

THE MORAL LIBERAL

Bureaucracy, Boondoggles, and Bad Behavior

By Chris Edwards
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In catching up on news about the federal government today, I noticed that articles fit into three categories: bureaucracy, boondoggles, and bad behavior. On any given day, it seems, the *Washington Post* and other outlets have new tales of BB&BB to report. No wonder [most Americans](#) want to cut federal spending.

Let's look at the latest on BB&BB:

Regarding bureaucracy, you can't find a better illustration than [David Fahrenthold's article in the Washington Post](#) last Sunday. He describes an underground cavern in Pennsylvania where 600 government workers process federal pension paperwork with the use of 28,000 old-fashioned file cabinets. The paper-based process works the same way that it did four decades ago, and it takes just as long. Efforts to computerize it have failed over and over.

Regarding boondoggles, the cost of a new D.C. building for the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has tripled to \$145 million, [reports the Washington Examiner](#). Meanwhile, a huge new D.C. headquarters for the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) [is overbudget by \\$1 billion](#). When President George W. Bush created DHS in 2002, [he promised](#) that it would “improve efficiency without growing government” while cutting out “duplicative and redundant activities that drain critical homeland security resources.”

Also this week, a House committee [learned that](#) numerous Veterans Affairs' building projects across the country are overbudget by hundreds of millions of dollars. It appears that [Edwards' Law](#) of Government Cost Overruns is as immutable as Murphy's Law.

Regarding bad behavior in the federal government, it's never ending. [The Air Force found out](#) that dozens of its officers at a nuclear base have been cheating on proficiency tests and breaking other rules. [And this week](#) the Secret Service reaffirmed its reputation as the Animal House of police forces when an agent in the Netherlands for a presidential visit was found passed-out drunk in a hotel hallway.

If anything can go wrong in government, it will go wrong—and we're all paying for it.

More on [cost overruns here](#). Thanks to Nick and Pierre-Guy for help.

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