Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF), a donor-supported foundation, invests for economic growth in the 20 counties of south central and southeastern Minnesota.*



## Regulations aren't killing newspapers, but lack of curiosity could harm them

A banker asked me recently if my industry had to deal with a lot of government regulations. He noted that even small banks have frequent visits by regulators and several examiners report to work each day in offices located within some of the larger banks.

That close watch hasn't stopped some bankers from thinking they can beat the examiners as our newspapers have had stories over the years about embezzlement at local banks.

What surprised him most, though, was my answer that newspapers have no regulations. Newspapers, protected by the First Amendment, pretty much have free reign. They are under the same labor laws as any business and potential libel is a concern, but there are no government examiners inspecting our operations.

Government also doesn't get involved in our operations by requiring certifications or other types of licensing for journalists. Individual newspaper operations set their own standards and draw people from a wide variety of backgrounds, which puts a big hole in the conspiracy theorists who claim America's media operates as one, unified front out to take down one side of the political spectrum or the other.

Even with all that freedom, there are a lot of similarities between media. I always thought it was because we share common principles and learn from what has proven successful in our field.

I was surprised, though, when a speaker at one of the educational sessions during last week's Minnesota Newspaper Association attributed the similarities to a copycat syndrome that has taken hold because we don't have a clue what works. The speaker, who has consulted with all sizes of newspapers in many countries, said we're all making it up as we go along.

He cited some evidence, including an

### Reflections from my Notebook

By David Phillips  
Bluff Country Newspaper Group



example of most daily newspapers copying the large, colorful, graphic weather map introduced by USA Today more than a decade ago. It works in some markets, but he showed the map in a desert region publication where every high temperature for each city that day was the same — 100 degrees. Those residents won't care about that information because they'll be sitting inside in air conditioning, he quipped.

As someone who has been in this business quite a while, I would like to think I'm doing more than making it up as I go along, but that's probably closer to the truth than any illusions that I'm some kind of expert.

However, I wouldn't be surprised if many businesspeople, at least self-aware ones, in other fields feel that they are making it up as they go along. That feeling may come not because they are getting by on blind luck or don't have any idea what they are doing, but because our world is so unpredictable that what works one day may not work another. Just ask the executives at Kodak, Toys R Us or Blockbuster.

In the same session, the speaker listed some of the unique stories newspapers have uncovered, often merely as a result of curiosity. He claims stories are everywhere; they just have to be discovered.

At one newspaper he worked with as a consultant, reporters were allowed to follow their curiosity for a certain amount of work time each week. Some of the best stories came out of that block of time.

## Gas tax issue illustrates rural, urban divide

The Star Tribune recently ran an opinion piece by James Lefestey, who advocated for an increase in the gas tax to finance infrastructure improvements and to reduce carbon dioxide emissions, but cautioned lawmakers to keep rural Minnesotans in mind when crafting this policy.

While it is admirable that the author wants to be sensitive to the needs of rural Minnesotans, the editorial further illustrates how people living in the metro area have scant idea how the policies they advocate harm those living outside of it.

I grew up on a small dairy farm in rural Wisconsin, helping my family raise 140 head of cattle while farming 500 acres, and many of the challenges we faced are the same challenges families currently face throughout rural Minnesota. Hopefully my life experiences can help me communicate the rural perspective to a broader audience.

First, it is important to realize that reducing carbon dioxide emissions from the agricultural sector will be a much larger undertaking than promoting wind and solar, having an electric farm exhibit at the State Fair, or subsidizing electric farm equipment.

The largest obstacle to reducing carbon dioxide emissions is that it simply isn't possible to run a farm on just wind or solar.

Electric fences only work when they're

### Center of the American Experiment

By Isaac Orr



electrified, but wind and solar only produce electricity when the wind is blowing or the sun is shining. Farms require electricity every hour of the day. In Minnesota, this electricity is provided by coal, natural gas, and nuclear power plants because they generate electricity regardless of weather conditions.

I've chased enough fleeing cows back into the pasture at 2 a.m. in the middle of January to know that few farmers will forego a steadily electrified fence so people living in the metro can feel warm fuzzy feelings about reducing their carbon dioxide emissions.

Electric tractors are also problematic. The John Deere electric tractor discussed by the author costs \$634,000 and can only run for up to four hours before it must be recharged for three. In contrast, a nearly new Case IH Magnum tractor retails for \$264,000, and these tractors can run for up to eight hours before they must take about 15 minutes to refuel.

Even if cost were not an issue, the four-hour battery life would be. It is not un-

usual for farmers to spend 12 to 16 hours per day behind the wheel during planting season to prepare the fields, plant the crops, apply fertilizer, etc. There simply isn't enough time to wait for three hours for recharging during this time of year, especially if we have a late, or exceptionally wet, spring.

Electric conversion kits for trucks are also unrealistic because converted trucks have a range of about 87 miles, without factoring in diminished range for hauling livestock or grain to market. My dad frequently hauled cattle 376 miles, round trip, to a sale barn in Bloomington, Wisconsin, which routinely pays the best prices for beef cattle.

An electric truck simply won't get this job done, and a 25-cent per gallon gas tax assessed on a truck that gets 11 to 14 miles per gallon while towing six 1,500 pound steers feels like piling on when the United States Department of Agriculture projects net farm income will be down 12 percent this year.

I appreciate the author's intent, but this article still feels like the author is talking at, rather than listening to, how the policies being advocated by the author will make it more difficult for small farmers to keep food on our tables and make a living off the land.

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