



News

Californians Aware

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Open government, free speech group salutes four in Los Angeles

Sacramento, March 12 – Four Los Angeles area figures are being saluted for their achievements or sacrifices in the public interest by a statewide group that fosters open government and free expression.

The four receiving the NOVA award from Californians Aware are Congressman Henry Waxman (D-30th District), civil liberties lawyer Carol Sobel of Santa Monica, former Los Angeles Times Editor Dean Baquet and Stephen Heller, a whistleblower prosecuted for his leak of a large law firm's confidential documents.

Rep. Waxman is cited for his record “second to none in the cause of federal transparency,” exhibited in a recently launched cluster of six bills he is co-authoring to create or expand disclosure of information about executive branch activities and improve the protection of federal whistleblowers.

Sobel, often associated with cases brought by the American Civil Liberties Union, is saluted as “a remarkable champion of free speech rights against any effort to suspend them—by those right, left or center who think they are the best judges of what the people may say and hear.”

Baquet, who recently accepted a job heading the Washington, D.C. bureau of the New York Times after being fired as editor of the Los Angeles Times, is praised “for his stubborn resolve to use all of his influence to keep the Times capable of doing first rate reporting in what may be the nation's most difficult daily newspaper business market—and coverage area.”

Heller, who recently entered a plea agreement to the charge of unlawful access to a computer system, leaked a law firm's documents to state officials and the press revealing the fact that its client, Diebold Election Systems, had installed uncertified software in the electronic voting systems of two counties. He is cited not for the criminal means he used but for his “impulse” to live up to the citizen's “duty to report crime and fraud on the government.”

The NOVA awards are made annually to a public official, an attorney, a journalist and a private citizen, each of whom represents a “bright star keeping Californians aware” of facts and issues vital to democracy.