



## A Big Idea

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One reason that so little gets done in Washington is that, on most issues, the opposing sides have become ossified, still debating the same policies and positions that they held 20 or even 40 years ago. There is a distinct lack of big new ideas.

However, when it comes to fighting poverty, and dealing with a changing workplace, there may now be a new idea worth exploring—a universal basic income, or UBI. And, with the launching of the Economic Security Project, that idea may now be about to receive the careful research and debate that it deserves.

The idea that cash is the best way to help the poor has a long history that cuts across ideological lines. Certainly, an unconditional cash grant would be simpler, more transparent, less paternalistic, and would have fewer disincentives for work and marriage. However, there are serious practical questions of implementation and affordability that would need to be answered before moving forward. My own thoughts can be found at

**<https://www.cato.org/publications/policy-analysis/pros-cons-guaranteed-national-income>**.

There also remain ideological differences within the UBI movement. Liberals largely see a UBU as a complementary part of the social safety net. Conservatives and libertarians view it as a replacement for existing welfare and regulatory programs. But the Economic Security Project, with its broad and diverse membership, holds real potential for resolving those tensions.

We are a long, long way from a serious plan to implement a UBI. But the Economic Security Project has taken a bold first step toward shaking up the Washington status quo. Even if a UBI turns out to be impractical, this big idea will have changed the debate permanently.

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