

ECONOMIC

OFF RAMP

HOW A GUARANTEED LIVABLE INCOME

can get us off the road
to destruction and onto
a livable future

C.A. DELLE
AN INVITATION

Economic Offramp: How a Guaranteed Livable Income Can Get Us Off the Road to Destruction and Onto a Livable Future

PDF Edition

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AN INVITATION

There are seemingly endless numbers of books, articles, interviews, documentaries, and podcasts telling us about the tragic and terrifying problems facing humanity and our environment.

Very few suggest what can be done, but there *is* a very possible and practical solution. This book describes how that solution would affect different aspects of our natural world, our society, communities, families, and individuals.

It's had various names over the years, but the concept is simple: guaranteed livable income for all. Yes, that's right. Just give everyone money without means-test or work requirements.

Of course, this sounds like some kind of bleeding-heart utopian idea. It is not. It's simply a matter of practical self-interest. That's because—however insulated from poverty you may be—when other people's lives get worse, everyone's lives get worse.

And when we improve life for others, we also improve our own quality of life.

Finally, but most urgently, we have to find a way to quickly reduce the harm we are inflicting on our environment and biosphere. You know, the very things we depend on for life.

Implementing a Guaranteed Livable Income will help both people and the planet. A GLI is a simple way to create a safe offramp to a livable economy. Rather than slamming the economic brakes and causing a massive collision, a GLI means we can make a smooth shift to a livable-for-all economy.

It is GUARANTEED—paid by federal governments to individuals and constitutionally mandated so it is not subject to changing political winds.

That makes it *non-coercive* and able to maximize individual freedom while also strengthening local communities.

It is LIVABLE—high enough to support people’s health, life, and dignity.

It is INCOME—a direct grant to individuals (also known as direct cash transfer).

It is UNIVERSAL—provided to everyone without means-testing, in order to avoid intrusive, complex, and costly bureaucracy. And without requiring any type of exploitative workfare.

It is an economic SHIFT—it allows the economic system to smoothly move from an exclusive emphasis on economic growth to a livable economy that conserves natural (and human) resources.

It is COMPLEMENTARY—it enhances but does not replace, essential public services such as healthcare.

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A GLI is a simple solution that embraces and enhances individual freedom, health, democracy, education, skills, problem-solving, innovation, and the environment.

Without it? People are forced to choose between doing any kind of job, including those that are harmful, or facing critical material deprivation (in one form or another). Fear of poverty stifles the best in people and brings out the worst. A society that tolerates widespread poverty pays a high price in both visible and invisible ways. Poverty is a calamity that intersects

and underpins all other social and environmental problems and makes them worse.

A GLI uniquely creates conditions for both maximum social solidarity and maximum individual freedom. It would give people a sense of belonging and dignity. It would complement many social and community projects. Most importantly, a GLI would permit us to respond quickly and creatively to problems as they arise.

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Some background: In the mid-twentieth century, there was a surge of interest in guaranteed annual income from people as politically distinct as Martin Luther King Jr. and Nixon. In the 1990s it was called a universal basic income. However, since then, the term ‘basic’, as it is commonly used, has acquired a negative connotation.

In the future, the particulars of a GLI may also change; however, the principle of a GLI—guaranteed access to what we need for health, life, and dignity—will not.

Other books examine this topic in great academic detail. That is not the purpose of this book. (See Appendix B for a list of books and resources, or you could try to get a copy of the \$149 US, 605-page *Handbook on Basic Income* published by Springer International.) Nor is the purpose here to get into policy particulars regarding implementation. The purpose is to explore all the reasons why a GLI is needed, rather than focusing on how it would be implemented. Understanding **why** we need a GLI has fundamental importance and must come before considerations of **how** to enact it. If we decide to implement a GLI for the wrong reasons—solely to address poverty, for example—the entire approach will be flawed, as poverty is just a symptom of much deeper and broader economic issues. That’s why a GLI is an economic offramp

that can solve many problems, including poverty, inherent in the current economic growth-focused system.

The bulk of this book is taken up with sections each examining a benefit or potential impact of a GLI. Most start with a personal anecdote. I am not an academic nor have I ever attended a university. My background comes from growing up on a farm in northern Alberta with a family that valued books and learning. I gained perspective of Indigenous culture from my father and of northern Europe from my Dutch mother. Both of their lives were shaped by the experiences of World War II (how they met) and the global Great Depression of the 1930s (expressed through thrift).

Sections are short to prompt discussion and to invite more people to advocate for this urgently needed initiative for humanity, other living creatures, and our planet.

# PROLOGUE - ARGUMENTS WITH MY FATHER

*What I learned from my father's Indigenous view of a guaranteed income*

My father and his siblings grew up in northern Alberta in the early part of the twentieth century. Both his mother and father were Métis. His father had a farm and a trading post (as had his paternal grandfather). His mother and her siblings had been mostly raised in a Catholic mission. I remember being very young and picking little bouquets of wildflowers for my grandmother. But mainly I remember her sitting with her head bowed, quietly praying, while moving her rosary beads slowly through her fingers. She was a very solemn and pious person who had survived much hardship and tragedy.

My father, on the other hand, was full of energy, confidence, and optimism. He had a big sense of humour and loved telling jokes, but just as often could fly off the handle when frustrated and erupt into loud sweaty outbursts. He also was a very 'pull yourself up by your bootstraps' kind of guy and had an extremely skeptical view of the government. He was especially vexed by all forms of bureaucracy. His views were no doubt shaped by all the trouble he had when trying to run his auto-wrecking yard where we all lived and where I grew up with my sisters. At one point, the Department of Highways decided they didn't want his auto-wrecking yard where it was, and took him to court. They didn't win, but this battle took a big toll on my father's health.

After he retired, we frequently talked politics as we were both very interested in people, communities, problems, and ideas to solve problems. He had a big collection of books and articles about methods to build innovative housing. He thought the tipi was a great design and should be modified to create permanent housing.

We also spent about ten years arguing about a guaranteed income. He was at first against it. Finally, after several years and many, many conversations, he became an enthusiastic supporter. One reason he flipped his view was because of a book.

My father liked reading history books, especially by Pierre Berton—a Canadian author who was hugely popular with my parents’ generation: those who lived through World War II. He read every Berton book he came across, whether from the public library or when my mother found them at garage sales. One day in the late 1990s, he handed me a thick Berton memoir and urged me to read it. I took it reluctantly. I was a big reader, but like many of my generation, I thought Berton was a bit old-fashioned.

Up till then, I’d only read his book on the Great Depression, as this was a topic I became interested in after interviewing Steve Brodie, an organizer of the unemployed in Vancouver in the 1930s.

Nonetheless, I quickly read Berton’s *My Times*. It was riveting, and I was surprised at what an outspoken force for progressive ideas Berton had been—and the career risks he had taken.

Buried in *My Times*, was mention of a little-known book he wrote in 1968, *The Smug Minority*, which has a long essay advocating a guaranteed annual income. After finding and reading this book, I got another copy and gave it to my father to read. Which he did.

After all those years of arguing with my father about the advantages of a guaranteed income, he became an enthusiastic supporter. But not only because of Berton’s book.