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Private in New Jersey

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New Jersey's new Republican governor, Chris Christie, is creating a commission that will recommend what state government functions could be done better -- and cheaper -- by the private sector.

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Christie may also suspend civil service rules to make it easier to lay off higher paid workers. This would be a switch from the way things are usually done in a state dominated by unions, which demand a last-hired, first-fired priority.

Given that it is New Jersey, watch for the predictable hyperbole from the left with forecasts of starving poor, homeless seniors and irreparable harm to children.

Privatization is nothing new. Ancient civilizations dating back to pre-Roman times practiced it. More recently, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher succeeded in reducing the size and cost of her government by selling-off entities like British Telecom and British Rail to private companies.

Other governments followed Thatcher's lead, some having begun the process before she took office. They sold airports, railroads, utilities and other assets. The first question became: can the private sector run these things better, more efficiently and at less cost than government?

The United States has had less success with privatization because of the commitment of liberal Democrats and some Republicans to big government. Still, President Ronald Reagan was able to sell off the Conrail freight railroad in 1987 for \$1.7 billion.

Here's a shocker: The Office of Management and Budget has calculated that about half of all federal employees do work that is not "inherently governmental." The CATO Institute has done an excellent study into what federal agencies and programs could be sold to private firms

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Edwards says selling off the postal monopoly would bring innovation to the mail industry, just as the 1980s breakup of AT&T transformed the field of telecommunications. That's just for starters. CATO says at the end of fiscal 2007, the federal government held \$12 trillion in buildings and equipment, \$277 billion in inventory, \$919 billion in land, and \$392 billion in mineral rights. Surely it doesn't need all -- or even most -- of that.

While the federal government grows and pays its workers more than the private sector, if Christie can reduce the size and cost of state government, he -- along with Virginia's Gov. Bob McDonnell, who has similar goals -- could change government as we know it back to what the Founders envisioned: small government that protects personal liberty.

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