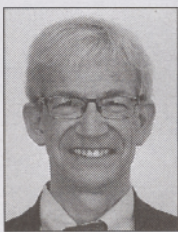




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COURTESY OF WESTERN REGIONAL ADVOCACY PROJECT

Working to cut poverty in half

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STAFF WRITER



David Riemer

David Riemer and the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute have a plan that would allow poor Americans to earn wages they need to get out of poverty

Reducing poverty by 50 percent sounds like a bleeding heart liberal's dream. Saying that people should work more sounds like the canned response of a free-market capitalist.

But David Riemer thinks such a dramatic reduction in poverty is possible — with the help of America's free-market economy.

Riemer is a senior fellow at the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute, a think tank based in Milwaukee that promotes policies to reduce poverty. In March, Community Advocates released a report analyzing how poverty can be reduced from its current national rate of 14.5 percent to nearly 7 percent.

The report presents a package of policy proposals that would enable more than half of people living in poverty to earn wages that would lift them above the poverty line.

The report takes a five-pronged approach

to reducing poverty: create "transitional jobs" for underemployed and unemployed people; increasing the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 an hour; expand the earned income tax credit; increase funding for child-care subsidies; and increase support for people who are physically or mentally incapable of working — people with disabilities and receiving Social Security and Supplemental Security Income.

The policy proposals developed by Community Advocates relies on modeling software developed by the Urban Institute, a national organization that conducts research on social and economic policy, which is able to simulate a household's eligibility for different assistance programs or tax credits, depending upon changes in income. The result is an empirical analysis of various factors that can lead to a reduction in poverty.

"Until this report came out, no one could say (how poverty could be reduced) with this level of certainty," Riemer says.

Riemer has spent his career in the private and government sectors implementing ways to reduce poverty and improve health care and other social services without increasing spending. In 2003, he worked as the budget director for Wisconsin's then-governor, Jim Doyle, and was responsible for balancing a state budget with a \$3.2 billion deficit without cutting core services. He has also worked as the budget director for the city of Milwaukee

and has authored numerous articles on poverty, health care reform and public administration.

Riemer will speak about the report 10:30 a.m. Thursday, July 30, at Portland State University's Smith Memorial Student Union. His talk, "Working Our Way Out of Poverty," is free and open to the public. It is sponsored by the Oregon Business Council's poverty task force.

Amanda Waldroupe: *Your report concludes that work is the primary way out of poverty. Why is that?*

David Riemer: As we talk about poverty here, we're talking about a shortage of income. The point that I was trying to make is that when you have a shortage of income when you're underemployed or unemployed, it makes it more likely for you to become sick or ill. It makes it harder for children to learn. I know there's often a lot of discussion that we shouldn't only think of poverty as being a matter of money. But it's hard to measure some of those other things — whether people's emotional state or general well-being is getting better or staying the same as things that you would measure and point to to change public policy. You can measure whether people's incomes stay the same or rise.

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