

NOVEMBER SPEAKER
HUGH SEGAL
“VALUE OF “BASIC INCOME”

“The federal CERB (Canada Emergency Response Benefit) payments during the worst of COVID-19 showed Canadians the importance of a guaranteed annual income for the needy,” Hugh Segal, a long-time proponent, told us. “Before the pandemic 55 to 60 percent of Canadians approved; now, 75 percent do.” UWCNY and CFUW are both active.

Hugh, a former Conservative senator, chief of staff for Ontario Premier William Davis and later Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, both Conservatives, and a renowned Conservative Party strategist, developed the Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project for Liberal Kathleen Wynne’s government in 2016. Although from different political parties they shared the belief that those below the poverty line - \$21,000 in Ontario- should get a supplement to pay for the necessities of rent, food, clothing, and public transportation.. Hugh is so committed to the cause that he declined to accept payment. The project was cancelled by Doug Ford when he became premier. “Participants were devastated. I know of one suicide,” Hugh said.

Following his political life Hugh was Master of Massey College, a university lecturer, tv pundit, newspaper columnist, and businessman. He now advises a Toronto law firm. Born into a poor family, his public commitment to a universal basic income began in the 1970s when, in his twenties, he helped Davis develop a financial support program for low income seniors, the first in Canada.

Hugh said: “4.9 million of the Canadian population -one in seven - live in poverty. A guaranteed annual income would top up their monthly income to about \$1,300 a month, 75 percent of the poverty rate. Provincial welfare across Canada doesn’t pay more than 40 or 50 percent, on average, \$640. Money earned working wouldn’t be clawed back as it is now; rather, income tax would be paid. Humane, respectful. The Far Right myth is that welfare recipients just want to sit on their couch eating bon bons. In reality, most want to work.

“The Parliamentary Budget Officer has said it would probably cost about \$60 billion nationally. Taking into account that existing government welfare would be replaced, the actual cost would be about \$25 billion. Government welfare workers would be repositioned from cementing people into poverty into helping them get out. In four to five years, it would pay for itself because there would be more liquidity in the economy. The liquidity benefit is why the banks, Chamber of Commerce, and big corporations have come to support a basic income.” “ I’m not so lonely now,” he said, referring to the title of his 2019 book *Boostraps Need Boots: One Tory’s Lonely Fight to End Poverty in Canada*. However, he acknowledged that small business has cost concerns.

He was asked, “How can UWCNY help in addition to writing politicians?” “Letters to the editor; call shows; the media in general. Politicians respond to what they think the public wants.”

Susan Goldenberg