



Written by [John Stossel](#) on February 22, 2023

Government's Dirty Secret

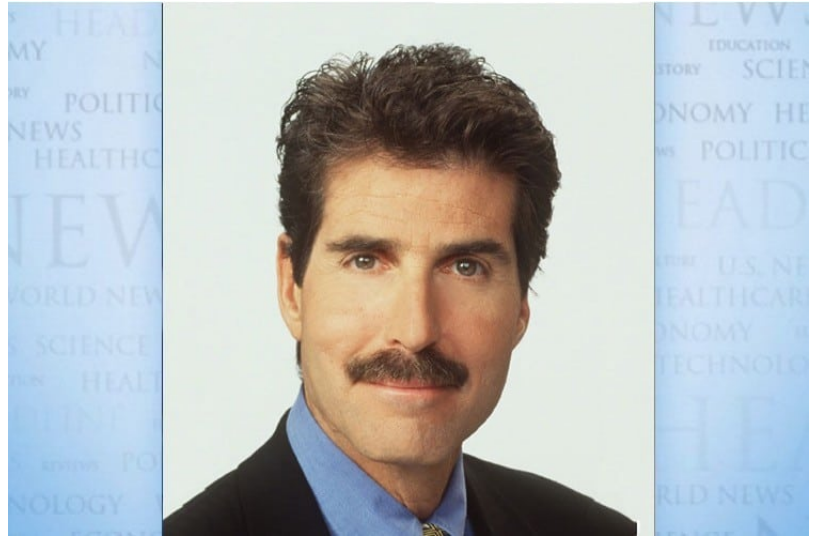
Classified documents are found in Donald Trump's home!

Democrats were outraged! Trump is guilty of "mishandling of some of our nation's most sensitive secrets" creating "a national security crisis!" said MSNBC's Chris Hayes and Nicole Wallace.

Then President Joe Biden got caught.

Suddenly conservatives were upset.

"Thanks to Joe Biden," said Sean Hannity, "America's most sensitive secrets were floating around."



John Stossel

But both sides were wrong.

The truth is, the word, "classified" means little. Our bloated government now classifies three things every second.

If you stacked up all the classified paper in Washington, the stacks would be taller than 26 Washington Monuments.

In my new video, Matthew Connelly, author of "The Declassification Engine," explains that "as much as bureaucrats know they're only supposed to classify information that's really important, they end up classifying all kinds of nonsense.... Even like telling a friend, 'Let's go have coffee.' They'll end up classifying that email as top-secret."

Former CIA Director Mike Hayden once got a classified email saying "Merry Christmas."

For years, government classified how much peanut butter the Army bought. They classified a description of wedding rituals in Dagestan.

They even classify newspaper articles.

They are especially eager to classify dumb things they do, like the Army's reported experiments testing whether "psychics" could kill people with their eyes.

"A lot of what the government keeps secret, they keep secret simply because it's embarrassing," says Connelly.

Occasionally, government tries to reduce the overclassification.

Presidents Richard Nixon, Jimmy Carter, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama all pledged to reduce the excess.

"Not in one case did they actually reduce the rate at which our government was creating secrets," says Connelly. "In fact, the amount of secrecy only increased."

I'm not surprised. In government, butt-covering and status matter more than efficiency.

I say to Connelly, "I would imagine bureaucrats think, 'Ooh, if I label this classified, I'm more



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important.'"

"In Washington," he answers, "many officials won't even look at something unless it's classified."

And classifying something needlessly has no downside.

"In all my years of research," says Connelly, "I've never found a single instance of anybody being fired for overclassifying something."

With so much unimportant but "classified" paper around, it's no surprise that some ends up in officials' homes.

After Trump and Biden were caught, classified documents were found at the home of former Vice President Mike Pence. In 2014, Hillary Clinton was caught sending emails that included classified information. Former CIA Director David Petraeus gave classified papers to his mistress for a book she was writing.

Connelly is upset that these people act as if government documents are their personal property. Some of Biden's documents were found in a folder labeled "personal."

"I'd like to know who thought that this was his personal property?" Connelly says. "These are *our* property. These records are *our* history."

Ordinary people who take records home go to jail. A Navy veteran who took top-secret documents got three years in in prison. An ex-CIA contractor who kept classified documents in his home was sentenced to three months.

I bet that won't happen to Biden or Trump.

America's first "top-secret" was the D-Day landing. It succeeded partly because Hitler didn't know exactly where the troops would land.

The second was the atomic bomb.

"We have to keep secrets," says Connelly. "But when we create tens of millions of new secrets every year, it's impossible to identify and protect the things that really do have to be protected."

Every Tuesday at JohnStossel.com, Stossel posts a new video about the battle between government and freedom. He is the author of Give Me a Break: How I Exposed Hucksters, Cheats, and Scam Artists and Became the Scourge of the Liberal Media.

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