

Pension fund leaders condemn political attacks on DB plans

BY [ARLEEN JACOBUS](#) | APRIL 6, 2016

A roundtable of public pension fund CEOs decried the politically motivated individuals and organizations, including the Koch brothers, billionaires that fund conservative causes, and the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, that are attempting to influence politicians to eliminate defined benefit plans.

Everyone on a Pension Bridge conference panel moderated by Gary A. Amelio, CEO of the \$8.1 billion San Bernardino County (Calif.) Employees' Retirement Association, on Tuesday agreed that defined benefit plan politics is a huge problem.

"Politics and portfolios don't mix," said Gregory W. Smith, executive director of the \$43 billion Colorado Public Employees' Retirement Association, on the panel. "What is most disturbing about politics is that there is money that entered the (political defined benefit plan) battle ... (that) doesn't have beneficiaries' best interests at heart. It has to do with a predetermined agenda against public employee pension plans."

Added Steve Yoakum, executive director of the \$36.7 billion Missouri Public School and Education Employee Retirement Systems: "There are people who believe we should not exist and they are putting money where their mouths are. ... It's a very, very toxic environment."

Term limits are exacerbating the problem because public pension fund officials are constantly educating legislators that oversee them on the benefits of pension funds as well as complex investment ideas, said Brian Guthrie, executive director of the \$125 billion Texas Teacher Retirement System, also on the panel.