

# California's public pensions breaking the bank

By Judy Lin, Los Angeles Times

More than 20 times in the last 15 years, political leaders looking to control California's fast-growing public pension costs have tried to put reform initiatives before the voters.

None of the proposals has made it onto the ballot.

Often, advocates could not raise enough money for signature gathering, advertising and other costs of an initiative campaign. Some of the most promising efforts, however, ran into a different kind of obstacle: an official summary, written by the state attorney general, that described the initiative in terms likely to alienate voters. Facing bleak prospects at the polls, the sponsors abandoned the campaigns.

Taxpayer advocates contend that the attorneys general – Democrats elected with robust support from organized labor – put a finger on the scale, distilling the initiatives in language that echoed labor's rhetoric. Labor leaders say the summaries were neutral and accurate, and that the problem lay with the initiatives – which, they contend, would have diluted benefits already promised to public employees.

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