



Taxation Without Reason

My income tax is due in a few weeks!

I hate it.

I'm pretty good at math, but I no longer prepare my own taxes. The form alone scares me.

I feel I have to hire an accountant, because Congress, endlessly sucking up to various interest groups, keeps adding to a tax code. Now even accountants and tax nerds barely understand it.

I can get a deduction for feeding feral cats but not for having a watchdog.

I can deduct clarinet lessons if I get an orthodontist to say it'll cure my overbite, but not piano lessons if a psychotherapist prescribes them for relaxation.

Exotic dancers can depreciate breast implants.

Even though whaling is mostly banned, owning a whaling boat can get you \$10,000 in deductions.

And so on.

Stop! I have a life! I don't want to spend my time learning about such things.

No wonder most Americans pay for some form of assistance. We pay big — about \$104 billion a year. We waste 2 billion hours filling out stupid forms.

That may not even be the worst part of the tax code.

We adjust our lives to satisfy the whims of politicians. They manipulate us with tax rules. Million-dollar mortgage deductions invite us to buy bigger homes. Solar tax credits got me to put panels on my roof.

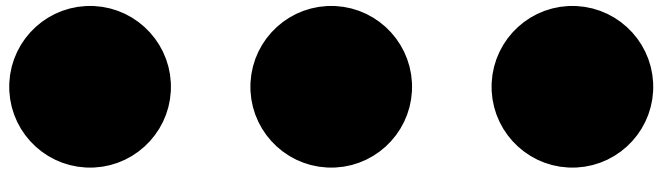
"These incentives are a good thing," say politicians. "Even high taxes alone encourage gifts to charity.

But "Americans don't need to be bribed to give," says Steve Forbes in one of my videos. "In the 1980s, when the top rate got cut from 70% down to 28% ... charitable giving went *up*. When people have more, they give more."

Right. When government lets us live our own lives, good things happen.

But politicians want *more* control.

American colonists started a revolution partly over taxes. They raided British ships and dumped their tea into the Boston Harbor to protest a tax of "3 pennies per pound." But once those "don't tax me!" colonists became politicians, they, too, raised taxes. First, they taxed things they deemed bad, like snuff and whiskey.



John Stossel



Written by [John Stossel](#) on February 28, 2024

Alexander Hamilton's whiskey tax led to violent protests.

Now Americans meekly (mostly) accept new and much higher taxes.

All of us suffer because politicians have turned income tax into a manipulative maze.

We waste money and time and do things we wouldn't normally do.

Since I criticize government, I assume some IRS agent would like to come after me.

So, cowering in fear, I hire an accountant and tell her, "Megan, don't be aggressive. Just skip any challengeable deduction, even if it means I pay more."

I like having an accountant, but I don't like *having* to have one. I resent having to pay Megan.

I once calculated what I could buy with the money I pay her. I could get a brand-new motorcycle. I could take a cruise ship to Italy and back every year.

Better still, I could give my money to charity and maybe do some good in the world. For the same amount I spend on Megan, I could pay four kids' tuition at a private school funded by SSPNYC.org.

Or I could invest. I might help grow a company that creates a fun product, cures cancer or creates wealth in a hundred ways.

But I can't. I need to pay Megan.

What a waste.

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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