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Resolved: The United States ought to provide a federal jobs guarantee.

DEFINITIONS:

Ought: As our friends at Merriam Webster remind us, ought is used to express duty or obligation. The combination of ought with “The United States” can help debaters to narrow down their framework. Debaters should consider looking at what metrics can be used to help determine what a government has an obligation to do for its citizens.

Provide: Again looking to Merriam Webster, provide is defined as “to supply or make available (something wanted or needed).” In the context of the resolution, providing a federal jobs guarantee would be to offer the program, as the government does with other forms of entitlements and services.

Federal Jobs Guarantee (FJG): This phrase is best understood by reading about the initiative itself rather than the denotative definition of each word in isolation. [This article](#) gives a brief history and outlines some of the major arguments on the topic. Essentially, a federal jobs guarantee is a government program with the aim to give a public sector job to any unemployed individual who is willing and able to work.

BACKGROUND:

Before diving into the individual arguments on the topic, it is helpful to start with an understanding of the national conversation surrounding a Federal Jobs Guarantee. In the literature, you may see MMT (Modern Monetary Theory) or ELR (Employer of Last Resort) as alternative ways that people refer to the general principles behind a Federal Job Guarantee. Ideas about a FJG or comparable programs have been floating around [in some form](#) or another for hundreds of years. A much-cited similar initiative took form in the United States through FDR’s [WPA](#). The more recent reimagining of this concept came in 2018 when Senator Cory Booker and a handful of other senators introduced the [The Federal Jobs Guarantee Development Act](#). Much of what debaters may find when initially researching will likely be in reference or reaction to this 2018 proposal, though it is important to note that the resolution itself does not specify a particular policy or version of a federal jobs guarantee. Right now, there are very few countries with actual Federal Jobs Guarantee policies; however, India’s

[MGNREGA](#) Act, which provides jobs for rural farmers, is one of the closest examples currently in existence.

It is also important to note that, like virtually every other conversation one can have in 2020, many of the arguments on this topic are supercharged by the [lasting impacts of the Coronavirus](#), particularly the economic impacts and rising unemployment rates. Many individuals have called for a reconsideration of some version of a FJG in the wake of rising unemployment as a way to stabilize the economy; however, these policies have incurred a fair amount of criticism. Debaters should be cognizant of how this more recent data interacts with the overarching arguments on this topic. This does not necessarily mean that evidence prior to March of 2020 cannot be used but does mean that debaters should spend a little more time thinking about the inherency of whatever argument they decide to run. It will be beneficial to have a working knowledge of some foundational economic theory concepts when debating this topic (shout out to those of you taking AP Econ!) because many of the impacts will likely rely on more nuanced economic principles.

[MMT - The Good, the Bad and the Ugly](#)

[Cory Booker job guarantee: his plan for a pilot program that guarantees everyone a job](#)

[What Is a Jobs Guarantee—and Can It Work?](#)

[Likely 2020 Democratic Candidates Want To Guarantee A Job To Every American](#)

[Would a federal jobs guarantee be good for the economy?](#)

[Job Creation Programs of the Great Depression: The WPA and the CCC](#)

[What Is A Federal Jobs Guarantee?](#)

[Job Guarantee](#)

AFFIRMATIVE ARGUMENTS:

Poverty Reduction

One of the more intuitive arguments on this side is that, by creating a jobs guarantee program, the government ensures that anyone who would like to work has the opportunity to do so. A [widely recognized](#) impact of the pandemic is that millions of people are being plunged into poverty due to involuntary unemployment. Reducing unemployment allows for more people to get a livable wage and can contribute to an overall reduction of poverty. Debaters running this argument should evaluate whether having access to employment [is a right](#) that the government ought to protect and, if it is, what obligation the government then has to ensure those willing and able to work are able to do so. The potential effects of a federal job guarantee are also magnified when evaluating how this could impact more marginalized communities.

Debaters looking to run this argument can highlight the systemic change that job creation can have on those trapped in a cycle of poverty.

In a time where the national unemployment rate is [over quadruple](#) where we started the year, it is likely that poverty will continue to spread across the United States at an increasingly rapid rate. Allowing individuals to access a federal job would potentially offset the worst of this poverty and give individuals the ability to meet the basic needs of their families. Though a federal jobs guarantee would not solve all poverty and there would be individuals who are unable to work, it could help to eliminate the root of much poverty in the United States.

[Can Latin America learn from India's efforts at fighting poverty? The case of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act | Journal of International and Comparative Social Policy](#)

[The Federal Job Guarantee - A Policy to Achieve Permanent Full Employment](#)

[A Job Guarantee Costs Far Less Than Unemployment](#)

[Why a job guarantee could be key for post-COVID-19 economic recovery](#)

[CofFEE Research Report 2020-02](#)

[A Federal Job Guarantee: Anti-Poverty and Infrastructure Policy for a Better Future](#)

Raises the Minimum Standard

When evaluating poverty levels in the United States, another group that is often discussed is the [working poor](#). These are individuals who hold a job (or in some instances more than one job) but still live below the poverty line. In the United States, the number of individuals who are at or below the poverty line despite working has been [steadily getting better](#) but still a significant portion of the population. Some estimates note that as many as [one in nine](#) workers are paid wages that can leave them below the poverty line.

One expected consequence of a Federal Job Guarantee is that it would be able to raise the bar for labor standards by giving individuals an alternative to working in poor working conditions or low paying jobs. Now, an important caveat here is that, because the resolution isn't advocating for a specific version of a FJG, debaters cannot assume what the exact wages of the federal jobs will be. That said, almost all of the literature assumes that any federal jobs guarantee would pay employees at a livable wage. In addition, federal employees are given a [range of benefits](#) and insurance coverage that many do not have access to in the private sector. If workers know that they are able to get a well paying job through a FJG, they would be less likely to stay in a situation where they are being underpaid or are facing unfair or unsafe working conditions. This also has the expected ripple effect of incentivizing companies in the private sector to raise their own wages and benefits accordingly. The expected benefit here would be an overall increase in the quality of working conditions across the United States, impacting way more people than just those who are unemployed and looking for a job.

[Who Are the Working Poor?](#)

[Low-wage work is more pervasive than you think, and there aren't enough "good jobs" to go around](#)

[A study on factors influencing the status of the working poor in welfare states](#)

[Stress and the working poor](#)

Creating More Equity in the Workplace Preventing Job Lock

A Federal Jobs Guarantee could also help solve for workplace discrimination. There is a considerable body of research that shows [discrimination is a significant problem](#) in the workplace across the United States. This happens at every level of employment-- from hiring, to harassment at work, to unlawful termination. Studies have shown that many of the most marginalized groups within society face significantly more challenges when finding a job and are [not paid equivalently](#) to their white/cis/straight counterparts once they have a job. While [discrimination and harrassment is illegal](#) in both the private and the public sector, the rates of discrimination that have been [reported over the last 30 years](#) have remained startlingly consistent.

A federal jobs guarantee would be a [massive step](#) towards reducing this inequality. The solvency here looks different depending on the part of the employment process. For those who have difficulty finding employment because of discrimination, this program would ensure that they had access to a job and to benefits. Many individuals who face harassment or discrimination in the workplace are forced to choose between staying in abusive situations or facing unemployment. A FJG would allow these individuals to have more mobility by providing additional employment options.

[Employment Discrimination | Wex | US Law | LII / Legal](#)

[Hiring Discrimination Against Black Americans Hasn't Declined in 25 Years](#)

[Workplace discrimination is illegal, yet it persists. Here's why.](#)

[Systematic Inequality and Economic Opportunity](#)

Additional Reading

[Why Democrats Should Embrace a Federal Jobs Guarantee](#)

[The Job Guarantee: Design, Jobs, and Implementation](#)

[Coronavirus unemployment: The case for a federal job guarantee](#)

[The case for a Federal Job Guarantee Program](#)

[A Consensus Strategy for a Universal Job Guarantee Program](#)

[Envisioning an Effective Federal Job Guarantee](#)

[Congress: Enact a Federal Job Guarantee](#)

NEGATIVE ARGUMENTS

Negative Strategy

When crafting their negative cases, debaters have a few different options for what strategy they want to go with. Some debaters may find it easier to lean into the framework debate a little more heavily and evaluate the role of the government when it comes to providing jobs or solving for unemployment. A debater using this strategy could concede that a federal jobs guarantee may create benefits but that it is not an obligation of the government to uphold such a program. Debaters can dig into [The Social Contract Theory](#) or into [Locke's Philosophy of Politics](#) when determining how to evaluate a government's obligation to its people. For those competing in more progressive circuits, there may be alternative ways to solve for the harms listed by the affirmative that are more beneficial than a federal jobs guarantee. An alternative strategy would be to prove how the negative consequences of a federal job guarantee greatly outweigh any potential benefit. This would shift the debate to focus more on the line by line. In any case, debaters on this side will need to contend with the concrete ways in which the affirmative can argue that they increase the quality of life for individuals who, in the status quo, are unemployed or are in poor working conditions. Debaters should be wary of arguments that directly minimize the plight of those individuals. Instead I would encourage debaters to think of the unintended consequences and disadvantages that a FJG may create and how that impacts citizens.

Economic Instability

One of the largest concerns with a federal job guarantee program is that it would destabilize the economy. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities estimated that a federal jobs guarantee program could cost as much as [\\$543 billion](#). The "real cost" of this program will likely be lower as those with jobs would no longer collect welfare entitlements; however, these numbers do not take into account the most recent spike in unemployment because of the pandemic. This argument can give debaters an opportunity for direct clash with many affirmative cases because the link is rooted in the affirmative argument of how a federal jobs guarantee would increase wage growth in the private sector.

If FJG jobs pay higher wages, private sector companies will be pressured to raise their wages accordingly to remain competitive. Companies, in particular small businesses, who are not able to match these wages may lose employees in search of better opportunities. If businesses do match the wages offered by the FJG, they run the risk of triggering more [inflation](#). When businesses in the private sector are pressured to raise their wages, they have a few options for how to cover the cost. They could pass the increased cost onto the consumer, in the form of raising prices. In addition, some companies may choose to make up the additional funds paid through layoffs or consolidating jobs. Another move that companies may make in order to solve for this gap is to more quickly accelerate to automation. This would eliminate even more low-skilled jobs from the private sector and trigger more wide-scale unemployment.

[The economic and political consequences of automation](#)

[Small Businesses Struggling With \\$15 Minimum Wage, New Site Reports Opinion | The Dangerous Fantasy of a 'Jobs Guarantee'](#)

[The robots are ready as the COVID-19 recession spreads](#)

[Future is Now: How COVID-19 is Propelling Automation and Pushing Us to a World Without Work](#)

Feasibility Challenges

A general assumption that much of the literature makes is that most jobs through a federal jobs guarantee would be temporary in nature, allowing individuals who had lost their job during a recession or crisis to move back into the public sector as the market stabilizes. [Hughes calls this](#) “buffer stock employment” and notes that there is tension between having rapidly creatable jobs that will be available at any point and time for anyone who may need it but that are still socially valuable enough to justify being in existence. Another common criticism of a federal job guarantee program is that it would be unable to consistently provide jobs that were both useful to society but low-skilled enough to be available to anyone who may need it. When [FDR's WPA](#) was put into effect, many of the jobs required physical labor or were fairly low-skill infrastructure jobs. In the modern workforce, many low skill jobs have been rendered unnecessary because of automation and many of the jobs that are needed would require specific skill sets or training.

The expense of providing training, if that is necessary, would be layered on top of the overall cost of the program. [Critics have also questioned](#) how much the other assumed expenses, such as healthcare, disability, etc, would impact the overall bottomline of such a program. There are some that have also proposed that such a program would quickly become politicized and that would gut the overall ability for a federal jobs guarantee to effectively do what it is intended to do. One argument here is that, if it is not possible for the government to offer a federal jobs guarantee program that truly meets the needs of citizens without becoming an undue burden, it cannot be an obligation.

[The Terrible Idea Of A Government Job Guarantee](#)

[Constructive Criticisms of a Job Guarantee Program](#)

[Why Not A Job Guarantee?](#)

[Three More Reasons to be Cautious About a National Job Guarantee](#)

Additional Reading

[Some Notes on Federal Job Guarantee Proposals – People's Policy Project](#)

['Federal Jobs Guarantee' Idea Is Costly, Misguided, And Increasingly Popular With Democrats](#)

[The Federal Job Guarantee: Prevention, Not Just a Cure](#)

[Make work can't work - A jobs guarantee is a flawed idea | United States](#)

[US Economy: Federal Job Guarantee Would Hurt Private Employers](#)

FURTHER READING:

[The Job Guarantee: A Superior Buffer Stock Option for Government Price Stabilisation](#)

[You know the deficit hawks. Now meet the deficit owls.](#)

[Do Temporary-Help Jobs Improve Labor Market Outcomes for Low-Skilled Workers? Evidence from Work First](#)

[How do our job creation recommendations stack up against a job guarantee?](#)

[What Works? A Meta Analysis of Recent Active Labor Market Program Evaluations](#)

[Minimum wage increases aren't a job killer: Small business survey](#)

[Would a Job Guarantee Guarantee Jobs? An Analysis of the Employer of Last Resort Proposal](#)

[The promise of a jobs guarantee depends on CBE](#)

[Labor Market Considerations for a National Job Guarantee](#)

[We Need a Jobs Guarantee Now More Than Ever](#)

[Coronavirus is draining America's public infrastructure. A federal jobs policy would protect its workers](#)

[Green Jobs Guarantee, Coronavirus, and Public Sanitation](#)