



## Oregon Set to Privatize Several Agencies

**A woefully ailing pension system is forcing the profligate state into fiscal responsibility.**

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It's the quintessential Churchillian remark—particularly in the sense that there's [no evidence](#) that Winston Churchill ever actually said it: "You can always count on Americans to do the right thing, after they've exhausted all other options." But perhaps the adage should be updated to this: You always can count on Oregon Democrats to do the right thing—after they've exhausted all other options.

*Willamette Week*, a Portland alternative weekly, [reports](#) that Oregon governor Kate Brown—heretofore a down-the-line liberal—is considering "selling \$5 billion worth of public assets." They're assets the state has no business owning in the first place, including a workers-compensation insurer and the Oregon Liquor Control Commission, a depression-era relic that controls booze distribution in the state with an iron fist. (As the *WW* notes archly, "Neither of those agencies performs a core state function. Many states own neither an insurance company nor a monopoly on all liquor sales within their borders.") Governor Brown is also reportedly entertaining the idea of selling off some highways and leasing space in rest stops to companies like McDonald's, or more likely, the Pacific Northwest's own Burgerville. (Most Oregon rest stops currently offer nothing more than bathrooms and vending machines, so this would surely be a popular move.)

What explains Brown's move to the right? It is not—alas—the result of some sort of ideological epiphany; don't expect Brown to take up a fellowship at the Cato Institute anytime soon. Rather, the governor simply has no choice: Oregon faces a \$22 billion pension deficit. "The state has promised retirees more money than it has to pay them," reports *WW*. So she needs the money, badly. Therefore, it's not surprising that the political director of Oregon's AFSCME chapter has backed the plan, saying, "we're comfortable with the general idea."

Viewed through this prism, then, it looks not like Brown has turned into a latter day Grover Norquist, but that rather she is instead burning the household furniture to stay warm. She's arrived at a good idea—privatizing assets, kyboshing the state-funded temperance league—but for the wrong reasons. That means eventually, she'll still have to reform the state's creaking

pension system. Either that, or in a few years you can expect her to rechristen the University of Oregon "Nike U."