

## Robert Rector – Biography



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Robert Rector, a leading authority on poverty, welfare programs and immigration in America for three decades, is The Heritage Foundation's senior research fellow in domestic policy.

Dubbed the "intellectual godfather" of welfare reform (by *National Review* Editor Rich Lowry), Rector concentrates on a range of related issues, including the collapse of the marriage culture, the breakdown of the family and other social ills. He is a vocal proponent of marriage education, especially in low-income communities.

Rector played a major role in crafting the 1996 federal welfare reform legislation, which, for the first time, required recipients to work or get job training in exchange for benefits. Since its passage, he has continued to examine not only the mounting costs to the taxpayer (nearly \$1 trillion a year) but the role of welfare spending in undermining families.

Rector's impact on national policy includes the debate over how to fix America's broken immigration system – both today and the last time around. His current research on the long-term fiscal costs to taxpayers of granting amnesty to an estimated 11 million unlawful immigrants, as envisioned in the Senate's "comprehensive" immigration reform bill, builds on his influential work seven years earlier.

His recent papers (among those listed below) include "The Fiscal Cost of Unlawful Immigrants and Amnesty to the U.S. Taxpayer," "An Overview of Obama's End Run on Welfare Reform," "Marriage: America's Greatest Weapon Against Child Poverty," "Reforming the Food Stamp Program" and "Understanding Poverty in the United States."

In July 2012, Rector and Heritage colleague Katherine (Kiki) Bradley blew the whistle on the Obama administration's edict gutting the work requirement in the biggest cash-assistance welfare program among the federal government's 80 means-tested programs. Rector's series of detailed papers and commentary on the action set off denials and back-pedaling by the Department of Health and Human

Services – and led to moves in Congress to reinstate the work requirements of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).

As for his prior work on immigration reform, Rector discovered in May 2006 that the Senate's "comprehensive" immigration reform bill potentially would admit an unprecedented 103 million immigrants over 20 years. Such an influx, he wrote, would impose huge budget costs and fundamentally transform the United States socially, economically and politically. "Within two decades," Rector concluded, "the character of the nation would differ dramatically from what exists today."

Rector's research hit Capitol Hill like a "perfectly timed statistical bomb," noted the *San Francisco Chronicle*. Bill sponsors immediately denied Rector's claims. But Rector and Sen. Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., countered the naysayers by quoting chapter and verse from the bill in two packed news conferences on Capitol Hill. Eventually, Rector's analysis prevailed. The bill's sponsors changed the immigration cap to 60 million immigrants over 20 years.

Rector's research had a similar impact in 2007. His report with Heritage colleague Christine Kim, "The Fiscal Cost of Low-Skill Immigrants to the U.S. Taxpayer," found that households headed by immigrants who lack a high-school diploma received nearly three times as much in government services annually as they give back in taxes.

That burden on taxpayers directly applied to the Senate's immigration reform bill – but the bill's supporters didn't mention that before submitting the measure for a vote. As Rector's research gained traction, though, the bill died.

When the welfare reform law of 1996 came up for renewal in 2006, Rector huddled with key Senate and House staffers to strengthen the same work requirements he is fighting to save today. For example, states couldn't count bed rest as "work."

And Rector pushed for a new provision: the Healthy Marriage Initiative. The program aimed to help keep welfare families intact – a critical factor in reducing poverty and the resulting dependency on government. Unfortunately, a new national administration all but undid the effort.

Rector joined Heritage in 1984. He previously worked as a legislative assistant in the Virginia House of Delegates and as an analyst in the U.S. Office of Personnel Management. He served on the congressionally mandated Millennial Housing Commission.

He holds a bachelor's degree from the College of William and Mary and a master's degree in political science from Johns Hopkins University.

He is the co-author of *America's Failed \$5.4 Trillion War on Poverty*, a comprehensive 1995 examination of U.S. welfare programs, and co-editor of *Steering the Elephant: How Washington Works* (1987). For his research on welfare reform, he received the Dr. W. Glenn and Rita Ricardo Campbell Award, given annually to a Heritage employee who makes "outstanding contributions to the analysis and promotion of a free society."

