



# Intelligence MEMOS

In this special series of *Intelligence Memos* we presented the opposing arguments made at the C.D. Howe Institute's inaugural Regent Debate earlier this month. Four prominent voices, Janice MacKinnon, Conrad Black, Paul Begala and Hugh Segal, sparred over the following question: Should Western democracies establish a universal basic income? Today: the duelling rebuttals from former senator Hugh Segal in the affirmative and Conrad Black in opposition.

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**Hugh Segal:** So the notion that there has to be one form of UBI around the world is the notion that no country has the right to make its own domestic decisions about the right design in its own country.

The Ontario model, for seniors, was a top-up. If you were beneath the poverty line, you filed your taxes, you were automatically topped up. No new bureaucrats, no new forms to fill out. It worked automatically and it worked substantively, and that's what's basically being tested now in the pilot project going forward in this province.

So as we sit here today, Don Drummond told us a few years ago the cost of poverty to Canada: \$90 billion a year. Not one time; a year. That does not take into consideration the \$200 billion we distribute, governments to people, province and Ottawa, every single year. But the rate of poverty hasn't moved, hasn't gotten any better.

So the question you ask yourself: do you keep on repeating the same thing that you know isn't working or do you have the courage to try something new? And I would argue that the reason Finland, which is deemed to be the happiest country in the world, and the Dutch, who do reasonably well, and Ontario, which is in a period of some considerable economic growth, would be considering these issues, because we know the old system isn't working and allowing that system to continue without engagement makes no sense.

One final source: where did I hear about a guaranteed annual income first? An admission: I was a Richard Nixon Tory. I loved Richard Nixon. He got into some trouble, but before he did that he went to China, he did a whole bunch of wonderful things. He also put a group together in the White House after he was president, led by a whole group of really interesting Marxists like Cheney and Rumsfeld and Moynihan to develop a family benefits program. So the roots are very conservative and the principles are humane.

**Conrad Black:** In response to Paul Begala on behalf of both Janice and myself: neither of us militating against the work ethic, or imputing to us that the work ethic was really affected here was mistaken. The fact is my concerns about the issue do not actually involve the work ethic. What I do say is a job is better than being on welfare. It is better for the individual and it is better for society and I don't think anyone would dispute that. That does not mean that anyone who happens to be receiving state benefit is a slacker. Neither of us implied that.

Your references to the tax system I think were not exact in the first place. The recent tax cut (in the US) cut the taxes of every individual in the country except those who are collectively stupid enough to elect governors like the Cuomos and Jerry Brown, who lay off their state income taxes on the other states. People in Texas and Florida have more intelligent administrations.

As for Hugh Segal, I think we have an election coming up in June and I think the majority of those who vote, certainly all those who vote in my household, will be in search of the strong economic growth he purports to find here.

But my issue was job creation and the way to do it is not this way.

(Comments edited for length.)

*The Regent Debate series is generously sponsored by Aaron and Heather Regent.*

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