



Written by [John Stossel](#) on May 1, 2024

'Make Government Work'

President Joe Biden says, "I know how to make government work!"

You'd think he'd know. He's worked in government for 51 years.

But the truth is, *no one* can make government work.

Biden hasn't.

Look at the chaos at the border, our military's botched withdrawal from Afghanistan, the rising cost of living, our unsustainable record-high debt ...

In my new video, economist Ed Stringham argues that no government can *ever* work well, because "even the best person can't implement change.... The massive bureaucracy gets bigger and slower."

I learned that as a consumer reporter watching bureaucrats regulate business. Their rules usually made life worse for consumers.

Yet politicians want government to do *more!*

Remember the unveiling of Obamacare's website? Millions tried to sign up. The first day, only six got it to work.

Vice President Joe Biden made excuses: "Neither (Obama) and I are technology geeks."

Stringham points out, "If they can't design a basic simple website, how are they going to manage half the economy?"

While bureaucrats struggled with the Obamacare site, the private sector successfully created Uber and Lyft, platforms like iCloud, apps like Waze, smartwatches, etc.

The private sector creates things that work because it *has* to. If businesses don't serve customers well, they go out of business.

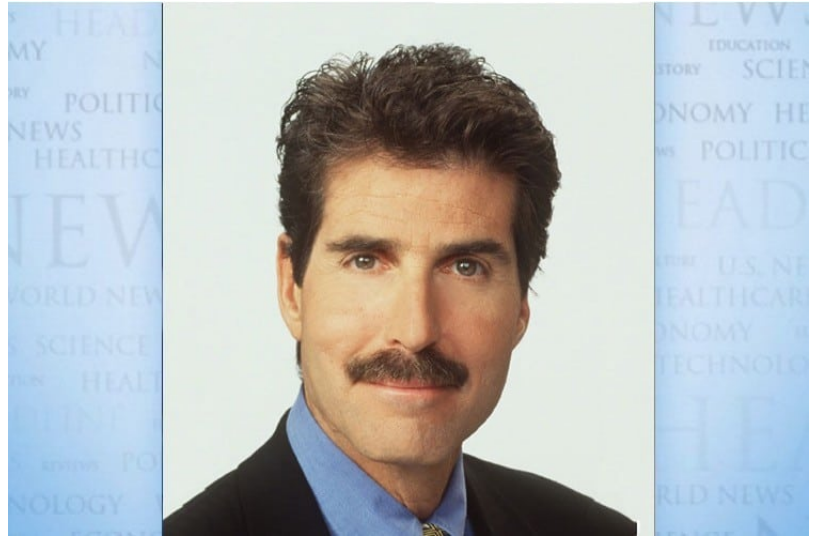
But government is a monopoly. It *never* goes out of business. With no competition, there's less pressure to improve.

Often good people join government. Some work as hard as workers in the private sector.

But not for long. Because the bureaucracy's incentives kill initiative.

If a government worker works hard, he might get a small raise. But he sits near others who earn the same pay and, thanks to archaic civil service rules, are unlikely to get fired even if they're late, lazy or stupid.

Over time, that's demoralizing. Eventually government workers conclude, "Why try?"



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In the private sector, workers must strive to make things better. If they don't, competitors will, and you might lose your job.

Governments never go out of business.

"Companies can only stay in business if they always keep their customer happy," Stringham points out. "Competition pushes us to be better. Government has no competition."

I push back.

"Politicians say, 'Voters can vote us out.'"

"With a free market," Stringham replies, "The consumer votes every single day with the dollar. Under politics, we have to wait four years."

It's another reason why, over time, government never works as well as the private sector.

Year after year, the Pentagon fails audits.

If a private company repeatedly does that, they get shut down. But government never gets shut down.

A Pentagon spokeswoman makes excuses: "We're working on improving our process. We certainly are learning each time."

They don't learn much. They still fail audits.

"It's like we're living in Groundhog Day," Stringham jokes.

When Covid hit, politicians handed out almost \$2 trillion in "rescue" funds. The Government Accountability Office says more than \$100 billion were stolen.

"One woman bought a Bentley," laughs Stringham. "A father and son bought a luxury home."

At least Biden noticed the fraud. He announced, "We're going to make you pay back what you stole!"

No. They will not. Biden's Fraud Enforcement Task Force has recovered only 1% of what was stolen.

Even without fraud, government makes money vanish. I've reported on my town's \$2 million toilet in a park. When I confronted the parks commissioner, he said, "\$2 million was a bargain! Today it would cost \$3 million."

That's government work.

More recently, Biden proudly announced that government would create "500,000 (EV) charging stations."

After two years, they've built ... seven. Not 7,000. Just seven.

Over the same time, greedy, profit-seeking Amazon built 17,000.

"Privatize!" says Stringham. "Whenever we think something's important, question whether government should do it."

In Britain, government-owned Jaguar lost money year after year. Only when Britain sold the company to private investors did Jaguar start turning a profit selling cars people actually like.

When Sweden sold Absolut Vodka, the company increased its profits sixfold.

It's ridiculous for Biden to say, "I know how to make government work."

No one does.



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Next week, this column takes on Donald Trump's promise: "We'll drain the Washington swamp!"

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

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