



# VIEWS

SCENIC MISSOURI'S MISSION: To preserve and enhance Missouri's scenic beauty

## A Letter From William Least Heat-Moon

Seven years ago three ordinary Missourians, dismayed and distraught over the utter trashing of the scenery along our highways, sat down in the Flat Branch pub and restaurant in Columbia and laid out a plan to return our roads, particularly our interstates, to the beauty they once had. With an innocence filled with optimism, we thought we could begin seeing billboards come down in three or four years.

We know better now. We know now it will take longer, but that in no way means we will give up on this grand cause of returning our byways to a harmony with our landscape.

During those early days, the industry challenged us legally in every way they could dream up, even a lawsuit to deprive us of our name Scenic Missouri - they claimed it was theirs! Each of these challenges, with your support, we took on and won. Our record against them was perfect. We felt the time had arrived to put this grand cause before all Missourians.

As you know, last November we took our first defeat. But some defeat it was! More than a million Missourians voted for Proposition A, the proposal to clean up the blight of thirteen thousand billboards. Through a four million dollar campaign against us, one built entirely on bold-faced misrepresentations and blatant lies, the industry managed to create just enough doubt in the minds of just enough voters to squeak out a win.

While we worked on the issue last year, the despoilers, foreseeing a change to their lucrative pollution, went on a frenzy of putting up even more signs. Because of that greed, our interstates today are so overloaded that many billboards are blank, or they display messages from "God" written by advertising executives, or, in an irony of ironies, they sprawl out huge "scenic" photographs that block the genuine beau-

ty behind them.

This stunning disregard for a truly scenic Missouri has further aroused all citizens as it has you and our board.

The most recent survey of your views on our future courses of action reveals that more than ninety percent of you want to see another campaign. Such battles are mightily expensive. It cost the

industry three times our outlay to defeat Proposition A, a price even their huge coffers noticed. The polluters understand we express the hearts and minds of too many Missourians to ignore, and they know the lies they propagated the first time will not work again. As a result, one of the largest national billboard companies recently proposed working with us to find ways to reduce the number and size of signs. We're willing to listen to their proposals. But, even more, we are listening to you.

Because of the success of our seven-year campaign, new strategies are now open to us and some of those we are pursuing. One of them in particular needs a handful of committed citizens to speak out to Missouri legislators and make them hear us and get them to see the ugliness that assails them in every quarter of the state.

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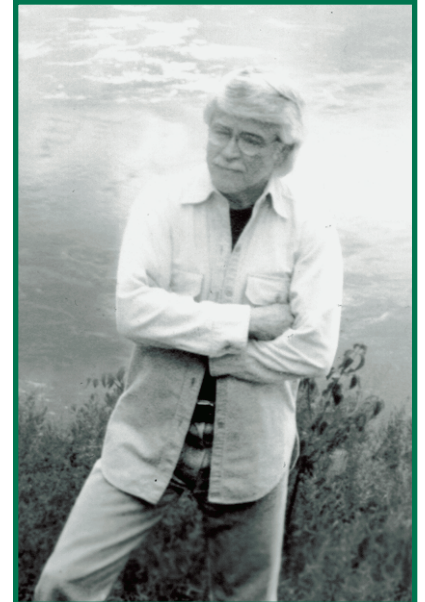



Photo: Edward Richardson

## I-70 Across America: Missouri - "The Show-Me the Billboard State"

### State Ranks 1<sup>st</sup> in Billboards

Some have joked that Missouri's official state motto, "The Show-Me State," be changed to "The Show-Me The Billboards State." Unfortunately, a recent study comparing billboards in Missouri to the other five states mainly traversed by I-70 provides fodder for this idea. The study, conducted by Scenic Missouri in August and September of this year, compared billboard inventory data supplied by Department of Transportation officials in Missouri, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Kansas and Colorado. Not only must travelers on I-70 in Missouri endure dangerous congestion, heavy truck traffic and dilapidated pavement, they are forced to look at more billboards than any of the other five states.

In fact, with 1,206 billboard structures, I-70 in Missouri has on the average three times as many billboards per mile as the other states. With nearly 2,000 billboard advertising faces, I-70 in Missouri has nearly twice as many as Kansas, two and one-half times as many as Indiana, over three times as many as Illinois, over nine times as many as Ohio and nearly twenty times as many as Colorado. I-70 is so over built with billboards that in some areas 20%-40% are vacant. I-55, I-44, Highways 54 and 65 are, along some stretches, even more visually polluted than I-70.

Scenic Missouri calls for the Missouri General Assembly to place a moratorium on new billboard construction on all interstate and primary highways, with an exception for billboards of less than 100 square feet if permitted by local ordinance. 

I-70 Billboard Faces by State

