

Coming in weakness

By [Scott D. Anderson](#)

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For the past 20 years I have toiled in the vineyards of two state legislatures: in California for 12 years and now in Wisconsin for the past eight, along with occasional forays to the U.S. Congress. In these arenas I have represented the interests of state councils of churches, which are really the interests of those who don't have the time, money or wherewithal to advocate for themselves: children, impoverished families, working-class parents with low-paying jobs.

My vocation is less about issuing pronouncements and buttonholing legislators and more about educating local folks in congregations to be the true advocates with their state and federal legislators. The work takes patience, a knack for timing and the ability to orchestrate some subversive political theater. Legislative success is rare.

A number of years ago, when Congress was threatening to choke off funding for low-income child care, I helped organize a lunch with a group of pastors, four young mothers who were on public assistance, and a powerful congressman who represented the community. After weeks of planning and several rehearsals, the lunch was staged to honor the invited congressman.

Following the award presentation, each woman succinctly shared her story of the challenges of raising children and being on welfare. The room fell silent. There was no confrontation, no pointing of fingers, no shrill rhetoric. The gathering was incredibly respectful, with the congressman invited to listen to the real human drama of living in poverty.

Some weeks later this legislator was responsible for inserting an extra \$1 billion for subsidized child care into the federal budget. I would like to believe there was a connection between the human need expressed at that lunch and the congressional response. There are times when humility holds great power, even in politics. When it happens, I trust that God is smiling.