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## Times editorials

# The human cost of the fluoride fiasco

Pinellas County commissioners did not just ignore established science when they voted 4-3 to stop adding fluoride this year to the county's drinking water. They also cost families plenty of money and unlimited frustration, because dentists are now advising parents to give fluoride to their children to prevent tooth decay. Two of the Fluoride Four are on the ballot Tuesday seeking re-election to their countywide seats: Nancy Bostock and Neil Brickfield. Their challengers, Charlie Justice and Janet Long, support restoring fluoride to the county's drinking water. It only takes one new commissioner to reverse the backward decision - and save Pinellas County families time, money and frustration.

and Bostock. Sasko said removing fluoride "was a mistake. Cost effect-wise, it's a no-brainer."

"I just feel very strongly about this issue," she added. "It's a public health issue."

It's also \$120 a year out of the family's pocket.



JIM DAMASKE | Times

Beth Palubin of Clearwater holds her 1-year-old daughter Olivia while her husband, Jeremy, holds son David, 2 1/2. Getting the children to drink fluoridated Nursery Water is a challenge.

The Palubin family: \$72.80 a year

Beth Palubin of Clearwater can't explain what fluoridated Nursery Water tastes like. But it doesn't taste very good. Just ask her 2-1/2-year-old son, David, who resists drinking two 8-ounce glasses a day. "Getting two glasses into him is a challenge," Palubin said. Since fluoride was removed from the Pinellas County water supply, Palubin and her husband, Jeremy, have struggled to get David and 1-year-old daughter Olivia, who requires one 8-ounce glass mixed with formula, to drink the fluoridated bottled water.

Palubin spends only about \$1.40 a week on the fluoridated water. But she resents the expense when compared to the county's per person cost to add fluoride to the water supply: 30 cents a year. "It's a disservice to our children," she said.

She will not vote for Bostock and Brickfield, who voted to stop adding fluoride to the drinking water. "I would like to change that," Palubin said, and she's not alone.

The Hull family: \$97.14 a year

When fourth-grade teacher Tina Hull was told



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Sue Sasko, a dental hygienist, buys chewable fluoride tablets for her children Lauren, 8, and Alex, 4, at a cost to the Palm Harbor family of about \$120 a year. Removing fluoride from the water supply was a mistake, she says.

The Sasko family: \$120 a year

Even for dental hygienist Sue Sasko, it's a hassle making sure her son Alex, 4, and daughter Lauren, 8, take their proper daily doses of chewable fluoride tablets. "It's a nuisance," said she said, and she criticizes commissioners who voted to stop adding fluoride to the drinking water for caving to uninformed political pressure.

Sasko and her husband, Alex, live in Palm Harbor and now spend about \$10 a month on fluoride tablets for their children. The misguided fluoride decision, she said, is "absolutely" the deciding factor for her decision to vote against Brickfield

by her dentist that she would have to start providing fluoride tablets for three of her four children, she thought he was kidding. But now she and her husband, Roger, rely on their health insurance to cover the cost of the tablets for their children, while also paying a co-payment out of their own pockets.

The frustration doesn't end there for the Clearwater couple. Their three younger daughters - ages 12, 5, and 3 - require varying dosages of fluoride, further complicating the challenge of providing proper dental care for the girls. "I guess I'm in the dark as to why the decision was made," Hull said.

"As a parent, as a family, we never had to do anything" when Pinellas County added fluoride to the water, Hull said.

Now, thanks to the commission's Fluoride Four,



DIRK SHADD | Times

Top, Tina Hull and her husband, Roger, of Clearwater, provide fluoride tablets for three of their four daughters, as directed by their dentist. The Hulls and their insurance bear the cost of the fluoride care



Right, the three Hull sisters — Maisy, 5, Madelyn, 3, and Meghan, 11 — require varying doses of fluoride from chewable tablets.

the Hulls and their insurance carrier bear the cost of fluoride, a combined \$97.14 annually, compared to the roughly 30 cents per person the county spent to maintain fluoride in the water supply.

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**Quick facts about fluoride**

**4** The number of commissioners who voted to remove fluoride from the Pinellas County water supply: Norm Roche, John Morroni, Neil Brickfield and Nancy Bostock. Brickfield and Bostock are seeking re-election on Tuesday's ballot.

**700,000** The number of Pinellas residents affected by the fluoride decision.

**\$205,000** The county's annual "savings" from eliminating fluoride.

**30 cents** The cost, per user, per year the county spent on fluoridation.

**\$27,000** The initial cost for the Pinellas County Health Department to provide free dental care to families, including fluoride treatment. That figure is expected to grow.