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## Times editorials

# Yes to dental health; no to double-talk

When it comes to common sense and public health, the cities are running circles around Pinellas County. First, Pinellas Park city commissioners voted to add fluoride back into the city's drinking water. Now city commissioners in Tarpon Springs have voted unanimously to design the city's new water treatment plant so it can add fluoride. Drip by drip, elected city leaders are proving to be more enlightened than the four county commissioners who ignored science and voted to stop adding fluoride into the county's drinking water.

The fluoride fight has become a traveling road show with more heat than light and many of the same faces. Four county commissioners blindly accepted misinformation about fluoride and misguided rhetoric about small government from the tea party crowd: Nancy Bostock, Neil Brickfield, John Morroni and Norm Roche. In Tarpon Springs this week, the city commissioners were not so easily manipulated or bullied.

For example, Kurt Irmischer of the antifuoride group Citizens for Safe Water again implied that fluoride's health effects have not been adequately studied. There have been plenty of academic studies that document the benefits and safety of fluoridating drinking water to reduce tooth decay, and those studies have been thoroughly reviewed by the scientific community. Irmischer's warning about the lack of a double blind study is a misdirection play. As the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention explains, that sort of study is impossible because public water systems cannot deliver fluoridated water to one house but not another.

Unlike the Fluoride Four on the County Commission, Tarpon Springs city commissioners did not buy the double-talk. They voted in favor of

the dental health of their constituents after listening to two hours of public debate. Tarpon Springs City Commissioner Jeff Larson, a middle school teacher who initiated the discussion, points out government routinely makes decisions about safety and public health, from requiring vaccinations for public school students to seat belts in motor vehicles. But apparently not at the county courthouse.

Tarpon Springs buys 80 percent of its drinking water from the county now, but in two years it will supply its own after a new \$45 million water treatment plant opens. The City Commission voted this week to add fluoridation equipment to the plant at a cost of about \$70,000. That's a small investment for a significant return in public health, particularly in a city with a number of low-income neighborhoods where families don't have the money for expensive dental care.

"I see too many individuals who don't have good dental care, who don't go to the dentist until it is too late," Tarpon Springs Mayor David Archie said in an interview Thursday. "This is an opportunity to look at how to enhance the quality of life for others."

For those keeping score, St. Petersburg, Dunedin, Gulfport and Belleair have their own water systems and continue to add fluoride to their drinking water. Pinellas Park will add it back in the coming months, and Tarpon Springs is now on board. Pinellas County is headed in the opposite direction. The County Commission on Tuesday will vote to donate to Dunedin \$12,000 in liquid fluoride that has sat unused since January. It would take only one vote to put that fluoride back in the county drinking water for the benefit of 700,000 Pinellas residents whose dental health has been sacrificed.