



Taxpayers Association Announces Winners of 2019 Golden Watchdog & Fleece Awards

San Diego leaders and citizens recognized best and worst of this year's public policy at 1970's-themed event

SAN DIEGO (May 17, 2019) — The San Diego County Taxpayers Association (SDCTA) last night hosted its 24th annual [Golden Watchdog & Fleece Awards](#), recognizing the best and worst in local government spending and decision-making in San Diego County. Below are the winners announced during last night's 1970's-themed extravaganza at the Hilton San Diego Bayfront, "Thursday Night Fever," which included dinner and humorous skits featuring San Diego elected leaders.

Grand Golden Watchdog Award

The San Diego Rapid Response Network: Sheltering Migrants

More than 24 participating non-governmental organizations and public entities have helped fill the demand for public services that the migrant caravan placed on the San Diego region, as part of the San Diego Rapid Response Network. These agencies have actively assisted with the fundraising for and operations of a migrant shelter started in October 2018 that provides meals, medical care, legal services, and travel aid to 30-40 immigrant families per day.

Grand Golden Fleece Award

Sweetwater Union High School District: District Financial Mismanagement and Accountability

Several state agencies are investigating instances of fiscal mismanagement by officials from the Sweetwater Union High School District. The District's budget overstated how much money it would actually receive, and understated how much money it was budgeted to spend, specifically on salaries and benefits. The District is on track to be \$30 million in debt by the end of the 2018-2019 school year.

Metro Golden Watchdog Award

City of San Diego: Affordable Housing Regulations

Efforts by the City of San Diego's Planning Department to reform several housing policies represent a paradigm shift in the way the City is addressing the region's housing crisis. The early results from these reforms are significant: Construction of Accessory Dwelling Units



increased from only a handful per year to 216 units in 2018, while new development using the City's new density bonus incentives grew by 300% in 2018.

Regional Golden Watchdog Award

County of San Diego: Juvenile Justice Transformation

Using research-backed best practices and help from leading experts, the San Diego County Probation Department has shifted its juvenile justice approach to one that is less punitive. The Department now spends \$37 million less per year on Juvenile Field Services and Juvenile Institutions, compared to 10 years ago.

Public-Private Partnership Award

San Diego County Assessor's Office, Veterans Association of Real Estate Professionals, and Pacific Southwest Association of Realtors: Better Serving 100% Disabled Veterans

The San Diego County Assessor's Office partnered with representatives from the disabled veterans community and the real estate community to spread the word about a little-used California property tax exemption for disabled veterans and their spouses. By promoting home ownership, housing affordability, and property tax refunds, the County helped more than 1,400 disabled veterans (a 28% increase from the previous year) save a collective \$1.9 million in property taxes in 2018.

Media Watchdog Award

Dorian Hargrove, Tom Jones, Bob Hansen, and Ry Rivard, NBC 7 Responds & Voice of San Diego: Coverage of City of San Diego Water Bills

After analyzing more than a year's worth of customer billing data, NBC 7 Responds and *Voice of San Diego* uncovered a "glitch" in meter readers that significantly increased the water bills of City of San Diego Public Utilities Department customers. After disproving several allegations made by the Public Utilities Department, this series of stories prompted an internal review of the agency that culminated in a structural reorganization.

Golden Fleece Award

San Diego Unified School District: "Where Do We Even Start?"

San Diego Unified School District has demonstrated a lack of transparency in several areas, including: delayed responses to records requests; an attempted policy that would purge all



emails older than six months without public input; changes to the public comment period; and the mishandling of incidents of sexual misconduct. The district also failed to secure \$750,000 in federal funding for homeless students that it qualified for, due to a missing signature on its application.

“The Goldens are a highlight of our work every year,” said SDCTA president and CEO Haney Hong. “For nearly 75 years, the Taxpayers Association has been holding our local government to account, and we’re happy to honor those who are doing so exceptionally well through the Golden Watchdog awards, and highlighting instances of waste through the Golden Fleece awards.

“The Goldens aren’t just a fun excuse to get important people onstage to make fun of themselves—they’re an important part of our mission, and a tradition we will continue for years to come. I’d like to personally thank all of the volunteers, board members, and Taxpayers Association staff who put so much time and energy into making this year’s event happen.”

The list of this year’s winners, as well as winners of previous years, is available at <https://www.sdcta.org/goldens>.

The San Diego County Taxpayers Association (@sdcta) is a non-profit, non-partisan organization, dedicated to promoting accountable, cost-effective and efficient government and opposing unnecessary new taxes and fees. For the last 73 years, the SDCTA has been providing information to help educate the public and save the region’s taxpayers millions. Public opinion polls consistently rate the SDCTA as the most “influential” and “trusted” public policy institution in San Diego.

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