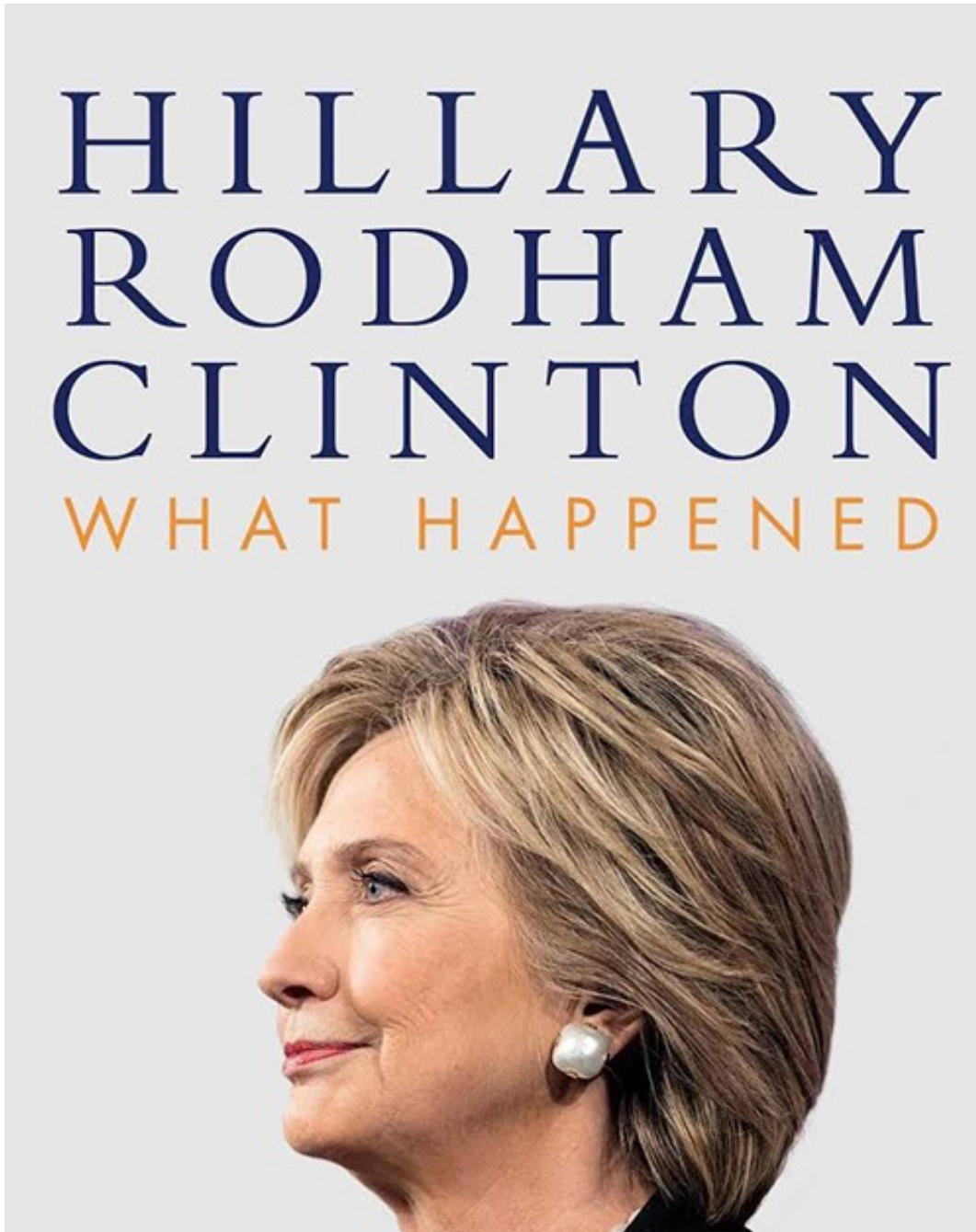


Hillary Clinton and Basic Income





Hillary Clinton just released a new memoir, [*What Happened*](#), about the 2016 campaign where she claims to regret not embracing a Basic Income as part of her platform. Clinton attributes her enthusiasm about Basic Income to a book by [*Peter Barnes. With Liberty and Dividends for All: How to Save Our Middle Class When Jobs Don't Pay Enough*](#). The book, Hillary says, “explored the idea of creating a new fund that would use revenue from shared national resources to pay a dividend to every citizen, much like the [*Alaska Permanent Fund*](#) Distributes the state’s oil royalties every year.”

Hillary endorses Peter Barnes’ idea and includes as shared national resources, “oil and gas extracted from public lands and the public airwaves used by broadcasters and mobile phone companies”, but she says she would even go further viewing “the nation’s financial system as a shared resource”, implementing a “financial transactions tax”, and the “same with the air we breathe and carbon pricing.” She suggests there could be a capitalized fund financed by these resources which would not only provide a “modest Basic Income” every year, but also “make every American feel more connected to our country and to one another—part of something bigger than ourselves.”

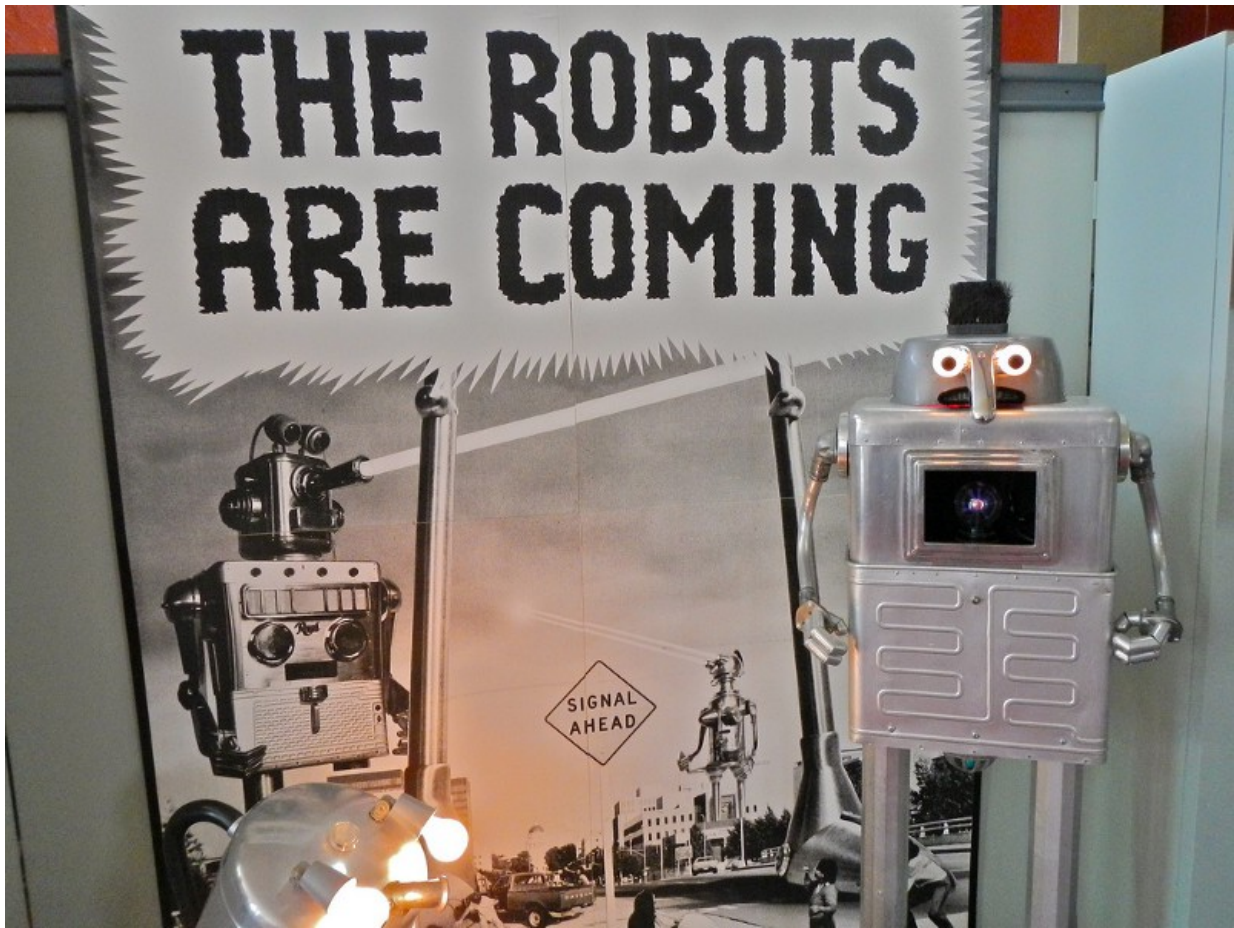
Hillary says that she and her husband were fascinated by this idea and spent weeks working with her policy team to see if the idea was viable and could be included in the campaign. The proposal would be called “Alaska for America.” The campaign did not pursue this proposal because, according to Clinton, “we couldn’t make the numbers work.” In order for the dividend to be meaningful “you’d have to raise enormous sums of money, and that would either mean a lot of new taxes or cannibalizing other important programs.” This policy proposal was then seen as “exciting but not realistic”, and therefore it was shelved. The regrets come when she says: “I wonder now whether we should have thrown caution to the wind and embraced “Alaska for America” as a long-term goal and figured out the details later.”





Clinton also quotes Republican former [U.S. Treasury Secretaries James Baker and Hank Paulson](#) who proposed a nationwide carbon dividend that would “tax fossil fuel use and refund all the money directly to every American” as an alternative to government regulation. Again, Clinton claimed she looked at the proposal but couldn’t make the “math work without imposing new costs on upper-middle-class families.” She goes on to speak of the challenges Silicon Valley has been telling us about, specifically that “this could be the first great technological revolution that ends up displacing more jobs than it creates”, so we must think “outside the box.” She says she was so impressed by this that her staff lived in fear that she’d start “talking about ‘the rise of the robots’ in some Iowa town hall.” She adds: “Maybe I should have.”





[“The Robots are Coming”. Bailey Art Museum. Crockett CA](#)

Hillary concludes that “we have to think big and think different”, suggesting things like “taxing net worth instead of annual income” in order to reduce inequality. She says we need to “rethink how Americans receive benefits such as retirement and health care so that they’re universal, automatic, and portable.”

It’s great to hear that Clinton is enthusiastic about the idea of Basic Income, it goes to show that the idea is getting around more and more. However, the claim she makes that it wasn’t endorsed because “the numbers didn’t add up” is misleading. It is especially misleading if you are proposing a Basic Income that is a dividend similar to Alaska. Alaska’s permanent fund is not enough to live on, usually it is between \$1,000 and \$2,000 per year. The fund distributes “around 10 percent of the average of its cash flows over the previous five years” (see [Marinescu, “No Strings Attached”, 2017](#)). Clinton claims she wanted to name her campaign “Alaska for America.” There is nothing in a permanent fund distribution that implies it needs to be something one can live on. If Hillary wanted to propose a permanent fund *a la* Alaska, there is no excuse saying it didn’t add up, the income thus distributed would be dependent on what sources of funding were attained to sustain it and what investments were made with such a fund.

If I have to take a guess, the reason why “Alaska for America” was not endorsed had nothing to do with numbers and everything to do with how the campaign saw the public support for that idea. Clinton even says the campaign staff lived in fear that she’d start “talking about ‘the rise of the

robots' in some Iowa town hall." This sentence, in my opinion, exemplifies exactly what went wrong in Hillary's campaign—basically instead of supporting things they believed in, there were strings attached from every which way, either concerns about the public perception of the proposals, or compromises with interests that were previously made. The days are numbered for this sort of politics. If anything positive is to come out of the failed campaign Hillary ran, it is that the people will stand by those who will clearly defend what they believe in. The excuse that "it is just not possible" doesn't fly anymore. Yes, it is possible to have Universal Health Care, a great many number of countries have it. Yes, it is possible to have an Alaska style permanent fund, Alaska has it. Yes, Basic Income is possible, we will have to work out the details and see *what* versions of it can be implemented and *how* they can be implemented. Of course we cannot snap our fingers and suddenly have Basic Income or Universal Health Care, no one ever said that, but these are policies that are possible, and can be achieved if that's what We the People want to achieve.

And in the spirit of Hillary Clinton and her condescending way of addressing any real progressive ideas, I say, no more excuses Hillary. It's time to move forward and do the hard work that we need to do to achieve the society we want to live in.