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Z ON TV

Stossel calls his start on Fox 'good and bad'

ABC veteran 'struggling' to adjust to new format

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If nothing else, give John Stossel this: He seems like one of the straightest talkers in the TV news business.

On the eve of launching a new show on the Fox Business Network, the 62-year-old newsman is asked how things are going six weeks into his move to Fox after 28 years at ABC News. In addition to the new show that makes its debut Thursday and is described as a "one-hour program focusing on libertarian and economic issues," Stossel's duties also include appearing on such popular shows on the Fox News Channel as those of Bill O'Reilly and Glenn Beck.

"I would say it's going good and bad," he says of his early days at Fox appearing as an expert on the shows of other hosts. "It's good in that everybody is very nice, and it is great to have the airtime to talk about economic freedom more often. But I'm struggling because it's a different format. I have always written scripts and married the scripts to video. And this doing live debate is new to me. I think I was really awful at the beginning, and I'm starting to get better at it. But it's a new thing that I have to learn."

Coming at a time when government is expanding at a pace reminiscent of Lyndon B. Johnson's White House in the 1960s, or Franklin Roosevelt's in the 1930s, Stossel's new show should have no trouble finding an audience of viewers eager for a discussion about the pedal-to-the-metal pace of expansion since Barack Obama took office.

His show also arrives at a time when it could become a signature series for the Fox Business Network, which is rapidly expanding with 3 million new homes in the New York market, as well as the arrival of Don Imus - and rumors that Lou Dobbs might soon be on board. (The Fox Business Network airs on Comcast Channel 106 in the Baltimore area, as well as Channel 359 on DirecTV and 206 on DISH Network.)

"I certainly could not make it more time-appropriate or relevant," Stossel says of the show's timing. "But all those things you said about growth of government, and people being worried about it, are things I have become interested in over a dozen years and wanted to report. ... I was doing 'Give Me a Break' attacks on expanded government when George Bush I was in power when I was at ABC. ... I mean, I thought it was bad because Medicare was in the hole, and Bush wasn't cutting anything. Congress wasn't cutting anything. And



now, it's much worse. They're talking about spending more and doing a whole new entitlement."

His weekly show, "Stossel," is a live-to-tape format, which means it will be taped before a live audience, and working in any kind of live format is an issue for him, the winner of 19 Emmy Awards says.

"I was a stutterer when I first joined ABC," Stossel recalls. "In my contract was the line that unless there was an emergency, I did not have to be on live. And here I am, doing lots of live."

He says he asked for the live audience "because speaking at colleges, I liked the interaction with these angry students who say, 'Capitalism is evil.' Through trying to explain it and answer them, I've gotten better at it - and more willing to try it."

Stossel is one of the media's staunchest defenders of capitalism and the freest of free marketplaces. Central to his libertarian ideology is the belief that government should be smaller, not bigger.

In line with that philosophy, "Stossel" will be bringing some new voices to the prime-time discussion of economics, politics, business and culture.

"The planned first guests are John Allison, chair of BB&T Bank, one of the banks that was forced to take [stimulus] money," Stossel says, explaining some of his selections and topics.

"And the first show is based on 'Atlas Shrugged,' the [Ayn Rand] novel, which predicts the explosion of government that we have now," he continues. "And on global warning, there's Jerry Taylor, of the Cato Institute - you don't normally see him on these shows. John Mackey, creator of Whole Foods, will also be on. He wrote an op-ed and got boycotted by the granola folks who shop at Whole Foods. He was suggesting less big government and more individual health care. So, yeah, they aren't the normal people."

Stossel has not been shy in recent years about challenging mainstream media on what he sees as a liberal bias and hypocrisy about it. The most recent example: The New York Times writing a piece about Stossel making a paid speech to a group involved in the national health care debate.

"I have always made speeches, and I have always given the money to charity," he says. "Some of the groups are controversial or involved in political debates. And the Times never wrote an article about it until I got to Fox. So I think it says more about the Times than it does about me."

Stossel, who writes a blog that is as lean and focused as his speech, went online to challenge the Times article. You can read his blog at foxbusiness.com.

"I noticed something similar earlier in my career," the Princeton graduate says, sticking with the theme of media bias. "I had never gone to journalism school, and I was making up consumer reporting as I went along, and I always had a point of view. I was bashing business and chasing the crooks. I was asking, 'Why are you a crook?' And I was saying, 'Laws should be passed to solve this.' And my colleagues loved it. And I won 19 Emmy Awards and a Peabody and a Polk."

But then, he says, "I wised up and saw that these rules made things worse most of the time and started writing about that. And once I did that, the tone totally changed. I stopped winning awards."

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"Stossel" airs at 8 p.m. Thursday on Fox Business Network

Corrections: An earlier version of this story listed an incorrect starting date for the show, which airs Thursday. Additionally, the Fox Business Network and John Mackey were misidentified. The Baltimore Sun regrets the errors.

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