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San Diego County Taxpayers Association Announces Golden Watchdog and Golden Fleece Winners in the Transportation, Utilities, and Infrastructure Award Category

Awards Committee recognizes the City of Carlsbad for using GEO Artificial Intelligence to address water pollution as well as scolds the City of Solana Beach for their skyrocketing CCA rates

San Diego (April 26, 2022) - The San Diego County Taxpayers Association (SDCTA) announced the final pre-released finalists and winners to be acclaimed and chided at Thursday's Annual Golden Watchdog and Fleece Awards. In the Transportation, Utilities, and Infrastructure category, SDCTA awards the Golden Watchdog to the City of Carlsbad for their commitment to protecting our water supply through the ACTION System. The Golden Fleece has been awarded to the City of Solana Beach for breaking its promise of cheaper energy to Solana Energy Alliance customers and increasing rates.

In its 26th year, 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, Utilities and Infrastructure; Public Health and Safety, and Public-Private Partnership. The following nominees were finalists and winners in the Transportation, Utilities and Infrastructure category:

- **Winner - Watchdog: City of Carlsbad for ACTION System: Reducing Water Pollution using Geo AI**
  Protecting our regional water system and supply is undoubtedly a tricky - and critical - undertaking. The City of Carlsbad has used innovative, out-of-the-box thinking to harness the power of Geo AI (artificial intelligence) and machine learning to maximize the efficiency of their water pollution inspections and operations. We commend our fellow wonks up in Carlsbad for geeking out and bringing these data analytics solutions to protect our regional water supply! Now if only they could give the Taxpayers Association this AI technology to help increase the efficiency of our water supply advocacy across the region *pushes spectacles up*.

- **Finalist - Watchdog: UCSD for Predicting COVID Outbreaks Using Sewer-Handling Robots**
  It feels like we are even closer to the world of the Jetsons with UCSD's fleet of 120 robots testing sewer samples all over campus to predict COVID-19 outbreaks. The robots collect samples at each location over a 24 hour period, compare that data with infections on campus, and share the information in an interactive map to track viral activity. Our minds are quite blown on this one - congratulations to UCSD for their innovative approach to getting us all back to our far less exciting normal pre-pandemic lives.

- **Finalist - Watchdog: City of Poway for Mickey Cafagna Community Center**
When the City of Poway was planning to replace a very outdated community center far beyond its useful life, they set a budget and stuck to it! The original project bid came in at twice the amount budgeted, so the City got to work convening a committee to explore all options. After leaving no stone unturned and realizing their champagne taste on a beer budget might be a little out of the realm of possibility, the City successfully constructed the new, large, multi-use Mickey Cafagna Community Center within budget! Maybe Poway should teach their colleagues in other cities how to stick to a budget too - now THAT would be Golden Fleece worthy for sure!

- **Finalist - Watchdog: SANDAG for Broadband laying requirements during road construction**
It pains us to see a newly paved road be torn up to install utilities that were overlooked in the planning process because agencies didn't sync up first. Well, SANDAG has partnered with CALTRANS, the County of San Diego, and the California Transportation Commission to set the example for collaboration among agencies. In just six weeks (a feat for government in itself!) SANDAG successfully allocated funding to install internet fiber in conjunction with a scheduled repaving project along State Route 67. Kudos for helping bridge the digital divide, and showing us how effective and efficient public agencies can be when they work together!

- **Winner - Fleece: City of Solana Beach for CCA Rate Spike**
Solana Beach Councilmembers voted to increase the rates of the Solana Energy Alliance by 2.4% to account for the more than $180k owed to the city for incurred administration costs. After a lot of pointing fingers, the fault seems to lie with faulty energy procurements strategies - along with failing to account for CPUC-determined SDG&E exit fees for joining a community choice program. But we were all told it would be cheaper….hmmmmmm…

- **Finalist - Fleece: City of San Diego for the Holiday Bowl Debacle**
We aren't really sure where to begin on this one. Perhaps we will simply ask the question: Why did the City plan to host a football game at a field that expressly prohibits football games during a global pandemic without adding a pandemic-related clause in the contract, and then not even try to reschedule the event to recoup costs when the event was canceled? That sure is a head-scratcher…

- **Finalist - Fleece: California Public Utilities Commission for Delaying Vote to Address Structural Inequities**
We could forgive the CPUC for not knowing about the inequities caused by the rate structure. We could even forgive them for how long it took to quantify the disparities. But we cannot forgive their decision to indefinitely postpone the implementation of a new, more equitable rate structure once the inequities were brought to light. It is the responsibility of appointed and elected leaders to make the tough calls and do what is right - not bury their heads in the sand because some do not agree. Leadership means doing the right thing, even when it is the hard thing, and we are (im)patiently waiting for the Commissioners to do the right thing and redesign the Net Energy Metering rate structure….

"The winner and finalists this year reflected creative and innovative tactics when dealing with water, energy and infrastructure challenges faced by our region," said Haney Hong, president and CEO of the SDCTA. "Ultimately, the Awards Committee applauded cutting-edge resourceful solutions while criticizing poor planning and use of taxpayer dollars."

The 26th Annual Golden Watchdog and Fleece Awards is taking place on Thursday, April 28 at 5:30 p.m. The final round of finalists in the Public Private Partnership category will be announced Thursday, April 28th prior to the event, with the winner being announced live during the event. Also announced live at the event will be the GRAND Golden Watchdog, GRAND Golden Fleece awards, which will be selected from the entire list of finalists in all categories.

Visit www.sdcta.org/goldens to see all finalists.