

# ANNOUNCEMENT OF A BILLBOARD REFORM ACT

## Press Conference with State Rep. Amanda Stuck

July 27, 2019

A small group of interested persons gathered as state Rep. Amanda Stuck of Appleton approached the grassy strip along an edge of the parking lot at Houdini's Escape Gastropub on Oneida Street in Appleton. On a six foot high wooden fence which stretched along the back edge of the grass was a five-by-six-foot poster with a patchwork of photos of Wisconsin fields, forests and barns: the site of the Press Conference. A cameraman/reporter from Channel 5 TV in Green Bay arrived about 11:00am.

Rep. Stuck made a statement about her new bill (2019 LRB2251) which she is calling the Billboard Reform Act. She said that non-conforming billboards are an unsightly and expensive problem across Wisconsin. She referred to the principles of the federal Highway Beautification Act of 1965 in controlling billboards and she stated the importance of the special Wisconsin scenery which people enjoy and which is so important to tourism. She said the bill repeals the changes made to state law in recent years which favor billboard companies at the expense of taxpayers.

Then Charlie Mitchell spoke in support of the bill on behalf of Citizens for a Scenic Wisconsin. Charlie introduced himself as a businessman who, travelling by car on the state's highways, noticed an increase in roadside billboards causing a degradation of the landscape. Charlie said that the bill will be effective in improving Wisconsin scenery because it prohibits new billboards going up and strengthens the regulation of non-conforming billboards such that they will eventually be taken down. He said that not allowing trees to be cut down to improve views of billboards is also a benefit.

Charlie cited several reasons and justifications for this Act. Smart phones and GPS are now much more effective than billboards in providing information to the traveler on the highway. The idea that billboards are necessary to doing business was never entirely valid – seven other states have billboard bans or restrictions, and many Wisconsin cities limit or prohibit billboards as a beautification measure. It costs the DoT millions of taxpayer dollars to remove billboards for highway widening.

The story of the Billboard Reform Act led the CBS WFRV-TV Channel 5 news broadcasts at 6: and 10:00pm. The story also aired on WHBV radio in Appleton four times in the afternoon.