

# High-minded and high-heeled

**POLITICS:** Sarah Palin isn't the only conservative female juggling act in politics: Meet Minnesota's Michele Bachmann | *Zoe Sandvig*



ASSOCIATED PRESS/PHOTO BY PAUL SANCYA

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Buzzing from the House floor interrupts Michele Bachmann, R-Minn. In a flurry of hot pink she disappears around the corner to cast her vote. Within minutes she is back, sitting on a couch in a Capitol lounge. The perfectly manicured toenails are misleading: The freshman congresswoman is a tax attorney, a full-time mom, and once worked in a fish cannery in Alaska. Before becoming Minnesota's first Republican congresswoman, she also prayed outside of abortion clinics, helped her husband start his own business, and welcomed 23 foster children into her home.

She might not be Sarah Palin, but a noticeable Minnesota accent and Midwestern work ethic put her in the same camp. At 13, Bachmann was forced to become almost financially independent after her parents divorced. She used her babysitting money to buy her own clothes and lunches at school and saved up enough to purchase her first pair of contact lenses. Between college semesters at Winona State University, she took her hardworking streak to Alaska where on one memorable day she cleaned 280 salmon.

"I learned the value of a dollar," she told WORLD. "Deprivation sometimes can be one of the most marvelous teachers."

Bachmann grew up in a Democratic family and worked on Jimmy Carter's campaign during college. But throughout Carter's presidency, Bachmann says she grew disappointed with his liberal approach to public policy, from support for legalized abortion to economic decisions that sent gas prices soaring. Next election she voted for Reagan.

As her politics changed, so did her faith. She attributes a turning point to watching Francis Schaeffer's Christian worldview video series, *How Should We Then Live?* "In college I felt like in some ways my mind had been saved," she said.

For Bachmann, who is a member of Salem Lutheran Church in Stillwater, Minn., being a Christian and a politician means fighting for compassion—individual compassion. "People confuse compassion with government being compassionate with other people's money versus people being compassionate with their own money," she said.

For the Bachmann's, opening their family's home to teenage girls was a way to express their Christian faith and live out good economics. That didn't mean it wasn't challenging. At one point, Bachmann was nursing a newborn, juggling two toddlers, homeschooling two children, and overseeing four foster teenage girls. "I was so tired, I could hardly pick my head up off the pillow," she admitted. These days, all of her foster children have moved on, but she still makes time for her mostly grown children, who range in age from 26 to 14.

Until 1993, Bachmann juggled mothering with her work as a federal tax litigator. She took a break to stay home full time, but by 2000 she was back in the workforce. This time she tried politics and won a spot in Minnesota's state senate, where she used her expertise as a tax attorney to author the Taxpayers Bill of Rights. Six years later, she had made her way to Capitol Hill. In its marble corridor she estimates she walks at least seven miles a day, keeping up with her varied interests: federal budget reform, border security, energy, and pro-life causes.

During the first week of August, she joined more than 40 other Republican lawmakers in an unprecedented "after hours" protest against soaring gas prices after the rest of Congress had already left for a month-long recess. "We didn't want to go on vacation because the American people can hardly afford to go on vacation," she told CNN.

Last month Bachmann doubled up campaigning back in Minnesota with some time at the Republican National Convention, where she put in a plug for the McCain-Palin ticket and applauded the McCain's for setting the example for American compassion by adopting their daughter. "We must never forget what government is not. Government is not a philanthropic organization. Government is not the family. And government certainly is not the church," she told convention delegates.

**Bachmann says for her one thread ties all the day's obligations together: "radical abandonment to God's call."**

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