



Written by [John Stossel](#) on September 21, 2023

“Emergency” Spending

Did you survive the budget cuts from the last debt ceiling fight?

President Joe Biden called them “draconian,” while Republicans praised the deal’s “historic reductions in spending.”

But both parties conned us, as my new video explains.

What they call “cuts” were just a reduction in their planned spending *increase*. Instead of raising spending by 7.8%, they increased it by “only” 3.9%. Only politicians get to call an increase a cut.

Biden praised the deal, saying, “We’re cutting spending and bringing the deficits down at the same time!”

But they didn’t.

Now they’re using tricks to spend even more.

“Call it an emergency — done,” says Cato Institute budget specialist Romina Boccia. “Spend the money on whatever you want.”

Boccia reports how the Senate is moving to increase spending beyond the agreed-upon caps simply by calling it “emergency” spending.

“They gave \$296 million to NASA for ‘emergency infrastructure.’ What’s ‘emergency infrastructure?’” I ask.

“That’s not really a thing,” she replies. “It’s just a way to plus up the NASA budget ... a huge slush fund.”

“How do they justify this?”

“They don’t even try!” Boccia complains. “Unfortunately, Congress has complete discretion over what it calls ‘emergency.’”

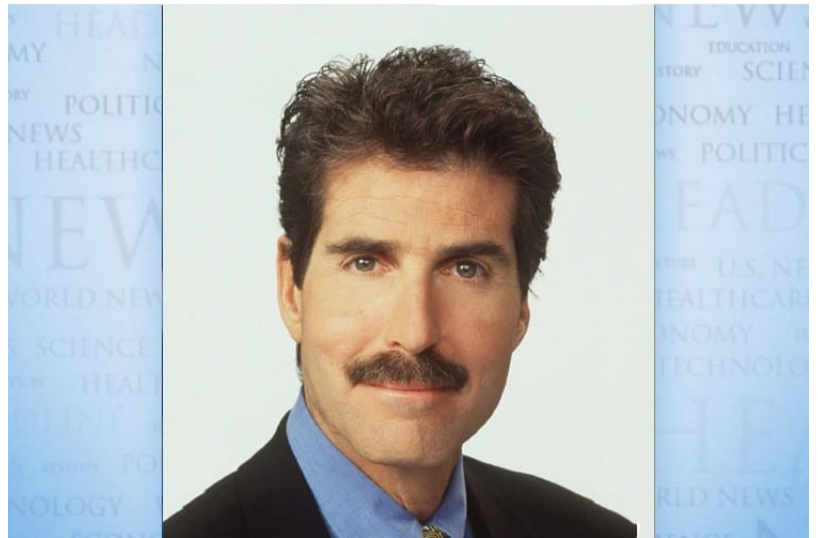
This trick isn’t new. Under President Barack Obama, \$150 million for fisheries got added by calling it “emergency funding.”

“I don’t think that’s an emergency,” says Boccia. “It’s not sudden; it’s not urgent.”

In the current budget, even useless agencies that should be eliminated, like the Education Department, get more money. It will now spend 300% more than it spent 10 years ago.

“By the end of this decade, spending will be about \$10 trillion,” says Boccia. “Who will be willing to lend that money to the U.S. government?”

Good question.



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Recently, Fitch Ratings downgraded the U.S. government debt.

“The rating agencies and investors are catching on that the federal budget is highly unsustainable,” she points out.

It sure is. Politicians have voted to spend much more money than the government will ever have.

On the other hand, so far, nothing terrible has happened.

“The fact that it hasn’t happened yet does not mean that it will not happen,” says Boccia. “The math does not work out.”

The biggest reasons are Social Security and Medicare.

But when anyone proposes cuts, my fellow old people scream, “Government deducted money for Social Security and Medicare from my paychecks for years. I’m just getting my money back!”

They don’t realize that because we now live longer, most of us will get triple what we paid in.

But of course, we old people are the biggest voting bloc.

“Asking members of Congress running for office to reform old age entitlement programs is a bit like asking an astronaut in space to turn off his oxygen supply,” says Boccia.

So she and the Cato Institute propose a solution: Congress should create an independent commission to do the cutting. That way politicians can say, “Don’t blame me, the commission made the cuts!”

That worked once with military bases.

The military actually wanted to close some bases. But selfish members of Congress fought any closure in their states.

“In the middle of a war, you don’t close a base like Groton,” declared Sen. Joe Lieberman, D-Conn.

“Circumstances at our base are unique,” claimed Sen. John Thune, R-S.D.

By ignoring the self-serving politicians, the Base Realignment and Closure Commission got 350 bases closed.

“It was quite successful until Congress turned it off,” says Boccia.

Since Congress won’t cut, and Biden definitely won’t, an independent commission may be our only hope.

We need to do something before our debt explodes, mauling our future.

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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