



Written by [John Stossel](#) on February 1, 2023

A Surprising Politician

The next presidential race is on.

One probable candidate is former CIA Director and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

He just released a new book: “Never Give an Inch: Fighting for the America I Love.”

Pompeo must be a smart guy. He graduated first in his class at West Point. Then he went to Harvard Law School.

Interviewing him makes it clear that he is smarter and more thoughtful than most politicians. We talked for an hour about immigration, defense, education, tariffs, entitlement reform, pandemics and more.

We disagree about a lot.

Pompeo knows I’m a libertarian and would disagree with him about a lot. But he agreed to talk about ... anything.

Then he repeatedly said things that surprised me.

Pompeo calls himself a “deficit hawk.” I give him a hard time about Republican hypocrisy, pointing out that under Trump, Republicans increased the deficit.

“Guilty as charged,” Pompeo replies. “My party has been no more serious about actually delivering solutions to this problem than the Democrat Party.”

That’s surprisingly honest.

He also doesn’t dodge the fact that Social Security and Medicare are going broke.

“The math suggests that somehow these trust funds run out about the time my son Nick will turn to Social Security.”

“What do you do?” I ask. “Raise retirement ages?”

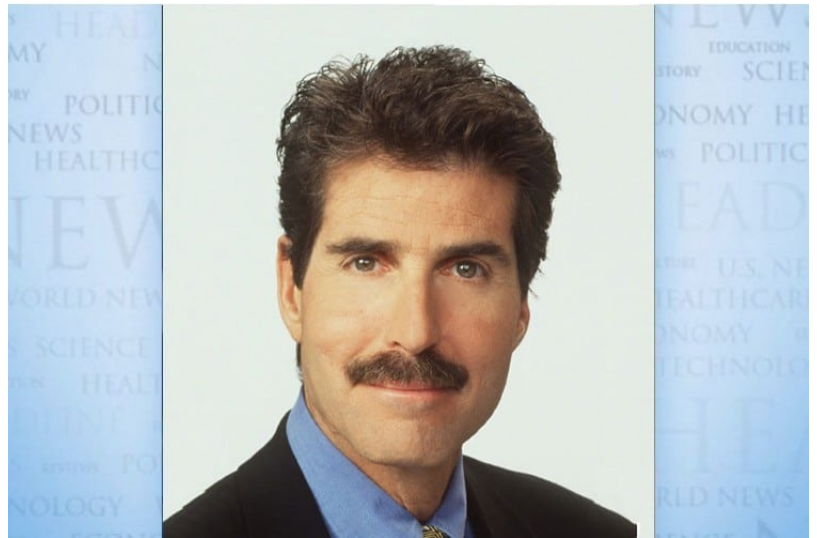
“There’s nothing that should be off the table,” he answers.

That’s brave. Voters vilify politicians who admit that Medicare and Social Security are unsustainable and must be changed if they are to survive.

A cowardly President Donald Trump declared, “Under no circumstances should (we) cut a single penny.” A cowardly President Joe Biden agreed, calling Medicare and Social Security “a promise we made as a country.”

But that promise is now an impossible promise.

When Social Security began, most Americans didn’t even live to age 65. “Entitlements” were meant to protect the minority who lived long enough to exhaust their savings. But now we live an average of 76



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years. Most of us will collect significantly more from Social Security and Medicare than we ever put in. That's unsustainable.

Pompeo is a rare politician who admits that something has to change.

Then he surprised me again.

Since Pompeo is called a "staunch conservative," I assumed that he would say we should spend more on the military. But he didn't.

"There's no need to spend more money than we're spending today."

Again, that was refreshing.

America already spends \$800 billion, more than the next nine countries *combined*. Finally, a hawkish Republican *not* so eager to pander to the military establishment.

As secretary of state, Pompeo met with Vladimir Putin, Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un. He calls Putin a "thug." He criticized China so much that Trump told him, "Shut the hell up about China!" He calls Kim Jong-un an "evil mass murderer."

So who is the *most* dangerous person in the world?

"Randi Weingarten," says Pompeo.

That was another surprise. Teachers union boss Randi Weingarten is more dangerous than dictators?

"We'll figure out Putin. We'll figure out Xi Jinping," Pompeo replies. "But you teach kids that America is a racist nation? ... that groups matter more than individuals? ... that there's an oppressor class and somehow America is the most indecent nation in the history of the world? You're done."

What would he *do* about education if he were president?

It's my trick question. I long for a politician who will answer questions like that by saying, "Nothing! It's not a president's job."

Education is a job for local governments. The Feds have no business trying to micromanage schools, although that didn't stop George W. Bush and Barack Obama from pushing No Child Left Behind and Common Core.

I assumed Pompeo would have some similar plan, but he surprised me again by just saying, "I would speak about it often."

"Speak." That' it.

Unlike most politicians with presidential ambition, Pompeo acknowledges that the Constitution puts limits on federal power.

Regarding education, he says, "Get the federal government out of that.... Let school boards, school superintendents, teachers and governors control decisions for their own students, instead of some knucklehead bureaucrat at the U.S. Department of Education."

Then he added, "get rid of" the Department of Education.

Finally! A politician actually open to shrinking federal power.

Pompeo said (in my opinion) bad things, too. I'll cover that next week.

Every Tuesday at JohnStossel.com, Stossel posts a new video about the battle between government and



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freedom.

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