

OP-ED

Cincinnati pension system targeted by tea party activists

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By Ben Peyton

This November, voters in Cincinnati will be asked to support a tea party backed plan to privatize the city's retirement system by closing the pension system to all future employees and enrolling them in 401(k) style accounts. Cincinnati's ballot initiative is the latest step in a nationwide effort to eliminate public pension systems and move individuals into riskier retirement accounts.

The effort here in Ohio is being spearheaded by anti-government, tea party activists that are backed by wealthy out-of-state funders who paint a bleak picture for the City of Cincinnati if radical changes are not made to its pension system.

In recent years, public pension systems from California to Rhode Island have come under attack by conservative organizations and activists from around the country drafting model amendments and legislation, collecting signatures, and helping to lead the effort to eliminate public pensions. It now seems that a very similar effort is afoot in Cincinnati where tea party activists are pushing an effort to repeal the city's pension system for its employees and force all new employees into alternative retirement programs.

This effort to dismantle Cincinnati's pension system and portray it as an unsustainable train wreck is straight from the conservative playbook being used in other cities and states across the U.S. Conservative activists and lawmakers will first decree the insurmountable pension's costs and conclude that the only sustainable path forward is to eliminate the public pensions all together and turn the system over to enormous banks that stand to profit handsomely from such a plan. While the sustainability of public pensions is a complicated matter, these so called "reformers" routinely exaggerate the fiscal health of public pensions and fail to point out that the main culprit in all this is the financial crisis of 2007-2008 which was a huge hit to pensions and was caused by the same people who now stand to profit from these changes.

In just the last year cities across the nation went to the ballot to determine the fate of public pensions in their municipalities. Likewise, Cincinnati is not the only city going to the ballot this November. Voters will also be considering a tea party backed proposal to put new city workers into 401(k) style plans and eliminate the city's public pension.

In Cincinnati, the committee behind the effort, Cincinnati for Pension Reform, is mostly individuals from the area associated with the tea party. One member of the committee in particular, Chris Littleton has a long track record of working to advance extreme policies that

are often in line with tea party principals. Littleton is a co-founder of the state tea party umbrella group Ohio Liberty Coalition. In the past, the organization fought for right to work legislation, opposed Medicaid expansion in Ohio, and worked against the implementation of Obamacare in Ohio. In addition, the ballot language for the proposal was drafted by the Executive Director and Founder of the 1851 Center for Constitutional Law Center – a strongly conservative Columbus based organization that advocates for limited government.

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