Universal Basic Income - Good  
Opposition Brief by Chris Jeub



**GOOD**

As you’re preparing for regionals and (hopefully!) nationals, you might be needing some examples to back up your affirmative case. It’s easy for the negative to cite random examples of a universal basic income not working and a *non-*working class rising up and exhausting society. It’s also easy for them to cite scientific studies saying UBI might not work. You need to be able to combat that.

What I’ve done in this brief is compiled a list of citations that you can use to illustrate the effectiveness of universal basic income. They stem from an article in the U.K. published by an outfit who promotes UBI locally. It’s a great list of reasons UBI can work for an industrial society. I extend their 11 reasons (the title says 10, but they cleverly added an 11th) with other source material to support their claims.

You can use this evidence to illustrate how such a system could work.

Opposition Brief: UBI Is Good

# 1) Basic Income will help us rethink how & why we work

Basic Income U.K. “Ten Reasons to Support Basic Income.” <https://www.basicincome.org.uk/reasons-support-basic-income>

A basic income can help you do other work and reconsider old choices: It will enable you to retrain, safe in the knowledge that you’ll have enough money to maintain a decent standard of living while you do. It will therefore help each of us to decide what it is we truly want to do.

AT Rethinking Basic Income

John Henley. “Money for nothing: is Finland's universal basic income trial too good to be true?” The Guardian, January 12, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2018/jan/12/money-for-nothing-is-finlands-universal-basic-income-trial-too-good-to-be-true>

But amid this unprecedented media attention, the experts who devised the scheme are concerned it is being misrepresented. “It’s not really what people are portraying it as,” said Markus Kanerva, an applied social and behavioural sciences specialist working in the prime minister’s office in Helsinki. “A full-scale universal income trial would need to study different target groups, not just the unemployed. It would have to test different basic income levels, look at local factors. This is really about seeing how a basic unconditional income affects the employment of unemployed people.”

Musk, Zuckerberg, Obama want UBI

Sabastian Johnson. “The Case for Universal Basic Income,” Los Angeles Times, June 29, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-johnson-universal-basic-income-20170629-story.html>

In the last year alone, Mark Zuckerberg called on Harvard's graduating class to "explore ideas like universal basic income," Elon Musk told a gathering of world leaders in Dubai that "some kind of universal basic income is going to be necessary," and President Obama remarked that universal basic income is a subject we'll be debating "over the next 10 or 20 years."

UBI concept is not new

Sabastian Johnson. “The Case for Universal Basic Income,” Los Angeles Times, June 29, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-johnson-universal-basic-income-20170629-story.html>

Though universal basic income, or UBI, has become [downright trendy](https://www.city-journal.org/html/disrupters-14950.html) in Silicon Valley, the concept is not actually new. Thomas Paine proposed a basic income for every citizen as early as 1792. Milton Friedman and Martin Luther King Jr. endorsed the idea in the 1960s as a way of fighting poverty. In 1971, a basic income for poor families almost became law under President Nixon.

UBI is not new

Scott Santens. “Why we should all have a basic income,” World Economic Forum, 15 Jan 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/why-we-should-all-have-a-basic-income/>

It may surprise you to learn that a partial UBI has already existed in Alaska since 1982, and that a version of basic income was experimentally tested in the United States in the 1970s. The same is true in Canada, where the town of Dauphinmanaged to eliminate poverty for five years. Full UBI experiments have been done more recently in places such as Namibia, India and Brazil. Other countries are following suit: Finland, the Netherlands and Canada are carrying out government-funded experiments to compare against existing programmes. Organizations like Y Combinator and GiveDirectly have launched privately funded experiments in the US and East Africa respectively.

# 2) Basic Income will contribute to better working conditions

Basic Income U.K. “Ten Reasons to Support Basic Income.” <https://www.basicincome.org.uk/reasons-support-basic-income>

With the insurance of having unconditional basic income as a safety net, workers can challenge their employers if they find their conditions of work unfair or degrading.

UBI simplifies worker benefits

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The trial data may also allow the government to spend less on bureaucracy by simplifying Finland’s complex social security system – currently, it offers more than 40 different means-tested benefits – which is struggling to cope with a 21st-century labour market of part timers, short-term contracts and start-ups. The benefit system is simply “not suited to modern working patterns”, Turunen said. “We have too many benefits. People don’t understand what they’re entitled to or how they can get it. Even experts don’t understand. For example, it’s very hard to be in the benefit system in Finland if you are self-employed – you have to prove your income time and time and time again.”

# 3) Basic Income will downsize bureaucracy

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Because a basic income scheme is one of the most simple tax / benefits models, it will reduce all the bureaucracy surrounding the welfare state thus making it less complex and costly, while being fairer and more emancipatory. “One participant has said she is less anxious because she no longer has to worry over calls from the job centre offering a job she can’t accept because she is caring for her elderly parents,” Turunen said. “We may be able to see from the trial data whether it has had unintended benefits – such as reduced medical costs.”

# 4) Basic income will make benefit fraud obsolete

Basic Income U.K. “Ten Reasons to Support Basic Income.” <https://www.basicincome.org.uk/reasons-support-basic-income>

As an extension of (3), benefit fraud will vanish as a possibility because no one needs to commit fraud to get a basic income: it is granted automatically. Moreover, an unconditional basic income will fix the threshold and [poverty trap effects](http://web.archive.org/web/20160428044500/http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poverty_trap) induced by the current means-tested schemes.

Automation of UBI will solve problems with status quo

Sabastian Johnson. “The Case for Universal Basic Income,” Los Angeles Times, June 29, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-johnson-universal-basic-income-20170629-story.html>

Although economists are still debating whether automation will ultimately devastate the American labor market or not – many point out that previous economic transitions created as many jobs as they destroyed – few dispute that such transitions were extremely painful for workers. We know that most of the American workforce currently lacks the skills required for the jobs of the future, and costly retraining programs have failed to close this gap. For all these reasons, establishing a universal basic income is the only real way to help Americans weather the widespread disruption that automation is sure to bring.

# 5) Basic income will help reducing inequalities

Basic Income U.K. “Ten Reasons to Support Basic Income.” <https://www.basicincome.org.uk/reasons-support-basic-income>

A basic income is also a means for sharing out the wealth produced by a society to all people thereby reducing the growing inequalities across the world.

UBI requires equal treatment

John Henley. “Money for nothing: is Finland's universal basic income trial too good to be true?” The Guardian, January 12, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2018/jan/12/money-for-nothing-is-finlands-universal-basic-income-trial-too-good-to-be-true>

Perhaps most significantly, the trial marks “a real breakthrough for field experiments”, according to Kanerva. Rolled out in record time and after a brief, one-line pledge in the government’s platform, it had to function alongside all existing social security laws and clear numerous legal obstacles – including Finland’s constitution, which requires all citizens to be treated equally. “It was a huge effort to get it over the line,” Turunen said. “The government was determined it must be based on specific legislation – most experiments are not – and that it had to launch in January last year ... It was quite a task.”

# 6) It will provide a more secure and substantial safety net for all people

Basic Income U.K. “Ten Reasons to Support Basic Income.” <https://www.basicincome.org.uk/reasons-support-basic-income>

Most existing means-tested anti-poverty schemes exclude people because of their complexity, or because people don’t even know how to apply or whether they qualify. With a basic income, people currently excluded from benefit allowances will automatically have their rights guaranteed.

Finland’s UBI helps solve for unemployment

John Henley. “Money for nothing: is Finland's universal basic income trial too good to be true?” The Guardian, January 12, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2018/jan/12/money-for-nothing-is-finlands-universal-basic-income-trial-too-good-to-be-true>

While UBI tends often to be associated with progressive politics, Finland’s trial was launched – at a cost of around €20m (£17.7m) – by a centre-right, austerity-focused government interested primarily in spending less on social security and bringing down Finland’s stubborn 8%-plus unemployment rate. It has a very clear purpose: to see whether an unconditional income might incentivise people to take up paid work. Authorities believe it will shed light on whether unemployed Finns, as experts believe, are put off taking up a job by the fear that a higher marginal tax rate may leave them worse off. Many are also deterred by having to reapply for benefits after every casual or short-term contract.

UBI provides equal opportunity for all citizens

Scott Santens. “Why we should all have a basic income,” World Economic Forum, 15 Jan 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/why-we-should-all-have-a-basic-income/>

“Basic income” would be an amount sufficient to secure basic needs as a permanent earnings floor no one could fall beneath, and would replace many of today’s temporary benefits, which are given only in case of emergency, and/or only to those who successfully pass the applied qualification tests. UBI would be a promise of equal opportunity, not equal outcome, a new starting line set above the poverty line.

UBI is less expensive than status quo

Scott Santens. “Why we should all have a basic income,” World Economic Forum, 15 Jan 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/why-we-should-all-have-a-basic-income/>

I know what you’re thinking. It’s the same thing most people think when they’re new to the idea. *Giving money to everyone for doing nothing*? That sounds both incredibly expensive and a great way to encourage people to do nothing. Well, it may sound counter-intuitive, but the exact opposite is true on both accounts. What’s incredibly expensive is not having basic income, and what really motivates people to work is, on one hand, *not*taking money away from them for working, and on the other hand, not actually about money at all.

UBI costs less for more impact

Scott Santens. “Why we should all have a basic income,” World Economic Forum, 15 Jan 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/why-we-should-all-have-a-basic-income/>

The true net cost of UBI in the US is therefore closer to an additional tax revenue requirement of a few hundred billion dollars – or less – depending on the many design choices made, and there exists a variety of ideas out there for crossing such a funding gap in a way that many people might prefer, that would also treat citizens like the shareholders they are (virtually all basic research is taxpayer funded), and that could even reduce taxes on labour by focusing more on capital, consumption, and externalities instead of wages and salaries. Additionally, we could eliminate the $540 billion in tax expenditures currently being provided disproportionately to the wealthiest, and also some of the $850 billion spent on defence.

UBI are like seatbelts

Scott Santens. “Why we should all have a basic income,” World Economic Forum, 15 Jan 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/why-we-should-all-have-a-basic-income/>

To some, this may sound wasteful. Why give someone money they don’t need, and then tax their other income? Think of it this way: is it wasteful to put seat belts in every car instead of only in the cars of those who have gotten into accidents thus demonstrating their need for seat belts? Good drivers never get into accidents, right? So it might seem wasteful. But it’s not because we recognize the absurd costs of determining who would and wouldn’t need seat belts, and the immeasurable costs of being wrong. We also recognize that accidents don’t only happen to “bad” drivers. They can happen to anyone, at any time, purely due to random chance. As a result, seat belts for everyone.

# 7) Basic Income will contribute to less working hours and better distribution of jobs

Basic Income U.K. “Ten Reasons to Support Basic Income.” <https://www.basicincome.org.uk/reasons-support-basic-income>

With a basic income, people will have the option to reduce their working hours without sacrificing their income. They will therefore be able to spend more time doing other things they find meaningful. At the macroeconomic level, this will induce a better distribution of jobs because people reducing their hours will increase the jobs opportunities for those currently excluded from the labor market.

UBI creates job fulfillment

Scott Santens. “Why we should all have a basic income,” World Economic Forum, 15 Jan 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/why-we-should-all-have-a-basic-income/>

How many people are unhappy with their jobs? According to Gallup, worldwide, only 13% of those with jobs feel engaged with them. In the US, 70% of workers are not engaged or actively disengaged, the cost of which is a productivity loss of around $500 billion per year. Poor engagement is even associated with a disinclination to donate money, volunteer or help others. It measurably erodes social cohesion. At the same time, there are those among the unemployed who would like to be employed, but the jobs are taken by those who don’t really want to be there. This is an inevitable result of requiring jobs in order to live. With no real choice, people do work they don’t wish to do in exchange for money that may be insufficient – but that’s still better than nothing – and then cling to that paid work despite being the “working poor” and/or disengaged. It’s a mess.

UBI creates jobs that are more engaging

Scott Santens. “Why we should all have a basic income,” World Economic Forum, 15 Jan 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/why-we-should-all-have-a-basic-income/>

Basic income fundamentally alters this reality. By unconditionally providing income outside of employment, people can refuse to do the jobs that aren’t engaging them. This in turn opens up those jobs to the unemployed who would be engaged by them. It also creates the bargaining power for everyone to negotiate better terms. How many jobs would become more attractive if they paid more money or required fewer hours? How would this reorganizing of the labour supply affect productivity if the percentage of disengaged workers plummeted? How much more prosperity would that create?

# 8) Basic Income will reward unpaid contributions

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A huge number of unpaid activities are currently not recognized as economic contributions. Yet, our economy increasingly relies on these free contributions (think about wikipedia as well as the work parents do). A Basic Income would recognise and reward theses activities.

UBI removes disincentives to work

Scott Santens. “Why we should all have a basic income,” World Economic Forum, 15 Jan 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/why-we-should-all-have-a-basic-income/>

But what about people then choosing not to work? Isn’t that a huge burden too? Well that’s where things get really interesting. For one, conditional welfare assistance creates a disincentive to work through removal of benefits in response to paid work. If accepting any amount of paid work will leave someone on welfare barely better off, or even worse off, what’s the point? With basic income, all income from paid work (after taxes) is earned as additional income so that everyone is always better off in terms of total income through any amount of employment – whether full time, part time or gig. Thus basic income does not introduce a disincentive to work. It removes the existing disincentive to work that conditional welfare creates.

# 9) Basic Income will strengthen our Democracy

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With a minimum level of security guaranteed to all citizens and less time in work or worrying about work, innovation in political, social, economic and technological terms would be a made more lively part of everyday life and its concerns.

UBI appeals to both the political Left and the Right

John Henley. “Money for nothing: is Finland's universal basic income trial too good to be true?” The Guardian, January 12, 2018. <https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2018/jan/12/money-for-nothing-is-finlands-universal-basic-income-trial-too-good-to-be-true>

Appealing both to the left (who believe it can cut poverty and inequality) and, more recently, to the right (as a possible way to a leaner, less bureaucratic welfare system), UBI looks all the more attractive [amid warnings that automation could threaten up to a third of current jobs](https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/02/state-handouts-for-all-europe-set-to-pilot-universal-basic-incomes) in the west within 20 years. Other basic income schemes [are now being tested](http://basicincome.org/news/2017/10/overview-of-current-basic-income-related-experiments-october-2017/) from Ontario to rural Kenya, and [Glasgow](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/dec/25/scotland-universal-basic-income-councils-pilot-scheme)to Barcelona.

UBI has many societal benefits

Scott Santens. “Why we should all have a basic income,” World Economic Forum, 15 Jan 2017. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2017/01/why-we-should-all-have-a-basic-income/>

The idea of basic income is deceivingly simple sounding, but in reality it’s like an iceberg with far more to be revealed as you dive deeper. Its big picture price tag in the form of investing in human capital for far greater returns, and its effects on what truly motivates us are but glimpses of these depths. There are many more. Some are already known, like the positive effects on social cohesion and physical and mental health as seen in the 42% drop in crime in Namibia and the 8.5% reduction in hospitalizations in Dauphin, Manitoba. Debts tend to fall. Entrepreneurship tends to grow. Other effects have yet to be discovered by further experiments. But the growing body of evidence behind cash transfers in general point to basic income as something far more transformative to the future of work than even its long history of consideration has imagined. It’s like a game of Monopoly where the winning teams have rewritten the rules so players no longer collect money for passing Go. The rule change functions to exclude people from markets. Basic income corrects this. But it’s more than just a tool for improving markets by making them more inclusive; there’s something more fundamental going on.

# 10) Basic Income is a fair redistribution of technological advancement

Basic Income U.K. “Ten Reasons to Support Basic Income.” <https://www.basicincome.org.uk/reasons-support-basic-income>

Thanks to massive advancements in our technological and productive capacities the world of work is changing. Yet most of our wealth and technology is as a consequence of our ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’: We are wealthier not as a result of our own efforts and merits but those of our ancestors. Basic income is a way to civilize and redistribute the advantages of that on-going advancement.

Works will seek jobs that automation brings

Sabastian Johnson. “The Case for Universal Basic Income,” Los Angeles Times, June 29, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-johnson-universal-basic-income-20170629-story.html>

There are competing ideas about how exactly the policy should work. Advocates on the left call for a UBI that would increase benefits to the poor and be financed by increasing taxes on corporations and the wealthy. Conservative advocates favor an approach wherein programs in the current safety net, such as Social Security and food stamps, are replaced with a UBI. Others favor an incrementalist policy in which current safety net programs are expanded to include all Americans, while another faction wants to build a UBI program from scratch. Despite their differences, all approaches to UBI policy share the core goal of establishing an income floor for every American. An income floor would help American workers in a number of critical ways. Relieved of the immediate pressure to pay bills, workers could pursue training for the kinds of jobs that automation will bring. A universal basic income would allow skilled workers to take entrepreneurial risks they cannot afford now. It would also allow Americans to work fewer hours but maintain their living standards, leaving more time for caregiving and raising children. Overall, UBI would provide a significant boost to the American middle class, which has stagnated even as productivity and overall wealth continue to rise. By putting more money into the pockets of workers, a UBI could fuel aggregate demand and job growth in different sectors across the country.

# 11) Basic Income will end extreme financial poverty

Basic Income U.K. “Ten Reasons to Support Basic Income.” <https://www.basicincome.org.uk/reasons-support-basic-income>

Because we live in a world where we have the means (and one hopes, the will) to end the kinds of suffering we see as a supposedly constant feature of our surroundings. Basic income is a way to join together the means and the will.

UBI programs help child poverty

Sabastian Johnson. “The Case for Universal Basic Income,” Los Angeles Times, June 29, 2017. <http://www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-johnson-universal-basic-income-20170629-story.html>

Momentum is building. Child poverty experts in growing numbers have called on states and the federal government to consider a child allowance – UBI for kids – that would help level the playing field for low- and middle-income families. The California Senate is considering ambitious cap-and-trade legislation that would send "climate dividend rebates" to every citizen. Even some oil companies are in favor of schemes to tax carbon and send checks to every American. This month, Hawaii's Legislature unanimously passed a bill that directs state agencies to study UBI as a way to provide financial security to all Hawaiians. This landmark legislation could pave the way for UBI to move from the realm of fantasy to reality. Other progressive states, including California, should follow Hawaii's lead and prepare their citizens for our uncertain future.

UBI is a working utopia

Alyssa Battistoni. “The False Promise of Universal Basic Income,” Spring 2017. <https://www.dissentmagazine.org/article/false-promise-universal-basic-income-andy-stern-ruger-bregman>

This utopia—to not have to work so much or so hard; to pass time in leisure rather than labor; to do what one wants rather than what one’s told—is perhaps the oldest of all. The medieval Land of Plenty was, in the words of one poet, where “money has been exchanged for the good life,” and “he who sleeps the longest earns the most.” And for more than a century, it’s seemed within reach. Karl Marx, Benjamin Franklin, John Stuart Mill, Oscar Wilde, and John Maynard Keynes all looked at soaring productivity with the certainty that it would soon be high enough to satisfy people’s needs and wants with just a few hours of work a week. In the 1960s, with automation on the rise, it seemed so imminent that the question wasn’t whether people would have more leisure time—it was what they would do with it. Would we get bored? Waste all our time in front of the TV? Lose our purpose in life? Such worries now seem charmingly naive. “We aren’t bored to death,” Bregman warns, “we’re working ourselves to death.” But it’s not because the likes of Keynes and Mill were wrong—they just didn’t account for politics. Instead of increasing leisure for working people, productivity gains went into growing profits for owners of capital. The 2008 financial crash and subsequent recession only made things worse. These days, instead of relaxing into a life of leisure, most people are working more in a desperate attempt to cling to their jobs, or working less than they need to support themselves.