

To the judges:

In October 2011, the Pinellas County Commission turned back the clock. The commission, pressured by antifuoride zealots and tea party conservatives, abruptly voted to stop adding fluoride to the drinking water. The commissioners ignored established science and the public health, and in January 2012 the Pinellas water system suddenly became one of the nation's largest without fluoridated water. More than 700,000 residents no longer benefited from what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calls one of the nation's greatest health care advances.

The Tampa Bay Times editorial board went on mission to correct this travesty. With original reporting and persuasive arguments, Tim Nickens and Dan Ruth educated readers and delivered a clarion call for action on behalf of those who need fluoridated water the most: the poor families and the children of Pinellas County.

Nickens and Ruth interviewed dentists and fluoride experts from the CDC to expose the fiction spread by fluoride opponents. They met with fluoride critics, reviewed their arguments and read thousands of pages of academic studies. When fluoride opponents and elected officials misled the public, they called them on it. Nickens and Ruth visited dental health clinics and interviewed families who were paying for fluoride pills and expensive treatments because of the county's action. They interviewed county commission candidates and held the incumbents accountable for their positions.

These editorials produced profound results. In a rare occurrence, voters in November ousted two incumbent commissioners who had voted to stop adding fluoride in the water and replaced them with two candidates who pledged to add it back. In their first meetings after the election, the new commissioners fulfilled their pledge. Another incumbent who was not on the ballot also switched his vote and supported fluoride. A County Commission that had voted 4-3 a year ago to stop adding fluoride voted 6-1 to resume adding it to the drinking water in March 2013.

Without the Tampa Bay Times editorial board, hundreds of thousands of Pinellas residents still would be deprived of the most effective method of preventing tooth decay. The best editorials educate, call for action and achieve results. These editorials achieved all of those goals.

I hope you will consider this work worthy of recognition.

Sincerely,

