



Written by [John Stossel](#) on July 26, 2023

Free to Try Stuff

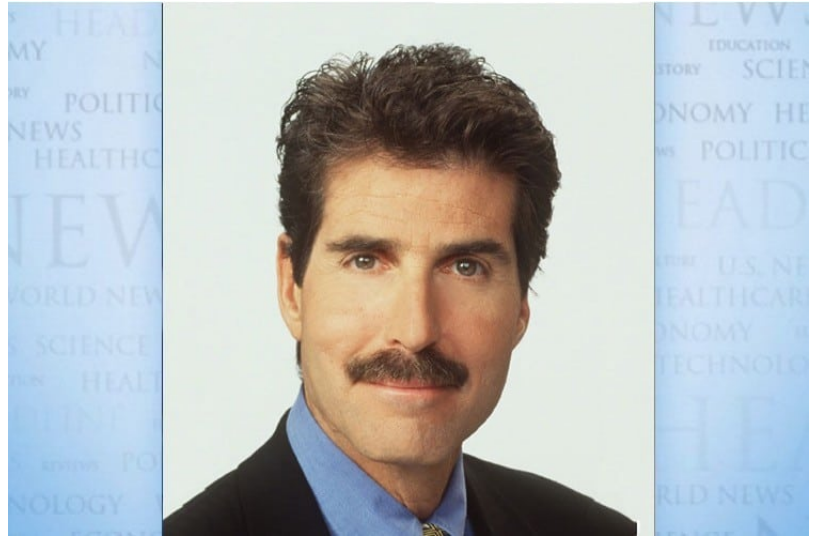
Politicians have big plans for us.

President Joe Biden repeatedly says, “I have a plan for that.”

“I alone can fix it,” shouted President Donald Trump.

But most of life, and the best of life, happens when politicians butt out and let us make our own choices.

Chinese philosopher Zhuang Zhou called that “spontaneous order.” Thousands of years later, economist F. A. Hayek added that order comes “not from design, but spontaneously.”



John Stossel

Did you eat a banana this morning? No central planner calculates how many bananas should be grown, who will pick them, when they’ll be harvested, how they’ll be shipped or how many to ship. We get bananas and most everything in life through billions of individuals, planning, cooperating and reacting on their own.

“Think about spontaneous order on a road,” says The Atlas Network’s Tom Palmer.

Right. Millions of people, some of them morons, propel 4,000-pound vehicles at 60 miles per hour, right next to each other. We rarely smash into each other.

There are rules, like “pass on the left,” but for the most part, people navigate highways on their own.

Likewise, no one invented language, but the world has thousands. “Experts” tried to invent better ones, like Volapük and Esperanto, which supposedly would let us communicate better.

“No one speaks these languages,” says Palmer, because language evolves spontaneously. “That is always superior to top-down systems that rely on the information in one brain.”

Amazingly, my town, New York City, has twice now allowed spontaneous order that makes my life much better.

City government once managed Central Park. When it did, trash was everywhere, and most of the grass was dead.

The city then agreed to let a private nonprofit, the Central Park Conservancy, manage most of the park. Without a government plan, people came together, giving money and time to turn the park around. (Disclosure: I was one of them, and now I’m a conservancy director.)

Now Central Park is beautiful. Forty million people spend time there every year. Despite the crowds, the park works well, without strict government rules.

Musicians play music, asking for donations. There are many of them, but on their own, they figure out how to stay far enough away from each other.

Skate dancers spontaneously chose a spot where they meet to skate. Hundreds gather and dance to



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music. No one tells them where or how fast to skate. No one says, “Go left, go right.”

“You just skate with the flow of the music,” one skater says in my new video.

I play volleyball in Central Park. There’s no volleyball boss. People just show up and play.

Pickup basketball is famous for that. Players know the rules, otherwise there wouldn’t be a game, but who gets to play, and the playing, is spontaneous.

Central Park is filled with walkers, runners, skateboarders, bikers, pedicabs and horse-drawn carriages. But there are no traffic cops. People maneuver around each other on their own.

There are some rules. You can’t drive a car in the park. You can’t play soccer on grass right after it rains. But rules are minimal.

Police usually ignore lawbreaking. Unlicensed vendors sell water and fruit. Some people drink alcohol. But as long as they don’t bother anyone, police and park workers leave them alone.

Government that governs less, governs best.

Politicians usually want to control more things. My town has been the worst example of that. Progressive politicians add so many rules they make it nearly impossible to do anything new.

Own a restaurant and want to put some tables outdoors? Restaurant owner Jeremy Wladis says he needed permission from 11 agencies. “You had to get a lawyer, get an architect. It literally takes a year!”

But during Covid, something amazing happened. Politicians actually loosened the outdoor table rule. Restaurants quickly opened outdoor seating in sheds on the street.

It’s great. The streets around my apartment feel safer now because at night, they are alive with people.

“We need flexibility to allow people to experiment,” says Palmer.

Freedom to experiment brings the best in life.

More politicians should learn from Central Park and, amazingly, from politicians in New York City who actually let go a little.

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

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