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water systems charge 84 percent more than public systems.

But even as privatized water expands in states such as Illinois and New Jersey, it decreased nationwide between 2007 and 2014. But privatization trends have become more difficult to track since 2015, said Grant, when the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency stopped making that data available. In 2014, 87 percent of the nation's ratepayers got their water from publicly owned utilities.

On Monday, Aug. 6, Baltimore City Council voted unanimously to ban water privatization. The amendment to the city's charter will go before voters this November, positioning Baltimore to become the first large city in the nation to prohibit the sale or lease of its water and sewer systems. This move came after multiple water companies expressed interest in purchasing the city's system.

When mass water shutoffs in Flint and Detroit, Mich., made national headlines, the public knew the number of people who'd lost

access to water because the utility was public. Grant said it's unknown how many people lose access to water because of non-payment when the company shutting off their services is private.

"We've requested information from them, we've filed information act requests but they're not subject to the information act requests," Grant said. "They're not talking to

us, they're not telling us how many people they shut off. And they're an investor-owned utility - they don't have to."

One of Food and Water Watch's biggest concerns, Grant said, is the revolving door between regulators and the private water industry. For example, before becoming the head of the National Association of Water Companies, the industry's trade association, Robert Powelson was the head of the National Association of Regulatory Utility

"Subsequent private company management doesn't always deliver on promised cost savings because the financing of frequently-needed infrastructure improvements can be more expensive for private compared to public utilities."

JANICE THOMPSON
CUB ADVOCACY DIRECTOR

Commissioners - the industry's regulators. "These big companies, they have relationships with regulators, and they often seek to change state regulations that make it easier to increase rates on consumers," she said. And that's happened in states like New Jersey - where 40 percent of residents live in districts where the water utility has been privatized, and private water companies charge 79 percent more than public water utilities.

Grant said one piece of legislation making its way through state legislatures removes regulator oversight of water company purchase prices. In Oregon, this hasn't happened, and the state's Public Utility Commission is overseeing that detail of NW Natural's acquisition of Salmon Valley Water.

But in states where this law has been passed, such as Indiana and California, Grant

said, "a private water company can offer an inflated purchase price to a local government, which entices the government to sell, but then they also can automatically add that to their rate base."

Grant said that in some cases, lawmakers might not realize what they're signing off on when they pass legislation introduced on behalf of private water companies. "There is some really wonky legislation," she said.

In Oregon, investor-owned utilities can't raise rates without going through a public process overseen by the state's Public Utility Commission. It will step in and regulate a water utility if it serves more than 500 customers or if its rates exceed certain thresholds.

"They can't charge more than it costs them to provide service," said Bruce Hellebuyck, a water program manager at the commission.

An investor-owned company has to make a return on its investments, and those returns are also calculated into the rates customers pay, he said. The percentage of the return is determined on a case-by-case basis.

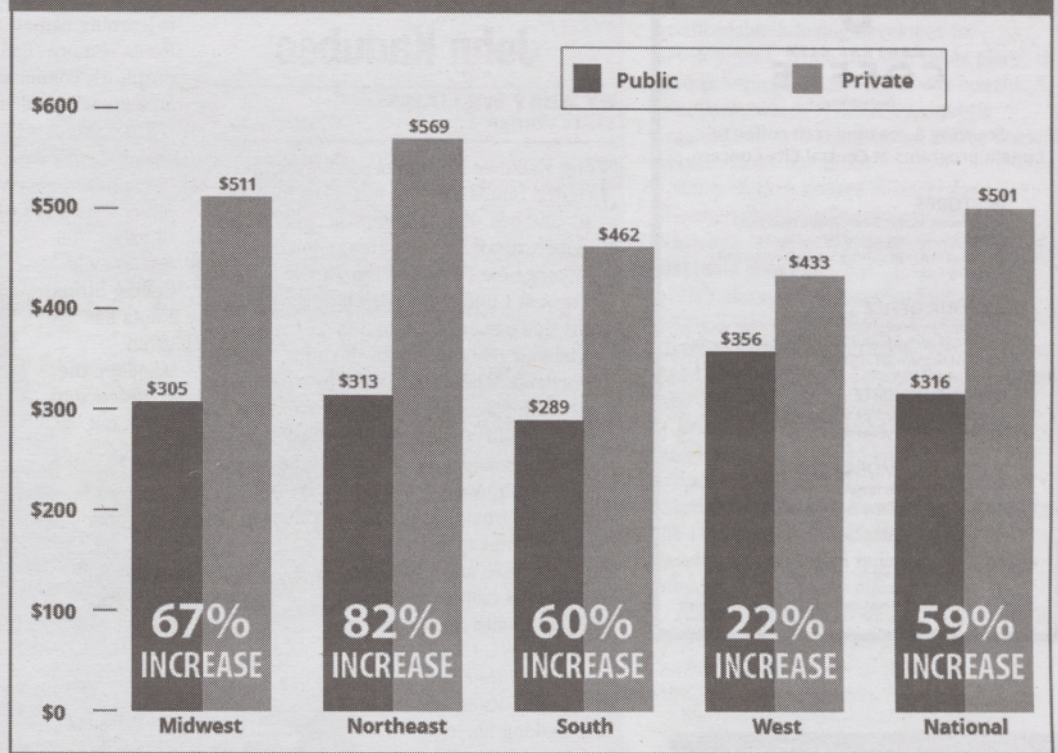
The state commission regulates the rates and services of 32 Oregon water companies, and regulates the service but not the rates of about 40 more. Its system is complaint driven, and customers can file grievances through its Consumer Services Division.

Combined, Oregon's regulated private water companies serve just 32,000 customers, Hellebuyck said.

When a regulated water company wants to raise its rates or change ownership, the commission investigates and its three governor-appointed commissioners either approve or deny the request. If it's a sale, commissioners will approve it if it will not make services worse, or otherwise harm customers, and if it's a rate increase that's been requested, commissioners will approve it if it can be justified.

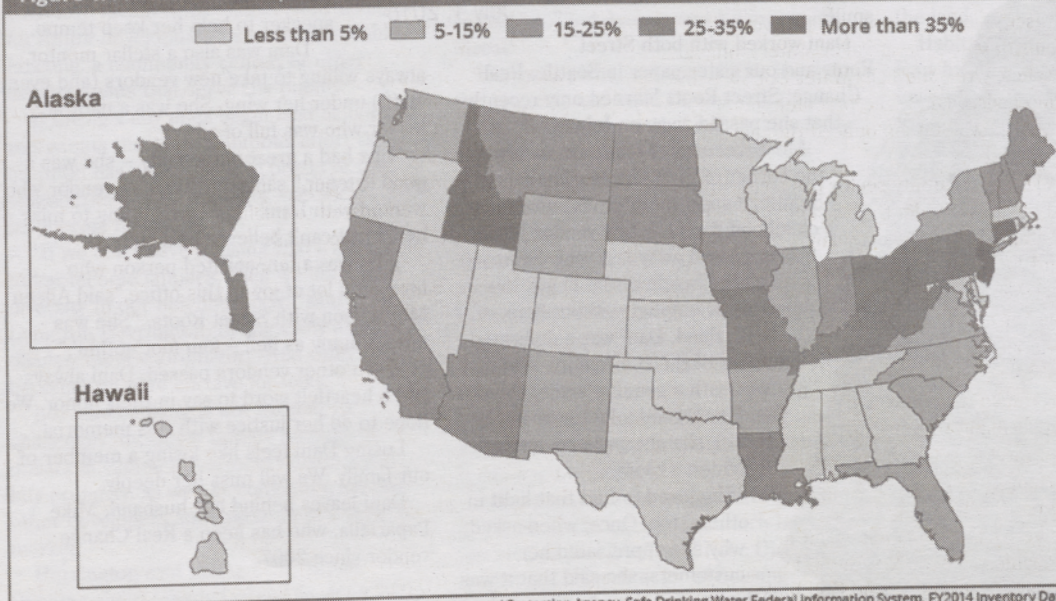
A vote on NW Natural's acquisition of Salmon Valley Water Company has not yet been scheduled.

Figure 5: Average Annual Water Bill 2015
For Households Using 60,000 Gallons a Year Based on the 500 Largest Community Water Systems



From "The State of Public Water in The United States," a 2016 report from Food and Water Watch

Figure 1: Private Ownership of Community Water Systems by Service Population (2014)



SOURCE: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Safe Drinking Water Federal Information System, FY2014 Inventory Data.

From "The State of Public Water in The United States," a 2016 report from Food and Water Watch