

COMMENTARY

Letter about SE MN needs a leader, not Jeremy Miller...

To the Editor,

Recently, Amir Locke was killed during a “no-knock warrant” in the Twin Cities. Body camera footage shows a sleeping Amir awoken by the sound of men breaking into the apartment. When he grabbed his legally permitted handgun he was shot immediately. A no-knock warrant is when police enter a home without announcing themselves. This leaves homeowners confused and scared for their own safety. When two groups of people are both armed, confused, and startled, bad things happen.

The Minnesota Gun Owners

Caucus has voiced their support for banning no knock warrants. The chair of the Police Officer Standards and Training board has said, “Banning no-knock warrants does demonstrate to the community that we hear their concerns and are committed to preserving human life.” What does that say about politicians who are unwilling to ban no-knock warrants? The MN House and governor have expressed their support for banning no-knock warrants. They are waiting for the Senate to act. That means all of Minnesota is looking to Winona for a leader who can enact the change that will increase trust in police, make gun own-

ers and police safer, and prevent loss of life and property damage. Someone who will “hear their concerns and is committed to preserving human life.” Unfortunately, instead of finding a leader, we have found a politician; someone who has no concern for his community, and is unwilling to do anything that would make donors in the Republican Party unhappy. Winona deserves a real leader, not a politician like Jeremy Miller.

Daniel Wilson
Rushford, Minn.

Letter about Sen. Miller should deliver for livestock farmers and meat processors with the state surplus...

To the Editor,

The State of Minnesota has a historic budget surplus of \$9.3 billion and Senator Jeremy Miller, particularly through his role as the Senate Majority Leader, has a unique opportunity to deeply invest in building economic and environmental resiliency in our farm and food system with less than 1% of the surplus. COVID has also made it clearer than ever that our meat processing system is fragile. As a hog farmer, I know all too well how difficult it is to find timely processing to be able to deliver promised products to my customers. That’s

why our senator should fight for proposals that would make it easier for small and local processors to recruit and retain staff, train staff, navigate the certification and inspection processes, and protect their workers and consumers from health risks. With an abundant surplus, I hope Senator Miller fully takes advantage of this rare opportunity to deliver for livestock farmers and meat processors. I’ve reached out directly to ask him to support these initiatives and hope you’ll do the same.

Dayna Burtness
Spring Grove, Minn.
Nettle Valley Farm
Pastured Hog Farmer
Land Stewardship Project
Member

Make a difference in southern Minnesota

By Tim Penny
President/CEO
Southern Minnesota
Initiative Foundation

One of my proudest moments as a congressman was voting to support the creation of the national AmeriCorps program 27 years ago. Little did I know at the time how central this program would become to our culture of volunteerism and giving back to our communities. Even more surprising, and delightful, to me is the fact that I am now president of an organization that has stewarded AmeriCorps programs for the full 27 years. At Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF) we place people in service roles across our 20-county region through two AmeriCorps programs.



Tim Penny

AmeriCorps, a federal agency, brings people together to tackle the country’s most pressing challenges, through national service and volunteering. AmeriCorps members and AmeriCorps Seniors volunteers serve with organizations dedicated to the improvement of communities. These programs help make service to others a cornerstone of our national culture and engages more than 75,000 Americans each year in intensive service to meet critical needs in community. SMIF has placed more than 600 AmeriCorps members throughout southern Minnesota over the past 27 years.

SMIF is the host organization for a program that focuses on early childhood development called AmeriCorps LEAP (Learning Early Achieves Potential) Initiative. We place up to 20 members in early childhood settings across our region. Members work one-on-one and in small groups with young children, ages three to five, building social and emotional proficiencies to prepare for kindergarten success. We are currently accepting full- and half-time applica-

tions for the 2022-2023 school year for this program.

SMIF is also the host for the AmeriCorps VISTA program which helps build capacity for organizations dedicated to providing economic opportunities to citizens in low-income or poverty circumstances. We are proud to work in partnership with Minnesota Farmers Market Association, Renewing the Countryside and Sustainable Farming Association by hosting two VISTAs who are working on a Local Foods Sustainability Project. Maeve Mallozzi-Kelly is in her second year of service, and we recently welcomed Kathleen Rykhus as the second VISTA working on this project. Together they are creating a much stronger trajectory for building farmers’ markets and food producers’ capacity across SMIF’s region. We are also currently hiring three VISTA members to help spur entrepreneurial activity and create more welcoming communities in the region. These positions are in Red Wing, Blue Earth and here at SMIF.

One of the things that I love about AmeriCorps is that it embraces members from all stages of life. One of our current LEAP members, Katelyn Kruger, is serving in St. Peter at an after-school program called Hikmah and is simultaneously earning her master’s degree in nutrition and dietetics. Her experience in the program has influenced her to work more directly with underserved populations in the future. One of our members from last year, Maurya Torgerson, used to own a cosmetology business before she became a parent. Her time in AmeriCorps has been a meaningful stepping-stone as she considers re-entering the workforce and earning a degree in social work.

Many AmeriCorps members are retired professionals looking to give back to their communities. Bruce Boyce served as an AmeriCorps LEAP Initiative member from 2010-2012 after he retired from a 32-year career as the Waseca County Adminis-

trator. His experience in LEAP influenced him to begin a second career as a paraprofessional for eight years. He recently shared, “I really believe that all citizens should engage in some form of service to their country and community. In that sense AmeriCorps continued my lifelong pattern of civic engagement.”

These positions are paid, and members receive many benefits including an education award which can be used for paying off student loans or furthering their education. Those members who are 55 or older can gift their award to a child or grandchild.

It has been incredible to see the impact that AmeriCorps has had in our country over the past 27 years. Even more so, it has been wonderful to see the direct result that this program has had on the children, nonprofits and communities in our own backyard.

For questions or to apply for LEAP or for VISTA, contact Barbara Gunderson, AmeriCorps Director, at (507) 456-0353 or barbarag@smifoundation.org. Learn more about AmeriCorps at AmeriCorps.gov.

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

About Tim Penny

Tim Penny is the President and CEO of Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation. Tim represented Minnesota’s First Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1982–1994.

About Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation

Southern Minnesota Initiative Foundation (SMIF), a donor-supported foundation, invests for economic growth in the 20 counties of south central and southeastern Minnesota. The Foundation has provided more than \$121 million in grants, loans and programming within the region during the past 35 years. SMIF’s key interests include economic and early childhood development and community vitality. To learn more about our work and mission, visit www.smifoundation.org.

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