San Diego County Taxpayers Association Announces Golden Watchdog and Golden Fleece Winners in the Public Health and Safety Award Category

Awards Committee recognizes the San Diego County District Attorney for their commitment to prosecuting EDD fraud as well as painfully provides the Golden Fleece to the County for Sheriff’s Department Preventable Inmate Deaths

San Diego (April 21, 2022) - The San Diego County Taxpayers Association (SDCTA) announced more finalists and winners to be celebrated and reprimanded at next week’s Annual Golden Watchdog and Fleece Awards. In the Public Health and Safety category, SDCTA awards the Golden Watchdog to the County of San Diego for the District Attorney’s devotion to prosecuting rampant EDD fraud. The Golden Fleece also goes to the San Diego County Sheriff’s Department for the unnecessary deaths of inmates this past year under their custody.

The Golden Watchdog and Fleece Awards, nicknamed “the Goldens' will convene community and business leaders, elected officials, and more in downtown San Diego to applaud good governance that took place through 2020/2021. The nominated policies and programs were submitted to the SDCTA through a public process. The confidential Goldens’ Award Committee carefully deliberated each nominee to determine who should earn a Fleece or Watchdog award in the following four categories: Education; Transportation, Energy, Water and Infrastructure; Public Health and Safety, and Public-Private Partnership. The following nominees were finalists and winners in the Public Health and Safety category:

- **Winner - Watchdog: San Diego County District Attorney for Prosecuting EDD Fraud**
  
  Our District Attorney has certainly been busy this last year - and we are grateful for her steadfast commitment to protecting individuals, and in this case - significant taxpayer dollars as well! In the Spring of 2021, District Attorney Summer Stephan charged a trio of crooks for fraudulently using the names of 64 inmates to file false unemployment claims with the Employment Development Department (EDD) totalling $1.3 million! Taxpayers throughout the County should celebrate her dedication to advocating for those who cannot effectively advocate for themselves, and for ensuring our hard earned tax dollars are protected. Cheers to you Summer!

- **Finalist - Watchdog: County of San Diego: COVID-19 Testing Partnership with Helix**
  
  It’s July 2020 and the demand for rapid COVID-19 tests is soaring as the region struggles to contain the virus. County testing labs are processing roughly 1,500 tests per day at maximum capacity. The County Board of Supervisors quickly looked to local biotech start-up, Helix for help, and brokered the deal of a lifetime that provided upwards of 10,000 tests per day at a hefty discount, with results in as little as 24 hours. This was a huge win for taxpayers, a victory for our local biotech industry, and an even bigger achievement for public health in the wake of an unprecedented public health crisis. This is the kind of deal-making the Taxpayers Association loves to see - congratulations County of San Diego, and thank you!
Finalist - Watchdog: County of San Diego: San Diego Health CARES Program

With domestic violence on the rise in San Diego County, County leadership decided to be proactive about education, prevention, and accountability by enlisting multiple departments to help design an outreach and education program. During the past year, the Healthcare Committee of the San Diego Domestic Violence Council has trained over 400 healthcare professionals in the San Diego Health CARES protocol, resulting in a drastic increase in domestic violence forensic exams and 300% increase in felony charges brought forth. The Taxpayers Association applauds the County of San Diego for taking a proactive approach to public safety!

Winner - Fleece: San Diego County Sheriff’s Department Inmate Deaths

While we usually like to poke a little fun at those who have “won” the Golden Fleece Award, unnecessary deaths of those in custody is no laughing matter. Over a ten-year period 141 inmates in San Diego County Sheriff custody have died, well above the reasonable expected rate, and far exceeding the other 11 largest Counties in the State. The Sheriff’s department must do better. Those in custody have a right to be protected, and the San Diego County Sheriff’s Department has a responsibility to make it so. This is not only an issue of inefficient and ineffective government, it is a tragedy. We are encouraged by the new policies being put into place to prevent future deaths, and will continue to monitor this issue on behalf of ALL taxpayers - even those behind bars.

Finalist - Fleece: Society at Large: Loss of Civility and Displays of Public Violence

While the global pandemic has shown us incredible instances of human kindness, resiliency and generosity, it has also put on display some of the most disgusting human behavior of the modern age. Healthcare workers who were once coveted as heroes for showing up in the uncertainty of the COVID-19 virus have been publicly assaulted, buildings have been defaced and vandalized, police officers have been attacked, neighbors have been berated at the local grocery store. Simply put, civility is at an all-time low. Our democracy only works if we can share our differing opinions in a productive manner knowing that while we may not always agree, progress can still be made and we are all on the same team. Here at the Taxpayers Association, we believe strongly in the principles of respect, responsible citizenship, and productive civil discourse. As a society, we must work together to regain a sense of community, healing, and hope. We are ready to do the hard work of restoring these principles, and we hope you will join us on the journey.

“These last two years have really tested our region’s ability to handle public health and safety,” said Haney Hong, president & CEO of the SDCTA. “We have seen exemplary leadership and also grave failures, and we congratulate our finalists and winner of the Golden Watchdog in this category. We also want to remind the public that we get through crises – not by attacking each other – but by exercising the mutual toleration and forbearance that makes our democracy work and makes our country the greatest place to live on earth.”

The 26th Annual Golden Watchdog and Fleece Awards is taking place on Thursday, April 28 at 5:30 p.m. The GRAND Golden Watchdog and Fleece will be announced live during the event’s program. The next finalists and winners will be announced on Tuesday, April 26 in the Transportation, Energy, Water and Utilities category.

Tickets are still available. Visit www.sdcta.org/goldens to learn more!