



PROFILE: MINNESOTA SENATE MAJORITY LEADER JEREMY MILLER

‘If someone says no, try to find new paths to yes’: Lifelong Minnesotan uses lessons from back home as a legislative leader in a state where parties share power

by Mitch Arvidson (marvidson@csg.org)

Like many people who decide to run for public office, Jeremy Miller did so to make a difference in the lives of others, especially in his home community of Winona.

But what made Miller’s candidacy unique at the time was the “when” in his own life.

Miller was only 27 years old, and with his first election victory in 2010, he became the second-youngest Minnesotan ever to serve in the state Senate.

“I’ll be honest, there were some challenging times,” Miller says about when he first arrived in St. Paul.

“Especially in the beginning, there were members and others inside what I call ‘the bubble’ at the Capitol that were disrespectful or made comments that I was too young, or I didn’t have the experience to be a state senator.”

What got Miller through: some timeless values passed on by his parents and others.

From his father, the longtime mayor of Winona, he learned the importance of continually working on and building relationships. From a high school cross country coach (Jim Flim), Miller was instilled with the value of perseverance.

Last, but not least, there was this message about flexibility and persistence from his mother: “If someone says no, try to find a new path to yes.”

Miller says those three lessons, along with a commitment to hard work, respect for others and honesty, helped him crack “the bubble.”

By 2019, he had been elected president of the state Senate by legislative peers, the youngest senator to serve as the chamber’s presiding officer. Two years later, he became Senate majority leader.

In a conversation with CSG Midwest, Miller shared his perspective on legislating and leadership, as well as his priorities for the year ahead. Here are excerpts.

Q You have been in office for more than a decade, but are still a relatively young legislator at age 39. Have you seen other young people follow in your footsteps?

A One of the things that I’m most proud of is that I’ve had several members from both sides of the aisle approach me over the years to share that they originally thought they were too young to run for office, but changed their mind after being encouraged by my style of collaboration and success of getting things done. So, to me, that’s pretty special, to think that I’ve made



BIO-SKETCH: MINNESOTA SEN. JEREMY MILLER

- ✓ first elected to the Minnesota Senate in 2010 at the age of 27
- ✓ has served as Senate majority leader since September 2021; became the youngest president of the Senate in Minnesota history in 2019
- ✓ is entrepreneur and small-business owner, and is chief financial officer of his family’s full-service recycling business
- ✓ lives in his hometown of Winona, in southeast Minnesota, with his wife, Janel, and three sons: Drew and twins Luke and Tom.

“In politics, and life in general, there aren’t too many trips down easy street. ... It takes a lot of perseverance to find that common ground in order to get things done.”

a positive impact and encouraged other younger people, at least in some capacity, to run for public office.

Q Why have you found persistence and perseverance, traits you took or learned from people such as your parents and high school cross country coach, to be important in the legislative arena?

A In politics, and life in general, there aren’t too many trips down easy street. Not many things come easy, especially in a split legislature (where control is divided among the two parties). You have ideas from Democrats and Republicans, you have ideas from metro and suburban members in addition to rural members, and it takes a lot of perseverance to try to find that common ground in order to get things done.

My No. 1 priority, and the reason I ran for the Minnesota Senate, is to help make a difference in the lives of others. And the way you help make a difference is you work together and you get things done. ...

My business background has helped me more than anything else in developing relationships, and being able to work together to find common ground. When it comes to business, when you’re working on getting a deal, there’s give and take and there’s compromise. Eventually, you either make a deal or you don’t, but then you move on to the next deal.

Q This year, the Minnesota Senate lost David Tomassoni, a longtime, well-respected member who also once held

your same position as Senate president. Were there any lessons you gained from him?

A I really become close friends with Sen. Tomassoni, and he became a mentor of mine. He was a great example of a legislator who not only was committed to the district that he represented, but to working together with legislators to try to find common ground on important issues. ...

Too often in politics, especially in this day and age, the political divide seems to be getting worse and the divisiveness continues to get nastier by the day. Having a member like Sen. Tomassoni — someone focused on bringing people together and building bridges — was really an asset for the Minnesota Senate, and he will be missed dearly. *[Editor’s note: Sen. Tomassoni served in the Legislature for 29 years; he passed away earlier this year from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis.]*

Q Next year, there will be many first-time senators in Minnesota. What challenges does that pose for more-veteran members like yourself?

A This will be one of the largest turnovers in the history of the Senate when it comes to new members just because of all the retirements that we’ve had on both sides of the aisle.

The most important thing for veteran members, and one of the things I’m going to focus on the most is, No. 1, just listening to the new members about what issues are important in their districts. And No. 2, really working hard to develop those relationships

and making the new members feel comfortable here in the Senate.

The most important thing for me, and hopefully for my colleagues, is to work together and get good things done for the people of the state of Minnesota. The best way we can do that is to listen and learn from each other.

Q Speaking of the 2023 legislative session, what will be your legislative focus?

A We are going to have three priorities.

The first is permanent, ongoing tax relief to put money back in the pockets of hardworking Minnesotans. Every single paycheck, week after week, month after month, year after year. We’re really focused on helping Minnesotans afford life, especially when they’re facing record rates of inflation.

The next priority is going to be public safety. We hear from too many people who no longer feel safe in the community where they live, where they work, and where they’re raising a family. We’re going to make public safety a top priority by supporting police officers and getting tough on crime.

And the third priority is education. We’re seeing too many kids fall behind in the classroom, and we’re hearing from too many parents who feel like they’ve been shut out of their children’s education. So we’re going to focus on empowering parents to be partners with teachers in their kids’ education, and then we’re going to focus on providing more resources to give students more opportunities to be successful in the classroom and beyond.