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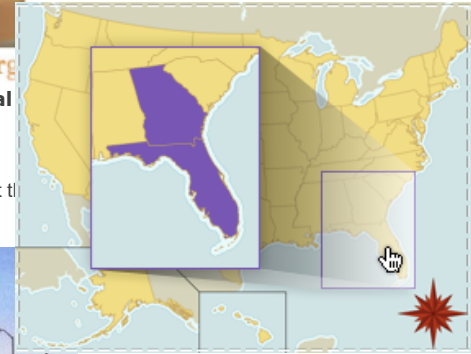
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[Scenic Quote of the month:](#)

["Something like that is designed specifically to draw the driver's attention away from what they're doing to see an advertisement."](#)

[~ Stuart Hodes, AAA spokesman, in reference to a new digital billboard on I-4 in Orlando, Fla., which is causing concern](#)

Get Local



New amendment proposes "vegetative" billboards along federal highways

There is an amendment being floated in the halls of Congress that would corrupt the legacy of Lady Bird Johnson in the most perverse way possible.

Scenic America has just received information that a company called Grologo is trying to get permission to place what are called "vegetative" billboards on the public right of way on federal Interstate and federal-aid highways. A vegetative billboard is basically a logo or advertisement made out of flowers, shrubs and other plants.



Simulated image of a proposed vegetative ad in Texas several years ago

Sen. Harry Reid has reportedly sneaked an amendment into the long-delayed technical corrections bill for SAFETEA-LU, the massive federal highway bill that passed over two years ago, that will give Grologo what it has spent hundreds of thousands of lobbying dollars to get: access to the federal right-of-way for its "vegetative" billboards.

Imagine the Golden Arches made out of yellow flowers sitting in the median of your local Interstate. They want to place these horizontal billboards on the right-of-way itself, which includes the median and the embankments near overpasses or along the shoulder of the road. This is public property, not private. And this is, in a word, **illegal**.



Image of a proposed vegetative ad in Texas several years ago

Floral billboards of this sort directly violate several federal laws, including the Highway Beautification Act and the core statutes that spell out the proper use of the federal right-of-way. Multiple laws would need to be waived in order to give this company this special right. This issue has come up at least twice before, once in [1997 in Florida](#) and once in [2000 in California](#). In both instances, FHWA told

the states they could not implement such a program since it would be patently illegal.

Although the language of the provision remains secret, our understanding is that a five-state pilot project will be authorized to, for the first time in U.S. highway history, turn over the public right-of-way to advertisers. No one has been consulted, other than the company. No input has been sought from the public or state departments of transportation.

Scenic America strongly supports highway beautification efforts, of course, including

over its potential as a safety hazard.

natural plantings, but to place corporate logos on the roadside using vegetation turns highway beautification on its head and is a particularly perverse attempt to undermine existing sign regulations and restrictions on commercializing public lands.

Scenic Trivia Question

Q: How many miles comprise the National Highway System (NHS)?

A: The NHS of the United States is comprised of approximately 160,000 miles of roadway, which includes the Interstate Highway System as well several other subsystems of roadways.

It would be hard to imagine a more egregious slap at the legacy of Lady Bird Johnson than to use vegetation to undermine her legislative legacy. A billboard is a billboard no matter whether it is horizontal or vertical or whether it is made out of vinyl and steel or shrubbery and flowers.



Image of a proposed vegetative ad in Texas several years ago

Any exception to the very clear prohibitions on commercialization of the right of way would set a damaging precedent that would open a Pandora's Box of ugliness and commercial exploitation along the nation's highways, regardless of whatever alleged financial benefit is promised for states or localities from such an arrangement.

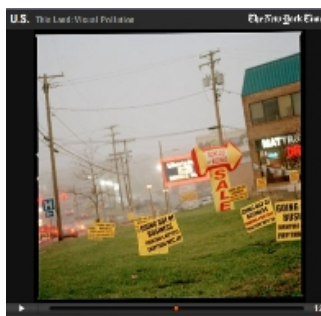
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We expect that this amendment will be taken up when Congress reconvenes in January. Scenic America will, of course, remain vigilant and keep you informed of any new developments.

Scenic America featured in 'This Land' column in *The New York Times*

Dan Barry's weekly New York Times column 'This Land' is currently titled "A Place Just Like Every Other Place. Only Not," and features an interview with Kevin Fry, Scenic America president, and Brad Cownover, Scenic America's director of conservation services. [Click here](#) to view the article.



Click the image above to watch and listen to a slideshow narrated by Kevin Fry

Fry and Cownover accompanied Barry on a tour of a suburban landscape near Washington, D.C., and discussed the impact of the built environment on the collective human condition. Barry juxtaposes the unique, unforgettable American landscapes he has seen with the "familiar and hideous commercial stretches that all but dare us to guess the state we are in."

Supplementing the column is a [fantastic slide show](#) narrated by Kevin Fry.

America's Byways interviews Cownover about preserving the landscape

Brad Cownover, Scenic America's director of scenic conservation services, was recently interviewed by the [America's Byways Resource Center](#) for their bi-monthly publication *Vistas*. In the interview Cownover talks about the threats facing America's agricultural landscapes and rural heritage, scenic viewsheds, and scenic conservation issues surrounding scenic byways. [Click here](#) to download *Vistas* as a PDF. Cownover's interview is on page 5.



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