



## Cato's Tanner places recent federal government scandals in their proper perspective

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The GAO's lavish partying and the Secret Service's Colombian shenanigans have generated plenty of headlines. [Michael Tanner](#) of the Cato Institute warns in his latest National Review Online [column](#) that these scandals shouldn't distract people from the federal government's real problems.

*Given our flaws as individuals, the Obama administration believes that government should run our health-care system. Left to our own devices, we might fail to buy health insurance or buy insurance that doesn't include the right package of benefits. Government needs to subsidize "green energy," because we might decide to buy fuel-inefficient cars. Government needs to oversee the banking industry and housing markets, because banks made loans to people who couldn't afford to pay them back. People are prejudiced and selfish. Government is altruistic and "fair." Markets fail, but not government. As President Obama sees it, government can make us better and lead us to the promised land.*

*But, as the GAO and Secret Service scandals should remind us, government is made up not of philosopher-economist-saints but of men and women like the rest of us — afflicted by failures, corruption, short-sightedness, and self-interest. The difference is that government gives those imperfect individuals the power to impose their views and desires on the rest of us.*

*The Founding Fathers understood this. They knew that some government is necessary to protect our rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." For this reason, they noted in the Declaration of Independence, "governments are instituted among men." But they also understood that government needs to be carefully limited in its scope and power.*