



## Shopping Around for a Better Life

By John Stossel January 23, 2013

---

Thanks, California! Thanks for your monstrous spending and absurd regulatory overreach! America needs you. We need Connecticut and Illinois, too! We need you the way we needed the Soviet Union, as models of failure, to warn us what happens if we believe those who say, "Government can."

Moving to California was once the dream for many Americans. Its population grew at almost triple the national average — until 1990. Then big government, in the form of endless regulation and taxes, killed much of the dream. In the last decade, 2 million people left California.

Many of them moved to Alaska, Florida, New Hampshire, Nevada, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Washington or Wyoming. More on what makes those states special in a moment.

When the USSR died, overthrown by its own citizens' hatred of central planning, I assumed the world would acknowledge that big government is a nightmare. But people don't. Our brains are programmed to believe that "next time, central planning will help." So, many people forget the lesson of the USSR.

Fortunately, they can still watch what's happening right now in California, Illinois and Connecticut. OK, those states are not totalitarian dictatorships, but they tax and micromanage so much that they will soon approach bankruptcy, cut services and stagnate.

And Americans have an advantage Soviet citizens never had: 50 states. If we live in a big-government state, we can move. I did.

I grew up in Illinois. It was nice enough (except in winter). But gradually its politicians gave away its future.

I moved to New York City, no political paradise, but where the big TV news jobs are. And maybe New York's promises to unions won't bankrupt us too soon.

I could always move again. I would still be smothered by federal rules, but at least I can move to a place with fewer onerous state rules.

A group called the Free State Project invites us to move to New Hampshire to help create "liberty in our lifetime." It's too early to see how that will work out, but that state now has a booming population of libertarians and anarchists.

One even got elected to the state legislature after running against his own roommate, also a libertarian, whom he accused of not being anti-government enough.

Americans who want to escape state income taxes and live near better job prospects can move to one of those nine states that I mentioned above.

It's no surprise they produce more jobs. Without an income tax, those states were forced to limit the growth of their governments, so they did. Every state has schools, social service programs, prisons, etc., but those states find a way to fund those things for less. Then they reap benefits.

Last decade, those nine states gained population and increased jobs by 4.9 percent; jobs in the rest of the states declined by 2.6 percent.

It's good that we have places like Texas and New Hampshire to which fed-up citizens can escape. In Europe, you'd have to leave your country to escape its worst laws.

French actor Gerard Depardieu just moved to Belgium to escape France's proposed 75 percent tax on the rich. Years ago, high taxes in Britain drove Rod Stewart to move to Los Angeles. But by 2010, California's taxes had risen, and Stewart moved back to England. (He doesn't claim the reason was taxes; he said his child could get a better education in England.)

Dan Mitchell of the Cato Institute summed up California's situation for me. "The politicians want to get re-elected, and the state government workers want to get as much as they can before the whole house of cards comes tumbling down. California is Greece — the Greece of America."

I hope all Americans watch and learn from states like California. But if we don't, and if people keep electing big-government politicians, at least Americans, unlike the Greeks, can hop around between 50 states, trying to stay one step ahead of bad laws and ruin.