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## Picking fight with public employees

*By Mike Pruger, Special to the Sentinel*

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In response to your editorial of Aug. 13, “Attorney general’s ambition raises some doubts,” I question the motivation behind the writing. I am proud to have spent decades doing the tough but rewarding job of protecting the streets of Santa Cruz County and now caring for those who have lost loved ones. I’ve been a police officer and now a deputy for more years of my life than I haven’t. My entire community matters to me, and I’m proud to do my part to keep our neighborhoods safe.

I began my career because I wanted to provide for my family and have confidence that, when the time comes, I will have a modest retirement I can count on after a long and satisfying career.

Today, two career politicians with a bone to pick want to take that from those of us in law enforcement, firefighting, teaching or any other area of professional public service.

Chuck Reed and Carl DeMaio’s “Voter Empowerment Act” is anything but empowering for the 1.64 million public employees currently enrolled in our state’s pension system.

Public employees were not spared heartache during the recession. We experienced the same loss in our home values and retirement savings. Agencies throughout the state lost deputies and most of us returned to the bargaining table to make concessions to keep our departments, our cities, counties and our state afloat. The Santa Cruz County Deputy Sheriffs Association returned to the table at every request made by the county. We came to agreements that assisted the county because it was the right thing to do at the time.

Now fears similar to those felt by millions during the crash of Wall Street and the Great Recession are looming above the heads of nearly 2 million Californians. The prospect of this initiative coming to fruition will, even by the most conservative review, have a devastating consequence on public employees.

Pitched as a measure to save money on pension costs of future employees, the Voter Empowerment Act would eliminate defined benefit plans and create financial uncertainty. The promises made to employees regarding their retirement years will be broken under this initiative.



I'm tired of the rhetoric. Public employees are scapegoated too often and without justification.

Not only would Reed and DeMaio blame us for California's financial crisis, but now we somehow have so much power of persuasion that we can pressure our state's attorney general into writing the title and summary for the primary purpose of pleasing her supporters in the public sector? Enough is enough. Editorials should be a reflection of the community that they are writing for.

Attorney General Kamala Harris, once again, is calling it like it is.

This initiative is absolutely a maneuver to strip public employees of constitutionally vested and promised retirement and healthcare security.

Thanks to a thoughtful and accurate summation, the jig is up on Reed and DeMaio's plan.

They can pretend all they want that this initiative won't affect current employees, but the truth can't be ignored and voters deserve to have the full story.

Harris' title and summary has nothing to do with pleasing unions. It has to do with telling the truth.

Even one of the most notorious public employee pension critics, Daniel Borenstein of the Contra Costa Times, has said that no retirement experts have defended Reed and DeMaio's opinion, and that they should be honest about the measure.

So let's stop with the finger pointing and start talking facts.

This initiative will jeopardize the sustainability of our state's multi-billion dollar pension funds, thrust public employees into financial uncertainty, cause administrative and legal headaches we cannot even gauge, break promises to current employees and eliminate death and disability benefits for officers, firefighters and other employees.

This is a financial crisis we can avert before it starts. I hope we do.

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*Special Notes:*

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