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'Stossel' lets reporter become commentator

By WALT BELCHER wbelcher

@tampatrib.com

John Stossel says his new weekly show on Fox Business Network will be a work in progress. He is still adjusting to this new role as an opinionated commentator.

"This is different for me after years of being a reporter," he said in a recent telephone interview. "I'm learning a new skill. I've always worked off a written script and edited with pictures. Being spontaneous in a live debate is new for me."

Stossel, 62, used to stutter, and in his early days at ABC he would not appear on camera live unless he was needed for crisis coverage. Now he's jumping into the pundit area - where only the strongest personalities survive.

Stossel spent 28 years at ABC News, first as a bust-their-chops consumer reporter, then as an investigative reporter, and finally as co-host of "20/20." He picked up 19 Emmys along the way.

But he felt stifled by network bosses he said would not let him do stories that reflected his view that big government is bad government.

"Stossel," debuting at 8 tonight, will allow him to express his libertarian viewpoint, which he defines as less government, more personal freedoms and economic liberty.

At the moment, libertarians and conservatives are political bedfellows in opposition to bailouts, stimulus packages and a health care overhaul.

But Stossel says he's not a conservative and has views that would make them cringe.

He says the government should butt out of regulating drugs and prostitution. He says homosexuality is natural. He was opposed to invading Iraq and is against further involvement in Afghanistan. He also says President George W. Bush was a spendthrift who gave us a record expansion of government. And, he says, President Barack Obama will make it even bigger.

Stossel's early career was built upon exposing bad products and shady business practices. But over the years, he came to believe that the free marketplace would take care of bad businesses and that government regulation only made things worse. "Economic freedom works best," he says.

He will have a studio audience, and guests not usually seen or heard from on other shows - people who share the less government, more individual freedom view.

Among them are Yaron Brook of the Ayn Rand Institute (Stossel is a big Ayn Rand fan); John Allison, chief executive officer of BB&T; Jerry Taylor of the Cato Institute; and "Superfreakonomics" co-author Stephen Dubner.

His multiyear contract also calls for frequent appearances on Fox News Channel during the day and in prime time (with Glenn Beck and Bill O'Reilly), as well as four business- and consumer-themed one-hour specials during the year.

HUNT OUT: After two years, "The Bonnie Hunt Show" is going out of production. Warner Bros. Domestic Television Distribution is pulling the plug after this season because of low ratings.

Hunt may return to acting. She has appeared in films such as "Jerry Maguire," "Rain Man," "Return to Me," "Jumanji" and "Beethoven."

TUNE IN TONIGHT

"30 Rock," at 9:30 on NBC

Jack's interest in a new social-networking site unexpectedly reconnects him with a high school crush (Julianne Moore, "Blindness").