

October 18, 2006

## Yes to county advisory vote on fluoridation

Skagit County Proposition 2 is a local ballot oddity whose impact, no matter what the outcome, remains uncertain.

Proposition 2 is a nonbinding advisory vote on fluoridating water supplied from the Skagit County Public Utility District's main reservoir. The advisory question will be on the ballots of voters in precincts served by Judy Reservoir, an area in the central part of the county extending from the Swinomish Channel to a few miles west of Sedro-Woolley. The reservoir provides water for about 65,000 Skagit PUD customers.

Voters are being asked to offer their advice because the county commissioners have for months evaded a decision that, by law, is theirs to make in their capacity as the county's health board.

What are voters to make of this question? The pro and con tallies won't settle the issue, and perhaps won't even dictate the commissioners' decision — although they say they will take the results seriously.

The debate over the effectiveness — or danger — of fluoridating local water supplies rages unabated, as demonstrated by the stream of letters to the editor on the topic. Health care practitioners and other proponents cite proven benefits. Many opponents point to newer findings that raise questions about the appropriate amounts of fluoride that can be safely added — if it can be safely added at all. Others resist fluoridation on philosophical grounds, contending that using fluoride — even if you believe in its effectiveness — should be a matter of individual choice.

Two-thirds of the nation's water users are served by fluoridated systems, with no convincing evidence of adverse health effects. In the past five years, 136 communities around the country have opted for fluoridation, according to the American Dental Association.

It's likely that most minds are already made up about the fluoridation question, and people will vote based on what they have believed all along rather than what they hear or read the last few weeks before the election. In that sense, campaigning is almost pointless.

The wild card is, which side will motivate the most voters? And will prevailing in the advisory vote be the same as winning on the issue?

We have consistently recommended fluoridation of local water supplies, based on decades of evidence that it produces better dental health communitywide and that oral health is crucial for overall well-being.

For that reason, we urge approval of Proposition 2, in hopes that strong and decisive community support will move the commissioners off the spot they have been sitting on for too long.

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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. Signed columns reflect the authors' viewpoints.*