



August 31, 2018

Mr. Greg Stein
Mr. Haney Hong
San Diego Taxpayers Association
1855 First Ave. #201
San Diego, CA 92101

RE: San Diego Taxpayers Association Board Resignation

Dear Greg, Haney, SDCTA Staff & Board Members,

Prior to joining the Board of the San Diego County Taxpayers Association several years ago I had lengthy conversations with Chairman of the Board Greg Stein and President & CEO Haney Hong. I told them if SDCTA was a smart, impartial and thoughtful tax policy group I was interested in being a part of it, but if it was an anti-labor or anti-tax organization it did not align with my values and I would not be joining. I was assured SDCTA was an impartial group that took positions based on merit. Sadly, this has not been my experience and I do not believe the organization represents the majority of San Diego County taxpayers. My experience has been that SDCTA is essentially run by lobbyists, and the Taxpayers brand is used to bolster the positions of the lobbyists' clients under the guise of an impartial non-profit.

The Taxpayers holds itself up as a watchdog, demanding good public policy, transparency, accountability and checks and balances from municipalities, school districts and other public agencies, but it does not hold itself to the same standards.

There have been multiple significant issues facing constituents throughout San Diego County that SDCTA has not weighed in on. When I have inquired as to why this was the case I received explanations ranging from lack of staff time to the fact that the organization needed sizeable donations to vet the measure. In fact, one of the criteria for bond support is that a school district pay the Taxpayers education foundation to have district staff take a class put on by the Taxpayers. Yet when SDCTA is faced with tight deadlines for positions that align with its political/philosophical biases, the organization has violated its bylaws to take rushed positions through the executive committee. In these cases, the organization bypasses its Board, takes public positions, including signing ballot arguments, then seeks Board ratification after the fact. This is a direct violation of SDCTA's own standard practice of requiring a supermajority vote of the Board, as called for in the bylaws.

The most recent examples of the executive committee rushing to take positions, and bypassing the Board, on measures facing taxpayers include but are not limited to:

- Chula Vista Elementary School District | \$150 million | [SUPPORT](#)
- Bonsall Unified School District | \$37 million | [OPPOSE](#)
- San Diego Unified School District | \$3.5 billion | [OPPOSE](#)
- Mountain Empire Unified School District | \$15 million | [SUPPORT](#)
- Del Mar Union School District | \$186 million | [SUPPORT](#)
- Sweetwater Union High School District | \$403 million | [OPPOSE](#)
- National City Rent Control | Measure W | [OPPOSE](#)



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Perhaps most troubling about this board circumvention is the fact that a member of the executive committee who recently made the motion to oppose a school bond measure is a lobbyist for an organization working to oppose the measure because of their opposition to organized labor. Worse, the motion was made and seconded without a review of an analysis of the measure prepared by SDCTA staff.

I work with multiple public and private entities on both sides of the Labor/Project Labor Agreement fence. This is a philosophical issue that each public or private entity must evaluate based on their specific needs. SDCTA has historically opposed essentially every measure that has included a PLA component, alienating a large population of taxpayers across our region.

In the case of Sweetwater Union High School District, a district in desperate need of funding to serve some of the most socio-economically challenged students in the county, SDCTA's philosophically-based opposition has the potential to further hurt these students and limit their access to successful futures.

These are not the only lapses in judgment by the Taxpayers Association. The organization decided not to take a position on what is arguably the biggest taxpayer issue facing San Diego voters this November — the competing proposals for the former Qualcomm Stadium site in Mission Valley. SDCTA also should have been leading the charge for or against the \$6 billion tax proposal to expand the San Diego Convention Center, help the homeless and fix our roads. While the measure did not qualify for the November ballot, it may still qualify for a future ballot, and the plan has been public for months.

We need organizations in San Diego that lead on important issues, that help shape public policy and make our region a better place to live, work and play. SDCTA circumvented its own rules and rushed to take a position on multiple ballot measures. At the same time, it was absent or soft on other important regional taxpayer issues that should have engaged an organization that says it "promotes effective and efficient public policy on behalf of all taxpayers throughout the Greater San Diego Region."

On a recent KUSI interview, SDCTA's board chair repeatedly stated the organization produces impartial, fact-based analysis — but how can there be impartial analyses if the organization's culture is one in which political and philosophical positions are the norm?

As a taxpayer who was born and raised in San Diego, I care deeply about its growth and success. San Diego deserves better and I am no longer comfortable having my name associated with an organization that does not align with my ethics and integrity. Please accept my resignation from the Board and as a member of the San Diego County Taxpayers Association.

Regards,



Josh Gaffen