



November 17, 2006

## **Commissioners should heed vote on fluoride**

The Skagit County commissioners now have a decision to make about fluoridating a good portion of the county's public water supply.

For more than a year, the commissioners have considered a request to fluoridate water provided to about 65,000 customers by the Skagit County Public Utility District. The Washington Dental Service Foundation, the public service arm of dental insurer Washington Dental Service, has offered to cover the costs of installing a fluoridation system at Judy Reservoir, site of the PUD's existing treatment plant. Operational costs would be paid by the district's ratepayers.

Unable or unwilling to make a call on the fluoridation issue after hearing waves of testimony from a sharply divided community, the commissioners placed an advisory proposition on the November general election ballot. Proposition 2 asked PUD voters if they supported fluoridation. Nearly 53 percent of the responding voters said yes.

So the hypothetical question has been asked and answered affirmatively. The next question is, which county commissioners will make the call – the three now in office, or the newly constituted commission that will be in place come January when Sedro-Woolley Mayor Sharon Dillon replaces outgoing Commissioner Ted Anderson. Dillon says she hasn't made a decision yet on the fluoride issue. At least that's consistent. Perhaps Anderson will astutely sidestep the issue and leave it to the new triumvirate.

If the outcome of Proposition 2 is to be given any credence, the commissioners must prominently factor it into their decision-making. Rejecting fluoridation now would require a lot of explaining and probably wouldn't be the end of the issue. That doesn't mean the advisory vote – in essence an opinion poll more than an action item – makes fluoridation a sure thing. In their capacity as the county Board of Health, the commissioners can make any decision they believe is appropriate, including rejection of fluoridation.

We don't think that course is wise or defensible. This newspaper has consistently supported fluoridation because of its proven health benefits in thousands of communities, including some in Skagit County. It's time for the commissioners to keep faith with the voters, acknowledge the prevailing medical wisdom and approve fluoridation.

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Editorials reflect the consensus opinion of the editorial board and are written by its members: Publisher L. Stedem Wood, Editor Don Nelson and City Editor Dick Clever.