

## OUR VIEW

# Engage public safety in task force on public safety

As promising as many of the early-on ideas sound to help make our COVID-evacuated downtown Duluth more lively again, safer, and more inviting, an important voice is noticeably absent.

“Why not ask those that deal with crime every day?” as the Duluth Local 807 police union asked, quite reasonably, in a social-media post last week, a day after the Mayor’s Downtown Task Force announced its first recommendations.

Good question. If the problem is deteriorating public safety, why not involve the men and women of Duluth who confront and counter crime for a living? As logical as that may seem, not one of the 14 members of the task force is from law enforcement.

Those who are represented include Mayor Emily Larson (who formed the group), the president of the Duluth Chamber, leaders of downtown-located businesses and facilities like the YMCA and CHUM, two Duluth City Council members, the president of the Greater Downtown Council, and a member of the St. Louis County Board.

A solid, inclusive group, sure. But while the police aren’t the end-all on public-safety matters — as the many trumpeted and exploited incidents of violence involving police in recent years attest — it’s hard to see how law enforcement’s presence



While patrolling, Duluth Police make an arrest downtown at the corner of Lake Avenue and Superior Street.

2009 News Tribune file photo

and input on this task force wouldn’t be valuable. Even invaluable, with the Duluth Police Department so widely respected and revered.

But our department is also currently understaffed, and Duluthians citywide can join the police union in being “extremely disappointed” that addressing police staffing levels isn’t on the task force’s agenda “for creating a safer downtown.”

“We are struggling to fill our patrol shifts, extra duty jobs, and special event

positions. These positions specifically include bike patrols (focused) in the downtown business and Canal Park districts,” the police union further posted. “We’re frustrated that the rank and file DPD officer tasked with public safety downtown doesn’t have a voice on this task force. ...

“Violent crime is increasing throughout Duluth and specifically downtown. We continue to respond to these resource-demanding calls while working understaffed

and often overwhelmed. There are fewer investigators available to staff the Violent Crimes Unit. We continue to lose excellent partners and friends with vast experience to outside agencies, retirement, and simply finding new careers.”

The Mayor’s Downtown Task Force has only been meeting for three months and is expected to continue meeting into September. So there’s still time to engage law enforcement for its insights and ideas about

cracking down on crime downtown.

Such ideas can be added to the promising ones announced last week, including organizing walking groups along sidewalks and in the skywalks to spot and head off trouble, hiring a prosecutor to help the four in the city attorney’s office who now are overwhelmed, creating a fund for public art, repurposing vacant downtown offices for housing, and studying the downtown for long-term planning.

“Our goal here is to really fill spaces with people,” more like downtown was before the pandemic, Larson said in announcing the ideas, according to News Tribune coverage.

“It’s changing the feel of where we are right now,” Shaun Floerke, co-chair of the task force and president of Duluth Superior Area Community Foundation, said at the announcement.

“It’s people being proud of where they are and wanting to lift that up. We live in a time where everybody wants to push stuff down, shoot it down, ‘That won’t work.’ We call the community to pitch in and try to lift up.”

As long as the task force is calling, it can be sure to extend an invitation, too, in the name of curbing crime, to the men and women who work every day to do just that. The insights and expertise of Duluth’s law enforcement professionals need to be engaged here, too.

## AN ECONOMIST’S VIEW

# Can’t afford child care in Minnesota? Blame the government

Only a few things are as expensive for Minnesota parents as child care. According to data from Child Care Aware, the average family in Minnesota spent over \$16,000 to send their infant to daycare for the whole year in 2019. Families with two kids — one infant and one 4-year-old — paid over \$28,000 for both kids.

Compared to other states, only parents in Washington, D.C., Massachusetts, California, New Jersey, and Connecticut paid more to send their infant to a daycare center, making Minnesota the sixth-most expensive state for infant daycare in 2019. And after controlling



MARTHA NJOLOMOLE

for income levels, Minnesota was the fourth-most-expensive state for infant daycare in the country in 2019.

It is easy to see why a lot of effort has been focused on making child care more affordable. Minnesota parents have their budgets squeezed every year trying to afford child care — that is, if they do not end up out of the workforce altogether. And businesses all over Minnesota cannot find workers due to issues with child care.

Clearly, something should be done about these high prices. But to enact the right remedies, lawmakers need to first understand the root cause of the problem.

Sure, providing child care is naturally expensive because it is labor intensive, and there is little to no avenue for increasing productivity. But this does not explain why Minnesota households earning a median income pay over 20% of their income for infant daycare while households with a median income in Utah only pay 12% of their income. The nature of the child care industry is the same in Minnesota as it is in less-expensive states like Utah.

Moreover, compared to the rest of the country, Minnesota is not a highly expensive state. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, as of 2019, the cost of living in Minnesota was below the national average. So, cost of living — another common scapegoat — also fails to explain why child care is more expensive here compared to most states.

The fact of the matter is that, like most of our woes, the child care crisis is government-made. When compared to other states, Minnesota has more stringent requirements that raise child care costs.

Our state, for example, requires teachers at

daycare centers to look after a smaller number of children compared to other states. Our state also requires daycare-center teachers to have more education and longer training experience compared to other states. All these rules do not come at zero cost. When teachers must look at a smaller number of children, the cost of providing care per number of kids goes up. Similarly, when centers must hire highly educated teachers, they have to offer them higher wages. All these additional costs are passed on to parents.

Currently, Minnesota rules require that for every four infants present at a daycare center facility, there

must be one caregiver. In a newly published report, American Experiment estimates that if this rule was changed to allow centers to place five infants per one worker instead of four, parents would pay \$2,800 less for infant daycare. Likewise, infant daycare centers would be \$3,800 less expensive if the state did not require teachers to have a high school diploma and college credits.

The child care crisis is government-made. And no amount of money will fix it if nothing is done about Minnesota’s burdensome rules.

Martha Njolomole is an economist at the Center of the American Experiment (AmericanExperiment.org), a conservative public-policy think tank based in Golden Valley, Minnesota. She wrote this for the News Tribune.

## READERS’ VIEWS

### Democrats aren’t changing US for better

Why do Democrats want to shut down oil and gas production, making gas and food prices skyrocket; defund the police, causing crime to rise; spend trillions we don’t have, resulting in skyrocketing inflation that jeopardizes what once was a stable and prosperous free-market system; and indoctrinate 5- and 6-year-old schoolchildren with sexual-indentity confusion and the promotion of homosexuality?

The left’s push to destroy our traditional culture and to war against Christian beliefs of right and wrong appear to be reaching a fever pitch.

The leftist preaching of critical race theory is a Marxist teaching which attempts to sow misunderstanding and deceit. Its false narratives about our nation’s history promote hate, harming what should be everyone’s aim: good race relations.

The Democrats do little to rein in the billions being

stolen from COVID-19 government-relief monies and the billions misappropriated and stolen from what was supposed to be spent on our roads, bridges, ports, airports, and replacement of lead water pipes.

I fear the Democrats’ Title IX will leave parents no rights in knowing if their child is receiving sex-change hormones. This so upset Hispanics in a Democratic stronghold congressional district in Texas that a female Hispanic Republican was recently elected there.

Democrats push to nationalize our elections, which would make it much easier for voter fraud to become endemic. This would result in delegitimizing our elections, such as in Russia.

Finally, Democrats animus toward conservative speech and conservative religious expression is making our once free and open nation a self-censoring and fearing nation.

Primary elections are Aug. 9.

Midterm elections are Nov. 8. Vote.

**Gregg Schweiger  
Duluth**

### Stauber’s ‘concerns’ offer no comfort

I read the News Tribune’s endorsement editorial and U.S. Rep. Pete Stauber’s comments (Our View: “Schultz vs. Stauber a foregone conclusion,” July 19).

How comforting that Stauber is so concerned about election procedures in Wisconsin, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and Georgia that he signed onto a lawsuit filed by Texas that had no standing to interfere with those states’ elections (so said the Supreme Court). Contrary to what Stauber claimed, that suit was filed along with many others precisely to overturn millions of votes based on the Big Lie. That suit and numerous others were thrown out as there was no evidence of election fraud. The election “steal” stopped when President Joe

Biden was sworn in.

As to the infrastructure bill, again, it is comforting to see Stauber’s concern for procedure and to assert now that COVID-19 was the reason for the bill he voted against. He did attempt to take credit for a project funded by that very bill (“Stauber touts airport grants funded by infrastructure bill he voted against,” Jan. 10).

Stauber’s assertion that only 10% of the infrastructure bill was for infrastructure was

just plain absurd, and Stauber should know it. The information is public. I looked it up. Perhaps Stauber should as well. The infrastructure bill was the biggest investment since the Federal-Aid Highway Act of 1956 and was sorely needed. What a shame for Stauber to vote against it, though I’m sure he will slap himself on the back for every project it funds.

**George Balach  
Duluth**

### Readers’ Views and Local Views

Letters to the editor are a critical part of the community dialogue, and the News Tribune attempts to publish all letters of opinion meeting our requirements.

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With rare exceptions, the News Tribune does not publish poetry; letters that are anonymous, libelous or attack other writers; consumer-complaint letters; thank-you letters; or letters generated by political or special-interest campaigns.

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Include a full name, address and daytime phone number. Only names and hometowns will be published.