

Sign Control News

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

May-July, 1986, Vol. 3, No. 3

ALERT: CONGRESS TO VOTE ON BILLBOARD LEGISLATION

The U.S. Congress will soon act on new legislation to reform the Highway Beautification Act.

Please contact your Senators and Member of Congress right away and urge their support for billboard reform legislation (i.e. S.B. 1494 and H.R. 5043).

These bills, which are sponsored by a bi-partisan coalition of Senators and representatives would:

- * Ban all new billboards along federal highways;
- * Ban tree cutting on public land done solely to make billboards more visible;
- * End federal payments to the billboard industry;
- * Allow state and local governments to use their own zoning laws to remove billboards.

Background--The Problem

Today billboard pollution is spreading at an unparalleled rate. Why? Because the Federal Highway Beautification Act is riddled with loopholes. Over the past 20 years taxpayers have paid the billboard industry over \$200 million to take down old billboards which were then promptly replaced by newer, bigger billboards. In 1983 for example we paid to remove 2,235 old billboards along federal highways, but then 13,522 new billboards went up.

What's more the current law prevents cities and towns from removing billboards using their own laws, and allows billboard companies to chain-saw trees on public land so that visual pollution is guaranteed.

This is a waste of taxpayers money, a violation of local land use power, and an environmental nightmare. Indeed, Secretary of Transportation Elizabeth Dole has called the 1965 law "unworkable and in great need of reform."

Any law which allows new billboards to go up while forcing taxpayers to pay for the removal of others offends plain common sense. It's time to halt the spread of billboard blight and stop public subsidies for the billboard industry.

PLEASE HELP END THIS ENVIRONMENTAL SCAM BY IMMEDIATELY WRITING TO YOUR SENATORS AND CONGRESSMEN URGING THEM TO SUPPORT REFORM OF THE HIGHWAY BEAUTIFICATION ACT.

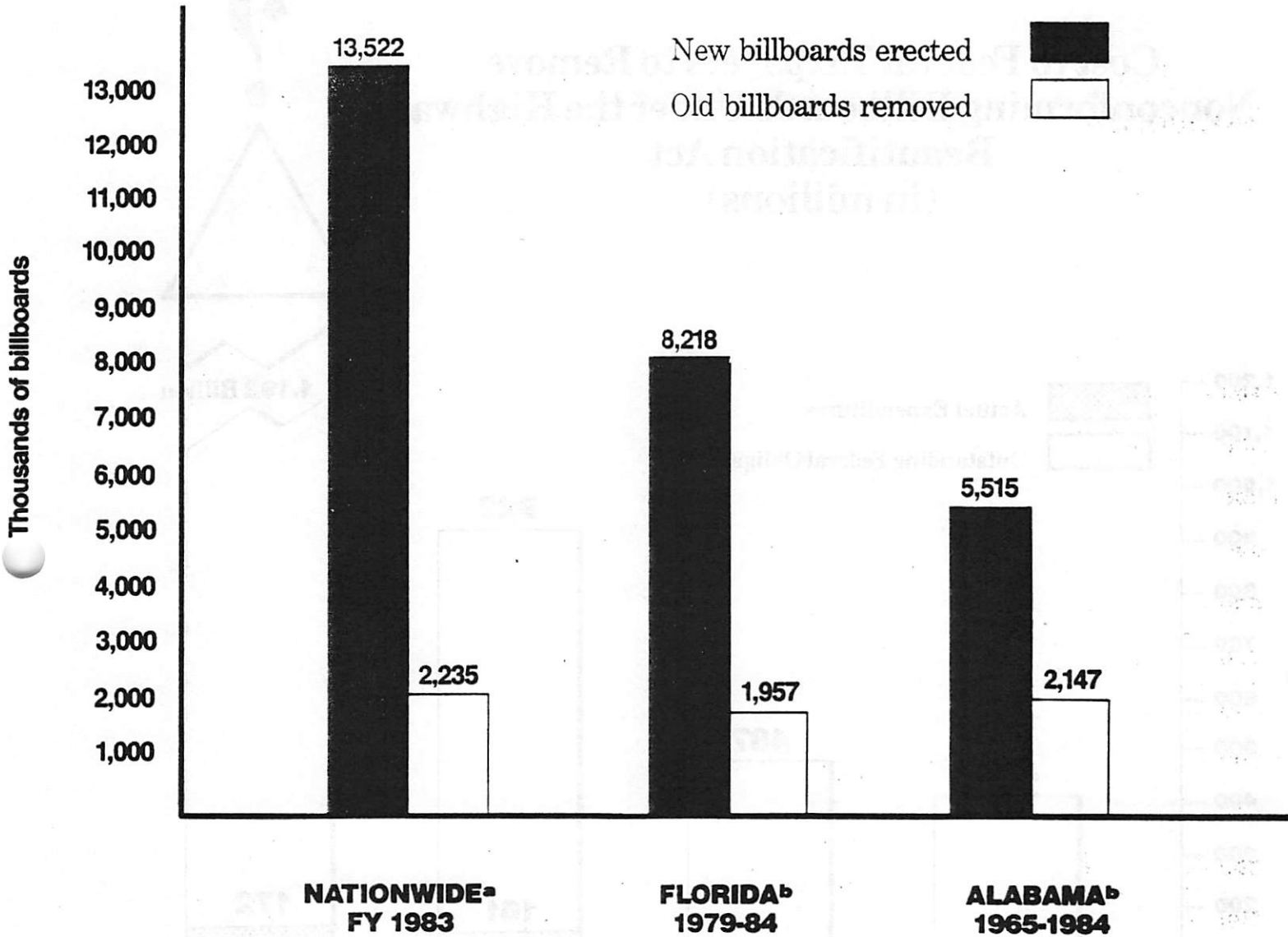
The Congress will vote on billboard legislation anytime after July 15th. PLEASE ACT TODAY.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH BILLBOARDS

1. Billboards are a form of pollution which scar the face of America. For example, columnist William Buckley calls them "acts of aggression against the American landscape."
2. Billboards erode the quality of life in America. They pollute our landscape, destroy our historic, cultural, and natural diversity, and undermine America's heritage and sense of place.
3. Billboards are bad for business. Business, industry, and new residents are all attracted or repelled by a community's appearance. An attractive community generates business and attracts homeowners. Without exception, every American community which has banned or regulated billboards has benefited economically. Just look at Scottsdale, Arizona, Sante Fe, N.M. or Boulder, Colorado to see that this is true.
4. Billboards are unnecessary. Most billboards advertise cigarettes, liquor, and other products which have nothing to do with roadside businesses. Six states, hundreds of cities, even entire countries have eliminated billboards. All have benefited.
5. There are alternatives to billboards which provide the same information to motorists without destroying our environment and at less cost to roadside businesses.
6. Billboards are a form of blight which invariably lower property values, waste energy, and discourage tourism. Tourists seek unspoiled countryside and unobliterated architecture not endless clutter.
7. Billboards violate our constitutional right to privacy. Unlike other forms of advertising which can be eliminated at the flip of a switch or the turn of a page there is no possible way to turn off a billboard.
8. Billboards cause traffic accidents. Research and common sense tell us that billboards are designed to distract motorists' attention. Highways cluttered with billboards have more accidents than those that don't.
9. If every billboard in America disappeared tomorrow no one would miss them. Maine, Vermont, Hawaii, Alaska and hundreds of American cities have eliminated billboards. All have benefited. Billboard controls will help business. Indeed, the Chamber of Commerce in Houston, Texas has made cleaning up billboard pollution one of their top priorities.
10. Even if we accept billboards as a legitimate form of business there is absolutely no reason why we can't pass regulations to control the size, height, placement, and number of outdoor ads. Presently, billboards are too big, too tall, too many, and in all the wrong places.

Growth of Billboard Pollution

(on Federal Interstate and Primary Highways)

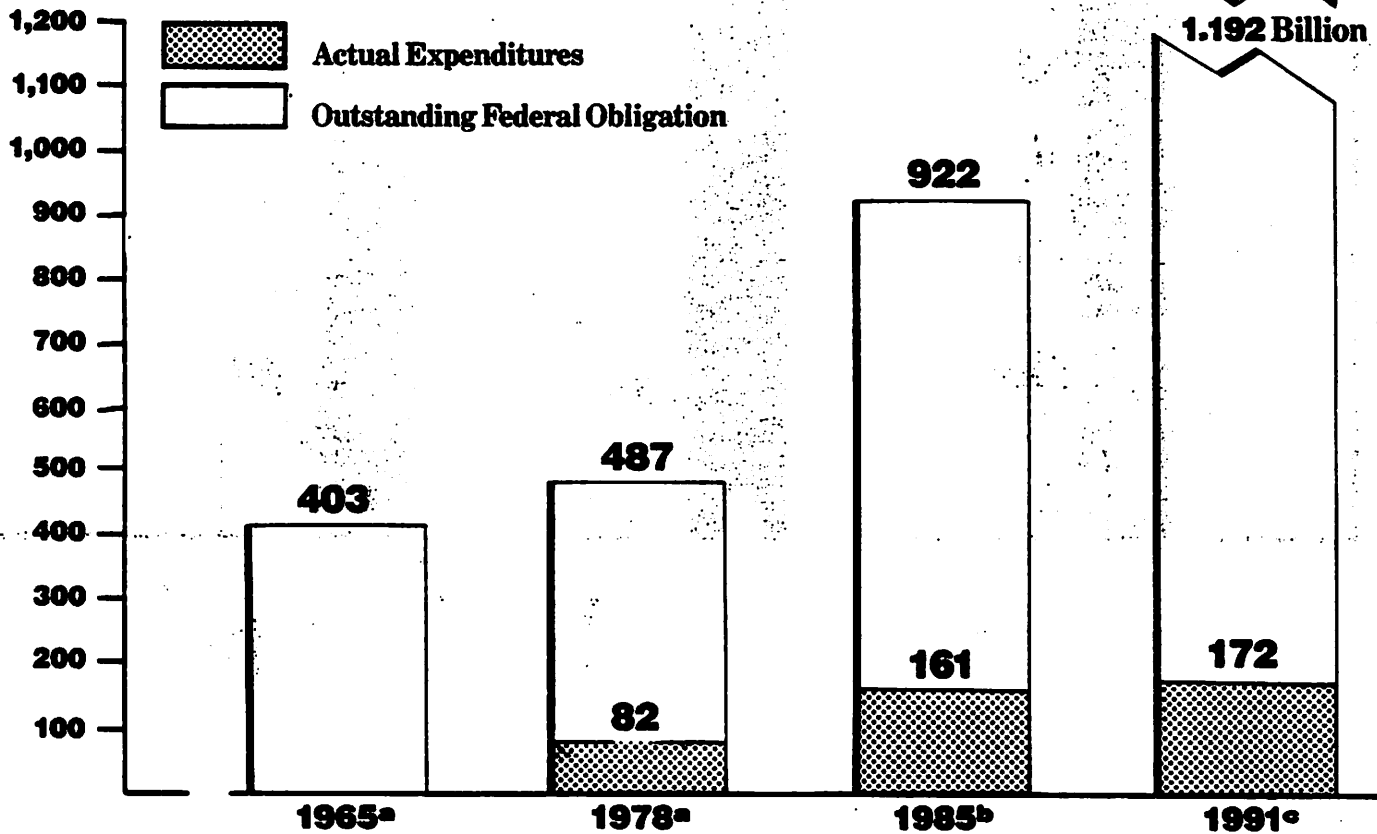


a GAO Report CED-85-34, January 3, 1985, "The Outdoor Advertising Control Program Needs to be Reassessed." (Data from 45 states.)

b Inspector General, Department of Transportation, Report on Audit of Highway Beautification Program, FHWA Region 4, Report No. R4-FH-4-158.

True cost unknown due to fact that Act permits perpetual payments for nonconforming signs and allows new signs to become nonconforming, hence eligible for payments.

Cost to Federal Taxpayers to Remove Nonconforming Billboards Under the Highway Beautification Act (in millions)



a GAO Report CED-78-38, March 27, 1978, "Obstacles to Billboard Removal."

b GAO Report RCED-85-34, January 3, 1985, "The Outdoor Advertising Control Program Needs to be Reassessed."

c Assumes inflation rate of 5%, compounded annually, and expenditure of all federal appropriations through FY 1985. Also assumes no further federal appropriations are made to remove billboards.

NEWS AROUND THE COUNTRY**PHOENIX PASSES VIRTUAL BILLBOARD BAN**

The Phoenix City Council in July imposed a ban on construction of virtually any new billboards. The Council, in a 6-2 vote despite heavy billboard lobbying has banned new billboards from its C-2 zones - which typically include small shopping centers and stores near residential areas - and from most freeways in the city. Industry executives told the Arizona Republic (7/3/86) that 80% of the 1,900 billboards in the city are on land with that zoning designation. The same ordinance also bans billboards from designated scenic roads and further limits their size and spacing.

BILLBOARD BAN IN LOS ANGELES?

A new billboard control ordinance passed by the Los Angeles City Council last May so infuriated homeowners and professional organizations that they have formed Citizens Against Billboards and are collecting signatures to put an initiative on the ballot to ban new billboards in the city. "They're putting them up like crazy", said CAB committee member Ted Wu. "There must be more than 15,000 billboards here".

The organization is composed of 200 homeowner associations covering most of Los Angeles and is endorsed by groups such as the American Institute of Architects, the American Society of Landscape Architects, Los Angeles Beautiful, and the Coalition for Scenic Beauty.

TOUGH SCHNEIDER-UDALL BILL INTRODUCED IN HOUSE

Representatives Claudine Schneider (R-RI) and Morris Udall (D-AZ) have joined forces to introduce H.R. 5043 in the House of Representatives. This bill is identical to the Gorton Bill (SB 1494) in the U.S. Senate. The bill is co-sponsored by Representatives Siberling (D-OH), Akaka (D-HI), Clay (D-MO), Porter (P-IL), Bonker (D-WA),

Miller (R-WA), Beilenson (D-CA), Pickle (D-TX) and Levine (D-CA).

The Schneider-Udall bill would ban the construction of new billboards along federal-aid highways, ban tree-cutting in the right of way in front of billboards along federal roads, and enable state and local governments to remove billboards using their own zoning authority.

This bill is currently the strongest billboard reform legislation in the House and has been assigned to the House Public Works and Transportation Committee.

GREENVILLE COUNTY, SC BANS BILLBOARDS

After wrestling with the issue for a full year, the Greenville County Council this June passed an ordinance prohibiting the erection of any new billboards in the county. Councilman Bob Leach, a leading advocate of the ban, told the Greenville Piedmont (6/10/86) "I'm excited, I'm pleased -- it is one of the greatest pieces of legislation we've passed since I've been here".

The Council members were under a terrific amount of pressure from the billboard industry to vote down the proposal, but public sentiment was strongly for the billboard ban.

KNOXVILLE GETS TOUGH WITH BILLBOARDS

After a year of debate the Knoxville City Council has passed a tougher billboard control ordinance. The law sets stricter size and spacing requirements and, for the first time requires billboard companies to pay annual fees and provides for a sign inspector. New billboards have also been banned from Knoxville's central business district and from the area surrounding the state university.

"I feel the ordinance is much more than we could have expected two years ago", said billboard control

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advocate Maria Compere, adding "we got most of what we wanted".

Compere is most pleased that billboard companies will be underwriting the costs of inspection. "We're not going to be subsidizing the billboard industry anymore", she said.

INDUSTRY KEEPS MONEY FLOWING TO CONGRESS

Common Cause reports that in 1985,

the billboard industry paid \$100,664 in honoraria to members of Congress. This placed the billboard lobby third among all givers. The industry was only outspent by defense contractors and the tobacco industry. (Honoraria are fees paid to members for speeches, articles, or appearances. Unlike political contributions honoraria go directly into the member's pocket).

The Coalition for Scenic Beauty needs your help in our fight to save our scenery. We are at a critical turning point. Please sit down right now and write or call your Senators and Congressman. Then take a minute to write out a check for \$20.00 or more to help us fight the ugliness lobby.

Please join us in helping to stop the ruthless destruction of our scenic heritage.

Please send \$20, \$30, \$50, \$100 or whatever you can today to: Coalition for Scenic Beauty, 44 E. Front Street, Media, PA 19063.

___ **YES**, I want to help Save Our Scenery. Enclosed is my check for \$ _____

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