

Ben Dueholm in our pages and others'

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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In a [Century article](#) published this week, Benjamin Dueholm explains why politicians of Michele Bachmann's ilk do well in the swing states of the upper Midwest. He starts with the fact that Bachmann and Garrison Keillor are from the same small Minnesota town, a place where

the network of local institutions and unspoken compacts that Keillor once called "small-town socialism" is still at work, inspiring people to shop at Ralph's Pretty Good Grocery rather than seeking out the lower prices, bigger selections and wider aisles of the stores in Minneapolis-St. Paul.

Later he summarizes what's happened to Anoka and towns like it:

In the Midwest, liberals and conservatives have essentially ripped the "small-town socialism" of Lake Wobegon in half. Conservatives champion private virtue, while liberals tout economic solidarity. Politicians thrive by persuading people, most of whom are a generation removed from the small-town qualities they remember or imagine, that the half they hold is, in fact, the whole thing.

The topic's one of particular interest to me: there are only a few things I care about more than national politics (I moved to DC six years ago), and the region where I grew up is one of them (I moved back two years later). But even if you've never been to dairy country or the northwoods, you should [read Ben's article](#)--very insightful stuff.

At one point Dueholm touches on Bachmann's experience as a foster parent, an area

where evangelical fervor meets Lutheran do-goodism, where private virtue meets public need. [*New Yorker* writer Ryan] Lizza quotes Bachmann explaining

that "God put something in me toward young people that I wanted to make sure the gospel would go out to young people."

Yet even as she touts her role as a foster mother, Bachmann defends her efforts to cut every governmental resource available to children in foster care, from Medicaid to early interventions to food stamps.

Dueholm gets into this subject in more depth in another [new article](#), a *Washington Monthly* cover story about his own experience as a foster parent. It's an excellent read as well, especially the parts where he describes the experience of being a middle-class parent trying to obtain government services your foster child is entitled to--in effect being suddenly immersed in the daily reality of low-income Americans. "The difference," he acknowledges,

is that most foster parents hold middle-class passports, and they can cut short their sojourn among WIC recipients and Medicaid administrators at any time.

Not so, however, with the children for whom foster parents care--[read it all](#).