

## **Switzerland's UBI Referendum Points The Way To Making A Jobless Future Work**

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Yesterday, the Swiss made history by voting in the world's first-ever election on a Universal Basic Income, the Swiss referendum proposed giving citizens a monthly check of \$2500. But despite the measure's defeat supporters," managed to launch a broad debate about an unconditional basic income," says senior political scientist Claude Longchamp. And a poll released on the day of the vote, "The Future of Basic Income in Switzerland," noted basic income is seen as a practical inevitability by Switzerland within just 15-25 years, even by those who voted no on the first referendum.

Tuesday, America's primary election season will reach its decisive finale when California, New Jersey and four other states vote. Then America's Democratic and Republican Presidential nominees' will turn their attention to their party's platforms to secure America's immediate and long-term economic prosperity.

For the short run, the parties would be wise to heed David Brooks' observation that fueled both Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders candidacies, "This election ... has reminded us how much pain there is in this country."

Only 21 percent of voters describe today's economy as excellent or good, while 47 percent of Americans would not be able to come up with \$400 to pay an unexpected expense.

Going forward, the American Dream no longer holds true for 57 percent of voters.

Today's economic pain though may only be a warm-up to more anguish if we fail to act boldly, and expeditiously. There is now quite reputable research on the potential disruption of software and AI; an Oxford University study predicting the loss of 47 percent of all U.S. jobs by 2033; Boston Consulting Group estimating up to 25 percent by 2025; McKinsey Global 45 percent elimination of all present tasks, with artificial intelligence reducing 13 percent more, could be harbingers of a future of increased economic peril.

And that future may arrive sooner than many expect. Self-driving trucks hitting the road in the next decade will not only be a catastrophe for 3.5 million truck drivers, the leading job in 29 states, but if truck driving jobs are gone, how many more of the estimated 6.8 million people employed in jobs that relate to trucking activity in insurance, auto repair, parts, motels, and rest stops will be affected?

Where previous shifts in jobs and labor markets on this scale — think the Industrial Revolution and globalization — brought pain and hardship acutely to male, non-college educated blue-collar workers, this wave of change will crest and break across the workforce. White-collar workers with college degrees will not be spared. “Get a degree”, while always glib, will no longer even be a valid retort to those in economic despair.

With such a massive, foundation-shaking scenario emerging in front of our eyes, what’s the American solution?

‘America First’ and ‘Hillary for America’ are nice campaign slogans, but the deafening silence from the candidates on the potential of technology creating a tsunami of disruption to jobs and income should make Americans worry for their future.

After a lifetime of fighting for good American jobs and wages, I want to challenge the candidates to consider experimenting with a universal basic income, maybe the biggest economic idea of the 21st century, as a policy to both ease the pain of transition through the next economic revolution and end poverty once and for all.

How would it work? Each month, every adult would get a check for \$1,000 – that’s \$12,000 a year, just above the poverty line. It’s that simple. A form of universal basic income has been in place in Alaska since 1976, paid as a dividend from oil revenues from the North Slope.

Richard Nixon proposed a guaranteed income bill that was supported in a non-partisan letter by 1200 of the country’s most prominent economists, and it actually passed the House twice. It is a policy supported across the political spectrum, including Martin Luther King, Milton Friedman, John Kenneth Galbraith, Charles Murray, Fredrick Hayek, Angus Deaton, and Robert Reich. Now countries, Finland, the Netherlands, Namibia, and Canada, and organizations such as Y Combinator, GiveDirectly, CATO, and the Roosevelt Institute are actively debating or experimenting with a Universal Basic Income.

Both Parties’ should look north to the new Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau’s, Liberal Party platform, which called for Federal government experiments to “work with the provinces and territories to design and implement a Basic Annual Income,” as well as the policies being considered to implement these ideas.

The Swiss have begun the difficult conversation about a future economy without enough work. Our country desperately needs a debate of our own. There is no avoiding what future technology may bring, but we can begin preparing now for a multitude of scenarios.

Giving every adult a monthly cash grant, a Universal Basic Income is my best idea. More significantly, what are our candidates’?