

Sign Control News

Newsletter of the Center for Sign Control • A project of the Coalition for Scenic Beauty

April, 1986, Vol. 3, No. 2

REAGAN ADMINISTRATION BACKS GORTON BILL

The Reagan Administration has now joined environmental groups in supporting efforts by U.S. Senator Slade Gorton to control the spread of billboards along the nation's highways through Gorton's bill, SB 1494.

Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole has gone on record to say that "the Administration wholeheartedly agrees that current billboard control laws are unworkable and in great need of change."

The Administration statement gives added momentum to SB 1494. It comes just a week after the nation's top environmental groups joined together to urge Senate action on Gorton's bill (see page 2). These actions prompted Senator Gorton to say that he now believes his legislation has a good chance of success. "These developments fortify our efforts for this tax saving and highway beautification legislation," said Gorton.

Dole's statement said in part, "We must tighten limitations on construction of new billboards in rural areas, where billboards intrude upon natural beauty. Equally important, we must end inappropriate interference with state and local zoning laws and billboard removal programs. We must simplify the program's administration. The Department [of Transportation] supports your efforts to gain enactment of these provisions."

Secretary Dole also made negative reference to the billboard industry proposals pending in House Bill 4144 (see SCN Jan-March '86).



Secretary Dole

21st CENTURY MAY SEE BILLBOARD FREE HOUSTON

Today, Houston, Texas has over 4,000 billboards but they may all come down under a new City Council proposal.

Houston Councilmember Eleanor Tinsley and the City Council Sign Committee have recommended new legislation to remove every billboard in Houston by the year 2007. The plan calls for the removal of all billboards at the end of their "useful life" while signs along federal-aid highways or those carrying political or religious messages would be purchased by the city.

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WASHINGTON UPDATE

HOUSE NOW HAS BILLBOARD REFORM BILL

Representative Clay Shaw (R-FL) has introduced legislation into the U.S. House of Representatives that would make changes in the Highway Beautification Act. The bill, HR 4635, would:

- ban billboards in rural, non-commercial areas;
- ban tree-cutting on public land in front of billboards;
- allow amortization of signs made non-conforming by the Act;
- repeal the bonus program;
- encourage the use of logo signs and other motorist information systems;
- require Indian lands to abide by the Highway Beautification Act.

The bill does not go as far as the Gorton legislation but it does

propose some limited reforms of the Highway Beauty Act.

For example, the bill would allow billboards in rural areas so long as they are grouped in "commercial areas." This could mean that certain stretches of rural highway will continue to be lined with legal billboards. The bill also introduces a troublesome new category of billboards called "Tourist Oriented Directional Signs."

While not as strong as the Gorton Bill currently before the Senate, the Shaw Bill is additional recognition of the need to reform the Highway Beautification Program. HR 4635 is currently before the House Public Works and Transportation Committee.

ENVIRONMENTALISTS ENDORSE BILLBOARD CONTROL BILL

The Chief Executive Officers of the major national conservation organizations have joined together to urge Congress to halt the spread of billboard pollution in America.

In a letter to Congress the leaders of the Environmental Defense Fund, Environmental Policy Institute, Environmental Action, Izzak Walton League, National Audubon Society, National Parks and Conservation Association, National Resources Defense Council, National Wildlife Federation, Sierra Club, and the Wilderness Society called for a new federal law to prohibit the construction of all new billboards along federal highways, halt tree cutting on public land in front of billboards, and return the power to clean-up highway blight to states and localities.

"The Highway Beautification Act of 1965 is a costly failure," said the environmental leaders. "Unlike most environmental regulations that require polluters to pay for the

clean-up of their own pollution, the 1965 Act requires taxpayers to pay the bill. The current law is so riddled with loopholes that despite spending over \$200 million, billboard blight is now worse than ever.

"Any law which allows thousands of new billboards to go up while forcing taxpayers to pay for the removal of others offends plain common sense," declared the environmental leaders who urged support for new billboard freeze legislation introduced by Senator Slade Gorton (R-WA).

"The Senator is very pleased that these environmental groups have jumped on board," said David Endicott, a spokesperson for Senator Gorton. "As allies, the Senator is glad that they are helping to get the legislation passed."

The environmental community has now joined the long list of organizations supporting Senator Gorton's legislation.

SOUTH CAROLINA CONSIDERS CASH SUBSIDIES FOR SIGN INDUSTRY

State Senator David Thomas has introduced a bill into the South Carolina Senate which would weaken already lax billboard control laws there. The bill, although praised by the Governor, is being blasted by localities since it would hamper their efforts to get rid of billboard blight.

Communities are upset because the bill would extend the cash compensation requirement to any non-conforming sign in the state. Currently, non-conforming billboards along state and local roads can be removed by local law. The new bill would require cities to pay polluters to stop polluting and would take away local governments' power to use their own zoning authority.

How are communities in the state reacting to the bill? Beaufort County, which passed an ordinance to get rid of its billboards using amortization, is very upset. Charles Gatch of the County Planning Department said "If South Carolina enacts a cash compensation clause, it's certainly not going to help our amortization provision."

Beaufort County Councilmember Janet Sawyer sees a connection with Thomas' bill. "The bill's cash compensation provision appears to be a direct result of the billboard industry's inability to overturn our amortization provision." Beaufort County just won a lawsuit upholding its right to remove billboards in the county. This followed a referendum in November 1984 in which county voters overwhelmingly endorsed removing all local billboards.

Councilmember Sawyer feels that the cash compensation provision may slip by unnoticed. "The problem is that this bill has been sold to legislators as a measure to strengthen billboard controls. But that's only half the story. They're not being told about the cash compensation clause."

The bill does propose better

UGLINESS LOBBY CONTRIBUTES BIG BUCKS TO CONGRESS

Billboard industry PAC contributions to Congress are continuing their steady rise, with Federal Election Commission records showing that for the 1986 election period over \$70,000 has already been given to members of Congress. And there are still eight more months to go before the election.

PAC contributions are just one of the many ways the billboard lobby channels money to elected officials. The industry also relies heavily on honoraria payments (money given to a Congressman for a speech) and personal contributions from company executives and association officers. For example, in 1984, the billboard industry contributed over \$99,000 in honoraria payments and for the 1984 election period over \$123,000 in PAC contributions to members of Congress. The industry also spends large amounts of money influencing legislation at the state and local levels.

The dramatic rise of billboard PAC contributions can be seen in the years 1977-1984. For the 1978 election period (1977-1978), Federal Election Commission figures show industry PACs giving Congressional campaigns \$17,225; for the 1980 election, \$32,436; for the 1982 election, \$62,537; and for the 1984 election, \$113,165.

size, height, and spacing requirements. It also imposes a \$50 fine for each billboard put up illegally and raises the permit fees from a shocking \$2-\$6 to \$75 per billboard.

Billboard control advocates fear that this billboard control legislation has become an industry bill and that if certain corrections are not made, then the situation in South Carolina may get worse. "Something needs to be done in South Carolina," said Carol Deretchin of Greenville. "We are just buried in billboards here."

CHARLESTON STOPS BILLBOARD CONSTRUCTION

Just as three giant billboards were rearing their ugly faces alongside Interstate 26, Charleston County, SC officials stopped them dead in their tracks.

On January 9 Charleston County imposed a moratorium on billboard construction while it considers revisions to its sign ordinance. Despite the moratorium, billboard companies leased land along the Southern Railway right of way which runs through North Charleston and into the city of Charleston. One company even constructed its monopoles on the land. But, work was halted when it was discovered that the billboards were erected illegally.

"In reality, the billboards were in Charleston County," Ferrell McCabe, senior specialist for Charleston County zoning, told SCN. "We checked it out and then issued a stop work order."

The billboards will stand in limbo devoid of advertising until the county makes a decision on how to control billboards under its jurisdiction.

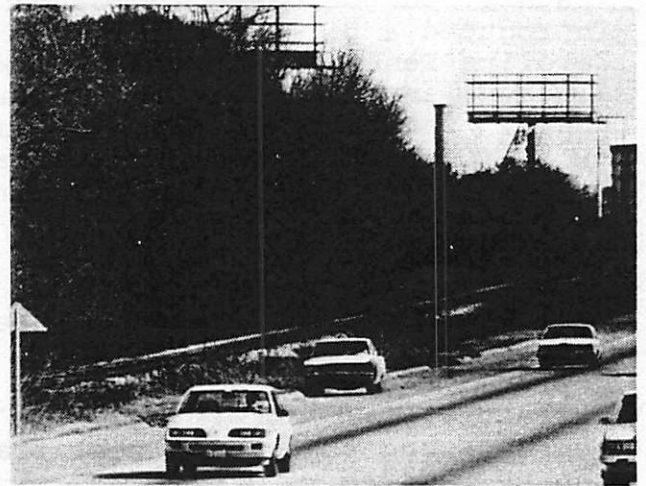
Meanwhile, motorists will be graced with their presence along I-26 and residents of a subdivision across the highway will get a good

NC LAWMAKERS STUDY BILLBOARD BLIGHT

North Carolina has formed a legislative study committee to explore changes in the state's billboard control laws. The committee held the first of three hearings recently in Raleigh, the state capital.

At the first hearing, Charles Floyd, President of the Coalition for Scenic Beauty, told the committee that "North Carolina doesn't have to be ugly." He urged the committee to propose more stringent billboard controls, to effectively enforce the removal of non-conforming signs, and to repeal the cash compensation requirement for the removal of non-conforming billboards in the state.

Ann Browning, Chairwoman of the



BRAD NETTLES

Monstrous billboards sit idle in Charleston County

view of the steel structures from their living room windows.

Said columnist Bill Settlemyer in the Charleston News & Courier (4/26/86), "Billboards are an in-your-face, slam dunk, get outta my way form of advertising with no regard for the public's sensibilities. That's why billboard advertising...is offensive. It disregards our right not to have our nose rubbed in advertising. And beyond that it robs us of what remains of scenic views of our environment."

the Carolina Coalition for Scenic Beauty, echoed Floyd's remarks by saying that her organization would like the legislature to ban construction of new billboards, improve the logo sign system so that it could be utilized throughout the state, and halt the legally sanctioned practice of cutting trees in front of billboards in North Carolina.

The committee, composed of legislators from both the North Carolina Senate and House, is expected to hold additional hearings this summer. Then, if the committee feels legislation is necessary, they will draft proposals in time

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PENNSYLVANIANS WANT SCENIC ROAD PROTECTED

Route 220 runs through the beautiful Juniata Valley in the middle of Pennsylvania. The new road hugs the eastern mountain range and motorists can look west to see the communities of Altoona, Logan, Allegheny, and Freedom as well as a spectacular view of the Allegheny Mountains beyond. Most people see the scenic road as a gateway for attracting more tourists to the area. Unfortunately, the billboard industry sees it as just another road to line with billboards. But, they are having a hard time getting their way.

Spearheaded by the Juniata Valley Audubon Society, residents of the valley communities are working to keep billboard pollution off Rt. 220. Most main roads in the valley towns are already lined with billboards. Residents are determined not to let it happen to the new scenic highway.

When one billboard company petitioned the Altoona City Authority to lease public land near a sewage treatment plant along Rt. 220, the Authority refused the request. The Altoona Mirror (3/86) reports that Allegheny Township supervisors are concerned about billboard placement, especially along the new highway. The plant itself lies within the Township. The Authority said that the billboard could not be erected for reasons of "aesthetics."

Freedom Township supervisor John Harker recently told the County Planning Commission and its 24 member advisory board that the best way to prepare for an onslaught of billboard permit requests is for the townships along new Route 220 to pass ordinances which regulate the use of billboards.

The Valley appears to be heading toward a confrontation between those who want a clear view of the mountains and billboard companies who want more billboards everywhere.

BILLBOARDS: COMING SOON TO A NEIGHBORHOOD NEAR YOU

The Institute of Outdoor Advertising says that the billboard industry grew 8.3% in 1985 as total sales volume hit \$1.2 billion. Large billboard sales rose 8.7% to \$665 million, while poster panels were up 7.8% to \$556 million.

The smaller Eight Sheet billboards have been experiencing dramatic growth, increasing 75% since 1980 to 150,000 signs in 1985, according to the Eight Sheet Outdoor Advertising Association. Sales in eight sheets for 1985 were \$104 million.

The Institute for Outdoor Advertising estimates that transit (including rail) advertising sales for 1985 were \$100-\$150 million, airport advertising sales were \$25 million, mall advertising sales were \$15 million, bus shelter ad sales were \$10 million and taxi ad sales were \$8 million for 1985.

The continued growth of the industry undercuts industry claims that billboard controls have hurt their business. Perhaps more importantly the new figures indicate that the industry is making an all out push to put up more newer and bigger billboards--everywhere.

NEWS AROUND THE COUNTRY

ALABAMA--Mobile Chamber of Commerce President Jack Edwards, writing in the editorial section of the Mobile Press Register (4/13/86) said "Now is the time for a sign ordinance in Mobile. I say this because the number of billboards and other signs cluttering our roadsides is becoming unmanageable...We need to project an attractive image for both tourists and industrial prospects. As more development takes place in downtown Mobile, more emphasis should be placed on the aesthetics of the business district. Signs should not pop up helter skelter in an unorganized

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NEWS AROUND THE COUNTRY

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fashion without certain guidelines."

Edwards concludes his piece by saying, "As a natural part of all this improvement, there is no better time than now to remove some of the sign clutter that assaults visitors and residents alike."

ARIZONA--Tribal leaders on the Navajo Reservation have won an agreement from the distributors of Coors beer to remove a billboard on the Reservation border. The billboard, located about two miles north of Window Rock, shows a young Navajo man in rodeo gear and reads, "To the Navajo Nation: Coors is the One."

Duane Beyel, a spokesman for the tribe, said that complaints began to pour in shortly after the billboard was erected. "It's in bad taste," he said, adding that it promotes the stereotype of the drunken Indian. (AP 3/26/86)

CALIFORNIA--Livingston has revised its sign ordinance to eliminate all projecting and free-standing signs from its downtown area. The ordinance also restricts portable signs....

A billboard company is facing possible legal action from the town of La Canada Flintridge for adding another face to some of its billboards there. Gannett Outdoor allegedly took advantage of a three day lapse in the town's building moratorium to add the faces. The moratorium had run out before the city council could extend it. However, Gannett allegedly failed to secure building permits before adding to its billboards. Assistant City Attorney Stephanie R. Scher told the Van Nuys Daily News (4/11/86) "Moratorium or no moratorium, you can't build anything without a building permit and that's what they did. If we can't get them to move [their signs], we are authorized to and will seek an injunction to get them to take it down. And there is the

possibility the court will make them abate [remove] the rest of it. They had no right to expand those signs without a building permit."

FLORIDA--The Bunnell City Commission has placed a moratorium on billboards and advertising signs within the city limits until some form of regulations can be approved. Mayor Brice Hosford told the Bunnell News Tribune (4/12/86) that his action was prompted by a permit request seeking to place a billboard along U.S. 1 downtown. The mayor said he did not feel the city should allow billboards on the main streets of town....

The Monroe County Commission voted to extend their existing moratorium on billboard construction. Monroe County contains the town of Key West.

MARYLAND--The Montgomery County Council is considering taking down the county's 40 remaining billboards. The suburban Washington county banned new billboards over 15 years ago and already has strict sign controls on the books. But, after hearing a report by the county's Parks and Planning Commission, they decided to consider eliminating all billboards in the county.

NORTH CAROLINA--Salisbury, the hometown of Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole, has passed a virtual ban on billboard construction. The new sign ordinance requires non-conforming signs to come into compliance in 7.5 years, except for those signs along the federal interstate.

NEW YORK--The Long Island town of Islip is seeking court action to remove 18 billboards. The town had banned billboards in 1979 and gave billboard companies until December 31, 1985 to remove their signs. But the signs have remained standing. Assistant town attorney

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HOUSTON continued from page 1

In recent years Houston has been a national leader in efforts to clean up roadside blight. In 1980, Houston banned the erection of all new billboards and called for the removal of all signs exceeding 42 feet in height, those over 675 square feet and, depending on their size, signs spaced closer than 100 to 500 feet apart.

In 1985, Houston banned the erection of all new billboards in its extra-territorial jurisdiction, an area covering almost 2,000 square miles around Houston.

A Texas state law passed last year (see SCN May-June '85) introduced the concept of useful life to Texas communities' sign ordinances. The law directed communities to form Municipal Sign Control Boards to determine the reasonable life of their billboards. The Houston Sign Control Board said that the useful life of wooden billboards is 17 years while the useful life of steel structures is 21.5 years. The City Council's Sign Committee has taken the Sign Control Board's figures and has incorporated them into its plan to rid Houston of billboards. The Committee recommended amending the city's sign ordinance to ban all billboards at the end of their useful life. In addition, those billboards along federal-aid highways and those with non-commercial messages

would be removed using a combination of federal, state, and private funds in addition to revenue from new taxes on billboards.

Should this recommendation be passed by the city council, then all billboards will have to come down by the year 2007.

The City Council may hold hearings on the proposed amendment in the near future.

REAGAN ADMINISTRATION

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In commenting on the proposals she said to Senator Gorton, "Your efforts are even more important in light of changes considered by the House...which would place additional financial burdens on taxpayers and perpetuate the current unworkable program which adds little to scenic beauty."

[The House provisions were featured in a recent Jack Anderson column (4/10/86) which revealed that Reps. Howard (D-NJ) and Breaux (D-LA) are trying to amend current law to tap into the Highway Trust Fund for the first time to pay billboard companies even more money to move around billboards]

Dole's position brightens the future of SB 1494 but the "ugliness lobby" is working overtime to defeat the measure. If you haven't yet written to your Senator urging support for SB 1494, now is the time to make your voice heard.

NC STUDY

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for the legislature's spring session.

Residents of North Carolina who want to attend or testify at upcoming hearings should call or write Dennis Bryan, Legislative Study Committee on Outdoor Advertising, Legislative Office Bldg., 300 Salisbury Street, Raleigh, NC 27611; Phone: (919) 733-2578. Residents are encouraged to write to the committee via the above address to make their feelings known about billboard blight in North Carolina.

ARE YOU READING A PHOTOCOPY OF SIGN CONTROL NEWS? Why not join the Coalition for Scenic Beauty today and you'll receive your very own issue of Sign Control News along with legislative alerts and special reports. Don't be left waiting and wondering whether you are receiving every issue in time for you to act to protect America's scenic beauty from billboard blight. Become a member today and support the Coalition's efforts to bring a halt to visual clutter in America.

Sign Control News is published by the Center for Sign Control, a project of the Coalition for Scenic Beauty. The center provides research, information, and counsel to associate members interested in improving the quality of America's urban and rural environments through the control of signs and billboards. **Sign Control News** is available free to members of the Coalition for Scenic Beauty. Coalition membership fees are as follows: Individual memberships start at \$20; for clubs, associations, organizations, private businesses, or government agencies fees are \$50 for local organizations, \$100 for state or regional organizations, and \$150 for national organizations. To join, send check payable to the "Coalition for Scenic Beauty" to Coalition for Scenic Beauty, 44 East Front St., Media, PA 19063. Phone: (215) 565-9131.

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John DeSalvo told Newsday (4/14/86) that Islip could fine Sunrise Outdoor Advertising \$250 for each billboard.

TENNESSEE--State Transportation officials say they will revoke Stanley Outdoor Advertising Co.'s permits for signs along Interstate 40 near Bartlett after noticing that two giant oak trees on the state owned right-of-way in front of the billboards had been cut. One tree was 36 inches in diameter and estimated to be 75 years old. Tree-cutting permits can be issued in Tennessee if the billboard is older than the trees.

Transportation Commissioner Dale Kelly told the Memphis Commercial Appeal (3/8/86) that "there was never a vegetation control permit issued for cutting the trees."

TEXAS--Former Governor Bill Clements, running for the governor's office, has announced that he will not use any billboards in his campaign and he challenges his opponents to do the same....

The Hurst City Council has passed a stricter sign control ordinance that extends spacing requirements for signs. The ordinance was quickly put into effect before a billboard company was able to obtain a permit to erect yet another billboard in the town.