

# Calif. pension overhaul advocates try new strategy

By Jon Ortiz, Sacramento Bee

For the third time in four years, advocates for altering public pensions have a plan they want to put to a statewide vote.

But this time the proposal by pension-change advocates Chuck Reed and Carl DeMaio has a new twist: Pensions and other retirement benefits would automatically become a matter of ballot-box politics by requiring voter approval any time government officials sought to upgrade benefits.

It also would make “defined-contribution” plans the default retirement program for state and local employees hired Jan. 1, 2019, and later. Employers who wanted to add new employees to “defined-benefit” plans now common in government – but rare in the private sector – would have to get voter approval after that date.

Reed said that the measure is necessary to rein soaring retiree benefit costs that are “crowding out funding for important services such as police, fire, schools and road repairs.”

As news about the plan spread Thursday morning, union reaction was swift and predictable.

“Chuck Reed is a hypocrite,” said Bruce Blanning, executive director of the state engineers’ union. “He’s not interested in protecting taxpayers. His real target is working men and women who dedicated themselves to public service and then retire. He wants their money to be controlled by the same Wall Street bankers who gave us the Great Recession.”

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