

Tampa Bay Times Pulitzer Prize Winning Advocacy of Fluoridation

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A Times Editorial

Reverse the decay of common sense

Saturday, March 17, 2012 4:30am

This is a defining moment for Pinellas County, where Midwestern sensibilities run deep and extremism usually fails. It's been nearly three months since the county stopped putting fluoride in its drinking water. The reason: Four county commissioners sided with a handful of tea party followers, conspiracy theorists and a tiny antfluoride group misnamed Citizens for Safe Water. Nancy Bostock, Neil Brickfield, John Morroni and Norm Roche turned their backs on established science and public health.

The evidence that fluoridating drinking water is safe and prevents tooth decay is overwhelming and widely embraced. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the American Dental Association, the Florida Department of Health and the Pinellas County Dental Association stand behind it. Yet these four county commissioners voted last fall to stop spending \$205,000 on fluoridating water to improve the dental health of 700,000 residents. The annual savings per resident works out to 29 cents.

The first U.S. cities began adding fluoride to their water supplies in the 1940s. Now 196 million Americans drink fluoridated water, including 13 million Floridians. St. Petersburg, Dunedin, Gulfport and Belleair are on separate systems and continue to fluoridate their drinking water. So do Tampa, Temple Terrace and Hillsborough County. Plant City expects to start adding fluoride to its water by September, and the Pinellas Park City Council voted this year to start adding fluoride back.

Pinellas now operates the largest water system in the nation to discontinue fluoridation in recent years. Antifluoride activists use the commission's decision to lobby local governments across the country to stop adding fluoride to drinking water. That's not good for a county eager to be seen as a sophisticated destination for recreation, the arts and high-tech jobs.

The fluoride fight raises larger questions about our values: Are we going to let scare tactics trump established science? Are we going to risk public health to shrink government's role in society? Are we going to allow distortions and misstatements to drive political debate?

Pinellas should reverse course and add fluoride into the drinking water again. The opponents are small in number but vocal, determined and ready with distortions, half-truths and misstatements. Commissioners Bostock and Brickfield are up for re-election this fall, and voters should hold them accountable. Our community has long valued pragmatism and the greater good over extremism and selfish interests. It would take only one vote to change on the County Commission to reaffirm those values.

5 fears, facts on fluoride

1. Science

Claim: The federal government cannot cite a double-blind/peer-reviewed scientific study that proves the health benefits of fluoride. Kurt Irmischer, a Clearwater financial planner and president of Citizens for Safe Water, recently sent a mailing calling removing fluoride in drinking water "the health care imperative of the 21st century" and listed "the Lies we have been led to Believe."

Fact: Studies comparing the dental health between communities that add fluoride in drinking water and those that don't are numerous and peer-reviewed. Dr. Barbara Gooch, director for science for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's Division of Oral Health, said studies show there is generally a 25 percent reduction in tooth decay in the fluoridated communities. The reduction was higher before fluoride toothpaste.

There is a good reason there are no double-blind studies, where residents in the same community wouldn't know if they were drinking water with added fluoride or without it. Dr. William Bailey, the CDC's acting director for oral health and the chief dental officer for the U.S. Public Health Service, said it is impossible to conduct such a study. "You cannot deliver (fluoridated) water to one house and not the other," he said.

The double-blind/peer review argument doesn't hold water.

2. Risk

Claim: Fluoridated water causes widespread fluorosis, a discoloring of the teeth; skeletal fluorosis, which causes pain in bones and joints; a risk of cancer; and thyroid damage. A November 2010 CDC study found more than 40 percent of kids ages 12 to 15 have dental fluorosis.

Fact: Most of those were mild cases of dental fluorosis, which are often hard to diagnose and barely recognizable as flecks on teeth. Severe dental fluorosis occurs in less than 1 percent of the general population. The CDC cites another study that mild fluorosis has risen, but the portion of low-income teens with tooth decay decreased from 73 percent in 1988-1994 to 65 percent in 1999-2004.

Kip Duchon, the CDC's fluoridation engineer, said there have been a handful of skeletal fluorosis cases in the decades since fluoride was introduced into drinking water, and they generally aren't tied to routine drinking of potable water. Some studies show fluoridation can help strengthen the bones, and repeated studies have not established a clear link between fluoridation and cancer or thyroid damage. Over the decades, fluoridation has not posed any significant health risk in the United States.

3. Need

Claim: It is unnecessary to add fluoride to public water supplies since it is available in toothpaste and other supplements.

Fact: There are sources other than drinking water for fluoride, which is why the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services recently recommended lowering fluoridation levels to 0.7 milligrams per liter of water instead of a range of 0.7 to 1.2 milligrams based on the community's climate. The Pinellas level was only 0.8 milligrams per liter. But even with toothpaste containing fluoride widely available, fluoridated water still can result in 25 percent reduction in tooth decay. It benefits children as well as the elderly, who are living longer and keeping more of their teeth. Fluoride, combined with other fluoride products such as toothpaste, enhances oral health.

4. Conspiracy

Claim: There are plenty of conspiracy theories regarding the federal government and fluoride, such as alleged connections to the Manhattan Project or secret coordination with sugar growers or heavy industry. Tom Nocera, a Pinellas resident and longtime fluoride opponent, cryptically suggests a link between the introduction of fluoride into the

Pinellas County water system in 2004 and former Pinellas County Commissioner Steve Seibert.

Seibert joined the Mosaic Co.'s board of directors in 2004 and served as secretary of the Department of Community Affairs under Gov. Jeb Bush. Mosaic, one of the world's leading producers of phosphate, from which fluoride is a byproduct, provided Pinellas County's fluoride.

Fact: Seibert left the County Commission in 1999. He was on Mosaic's board of directors at the time the Pinellas commission voted to add fluoride to the drinking water. Now a Tallahassee lawyer, he said he had "absolutely nothing" to do with the decision.

Mosaic spokesman Russell Schweiss said fluoride sales represent about 0.02 percent of the company's estimated \$6.7 billion in annual revenue. The implication there was a conspiracy to win the Pinellas contract is baseless.

5. Bottom line

Claim: The federal government will not vouch for fluoride.

Fact: The EPA, which is responsible for the safety of the nation's drinking water, sets the standards for fluoride in drinking water. The CDC is unequivocal in its support. "We promote water fluoridation as effective," Bailey said. "We would say absolutely it is safe."

Reverse the decay of common sense 03/17/12

A Times Editorial

Another city steps up for dental health

Thursday, April 19, 2012 6:35pm

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.

Another city steps up for dental health 04/19/12

A Times Editorial

Paying for Fluoride Four's foolishness

Saturday, August 4, 2012 4:30am

They started lining up shortly after sunrise in the county that rejected science and removed fluoride from the drinking water. By midmorning, the Pinellas County Health Department was jammed with families waiting for free dental exams for their children that could include cleanings, X-rays, fillings — and fluoride treatments. These are the voices that four county commissioners ignored when they voted against public health.

Those who drove or took the bus to the sparkling office on Ulmerton Road last week had little money. Some earned too much to qualify for Medicaid but not enough to afford dental care for their kids. Others were unemployed or military veterans. Many were aware that four county commissioners — Neil Brickfield, Nancy Bostock, John Morroni and Norm Roche — had voted to stop putting fluoride in the drinking water this year. They did not understand why their elected officials would jeopardize their children's health.

Althina Ford of St. Petersburg brought her two grandchildren, ages 9 and 10, and waited for their turn. "Fluoride is good for you," she said. "If it's good for you, they should keep it in. If they take something that's good for you away, they shouldn't be elected."

Margarita Marian of Seminole struggled to keep track of her six children as she waited for them to see the dentists. "Fluoride. They're supposed to leave it there," she said, adding she would never vote for a politician who removed it from the drinking water. "Fluoride is better for kids."

Julie Opsahl of Clearwater was waiting with about 50 other families when the doors opened at 8 a.m. She was still waiting three hours later for her number to be called for her 9-year-old and 15-month-old sons. The family has no health insurance, and the unemployed teacher said she now gives fluoride drops to her youngest son at the suggestion of her pediatrician. "I know it's important for kids to have," she said, "so I have to add it now."

This is the irony of the Fluoride Four's foolish decision. They saved the county \$205,000 by no longer adding fluoride to the drinking water. But taxpayers will spend roughly \$27,000 on free dental care for 267 children who showed up last week, including the cost of fluoride treatments. And that's just the start.

Pinellas County employs nine full-time and seven part-time dentists. Last year, the health department helped 12,356 patients with 113,524 various dental services. Aside from the annual free care days, children whose families are on Medicaid pay no charge; fees for other children are on a sliding scale based on income. Without fluoride in the drinking water, the county health department's dentists will only get busier.

"I thought it was a terrible decision," said Christina Vongsyprasom, dental services manager for the health department. "We will see over time more children with dental caries (cavities), absolutely."

Dr. Stacey Golden, who oversaw the health department's free clinic event, said the controversy over fluoride has heightened public awareness about dental health. She said roughly nine of 10 families who seek dental care for their children at the health



DIRK SHADD | Times

M.J. Opsahl, 9, of Clearwater, gets a dental checkup at the Pinellas County Health Department in Largo last week. Families began lining up shortly after sunrise for free examinations, X-rays and fillings.

department want the fluoride treatment. Yet the Fluoride Four caved in to pressure from vocal tea party supporters and antifuoride activists who misrepresented the science.

No wonder two of the antifuoride commissioners who are seeking re-election this fall don't want to talk about it. At a recent Suncoast Tiger Bay Club forum, Bostock and Brickfield deflected questions about their votes to take fluoride out of the water. Instead of dismissing the issue as old news, they should read the memo on the county health department's website: "Water fluoridation continues to be the most cost-effective, practical and safe means for reducing and controlling the occurrence of tooth decay."

Bostock and Brickfield also should listen to the county's own dentists. They should explain how it makes sense to take fluoride out of the drinking water and then spend even more public money on dental care for poor kids, including fluoride treatments. And they should visit the county health department and talk to the parents who know what's right even if their elected officials don't.

Paying for Fluoride Four's foolishness 08/04/12

A Times Editorial

Scott picks ideology over residents' health

Tuesday, August 21, 2012 5:06pm

Gov. Rick Scott and his right-wing extremists in the Legislature are putting their hatred of President Barack Obama and health care reform ahead of Florida's poor children. Their rejection of a modest federal grant that has helped dozens of families in Pinellas County and hundreds statewide shamefully values rigid political ideology over the well-being of our own residents. But such callous calculations do not reflect the values of Floridians, who should demand better.

Scott's Department of Health has turned down a \$4.9 million federal grant tied to the Affordable Care Act because the Legislature refused to allow the money to be spent. The Healthy Start Coalition of Pinellas has used its share of last year's money — which the Legislature approved because it was also tied to another federal program — to focus on parents with children who are born with drugs in their system. The mother or father, or both, work with a parent educator who can help them with all sorts challenges. It might be drug treatment or a job search, or parenting classes or housing, or finding a food bank or mental health counseling. Now 84 Pinellas families with 217 children will lose that help unless the Healthy Start Coalition can cobble together another solution. The message from Tallahassee: Tough. You're on your own.

There is nothing conservative about rejecting this federal money, part of a five-year, \$1.5 billion program that uses home visiting programs to help at-risk poor children. It won't lower the federal deficit, because you can bet a more enlightened state will take the cash. It is not top-down government, because the program relies on folks on the ground like the Healthy Start Coalition to tailor the help to meet the needs of individual families. It is not about accountability, because the coalition has been around for two decades and has proven results. It certainly isn't about being cost efficient. Investing a modest amount of public dollars to help these families now will save plenty of money later if these children can stay out of foster care, in school and out of trouble that leads to crime and prison.

This is about ideological purity at the expense of Floridians who need help. Scott fought Obama and health care reform before he was elected governor. He and the Legislature have rejected millions in federal money tied to the law, and they fought the law all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court. They lost in court, and still they refuse to accept much of the health care money or prepare to carry out the reforms. While they hope Mitt Romney wins the presidential election and persuades Congress to repeal the Affordable Care Act, Floridians are suffering the consequences of their blind obsession.

Pinellas residents are all too familiar with this narrow-mindedness about public health. Four conservative Republican members of the County Commission — Nancy Bostock, Neil Brickfield, John Morroni and Norm Roche — voted to take fluoride out of the county's drinking water this year. Whether it is the state capital or the county courthouse, preventive care and proven results are no match for political pandering to the most rigid wing of the Republican Party.

Elections have a real impact in the quality of life in our neighborhoods. Scott is a long two years away from seeking re-election, but legislators will be on the November ballot. So will two of the Pinellas commissioners, Bostock and

Brickfield, who voted to remove fluoride. Voters should send a message that being conservative does not mean abandoning shared responsibility for healthy communities or refusing to invest smartly now to avoid far larger public costs later.

Scott picks ideology over residents' health 08/21/12

A Times Editorial

Brickfield strays from fluoride facts to defend his vote

Thursday, September 20, 2012 6:25pm

It's hard to defend the indefensible when the facts are not on your side. Pinellas County Commissioner Neil Brickfield makes several inaccurate statements as he tries to justify why he voted to stop adding fluoride to the county's drinking water. Brickfield misrepresents established science, and he misleads voters in the same fashion he was misled before voting against the public health.

In a candidate forum Monday night in East Lake and at a *Tampa Bay Times* editorial board meeting Thursday, Brickfield cited positions from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and area dentists to defend his vote. But he misstated the position of the CDC and the mainstream scientific community on fluoride:

- Brickfield says the CDC's position is that fluoridated water should not be given to infants. "That's not true," said Linda Orgain, a spokeswoman for the CDC's Division of Oral Health. In fact, the CDC specifically advises that fluoridated water can be used to prepare infant formula. If that is all the formula the child drinks, it says there may be a chance of mild dental fluorosis — usually barely recognizable flecks on teeth — and that parents can use low-fluoride bottled water some of the time if that concerns them.
- Brickfield says the CDC recommends that children under 8 should not drink fluoridated water or that it should be limited. "That's totally not true," Orgain said. The CDC says those children should not drink water that has high concentrations of fluoride, which naturally occurs in some regions of the country — but not in this area. Pinellas water was fluoridated at a far lower level before the practice was stopped in January.
- Brickfield says he was told by dentists that residents can get up to four times the recommended daily fluoride from other sources, so there is no need to fluoridate drinking water. That stretches the imagination. The CDC estimates that 75 percent of an individual's fluoride intake can come from water and beverages such as soda and fruit, and the recommended levels of fluoride in drinking water account for fluoride from other sources. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services proposes setting the recommended level of fluoride in drinking water at the low end of a range, given the common use of other sources such as fluoride toothpaste. Pinellas was already near the low end of the scale, so the change would be minimal. Fluoridated water still can result in a 25 percent reduction in tooth decay.

Even when presented the facts, Brickfield declined to change his position on fluoride and instead criticized the county's dentists for failing to see enough patients on Medicaid. Pinellas does need more dentists who will accept Medicaid patients, but that only strengthens the argument for fluoridated water to combat tooth decay. Brickfield and fellow Commissioner Nancy Bostock are on the November ballot and are half of the Fluoride Four, who



prevailed in a 4-3 vote to stop fluoridating the water for Pinellas' 700,000 customers. It only takes one vote of the commission to start repairing the county's reputation as a place where science and the public health don't matter. Until then, Brickfield could at least stop misrepresenting the facts on fluoride.

Brickfield strays from fluoride facts to defend his vote 09/20/12

A Times Editorial

Bring Pinellas commission back to mainstream

Friday, October 12, 2012 4:30am

For Pinellas voters, this election is about more than whether three County Commission incumbents should keep their jobs. This is about re-establishing the county's identity and its mainstream values. Do we still care about the health of our residents and respect established science in ways that attract families and jobs? Or have we become an ideologically driven backwater that takes fluoride out of the drinking water, caves in to vocal extremists and refuses to invest in the future? • Voters should send a strong message by replacing two of the Fluoride Four — Nancy Bostock and Neil Brickfield — and re-electing Ken Welch, who refused to be cowed and stood with the nation's leading health experts. For decades, the Pinellas County Commission reflected pragmatic local government. It has become an ideological swamp, and that has tarnished the county's reputation. Voters should start draining the swamp by replacing Brickfield and Bostock with two seasoned former state legislators. Janet Long and Charlie Justice better reflect the county's sensibilities, history and vision — and they would immediately vote to put fluoride back into the drinking water.

Janet Long

District 1, countywide

Four years ago in the Republican primary for this seat, the *Times* recommended a mainstream moderate who was defeated by Neil Brickfield. In the general election, we recommended Brickfield because he was knowledgeable about county government and there was no viable alternative. As we feared, Brickfield has proven to be too beholden to the most conservative wing of his party. His vote to take fluoride out of the water is the most egregious example.

This year, there is a far better alternative.

Janet Long, 67, is a former Seminole City Council member and state legislator who has an impressive record of public service. She is not afraid to stand up for children or consumers in the face of vocal opposition. She is socially moderate and fiscally conservative, and the Democrat made such a first impression in Tallahassee that Republicans asked her to switch parties after one term.

Long recognizes government has a responsibility to protect the public health, and she pledges to vote to resume adding fluoride to the water. She wants to maintain a unified countywide emergency medical service and says the commission should have made changes to reduce EMS expenses and avoid a tax increase. She wants to improve mass transit, expects the county to be active in talks about a new stadium for the Tampa Bay Rays and says those two issues ought to be part of the same discussion about preparing Pinellas for the future. Long supports the Safe Harbor homeless shelter and says the county should be exploring more ways to share services with cities.

Brickfield, 49, too often tries to appease both his tea party supporters and more moderate business interests. He didn't support county budgets even after they included deep spending cuts and eliminated hundreds of jobs. He has voted against reasonable spending on social programs, then supported smaller expenditures. He provided the decisive vote to extend the tourist tax to help the Salvador Dalí Museum cover a construction shortfall, but only after

insisting that part of the tax expire in 2021.

Don't expect Brickfield to invest in the future. He promises to vote to put a transit plan before the voters, but he likely would oppose any plan that includes light rail. He agrees the Tampa Bay Rays need a new stadium, but it is hard to imagine him voting to spend significant public money on one.

Brickfield's vote to stop adding fluoride to the drinking water is at odds with his interest in creating high-tech jobs and supporting education. Even worse, he has defended his vote by spreading fear and inaccurately describing the positions of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on fluoride.

For Pinellas County Commission District 1, the *Tampa Bay Times* recommends **Janet Long**.

Charlie Justice

District 3, countywide

Nancy Bostock has been a profound disappointment in her first term on the County Commission. The *Times* recommended the Republican four years ago based on her credible performance on a dysfunctional School Board. We presumed Bostock's socially conservative views would not be as concerning on a county commission that provides basic services.

We were wrong. Bostock is the partisan ideologue on the commission, frustrating her colleagues and the professional county staff. She turns countless votes into values litmus tests, voting against everything from the summer fertilizer ban to Meals on Wheels. She voted against the latest county budget because it included a tax increase to pay for Medicaid costs passed on by the state.

Bostock, 44, frames her vote to take fluoride out of the drinking water as support for individual choice and limited government. She fails to appreciate the importance of protecting public health.

Charlie Justice is a far better choice. The Democrat is a former state legislator with a low-key demeanor and mainstream values. The University of South Florida St. Petersburg administrator understands the intersection between education and job creation, and the need to balance the demand for county services with economic realities.

Justice, 44, recognizes the damage that has been done to the county's reputation, and he would vote to restore fluoride to the drinking water. Unlike Bostock, he has a broader vision of the county's future that includes improved mass transit and discussing a new stadium for the Tampa Bay Rays.

As a centrist, Justice moves easily between members of both political parties, business leaders and educators. He understands how to build coalitions and partnerships to consolidate services, create jobs and develop compromises on issues such as EMS. For example, he wants the county to focus more on growing existing businesses and less on providing tax breaks to bring new companies that don't always deliver the promised jobs.

In 10 years in the Legislature, Justice supported ethics and elections reforms; renewable energy and smart environmental initiatives; and efforts to protect seniors and help homeowners fortify their houses against hurricanes. He would bring those same forward-looking sensibilities to the County Commission.

For Pinellas County Commission District 3, the *Tampa Bay Times* recommends **Charlie Justice**.

Ken Welch

District 7, South Pinellas

Ken Welch is a voice of reason on the Pinellas County Commission, and as the commission's only Democrat and African-American he speaks up for minorities and low-income residents whose concerns might otherwise go unnoticed. The St. Petersburg resident has served this south Pinellas district well, balancing his efforts on local issues and those of countywide importance.

Welch, 48, has served on the commission since 2000 and often is aligned with more moderate Republican commissioners such as Susan Latvala and Karen Seel. Those three commissioners stood against the tea party crowd and for the public health when they voted to keep fluoride in the county's drinking water supply and lost by a 4-3 vote. Welch remains committed to putting fluoride back into the water with the help of one more vote.

On several key county issues, Welch has played a leading role in steering the discussion. He was an early advocate for Safe Harbor, which provides shelter and services to the homeless. He understands that Pinellas needs viable mass transit, and he has helped develop a transit plan that combines improved bus service with light rail that voters will be asked to approve. Similarly, Welch recognizes that the county should play a role in the discussions with the Tampa Bay Rays over a new baseball stadium. He also is willing to compromise on overhauling emergency medical services and look at alternatives such as allowing St. Petersburg firefighters to transport emergency patients to hospitals in return for some cost savings.

Buck Walz, 33, is a St. Petersburg native and first-time candidate for public office. The Republican is the operations manager for a building materials company, opposes adding fluoride back into the water and supports allowing voters to decide the fate of a transit plan. He says the commission should have cut more spending rather than approve property tax rate increases that covered EMS shortfalls and Medicaid costs passed on by the state. But Walz has no suggestions for what to cut, and he has a superficial grasp of some of the county's most pressing issues.

Welch's experience and foresight — and his willingness to stand with established science and public health in the fluoride controversy — are particularly valuable on a commission with too little backbone and vision. For Pinellas County Commission District 7, the *Tampa Bay Times* recommends **Ken Welch**.

Bring Pinellas commission back to mainstream 10/12/12

A Times Editorial

The real cost of the fluoride fiasco

Wednesday, October 31, 2012 3:13pm

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.



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 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.

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 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, 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.

The real cost of the fluoride fiasco 10/31/12

A Times Editorial

Facts over fear in Pinellas commission races

Wednesday, November 7, 2012 5:23pm

Pinellas County voters re-established the county's reputation for sensible, centrist government by replacing two commissioners who voted to stop adding fluoride to the drinking water. It is a victory for facts over lies, science over fear and the common good over narrow political agendas. It also is a reminder to public officials that the loudest, most extreme voices rarely reflect the sensibilities of the broader community they were elected to represent.

Republican commissioners Nancy Bostock and Neil Brickfield paid the price Tuesday for listening to the tea party crowd and discounting the established science that fluoridated water is a safe, effective way to substantially reduce tooth decay. They refused to accept that fluoride is embraced by dentists, the Florida Department of Health, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other experts. The voters rejected their uninformed decisionmaking and elected Democrats Charlie Justice and Janet Long.

The former state legislators will take office Nov. 20, and they are expected to immediately move to resume adding fluoride into the drinking water for 700,000 residents. They will be joined by three incumbents who voted against stopping the fluoridation in January — Republicans Susan Latvala and Karen Seel, and Democrat Ken Welch. Republican John Morroni should switch his vote and join the new majority. Republican Norm Roche, who rode the tea party wave to office two years ago, remains a hopelessly lost cause. He still wants a voter referendum on fluoride, but the voters already have clearly spoken.

Fluoride is widely supported by the public, and it is not a particularly partisan issue. Both Long and Justice received Republican votes, and Long defeated Brickfield in parts of the county that are hardly Democratic strongholds. What the Fluoride Four failed to recognize is that the controversy is not a manufactured issue but represents something larger about the county's identity. It undermined Pinellas' reputation as a community that values science, education and high-tech jobs. The voters made those connections, and they chose centrist government over ideological extremism.

The impact of replacing two of the most conservative Republican commissioners with two more moderate Democrats stretches beyond fluoride. Brickfield and Bostock were no fans of mass transit, and now Pinellas can take a more progressive approach toward designing a forward-looking transit proposal that is financially viable and politically acceptable to voters. There also should be more clear-eyed discussion about dealing with the Tampa Bay Rays and their quest for a new stadium. The same will be true for other pressing Pinellas issues, from overhauling the emergency medical services to providing programs for the homeless.

But fluoride was the flash point. The Fluoride Four tarnished Pinellas County's reputation, and voters corrected that mistake Tuesday by kicking half of them out of office. Now fluoride will be restored to the drinking water — and government based on facts, consensus building and the collective good will be restored in the county courthouse.

Facts over fear in Pinellas commission races 11/07/12

A Times Editorial

Welcome reversal on fluoride

Tuesday, November 27, 2012 6:09pm

It took nearly 14 months, an election and the clarion voice of Pinellas County voters to persuade county commissioners to correct a serious error in judgment. It will take until March to carry out the commission's order to resume adding fluoride to the drinking water. For 700,000 water customers, the benefits should last a lifetime.

Tuesday's 6-1 vote to add fluoride back into the drinking water caps a long public controversy that reaffirms the centrist judgment of Pinellas voters and their embrace of sound science and sensible government. New commissioners Charlie Justice and Janet Long decided to run for office in part because the commission voted 4-3 to stop adding fluoride in January. The Democrats defeated two Republican

incumbents who fell for the scare tactics and

the tea party political pressure, and they pledged to reverse the decision upon taking office. Long and Justice were joined by commission chairman John Morroni, who changed his vote, and the three commissioners who have been on the side of public health all along: Republicans Susan Latvala and Karen Seel, and Democrat Ken Welch. Only Republican commissioner Norm Roche still voted against the common good — and he will be on the ballot in 2014.

Tuesday's fluoride decision transcends partisan politics. It means Pinellas water customers will rejoin more than 200 million people nationwide who drink optimally fluoridated water. It means those customers will once again benefit from the most effective, cost-efficient method of reducing tooth decay even with the widespread use of fluoridated toothpaste. And it means less frustration and expense for Pinellas families who have spent this year scrambling to make up for the commission's misinformed decision to stop adding fluoride to the drinking water.

For Sue Sasko, Tuesday's commission vote should save the \$120 a year her Palm Harbor family spends on fluoride tablets for their children. For Beth Palubin, it should save her Clearwater family more than \$72 a year on fluoridated bottled water for their young son. For Julie Opsahl of Clearwater, who waited hours this summer at the county health clinic for dental care for her two sons, it should mean no longer giving fluoride drops to her youngest child.

There were the predictable hysterical warnings from fluoride opponents about "forced mass medication," poisoning the population and government conspiracies. There were the misrepresentations of academic studies of the negative



JIM DAMASKE | Times

Once fluoride was removed from Pinellas County water, Sue Sasko, a dental hygienist, bought chewable fluoride tablets for her children Lauren, 8, and Alex, 4, at a cost of about \$120 a year.

effect of fluoride in countries where the levels far exceed the recommended level in the United States. There were references to God's will, lead pipes in ancient Rome and Hitler's Germany.

Those sorts of scare tactics and political threats worked in 2011, but the voters demonstrated this month that they are more sensible and expect better from their elected officials. The new commission voted to resume adding fluoride into the drinking water at the revised level proposed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. "The majority of this commission believes in the science and in the facts," Welch said.

That change in direction is good news for the dental health of hundreds of thousands of Pinellas residents and for the future of the county.

Welcome reversal on fluoride 11/27/12

Editorial: Scientific sense and fluoride

Thursday, February 28, 2013 3:30am

Pinellas County residents will not see it, taste it or smell it. Yet today marks a significant milestone in recommitting to established science and the public health. Today, fluoride is once again being added to the county's drinking water to help prevent tooth decay.

The county's 700,000 water customers were without fluoridated water for just two months. It took much longer to reverse the misguided 2011 decision by the Pinellas County Commission to stop fluoridating the water. Voters in November ousted two commission incumbents who were fluoride opponents and replaced them with two candidates who promised to reverse course. The commission voted 6-1 before Thanksgiving to return fluoride to the drinking water, and the switch was flipped at midnight.

For Pinellas, the fluoride controversy has been about more than politics. It energized dentists and public health officials who have now expanded efforts to ensure better access to quality dental care. It educated parents about the importance of fluoride in preventing tooth decay for their children. And it provided an opportunity for voters from both political parties to re-establish the county's reputation for centrist policies and its strong commitment to children, education and science.

The fluoride debate in Pinellas has not been confined to the county commission. Despite considerable pressure from fluoride opponents, Dunedin city commissioners voted to keep adding fluoride to the city's drinking water. Pinellas Park decided to add fluoride to the drinking water it receives from the county if the county did not reverse course. In Tarpon Springs, city officials decided to build a new water plant with the equipment to fluoridate the water. In Hillsborough County, Plant City adds fluoride to its drinking water today.

While those were positive steps, the debate and the battles to stop the fear-mongering and correct the inaccuracies from fluoride opponents continue. It only recently came to light that Brooksville City Council members quietly decided more than a year ago to stop adding fluoride to the drinking water, much to the surprise of the Hernando County health department. As in Pinellas, the Brooksville decision was initially characterized as a cost-saving move and then defended by misplaced concerns about too much fluoride. The Hernando health department wanted to set



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Today, fluoride is once again being added to Pinellas County's drinking water to help prevent tooth decay.

the record straight before the Brooksville City Council on Monday, but the anti-fluoride mayor would not allow it. A loud public debate similar to the one that took place in Pinellas County is underway in Portland, Ore., where city officials decided last year to add fluoride but opponents gathered enough signatures to put the issue before voters in May.

In Pinellas, the fluoride referendum was the county commission election, and voters made their position clear. Today, fluoride is back in the county drinking water. Families no longer have to worry about paying for fluoride treatments and pills for their children. Scare tactics, lies and political threats have been defeated by mainstream science, public health and common sense.

Editorial: Scientific sense and fluoride 02/28/13

Tampa Bay Times

Times' Tim Nickens wins Walker Stone Award for editorials

Times staff

Thursday, March 14, 2013 5:37pm

Tampa Bay Times editor of editorials Tim Nickens on Thursday won the Scripps Howard Foundation's Walker Stone Award for editorial writing.

Nickens received the prestigious national award, which includes \$10,000, for editorials in 2012 on issues ranging from public health to voter suppression to state politics, including "Straying from facts on fluoride," "Behind the rhetoric, voter suppression," and "Blatant bid to politicize the courts."

Nickens, 53, is also a member of the Times Publishing Co. board of directors and first joined the *Times* in 1983. He was named editor of editorials in 2008.

"Offering readers and thought leaders clarity and candor is central to the mission of the *Tampa Bay Times*, and Tim is the architect of our efforts," said *Times* editor Neil Brown. "This award recognizes Tim for fine writing and the courage to be the community's honest broker."

The annual Scripps Howard Awards honored the best work in the communications industry and journalism education in 2012. Entries in the journalism categories were judged by 51 industry experts. The editorial award is named after a former president of the foundation.

Times' Tim Nickens wins Walker Stone Award for editorials 03/14/13

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Pulitzer, finalists are source of pride for Poynter

by [Roy Peter Clark](#)

Published Apr. 15, 2013 3:42 pm

Updated Apr. 16, 2013 12:10 pm

My usual pride in the Poynter Institute derives from its benign influence on journalists across the globe. Such influence may flow from a seminar or conference, an online course, or work published on this website. We teach journalism in the public interest, and we celebrate it.

But today that pride derives from another, lesser-known role played by Poynter as the owner of the Tampa Bay Times. That newspaper, formerly the St. Petersburg Times, just [won a Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing and produced two finalists](#) — one for investigative reporting and another for feature writing.

Tim Nickens and Dan Ruth earned the big prize for their [editorials](#) denouncing local county commissioners who, embracing [paranoid ideology over medical science](#), took fluoride out of the water supply. Thanks to editorials in the Times, those responsible were [voted out of office](#) and the fluoride restored.

Alexandra Zayas, who has taught at Poynter, was honored for investigative work calling attention to [abusive practices](#) in unlicensed religious homes for children.

Kelley Benham French, who studied at Poynter as a high-school student and now serves as an adjunct faculty member, caught the attention of Pulitzer jurors with [a stunning personal narrative](#) of the survival of her daughter Juniper, born prematurely at only 23 weeks, at a weight of one pound, one ounce.

All three projects share a concern with the health and well-being of children, which should be part of the *raison d'être* of any news organization.

Newspaper owners deserve to celebrate Pulitzer achievements, even when those honors are earned in spite of the cost-cutting efforts of the bean counters who run media companies.

We have bean counters at the Poynter Institute and the Tampa Bay Times, too, and I wish we could find more beans, or maybe plant some magic ones, grow a beanstalk and steal a giant's gold. The decrease in profitability at the Times since 2008 has meant a serious loss of revenue for Poynter.

To change the metaphor, all boats sink on a low tide, and both Poynter and its paper have seen resources shrink in the swamp of Florida's deep recession. Millions of dollars in yearly stock dividends have disappeared, forcing Poynter to look for new revenue resources and to be more inventive in executing its mission. And so we have.

In hard times, a normal owner would squeeze the newspaper for more profits, which means cutting costs to the bone marrow. Cut staff, cut newshole, cut sections, cut bureaus, cut the size of the paper – and now, for companies such as Newhouse, cut the number of days you publish a print version. Cut, cut, cut.

There comes a tipping point at such companies, of course, a time when the news resources have been cut so severely that the paper can no longer commit serious journalism in the public interest. The product becomes less compelling. It attracts fewer readers. Losses cycle down.

That has not happened at the Tampa Bay Times, and this year's Pulitzer recognition proves that something is different here. In spite of economic problems that continue to plague all of us, we can say with confidence that Nelson Poynter's visionary and ingenious plan is still working.

That plan, which went into effect upon his death in 1978, did not envision what kind of school the Poynter Institute would become. Nor could it have predicted the disruptive technologies of the 21st century. But it did have certain enduring benefits, and they flowed from Nelson Poynter's decision to give his newspaper away to a school he established.

This is what the estate lawyers describe as Mr. Poynter's testamentary intent:

* That the stock of his company would not scatter across generations among family members he did not know and might not even have liked.

* As a result, those family members could not cash out by selling their stock, as was the case with the owners of the Louisville Courier-Journal, to chains such as Gannett.

* As a result, his newspaper would remain locally owned and privately held, run by top journalists committed to the specific community served by their paper.

* As a result, those trusted leaders could offer their primary loyalties not to shareholders or advertisers, but to readers.

The entire Poynter project was predicated on trust. Trust in democracy and self-government. Trust in the continuing value of journalism to that enterprise. And trust in people. Nelson Poynter trusted Eugene Patterson to run the show, who trusted Andy Barnes, who trusted Paul Tash, who as CEO must adapt a once highly profitable business to the tumultuous changes that continue to shake the news media world.

But, for today, Tash – a member of the Pulitzer Board – can share the spotlight with the winners and finalists, with the entire staff that gathered in the newsroom at 3:00 pm to hear the official announcements and with all of us at the Poynter Institute who continue to outperform our resources. In doing so, we want to maintain our status not just as an influential school but as a newspaper owner that all who care about journalism can take pride in.

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THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

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MEDIA & MARKETING | Updated April 15, 2013, 4:47 p.m. ET

Pulitzers Awarded to Times, Journal

By [WILLIAM LAUNDER](#)

The [New York Times](#) and Random House each won four Pulitzer Prizes, while The Wall Street Journal received an award for commentary.

The prize winners were announced Monday by Columbia University, which administers the prestigious journalism and literary awards.

The Wall Street Journal's prize for commentary writing went to [Bret Stephens](#), for a series of columns on U.S. foreign policy and domestic politics.

The New York Times won the award for investigative journalism, which went to David Barstow and Alejandra Xanic von Bertrab for their reporting on practices by [Wal-Mart Stores Inc.](#) in Mexico. Times reporters also won the prize for explanatory reporting on practices by [Apple Inc.](#) and other technology companies. The Times' David Barboza won the prize for international reporting about corruption within the Chinese government. The Times also won the award for features writing, for John Branch's article and accompanying multi-media project about skiers killed in an avalanche and the science around avalanches.

Other award winners include the Sun Sentinel of Fort Lauderdale, Fla., which won the public-service prize for its investigation into reckless speeding by off-duty police officers. The award for breaking news reporting was given to the staff of the Denver Post for its coverage of the Aurora, Colo., movie theater shooting. The Pulitzer board noted the winners' use of Twitter, [Facebook](#) and video to help report the news.

Commentary Award

The Wall Street Journal's Bret Stephens received the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for commentary for a selection of his weekly Global View columns in 2012.

[The GOP Deserves to Lose](#)

[Who Will Tell the Truth About China?](#)

[Russia's Steve Biko](#)

[Anyone but Condi](#)

[The Decline of Democracy](#)

[In Defense of Fareed Zakaria](#)

[Muslims, Mormons and Liberals](#)

On the literary front, the big winner was Bertelsmann SE & Co.'s Random House publishing unit, which claimed four winners. The Random House imprint published Adam Johnson's novel "The Orphan Master's Son," which won for fiction, as well as Fredrik Logevall's "Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam," which won for history. On the poetry front, the Alfred A. Knopf imprint published Sharon Olds's "Stag's Leap," while the Crown imprint published Tom Reiss's "The Black Count: Glory, Revolution, Betrayal, and the Real Count

of Monte Cristo," which won in the biography category.

The Harper imprint of HarperCollins Publishers won the prize for general non-fiction for Gilbert King's "Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of a New America."

HarperCollins and The Wall Street Journal are both owned by [News Corp](#).

—Jeffrey A. Trachtenberg contributed to this article.

2013 Pulitzer Prizes

Public Service: Sun Sentinel, Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Breaking News Reporting: The Denver Post staff

Investigative Reporting: David Barstow and Alejandra Xanic von Bertrab of The New York Times

Explanatory Reporting: The New York Times staff

Local Reporting: Brad Schrade, Jeremy Olson and Glenn Howatt of the Star Tribune, Minneapolis

National Reporting: Lisa Song, Elizabeth McGowan and David Hasemyer of InsideClimate News, Brooklyn, N.Y.

International Reporting: David Barboza of the New York Times

Feature Writing: John Branch of the New York Times

Commentary: Bret Stephens of The Wall Street Journal

Criticism: Philip Kennicott of the Washington Post

Editorial Writing: Tim Nickens and Daniel Ruth of the Tampa Bay Times, St. Petersburg, Fla.

Editorial Cartooning: Steve Sack of the Star Tribune, Minneapolis

Breaking-News Photography: Rodrigo Abd, Manu Brabo, Narciso Contreras, Khalil Hamra and Muhammed Muheisen of the Associated Press

Feature Photography: Javier Manzano, freelance photographer, Agence France-Presse

Fiction: *The Orphan Master's Son* by Adam Johnson (Random House)

Drama: *Disgraced* by Ayad Akhtar

History: *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* by Fredrik Logevall (Random House)

Biography: *The Black Count: Glory, Revolution, Betrayal, and the Real Count of Monte Cristo* by Tom Reiss (Crown)

Poetry: *Stag's Leap* by Sharon Olds (Alfred A. Knopf)

General Nonfiction: *Devil in the Grove: Thurgood Marshall, the Groveland Boys, and the Dawn of*

a New America by Gilbert King (Harper)

Partita for 8 Voices by Caroline Shaw, recording released on October 30, 2012 (New Amsterdam Records)

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Poynter.

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Tampa Bay Times wins Pulitzer, reacts to announcement



by [Taylor Miller Thomas](#)

Published Apr. 15, 2013 3:26 pm

Updated Apr. 15, 2013 3:29 pm

Poynter's Tampa Bay Times has won a 2013 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing and is a finalist in two other categories.

The Times' Tim Nickens and Daniel Ruth won for their editorials on [Pinellas County's decision to fluoridate residents' water](#) won. Kelley Benham was a feature writing finalist for her [three-part series on her daughter's premature birth](#), and Alex Zayas' ["In God's Name" series](#) earned her a finalist spot for feature writing, as well as the [Selden Ring Award](#) earlier this year.

"Today, obviously, we celebrate journalism that makes a difference, and we celebrate the Tampa Bay Times," Editor Neil Brown told the newsroom. "We get to do it together, and with some teachers among us."

Speaking about Zayas' piece, Brown said that she "went places around this state where kids were being abused" and did "what journalists are supposed to do."

Speaking about Benham, Brown said: "Courage would be the word you associate with that story," which he called "a miracle with extraordinary reporting ... We're all a little smarter for it."

He went on to talk about the paper's editorial win, saying: "And then here's a couple of old cats, true believers in the editorial mission, why we got into this game in the beginning."

Mallory Jean Tenore contributed to this report.



Kelley Benham celebrates in the Times newsroom.

Tampa Bay Times

Times' Tim Nickens, Daniel Ruth win Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing



Eric Deggans, Times TV/Media Critic

Monday, April 15, 2013 3:26pm

The *Tampa Bay Times* on Monday won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing for editorials that encouraged Pinellas County to resume adding fluoride to the drinking water.

Times editor of editorials Tim Nickens and columnist Daniel Ruth won the award for a series of 10 editorials, earning the newspaper its ninth Pulitzer Prize.

Nickens, 54, and Ruth, 63, challenged a 2011 vote by Pinellas County commissioners to remove fluoride from the county's drinking water, long considered the most effective method to prevent tooth decay. After the pair's pointed 2012 editorials, voters ousted two of the commissioners who supported removing the fluoride, replacing them with candidates who pledged to add it back. After a 6-1 vote, the county began adding the substance again in March.

Writers Alexandra Zayas and Kelley Benham also were Pulitzer finalists for awards in investigative reporting and feature writing, respectively.

Times staffers and officials from the Poynter Institute, the school for journalists that owns the *Tampa Bay Times*, gathered in the newsroom Monday afternoon to hear the results delivered in an online webcast. As former *Times* editor and chairman Andy Barnes looked on, Nickens' and Ruth's names were announced to thunderous applause.

"Today, we celebrate journalism that makes a difference and we celebrate the *Tampa Bay Times*," said editor Neil Brown, standing on a chair in the newsroom facing the crowd of applauding staffers. "We are true believers in the editorial mission, and that's why we all got into the business in the first place."

The award is the first Pulitzer won by the newspaper since changing its name from the *St. Petersburg Times* in January 2012. The last wins for the newspaper came in 2009 when Lane DeGregory won for feature writing and the fact-checking site PolitiFact won for national reporting.

Nickens, who was a Pulitzer finalist for editorial writing last year along with three other members of the editorial board, credited the *Times* reputation in the community for giving their editorials added credibility and impact.

"I came here first in 1983 and I'm still proud to work here every day," he added, also thanking *Tampa Bay Times* chairman and CEO Paul Tash for urging the editorial board to continue pressing the fluoride issue. "It was Paul's initial outrage that said we had to get on this fluoride, and get it back in the water for the people of Pinellas County."

Ruth, a widely read columnist who joined the *Times* after being laid off by the *Tampa Tribune*, credited Tash and Brown for allowing him to continue working in the industry.

"If someone would have told me at my age ... after 40 years in this business that I would ever have my name associated with something like this, I would have said, 'You're crazy,' " he added, choking up a little. "I look at the talent in this room and I feel so unworthy ... but I'll take it."

Zayas was a finalist in investigative reporting for her series "In God's Name," examining years of abuse at unlicensed religious children's homes operating with little oversight and, sometimes, with no credentials at all.

Benham was a finalist in feature writing for "Never Let Go," a three-part series about the survival of her premature baby, born barely viable at 1 pound, 4 ounces, and her exploration of the costs and ethics of extreme medical intervention. Her daughter, Juniper, turned 2 on Friday and is in good health.

The *Sun Sentinel* newspaper in Fort Lauderdale won the Pulitzer for public service for its reporting on off-duty police officers' reckless driving.

The Pulitzer Prizes, journalism's highest honor, are given out each year by Columbia University on the recommendation of a board of journalists and others. Each award carries a \$10,000 prize, except for the public service award, which is a gold medal.

"There are three things that run through all of this (*Times*) work," Brown said. "The tremendous talent of the journalists, the support of a great institution even in tight times, and the core belief on the part of everyone at the *Times* that journalism matters today as much as ever."

Information from the Associated Press was used in this report.



Times' previous Pulitzers

2009, national reporting: staff for PolitiFact.com for its fact-checking website devoted to helping voters sort out the truth in politics during the 2008 presidential campaign.

2009, feature writing: Lane DeGregory for her story about the discovery of a "feral child" completely shut off from the world until she was found by police and adopted by a brave and supportive family.

1998, feature writing: Thomas French for his detailed and compassionate narrative portrait of a mother and two daughters slain on a Florida vacation, and the three-year investigation into their murders.

1995, editorial writing: Jeffrey Good for his editorial campaign urging reform of Florida's probate system for settling estates

1991, feature writing: Sheryl James for a compelling series about a mother who abandoned her newborn child and how it affected her life and those of others.

1985, investigative reporting: Lucy Morgan and Jack Reed picked up an award for their thorough reporting on Pasco County Sheriff John Short, which revealed his department's corruption and led to his removal from office by voters.

1980, national reporting: Bette Orsini and Charles Stafford won the *Times* a second Pulitzer Prize for their investigation of the Church of Scientology.

1964, meritorious public service: The *Times* won its first Pulitzer Prize for writer Martin Waldron's coverage of the Florida Turnpike Authority and its reckless expenditure of public money.

Times' Tim Nickens, Daniel Ruth win Pulitzer Prize for editorial writing 04/15/13

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Tampa Bay Times

Times' winning Pulitzer Prize entry for Editorial Writing

Monday, April 15, 2013



Tim Nickens

won its ninth Pulitzer Prize on Monday for a year by Tim Nickens and Daniel Ruth after the mission moved to stop putting fluoride in the drinking water, threatening the dental health of 700,000 people in the county. Daniel Ruth wrote in the last of the 10 editorials that won the Pulitzer Prize in Editorial Writing, "It took nearly 14 years and the clarion voice of Pinellas County voters to pressure the commissioners to correct a serious error in the water system. Here is the Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial by Times Editor Neil Brown, with links to the 10

Pinellas County Commission turned back the clock, pressured by antifluoride zealots and tea party conservatives, abruptly voted to stop adding fluoride to the drinking water. The commission ignored established science and the public health benefits of fluoride. In 2012 the Pinellas water system suddenly stopped adding fluoride to the county's largest without fluoridated water. More than 1 million people are no longer benefited from what the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calls one of the nation's greatest public health achievements.



The editorial board went on mission to correct this reporting and persuasive arguments, Tim Nickens and Daniel Ruth educated readers and delivered a clarion call to those who need fluoridated water the most: the children of Pinellas County.

The editorial board interviewed dentists and fluoride experts from the county and reviewed their arguments and read thousands of

Daniel Ruth

ies. 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, Neil Brown