
Inquiry into the Auction of the United States of America
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Science Fiction

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On October 11, 2016, the United States of America, including all of its assets, was offered at public auction.

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Statement from Secretary of the Treasury William P. Compton: “It's just simple mathematics. Our national debt now stands at something over 13 trillion dollars, and our annual revenues are insufficient to pay off the interest, let alone the principal. When there is no practical means of meeting one's basic expenses, then liquidation of assets is the only viable solution.”

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Statement from Shiekh Ali ben Hariff of Saudi Arabia: “Unquestionably it was a failure to adjust. For example, when Kinosaka of Japan made his breakthrough and gave the world an inexpensive way to convert to solar power, we Arabs didn't swim upstream against the tide of events. We didn't bare our fighting fangs against the Dentist of Destiny. No, we covered up our oil fields with public parks and quaint little brokerage houses of gossamer gaiety. Of course, owning a third of the world's banking houses *did* make the transition easier...”

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Statement from Hubert Jameson, Chairman of the Board of the now-defunct Standard Oil Company: “What the hell were we supposed to do—throw five million people out of work because some little Chink or Jap or whatever the hell he was found a way to bottle the Sun? Sure we fought to stay in business! After all, fossil fuels won us the first two World Wars, didn't they? Abe Lincoln lit his lamps with oil, didn't he? George Washington ... well, forget about George Washington. Anyway, it would have been unpatriotic to give up without a fight.”

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Statement from Richard J. Daley IV, Chairman of the Chicago Transit Authority (C.T.A.): “Yes, I realize that our fares have increased eight thousand percent in the past decade, and no, the C.T.A. is not dependent upon fossil fuels to any great extent. What we really have here is a situation in which, thanks to soaring gas prices, a finite number of trains and buses were being asked to transport an almost infinite number of commuters. The logistics of the problem, and the expenditures in time and manpower, became so great that we decided the only way to handle so much business was, paradoxically, to drive it away. Hence, every time there was a price increase in fossil fuels, we matched it penny for penny. This policy has worked out so well that only last week we laid off half our drivers, engineers, and conductors, and put the rest on part-time. Thus, once again, modern management has met the challenge.”

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Statement from Edwin Kominski, Comptroller of the United States of America: “Of course, there are a lot of details to be worked out yet. Will Lockheed still owe seventy billion dollars to the new government? Who will pay off our national debt? Can the Los Angeles Raiders still move to Butte, Montana? Will a general tax amnesty be declared? It's a tricky situation.”

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Statement from Clarissa Wyatt, Estate Appraiser for Sotheby's: “My own feeling is that they'd be better off selling the national parks, the Great Lakes, and the Las Vegas hotels separately. Put everything into one big package that includes such undesirable locations as Manhattan and Los Angeles, and the price has got to decrease accordingly. A guess? Oh, I would estimate that it should bring at least 35 billion. I mean, the buildings alone have to be worth that much. Of course, they'll all have to be converted to solar power—but even so, 30 billion would be the rock-bottom minimum. Maybe 28.”

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Statement from Harvey Purple Cloud, Hereditary Chief of the Mescalero Apaches: “Make a bid? Like, man, you gotta be pulling my leg! We gave those turkeys a perfectly nice little piece of real estate, and look what they did to it.”

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Statement from Big Frank Stephens, President of the Brotherhood of Coal Miners' Local #403: “They try to convert without using my union and I'll pull out every miner from here to Albany, and then let's see how warm they keep this winter while they're putting in half a trillion solar batteries!”

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Statement from Eugene V. Hagermann, Professor of History at Yale University: “No, I definitely wouldn't liken this to the fall of the Roman Empire. For one thing, Christianity and military overexpansion have nothing to do with our current situation. For another, the Romans had class.”

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Statement from Frederick J. Allenby, Chairman of the Board of Exxon Power Company: “Look, a corporation that can't keep up with the times is bound to go under. We're sorry about Standard and Shell and Mobil, but that's the way the cookie crumbles. I'd like to go into the subject in more detail, but I'm a little pressed for time right now. I'm getting together with some astronomers up at Mt. Palomar to determine a proper solar depletion allowance.”

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On October 14, 2016, the United States of America was sold to the Republic of Yemen for 22.4 billion dollars. The underbidder was the still-unsettled estate of Howard Hughes.

Payment was made in Japanese yen.