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## Times editorials

# In 2 cities, facts beat fluoride fantasies

Three different communities. Two starkly different approaches to protecting public health. While the Pinellas County Commission buckled to an irrational minority and removed fluoride this year from the drinking water, elected officials in Portland, Ore., and Phoenix have sided with science and public health and embraced fluoridated water. That makes two more enlightened communities out West - and one still in the dark on the west coast of the Sunshine State.

After an acrimonious debate featuring many of the discounted claims of fluoride's health risks that fooled four Pinellas commissioners, Portland's City Council unanimously voted last week to add fluoride to the water supply for 900,000 residents. Portland was the largest U.S. metro area that had not fluoridated its drinking water. With 700,000 water customers, Pinellas County now may be at the top of the list of those metro areas without fluoride or trust in established science. Thank the Fluoride Four who voted against the best interests of their constituents and succumbed to fear-mongering aided by the tea party crowd: Commissioners Nancy Bostock, Neil Brickfield, John Morroni and Norm Roche.

There also was more backbone last week in Phoenix. City Council members there rejected an

effort to remove fluoride from the water system that serves 1.4 million people. "I just feel strongly that ... what we're doing is the right thing," council member Thelda Williams told the Arizona Republic. "I think public health is the responsibility of government."

That's not the thinking of the Fluoride Four in Pinellas. Even as the county's dentists have launched an education campaign about the benefits of fluoride, the commission hasn't budged and the opponents continue to spread misinformation. Among the latest misrepresentations: Research in other countries reviewed by Harvard scientists suggests high levels of fluoride in drinking water could be linked to lower IQs among students. In fact, the scientists say the studies have no connection to drinking water in the United States, where fluoride levels are much lower than in China and elsewhere.

In Portland and Phoenix, elected leaders knew better than to fall for such misrepresentations. In Pinellas, the Fluoride Four fell for it and ignored the conclusions of dentists, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other public health experts. Bostock and Brickfield will be on the November ballot, and voters can send their own message about the importance of embracing science and facts rather than scare tactics and fear.