

100 Objections to UBI: A Memo to Supporters and Strategists

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Introduction

People resist all big ideas. This is perhaps one of the unwritten truths about human politics. The bigger the change proposed, the more people will resist it. Make no mistake: universal basic income is a big idea.

Universal basic income (UBI) is the idea that every person should be given money that supports their basic needs, regardless of means or merit. This is income they would receive just for being alive, whether or not they work a job or contribute to society in some other way. Whether a small dividend or pension generous enough to pay for a comfortable lifestyle, UBI will require a re-imagining and reframing of primordial ideas about labor, wealth, value and identity.

Right now the biggest barrier to the universal basic income movement is simple awareness. Most people have never heard of the concept. Correspondingly, the bulk of our early efforts should probably be focused on getting the word out. But if we are successful, this public ignorance will not last forever. People will find out about UBI, and when they do they will inevitably have opinions about it.

The basic income movement is now at a point where we may begin to lay the groundwork for upcoming political campaigns. Starting with local and state bills and ballot initiatives, perhaps working our way towards federal legislation, we will soon be asking the public to vote for UBI, to lobby for UBI, to demand UBI from their governments. But this will mean pushback and objections. Instinctual objections as individuals wrestle with new ideas. Strategic objections as hostile interest groups try to sway the public against us. We'll have to make a fight of it. And if we are to win, we'd best start preparing now.

This “strategy memo” was devised during a weekend-long basic income create-a-thon in San Francisco, in November 2015. It is one of many projects pursued by a diverse group of UBI enthusiasts during that event. The goal is to examine and articulate the arguments that will likely be made *against* universal basic income in the campaigns to come. If we understand them, we can figure out how to counter them—and hopefully our own ideas will be improved by this reckoning with rigorous criticism.

Think of this as “debate prep.” We began by brainstorming [100 potential objections to UBI](#). Then we tagged and categorized these objections based on archetype, underlying motivation, and interest group likely to voice them. Below is a summary of the themes and insights that came out of this work.

A Taxonomy of Arguments

The objections to universal basic income as a policy and a political priority are diverse, but they break down into three basic archetypes:

“We shouldn’t…”

“We can’t…”

“We won’t…”

“We shouldn’t” objections take issue with the very concept of UBI. UBI is a bad idea, or just plain wrong. Even if a perfectly doable policy was presented to them, these objectors would not want to implement a basic income. This is either because they believe UBI is in some way immoral, unethical, or unjust; or because they worry that life under UBI would in some way be worse than the alternative—for everyone, for a specific group, or just for them. Here we will find the people that will actively fight UBI proposals. When basic income is put on the ballot, they will campaign against us. We must be prepared to debate them on the intellectual merits of our cause, in the court of public opinion. With the right arguments, we can win some over. Others will always be against us.

“We can’t” objections agree that UBI would be beneficial in theory, but see problems with the practical reality of such a policy. These are the worry-worts, the naysayers, but we shouldn’t dismiss them carelessly. These arguments raise real questions about how UBI will be implemented, how it will be sustained, and what long term effects basic income would have on the economy and society. The Can’ts are critical because they may be willing to join our movement, if we can answer their concerns.

“We won’t” arguments see the value in a universal basic income, and they agree that such a policy would work. However they do not believe that the political will exists to fight for this better world—or that if we did, we would lose. These are the cynics, though they likely think of themselves as realists. Like the Can’ts, the Won’ts are all potential members of our movement,

if we can convince them to take heart. Of the objections we've mapped out, the fewest fall into this archetype. But in some ways this group is the first we should focus on, for they need motivation more than moral rhetoric, a sense of hope more than facts and figures. On the other hand, here we may also find the last holdouts to our cause, because they understood why we were right and still did not join us. That said, if we get to the ballot they are likely to support us.

There is a sort of fourth category here as well: objections that are actually requests for clarification. Some of these will be basic, knee-jerk questions that can be answered by any informed UBI advocate. Many others, however, may have to do with details that we ourselves have not fully reckoned with, such as whether children will receive dividends as well as adults or whether governments will take away subsidies from criminals who violate the social contract. Those who ask for clarification aren't necessarily objectors, but we do need to keep their comments in mind as we hammer out the details.

We have created this taxonomy as a better way to understand the underlying similarities between different objections, which we go into detail on below. We also hope these archetypes will help the basic income movement triage its early efforts to grow and bring more people on board. Each of these types requires a different strategy to counter. With Shouldn'ts we need to passionately articulate the the moral and sociological logic behind basic income, and stoke their imagination to envision a better world. As well, battling Shouldn'ts in the court of public opinion will help to prevent the passage of pro-poverty values to the next generation. Can'ts will want to see fleshed out proposals and economic models. Won'ts need to know that we are serious, and that we have the potential to win on the scale of other memorable social movements (abolition, suffrage, labor protections, civil rights, gay marriage, potentially marijuana legalization).

Fears and Motivations

We also considered the deeper beliefs, assumptions, and fears that may motivate objections to UBI. We believe that any campaign to promote or implement UBI will have to respond to these deep-seated -- and often quite natural and valid -- doubts about UBI, automation, and the possibilities of a world where the notions of employment and work are permanently severed.

We live in a moment where the **threat of collapse** -- economic, ecological, or social -- is very real to many Americans, and these fears animate many objections to UBI. Some of these collapses are seemingly inevitable, others exist only in the fever dream of talk radio, partisan television, or dystopian fiction, but no one who's lived through the last 15 years is a stranger to the idea that changes and breakdowns in large systems can unleash collapses with consequences both global and intimate (Katrina, Sandy, the dot-com bust, the subprime mortgage crisis, etc). Americans are connoisseurs of collapse. We identify **fear of economic collapse** and **fear of social collapse** as two common motivators of UBI objection.

Depending on its type of implementation, UBI is potentially a dramatic break with familiar capitalist forms. One strand of this fear plays out in unease about UBI in simple economic terms -- that *we simply can't afford it* and that *it will cause chaos* in wages and the prices of goods. Another strand is more general: fears about the collapse of capitalism's system of carrots and sticks, as individuals are de incentivized to "compete" and "innovate" and the working class flees structurally crucial but unpleasant jobs en masse, perhaps causing us to fall behind other countries. These interlace with anxieties about being outcompeted in the global economy by foreign powers—particularly China.

We found the fear of social collapse occurring across ideological lines. UBI could incentivize laziness, the pursuit of "non-productive" hobbies and work, or create roving bands of unemployed, unmonitored, and untethered young men or other undesirables looking for fun. Drug addicts and alcoholics would be freed to pursue their dissolution, criminals would be rewarded.

Traditional and conservative notions of family and social structure are very bound up in a belief in the **virtue of work**. Labor calms and enriches the soul, many believe, and employment grounds us in the social structure, gives us purpose and meaning. Work, particularly waged work, is the center of life, the source of identity, and an end in itself. Sloth is a sin and idle hands are the devil's playthings. Whether rooted in religion or ideology—or a need to justify the time we spend on uncomfortable or difficult tasks—a belief in the virtue of work underlies many of the most vigorous objections to UBI.

This is particularly true of the ideal of an authoritative male breadwinner as the linchpin of society. When women and children, each with a UBI sustaining them, outnumber the Father, the balance of power could shift precipitously. "Women's work" could exist on an equal plane. People would be disincentivized to pool resources and form nuclear families, and women would be freer to leave a marriage or have children out of wedlock. Even children could potentially gain more power over their parents and elders depending on how UBI is distributed to them.

These latter fears occur both as anxiety about social collapse, and as more intimate worries about a personal **loss of identity, role, ideal, or values**. Neoliberalism has tied our personal identities to our work, through ideas about the primacy and independence of the individual, the individual's power to control her success in the jobs marketplace, and the middle-class ideal of finding fulfillment and happiness by "loving what you do." Similarly, the Protestant work ethic

gave us a moral justification for hard work and for viewing our work as a “calling,” ideas which have long outlived their Puritan and Calvinist originators. By presenting a world where “employment” and “work” are no longer synonymous, and where one’s career is no longer necessarily a defining personal characteristic, UBI threatens our fragile identities as morally deserving of mobility and fulfillment (if not a seat in heaven) because of our labor.

This type of cognitive dissonance can encourage the continuation of struggle as a form of hazing: the frat member subjected himself to **hazing**, so, in order not to think himself stupid, he comes to believe it was good for him. To affirm this he must also believe it would be good to make new initiates go through the same process. Likewise, if I suffered through a job I hated to survive—without protesting or demanding free money—I need to believe that was good for me, and would be good for others as well. To these people advocating for a basic income may be seen as an attack on their identity and self-worth.

Some objections to UBI play on notions of **unfairness**, also drawing on the idea that work and the wealth gainful employment brings are a mechanisms or indicators that separate the deserving from the undeserving. The idea that people should not get something for nothing is primordial and deep-seated in our culture, and UBI’s redistributive, Robin Hood aura is deeply disturbing to this instinct.

Paradoxically, the universal nature of UBI can be viewed as unfair from a variety of angles. Some may say, “I don’t want to see their money redistributed to lazy people who don’t work as hard as me,” while others will say “I don’t want it given to people who already have more than me.” Complexities proliferate when we discuss offering the same benefits to felons, addicts, and shiftless layabouts as to the virtuous, creative and hardworking. For those who have succeeded in pulling themselves up by their proverbial bootstraps (or who believe they have or will one day), it may be offensive to consider others skating to financial comfort without discipline and moxie. We also see the appeal to fairness in potential objections from within the left, since UBI could conveniently sidestep campaigns for reparations to marginalized groups.

The unfairness motivation’s visions of an undeserving “other” overlaps with a **distrust of other people**, who may not be able to manage their income appropriately without a paternalistic state apparatus (a potential criticism from the left). From the right, we must confront hoary trope of the welfare queen who pleads poverty from the driver’s seat of her ill-gotten Cadillac. These objections can find purchase in the anxieties of racists and xenophobes, who don’t like the idea that UBI might empower groups they fear or despise.

In addition to worrying that others may find comfort and safety they don't deserve, we also see concerns that **I will lose comfort and safety I already have**. Many of us are aware that our comfort is predicated on the suffering of others, namely through cheap or difficult labor that exploited workers would be freed to quit under UBI. We also worry that our wages or purchasing power will drop, or that our way of life will change. Perhaps a world with UBI would have no need of whatever services I provide, and I would lose the career I've built. Perhaps I am rich, and see my taxes going up, or perhaps I envision some other way that the funding mechanism for a basic income program might sap my own prosperity.

Some will oppose UBI for largely **ideological and political** reasons. UBI represents a victory by an opposing faction or would undermine the power of their interest group. Or UBI steps off the path they envision for humanity, whether forward towards some future prosperity, backwards to recapture some golden age, or over the cliff, a dive into a promised revolution. Some see universal income as a turn that undermines meritocracy, or market solutions, or freedom itself. We see this largely on the right, where conservatives are reluctant to grow the impact of government, disrupt the traditional social structure, and give freely to strangers and dilettantes. But the left has its own ideological hackles to raise, particularly when Marxists get into the weeds on the labor theory of value. These may be some of the most difficult objections to dispel, because they flow from deeply held and comprehensive beliefs about the nature of the world.

Others may argue that despite its lofty goals, UBI won't fix the problems it aims to solve. **The system won't work**, poverty and inequality will continue because basic income does not tackle these problems as efficiently as more targeted social programs. In this way, UBI would be a **misuse of time and resources** that could be better spent solving the climate crisis, the housing crisis, the debt crisis. Or worse, perhaps **the cure is worse than the disease**, and a world without poverty will reveal some terrible crux of human nature—a brave new world that perverts some basic tenant of individuality or decency. This **fear of the unknown** is perhaps the most generalized reason for resisting a UBI plan.

Interest Groups to Consider

These fears and motivations do not exist in the ether. They coalesce around specific political groups, both ideological factions and demographic classes. Below we examine some of the

main groups likely to raise objections to UBI, and how we can best approach bringing them around.

Conservatives and traditionalists

We imagine this group to be most motivated by nostalgia for an (imagined) past where social roles were clear and hierarchical, work was plentiful and important (for men), and capitalism went unquestioned and unremarked upon. BI threatens this group by promising greater freedom for women and by equally rewarding traditionally feminine labor. BI also empowers other marginal groups that threaten to disrupt the social order: bohemians, radicals, the LGBT community, the ignoble poor.

Counterarguments to this group should be soothing and indulgent, focused on the ways UBI could offer benefits to overworked and financially stressed nuclear families. For these groups, UBI could offer a “return” to the dinner table, the day of rest, and to the personal pursuit of wholesome, time-consuming hobbies like woodworking and homesteading.

Capitalists, Neoliberals, Libertarians

These groups represent a spectrum of people who support the current economic order, either because they believe in the entrepreneurial freedom brought by market solutions and small government or because they themselves are the primary beneficiaries of the global capitalism. The former end will resist what they see as a nanny state that threatens individualism. The latter end will fear any change will unseat them from their rarified positions as plutocrats. Neoliberals are a particularly tricky case, for their zeal for markets is such that they believe capitalism should reform humanity, as opposed to the other way around.

Certain capitalists may be won over if we can convince them that UBI will open up new markets for their products, as well as mollify a populace hostile to the 1%. Neoliberals too care about opening up markets (any markets!) and may be convinced to make concessions to a change that doesn't threaten the basic mechanisms of capitalism. Libertarians should be approached about the ways UBI dismantles clunky means-testing bureaucracies and empowers the individual to pursue personal goals and dreams of innovation and success. Providing information about the growing body of evidence that UBI and Welfare programs give individuals an economic floor upon which to start businesses and other entrepreneurial endeavors may open some minds. All told, however, these groups may be a tough nut to crack.

Racists, nationalists and xenophobes

This group is, obviously, ruled by a fear and mistrust of the imagined other. While they may not reject BI for themselves and their communities, they would fear an influx of handout-hungry immigrants or migrants to any area that implemented it. They are concerned with the unworthiness of minorities, or that a basic income would loose people of color from the ghettos. American Nationalists particularly strongly buy into the archetype of the rugged individualist American, the self-made man. But any country's patriots might fear being outcompeted on the global stage by countries more tolerant of slave wages or more dedicated to big industry and infrastructure than public welfare.

The Alaskan example could be persuasive to this group (who is likelier to cite Greece or San Francisco's former cash handouts as arguments against UBI). Alaska has had a form of universal income since the early '80s and has not lost its character as a thoroughly red-blooded American state.

Liberals, paternalistic and otherwise

Liberals are invested, emotionally and sometimes professionally, in the American social safety net. We think they would have paternalistic concerns about whether the poor could be trusted to receive income without bureaucratic monitoring, and practical concerns about whether BI would be used as a neoliberal cover to shred education spending, Medicaid, and other existing social programs. The liberal psyche seems primed for self-defeating rhetoric and unproductive infighting, which could threaten BI initiatives from within the left. Additionally, BI implementation may require a coalition and compromises between techno-libertarians and liberals, and the left is ill-equipped for and inexperienced in this kind of collaboration across ideological lines.

To tackle this group, we need to appeal to liberals' sense of compassion, their belief in the goodness of people, and their beleaguered hope for a progressive future. We also need to reassure them that UBI is not "flat tax" style maneuver—dismantling a progressive system in the name of simplicity—but would in fact lead to more and better support for the poor and downtrodden.

Technolibertarians

A lot of the energy around basic income has been generated from within Silicon Valley circles. This group is primarily animated by a desire for freedom and a vision of an exhilarating high-tech future, and this ideology has the potential to clash with groups from the left who approach BI from a desire for equality. One natural fault line we see developing already is an

argument about whether BI will be private (crowdfunded, block-chained, or paid for by business or philanthropy) or public (and therefore enmeshed in a loathed government bureaucracy).

Like the left, it remains to be seen if technolibertarians will be willing to form coalitions and compromise with other BI supporters, especially on the left. Historically, this group is known for making brash proposals that do not always play well outside of tech industry circles.

Labor Unions

The Labor movement traditionally fights for a higher standard of living, and collective rights against capitalists. With membership eroding due to various factors, they are looking to make sure members continue to gain benefit from staying in a bargaining unit. Some in the labor movement might object to a UBI because a victory on such an effort would extend to those who don't pay dues—the so-called “Free Rider” problem.

Yet appealing to labor unions could be very important to advancing a UBI. Very few labor leaders know about the campaign for UBI, as they are currently very involved in efforts to win a \$15 minimum wage to level the playing field for working families. Were they to be convinced and engaged, they could lend staff, resources, and manpower to this social justice cause. Next year, former Service Employees International Union President Andy Stern is releasing the book: “Raising the Floor: How a Universal Basic Income Can Renew Our Economy and Rebuild the American Dream.” This could be a tipping point for getting labor engaged in the effort.

Environmentalists

The Cap-and-Dividend movement has been one of the biggest breakthroughs of the UBI movement into mainstream legislative thought. Advocates propose to fight climate change by capping carbon emissions and distributing pollution tax revenues to individuals, but this last part has proven controversial in the larger environmental movement. Some argue that pollution revenues should go towards climate mitigation efforts, i.e. expanding clean energy, storage, clean transit, etc. Many are now also advocating for long-term adaptation investments (sea walls, shoreline restoration, flood capture, etc.). Others argue that these funds should assist communities disproportionately affected by pollution. Cap-and-dividend advocates are trying to build momentum for an Alaska Permanent Fund-style dividend to individuals, which would serve as a de-facto UBI.

Appealing to environmentalists means putting pollution reduction first, acknowledging that short-to-medium term investments in transit and clean energy are important for long-term

carbon reductions, yet making the case that individuals inherently make poor choices on climate-related decisions when they don't have money. We need a long-term change in mindset needs to take place where environmentalists (and others) accept that we should all be entitled to a share of resources and revenues generated by the exploitation or improvement of our environment. Further public education about the Permanent Fund and research about people's polluting economic behaviors would be important to this effort.

We can also point out to environmentalists how support for cap-and-dividend programs can solve a serious image problem of the environmentalist movement. Environmentalists are often caricatured as middle-class white liberals who want to preserve the environment to have pretty places to take vacations, but who do not care about the suffering environmental-austerity will place on the poor. Cap-and-dividend programs can unite environmentalists with economic leftists, showing a way to clean the environment in a manner that directly helps the poor and working classes.

Marxists, anarchists and other radicals

UBI is a radical proposal, but it is still a proposal to reform and sustain the existing economic system. For those who hope for a future communist utopia, strict socialism, the overthrow of the state, or some other revolutionary break with the capitalist order, UBI might seem like bandaging a wound on a limb that would be better amputated. Dedicated Marxists may also have theoretical objections, particularly around the labor theory of value, which is skeptical of the vitality of an economy run on automation.

For the Marxists, a direct engagement with critical theory might be the best approach. For the anarchists, paint a vision of how freedom from bullshit jobs might unleash energies of liberation within the populace. In general UBI advocates should take radicals' ideas seriously and illuminate ways that a universal income can be a stepping stone to getting out from under the thumb (read: bootheel) of capitalism.

Marginalized groups

American minority groups may be suspicious of the "all lives matter" nature of UBI, which does nothing to reckon directly with historical and structural inequalities. Like liberals, they may see universal income as a covert way to dismantle programs that specifically benefit their groups. They may see UBI as a solution that does not fix more pressing problems, such as segregated housing or affordable education. They may look askance at the composition of UBI meetups and events—a composition which is, we must admit, often white, male, and middle class.

When addressing these groups, it's best not to pander. They have serious concerns about very real problems that UBI *won't* fix. Instead we should work to make the basic income movement more intersectional, more diverse, more connected with a wider variety of activists. All our struggles are bound up together.

Moderates and the middle class

For those whose position in the status quo is comfortable but whose grasp on prosperity is tentative, any major change can be scary. Unlike wealthy capitalists, who are going to be fine no matter what, the middle class may worry that shifts in the economic order wrought by UBI would leave them in a worse position. Moderates are skeptical of any radical proposition. Both are susceptible to moral panic driven by those with a more direct objection: capitalists, racists, etc.

Counterarguments to these groups should focus on UBI's common sense nature, the ways in which it provides financial stability for them and their families, and the incremental way UBI is likely to be implemented.

Major Objections and the Counter-Arguments

Though we imagined dozens of strange and sometimes twisted flavors of opposition to universal basic income, a few rose as the most prominent, the most sticking, the objections we will hear again and again. Below we name these, and we begin to counter them. These counter-arguments are not the only strategies that might be used to win over objectors, but we hope they lay the groundwork for an intellectually rigorous campaign.

Without jobs, people will be lazy.

A major goal of basic income is to eliminate the poverty trap of welfare by paying people whether they work or not. Most lottery winners work. Most people with trust funds work. Basic income trials for families in poverty in the U.S. in the 60s and 70s did show a 14% work reduction.

However the largest part of this reduction came from teenagers who stopped working and secondary workers who became homemakers. These reductions were likely responsible for the extraordinary gains in education and health outcomes produced by the cash grants. Some primary workers with two jobs quit one, and unemployed workers took longer to find work,

perhaps being more picky about finding a job that paid better and suited their skills more. Not a single case was found of a primary worker quitting all jobs and living solely off the basic income. In fact, the primary workers in recipient families still worked more than full-time on average.

More recent cash transfer experiments in nations with extreme poverty such as Uganda have shown *increases* in work, as people without jobs often use the money to start their own businesses. The pattern seems to be that almost all people want to spend a significant amount of time engaged in productive work, and a significant amount of time in leisure activities, and they will use whatever money they have to achieve that balance.

We can't afford it.

The gross domestic income for the United States last year was over \$16 trillion and the total population was just under 320 million, giving us a mean average income of more than \$50,000 per person. The 1950s and 1960s were known as decades of great economic growth in the United States. For most of the 1950s we had a top marginal income tax rate of 90 percent, and for most of the 1960s we had a top marginal rate of 70 percent. Our current top marginal rate is 39.5 percent. We could fund a basic income of \$10,000 per person on top of all our other spending with an across-the-board income tax increase of 20 percent, and our top marginal rate would be 59.5%—still less than during the 1960s.

That might not be the entire way we want to fund the basic income, but it does show we can afford it, and the cost would only go down from there as we started to cut now unnecessary welfare programs and began spending less on law enforcement and health care.

People will spend the money on booze, drugs, and hookers.

Confrontational answer: “Maybe. It is their money. Do you want everyone telling you what to do with your money?”

Likely follow up: “But it's *my* money. It is the money that I pay in taxes that will go to the people who do not work.”

Unless you earn significantly more than median income, you will likely be a net *recipient* of the basic income. The taxes you pay are your fee for the benefits of government, such as infrastructure, protection of your life and property, and use of legal structures such as contracts, corporations, and various forms of property. Your basic income is part of your personal dividend

as an equal owner of the government. Do you worry about whether your landlord will misspend what you pay for rent, or whether McDonald's will misspend what you pay for a Big Mac?

The libertarian answer is: There is no evidence that the government can run people's lives better than they can run their own. The government can help people make better decisions by educating them and providing resources. But when the government imposes regulations, demands paperwork, and takes enforcement action against people, the burden and stress discourages personal improvement. And experiments with direct cash transfers to the poor show they often come up with useful and responsible things to do with the money that the experts never thought of. Finally, the sanction of taking away money is counter productive. Becoming homeless almost never causes addicts to give up drugs, teenagers to study more, or the overweight to buy more nutritious foods.

Won't people have more kids just to get more UBI checks?

Actually, there are a lot of different opinions on whether or not or how much children should receive a basic income. Some say yes, some say no, some think children should get a smaller basic income, and some think children should get a full basic income but all or a portion of it should be held in trust until they are adults. Some jurisdictions actually provide small basic incomes, or nearly basic incomes to children even though they do not provide them to adults, through baby bonds and child tax credits. The most common reason given for saying that children should be denied the same basic income given to adults is that it will encourage poor people to have children who will be dependent on the state, but there is little support for this. Adults with a basic income will not be poor, and birth rates decline as incomes rise. For someone not already in poverty, it is unlikely the basic income will be large enough to make having a child a financially smart move. But whatever you believe about children and a basic income, remember that children are fully human, so any deviation from what adults receive needs to convincingly answer the question, "Why not?"

Isn't this communism or socialism? Is UBI a redistribution of wealth?

Actually, Milton Friedman and F.A. Hayek, two of the three most important libertarian economists in history, supported a basic income. Meanwhile, the most famous person to declare that those who don't work don't eat was Vladimir Lenin. So in this discussion, the BI supporter is following the words of Milton Friedman, and the BI skeptic is more aligned with Vladimir Lenin.

That's the snarky answer. The serious answer is that forms of a basic income guarantee are compatible with both capitalism and socialism/communism, and that fact helps to demonstrate that "capitalism " and "socialism" are both incoherent terms.

With UBI, nobody would do the dirty jobs, to the detriment of society.

That is an evil and aristocratic objection. How will we find cheap labor to do the nasty jobs we want done, but don't want to do ourselves, if we don't starve some unimportant people who refuse to do them for us? This question is the labor equivalent of the question a Democratic California State Senator in the 1970s asked a group of feminists who were petitioning for the removal of the marital rape exemption: "But if you can't rape your wife, who can you rape?" Or the plantation owners at the end of the Civil War who demanded to know who was going to pick their cotton.

The incentive to do dirty jobs will have to come from the free market. If you offered enough money you could probably get Warren Buffet to clean your toilet.

Note: The only way to teach the wider public, and most importantly rising generations, that it is contemptible to ask who will pick your cotton if not slaves, or who a man can rape if not his wife, or who will clean the toilets if not people who would otherwise starve, is to treat the question with the contempt it deserves. If you absolutely must answer the "But who will clean the toilets?" question in a diplomatic way, you can substitute the answer to the question about the effect of a basic income on wages.

Why should we give money to rich people?

The taxes that pay for a basic income are the only sensible means testing, and Bill Gates would pay far more than he received. Means testing is itself a tax on the middle class that traps people in poverty by creating a strong disincentive to work and save for those already at the margins of employment. Means testing a basic income would transform a system of just redistribution into a redistributive welfare program. Means tested welfare programs are a way for the rich to make the middle class pay the poor not to revolt.

Employers would reduce wages.

Wage substitution from a basic income should only occurs at the lowest subsistence level wages. Because no one will work for less than they need to live, supply drops off at that point. Giving those people other regular income that is not sufficient to live off of reduces what they need to live from employers. This is why a minimum wage will still be necessary until we have a basic income that is higher than what people need to live. However, a wage substitution effect

should not occur once there is a basic income above subsistence level, since recipients would be empowered to leave jobs where they did not believe they were being paid adequately.

There should be no wage substitution effect on skilled labor. Everyone making over subsistence level is getting paid based on the supply of and demand for their specific skills. There are plenty of people willing to do the work of a nurse for much less than nurses make, but they cannot because they do not have the skills. At subsistence level, the "supply" in the supply and demand labor curve is the supply of bodies. Above subsistence, the "supply" is the supply of skills. A UBI at less than subsistence level can allow bodies to be supplied for less, but no basic income will directly change the supply of skills.

It's just another lefty idea that will never happen.

In the U.S. Presidential campaign of 1972, both incumbent Republican Richard Nixon and Democratic challenger George McGovern included versions of a basic income in their campaign platforms. In 1988, two men in Indiana sued for a license to marry each other, and the judge not only threw out the case, but also levied a fine of \$2,800 on the men for wasting the court's time with a frivolous lawsuit. The judge wrote that the plaintiffs' "claims about Indiana law and constitutional rights are wacky and sanctionably so." Today, it may seem like basic income could never be taken seriously by mainstream politicians and it is hard to remember just how much of lunatic fringe idea same-sex marriage was one generation ago. But with all of human history against it, activists moved the zeitgeist in favor of same-sex marriage in just one generation. With hard work, poverty abolitionists should be able to advance public opinion back to where it was in 1972.

And we are making progress. In 2014, the idea of basic income received more media attention and support from political leaders around the world than at anytime in the past 30 years. And as the slowly growing crisis of technological unemployment demands attention from political leaders, basic income will be discussed more and more openly as the only practical solution. Do I really believe there is a reasonable chance of a basic income being adopted in the United States in the next five years? Sadly, no. But with hard work, adoption in the United States in 20 years is certainly feasible. And even if it takes 50 years to abolish poverty, would not that be worth it?

Some Niche Objections and the Counter-Arguments

The following are examples of possible answers to some of the less common potential objections to a UBI.

There is no provision in the Constitution for economic rights. UBI will be susceptible to political horse-trading.

This is why a basic income must be universal. Universal entitlements are nearly impossible to reduce or eliminate, because they create a special interest group consisting of everyone. Social Security is considered the “third rail” of American politics because politicians are afraid to touch it. George W. Bush’s attempt to “reform” Social Security was a fiasco. The Alaska Permanent Fund is considered the third rail of Alaskan politics for the same reason. During government shutdowns, the public gets the most upset when national parks are closed, because they exist for the benefit of everyone. Programs directed at the poor are vulnerable to political attack. A truly universal basic income will not be vulnerable because everyone would receive the check.

UBI will push women back into the home, erasing feminism’s gains in the professional sphere.

Basic income will solve a lot of problems, but it is no panacea. It is true that women are generally the partners expected to raise the children and keep the household, and it is possible that with a basic income, women in less affluent families are more likely to stay home and be homemakers because they will be able to afford to do so. In fact, that is what happened in the Negative Income Tax experiments conducted in the United States in the 60s and 70s.

Certainly we should support social movements that aim to change these gender expectations. But is forcing poor women to work at coffee shops or Walmart under the threat that their families may otherwise starve the answer? Is it the case that men generally share in the childcare and housework when their wives work? The dramatic gains in health and education outcomes among families in the NIT experiments suggest that the necessary household work that wives performed when they left work was simply not getting done by anyone when the wives were working. And the fact that these poor women had jobs to leave in the first place before women supposedly entered the workforce in the late seventies and early eighties illustrates the fact that poor women in America have always worked so that their families could survive, and that did nothing to help the ambitions of middle-class women who were expected to stay at home.

Do you want to lead a crusade to encourage men to do their share of household chores? Please do, it is about time. But do not use starvation to force poor women into crappy jobs. It never helped the cause of feminism in the past, and there is no reason to think it will do so in the future.

It will grow to be unaffordable because of the political pressure to increase payouts every year.

Senior citizens vote in huge numbers, yet Social Security has not risen to unsustainable levels, and we currently have tax rates far lower than during the boom years of the 50s and 60s. The truth is that even with a basic income, the people will still have to be responsible citizens and not raise it to unsustainable levels, and the rich will still have a disproportionate ability to influence legislators to keep their money. The basic income may very well rise above subsistence level, but if it rises above a sustainable level, that will have to be corrected by the political process, just as now the political process now has to correct when wealth concentration causes recessions due to lack of sufficient demand.

What about the people with more expensive needs? UBI is ablest.

The communist idea of “to each according to their need” is patronizing in theory and degrading in practice. Currently in the U.S., disability payments are for the survival needs of those who cannot work. They are not intended to compensate for how bad your life is with a disability, and the amount you receive is not determined by what type of disability it is or even how bad it is, as long as it is bad enough that you cannot work. How could it be otherwise? Should a blind person get more or less than a paraplegic? Should a person bed-ridden from pain six hours per day get twice as much as a person bed-ridden three hours per day? How do you prove it? How can you judge who is “disabled enough,” and how do you compare one disability against another?

Currently the process of applying for disability is long, arduous, arbitrary, humiliating, and demoralizing. We think we can easily tell who *really* needs our help, when the truth is that many – but certainly not all – people with traditional and obvious disabilities like blindness, deafness, and being confined to a wheelchair lead easier and more fulfilling lives than many people with invisible disabilities like depression, fibromyalgia, or chronic fatigue. We force people who cannot work to convince skeptical judges about how pitiful their lives are and then we label them as being either lazy frauds or useless burdens. You really cannot know what another person's life is like. To make someone prove they are disabled is to make them convince themselves they have no hope.

Health insurance should include paying for specific items that are needed for a specific disability, such as a motorized wheelchair for someone with severe neuropathy or para-transit services for people with epileptic seizures that make it dangerous to drive. But for our basic living expenses, we all deserve them equally, and no one should be forced to prove it.

UBI would cause inflation and throw the economy into chaos.

It would if we just printed the money and gave it away. But as long as we pay for BI through taxes, the money supply would remain stable and it would be no different than if everyone got more money from working. Alaska has a small basic income and there is no evidence that it has affected their inflation rate, nor is there evidence that prices rise when the minimum wage is raised. There is a potential for a basic income to cause a rise in the price of fixed assets such as land, but that is again no different from what would happen if everyone earned more money from wages, and those gains can be recaptured through land taxes.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This memo, and the list of 100 possible objections, was brainstormed in a day, with no outside input beyond our personal experience as Americans and our various forays into grad school social science. It will be necessary to gather firmer data through surveys, focus groups and ethnographies. We are confident that the main hurdle to a national conversation about UBI right now is its unfamiliarity, and if the concept can be introduced with sensitivity to the idiosyncratic concerns of different American interest groups, we think it will fare well.

In our taxonomy of archetypes and our dissection of fears, motivations and interest groups, we see a broad array of potential allies with specific concerns that can be addressed through data and tailored messaging. We hope this document and the spreadsheet it accompanies will be a useful thinking tool for those engaged in campaigns to publicize or implement UBI.

This project was first pitched as “opposition research,” an evocative but misleading term. And indeed, there will be an opposition. If universal basic income ever makes a push on a national or international stage, it will likely face a core of virulent detractors, funded by the big money of entrenched interests. Such has been the case with every social movement and economic reform in America for more than two centuries.

This won't be easy; it was never going to be. We will be slandered. We will make enemies. But the opposition is not united. Some we will win over. Some we will fight. If we know them, we can win.