



**Written Testimony  
by Karen Williams Seel to the  
Health and Human Services Committee,  
Kansas House of Representatives**

*Submitted for the Committee's hearing  
February 5, 2014*

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My name is Karen Williams Seel, and I am a county commissioner in Pinellas County, Florida. Our county has more than 920,000 residents, and I have served on the board of commissioners since 1999.

As a proud Republican, I should feel right at home in Kansas. It's a state that has historically favored GOP candidates and has produced many common-sense conservatives like Bob Dole. Both chambers of the legislature have Republican majorities. Yet I am disappointed to learn that a small group of Republicans in Kansas are pushing their party in the same direction that created a major backlash in the Florida county that I call home.

A handful of GOP legislators in Kansas are backing House Bill 2372. This misguided measure would impose a new mandate on local communities and mislead the public about community water fluoridation, a practice that reduces tooth decay by about 25 percent over a person's lifetime.<sup>1</sup>

Fluoride exists naturally in nearly all water supplies, but usually at a level too low to protect teeth. That's why so many communities fortify their drinking water with additional fluoride — the process called "fluoridation."<sup>2</sup> Fluoridation is endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Dental Association and the Institute of Medicine.<sup>3</sup> The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) cites the "strong evidence that water fluoridation is safe and effective."<sup>4</sup>

Whether they have been appointed by Republican or Democratic presidents, U.S. Surgeons General have consistently endorsed community water fluoridation. Dr. C. Everett Koop, who was appointed by President Ronald Reagan, called fluoridation "the single most important commitment a community can make to the oral health of its children and to future generations."<sup>5</sup>

Most of the language in HB 2372 echoes the rhetoric that we heard in Pinellas County, Florida. In 2011, fluoridation came to a vote of the county board, on which I serve. I supported continuing this health practice, but our board voted 4-3 to end fluoridation.<sup>6</sup> Local residents were understandably angered that we second-guessed the conclusions of physicians, dentists and other health experts.

Two anti-fluoride commissioners sought re-election in November 2012, and both were defeated. It marked the first time in nearly 30 years that an incumbent Republican commissioner in our county had lost a general election.<sup>7</sup> Our county resumed fluoridation in early 2013.

I urge Republicans in Kansas not to make the same mistake that some of my GOP colleagues made in Pinellas County. Legislators should recognize that HB 2372 runs counter to the scientific evidence.

This bill would force local communities that fluoridate water to notify customers “that the latest science confirms that ingested fluoride lowers the I.Q. in children.” However, this reference to “the latest science” is actually a cluster of flawed studies from China, Iran and Mongolia.<sup>8</sup>

These 27 foreign studies compared the I.Q. scores of children living in areas with high levels of fluoride in their water with those living in areas with low levels of fluoride. Yet the high-fluoride areas were as high as 11.5 parts per million — more than 10 times the level used to fluoridate water in the U.S.<sup>9</sup> Harvard researchers who reviewed these studies noted that “each of the [studies] reviewed had deficiencies, in some cases rather serious, which limit the conclusions that can be drawn.”<sup>10</sup>

Many factors, including arsenic exposure, can affect children’s I.Q. scores. Yet none of these factors was ruled out by the studies. In fact, most of the studies were conducted in China, which has nearly 20 million people living in areas at high risk of arsenic contamination through their drinking water.<sup>11</sup>

Anti-fluoride groups cannot explain why the average I.Q. score in America rose 15 points between the 1940s and the 1990s — the same period when fluoridation steadily expanded to serve millions and millions of additional Americans.<sup>12</sup> For these and other reasons, the CDC and other health experts have examined these foreign studies and have not viewed them as a reasonable basis for concern.

Kansas legislators should not be misled by the claims that are made by fluoridation opponents. A non-partisan, fact-checking service called PolitiFact has examined three of the typical arguments made by anti-fluoride groups and found each one to be false or deceptive.<sup>13</sup>

As a mother of two children, it disturbs me when anyone raises false fear about a health issue. Parents have enough real concerns not to be misled into believing something that is at odds with the scientific evidence. American communities have been fluoridating water for nearly 70 years. If there were any truth to the claims made by opponents, we would have seen ample evidence by now.<sup>14</sup>

Let’s be honest. People with unhealthy or missing teeth who show up for a job interview have an immediate strike against them. Why would elected officials want to do anything that could put children and adults at greater risk of tooth decay and other dental problems?

Support for fluoridation is completely consistent with conservative principles. Studies from Texas, New York and Louisiana confirm that fluoridation saves Medicaid dollars by reducing the costs of treating dental problems.<sup>15</sup> That’s good news for those of us who believe government should find ways to save money, instead of only spending it. In addition, Louisiana’s fluoridation bill was signed into law by Governor Bobby Jindal, who was praised by a national commentator as “the next Ronald Reagan.”<sup>16</sup>

The U.S. armed forces support water fluoridation. In fact, a few years ago, a senior Defense Department official reaffirmed the policy of fluoridating water on all military bases, noting that fluoridation will “directly reduce their risk for dental decay and improve [military] readiness.”<sup>17</sup>

As Republicans, we should be proud that American research and know-how has made our nation a pioneer in using fluoridation to reduce tooth decay. More than 160 million people living in Europe and on other continents have followed our nation's lead.<sup>18</sup>

Republicans should advance the party's core values — for example, keeping taxes low and creating a positive business climate. Let's not allow a small, vocal group of people to lure us into interfering with community water fluoridation. I urge Kansas legislators of both parties to reject HB 2372.

### Sources:

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<sup>1</sup> For a transcript of House Bill 2372, see the [Kansas Legislature](#) website; "Fluoridation Basics," [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), updated on July 25, 2013.

<sup>2</sup> "Fluoridation Basics," [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#), updated on July 25, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> O.M. Burton, "AAP Press Statement on HHS & EPA Recommended Change in Fluoride Levels in Drinking Water," [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), accessed on Jan. 20, 2011; "Fluoride & Fluoridation," [American Dental Association](#), accessed on Jan. 21, 2013 at; *Improving Access to Oral Health Care for Vulnerable and Underserved Populations*, [Institute of Medicine](#) (2011), p. 63.

<sup>4</sup> "Community Water Fluoridation: Fluoridation Safety," [CDC](#), updated on July 10, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> "What Surgeons General Say about Fluoridation," posted by the [Campaign for Dental Health](#), a project managed by the American Academy of Pediatrics.

<sup>6</sup> Rick Jervis, "Florida's Pinellas County rejects fluoride in drinking water," [USA Today](#), October 6, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Anna M. Phillip and Anne Lindberg, "Pinellas County commissioners blame fluoride vote for failed re-election bids," [Tampa Bay Times](#), November 7, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> A.L. Choi et al., "Developmental Fluoride Neurotoxicity: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," [Environmental Health Perspectives](#), October 2012, Vol. 120, No. 10.

<sup>9</sup> The current level recommended by U.S. health officials for fluoridation is a range of 0.7 to 1.2 milligrams per liter. See: "Community Water Fluoridation: Frequently Asked Questions," [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#).

<sup>10</sup> See p. 1367 of the *Environmental Health Perspectives* article cited previously.

<sup>11</sup> Hamza Mohamed, "Millions face arsenic contamination risk in China, study finds," [The Guardian](#), August 22, 2013.

<sup>12</sup> Ulric Neisser, "Rising Scores on Intelligence Tests," [American Scientist](#), September-October 1997.

<sup>13</sup> "Truth about fluoride doesn't include Nazi myth," PolitiFact, [Tampa Bay Times/Miami Herald](#), October 6, 2011; "Austin resident says fluoride compound added to local water supply is 'toxic waste'," PolitiFact, [Austin American-Statesman](#), April 19, 2011; "Milwaukee alderman says fluoride in toothpaste is a poison," PolitiFact, [Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel](#), July 9, 2012.

<sup>14</sup> Grand Rapids, Mich., was the first U.S. city to add fluoride to its drinking water. The city started fluoridation in January 1945. See: "Fluoride in Drinking Water," [City of Grand Rapids Water System](#), accessed on January 21, 2014.

<sup>15</sup> "Savings from Water Fluoridation: What the Evidence Shows," [The Pew Center on the States](#), 2011.

<sup>16</sup> Gov. Bobby Jindal signed Senate Bill 312 into law on July 8, 2008. See: Stacie Crozier, "Louisiana law clears path for fluoridation," [ADA News](#), July 31, 2008; Michael Gerson, "The Jindal Phenomenon," [Washington Post](#), February 25, 2009.

<sup>17</sup> The Defense Department official's quote is from "Is Using Fluoride Toothpaste Enough?" [Campaign for Dental Health](#), a website managed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, accessed on January 21, 2014.

<sup>18</sup> "The Extent of Water Fluoridation," [British Fluoridation Society](#), 2012.