



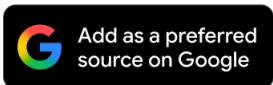
Friday, May 1,  
2026



Today's  
Paper

EDITORIAL

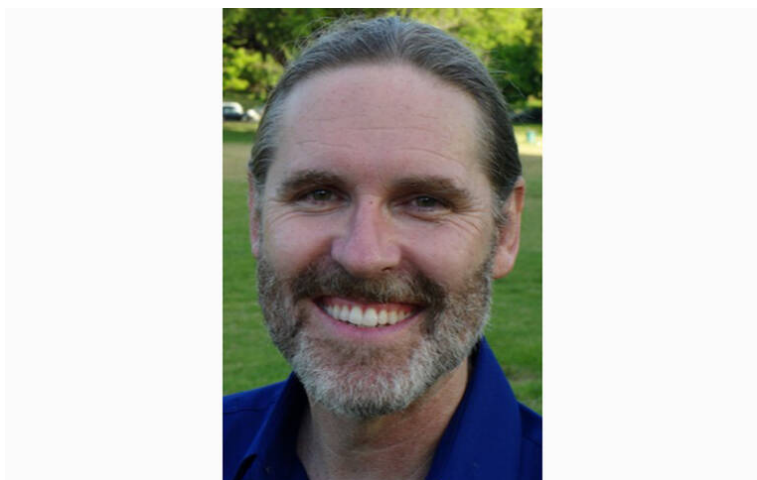
ISLAND VOICES



# Column: Say no to outdoor advertising signs that will ruin public views

By Winston Welch

April 27, 2026



Winston Welch

Two bills now before legislative conference committees — Senate Bill 2074 and SB 2353 — would begin trading Hawaii’s identity and public views for marginal revenue. The state Legislature must say no.

When you drive the H-1 Freeway at dusk and the Koolau Mountains are catching the last light, that view does not belong to the state. Everyone who lives here and those who will inherit these islands share that view. These bills ask us to begin treating that shared inheritance as something to be bought and sold.

Hawaii is one of only a handful of states with a near-total prohibition on offsite outdoor advertising. That did not happen by accident.

ADVERTISING

# CANYON SPIRIT

In 1912, residents pushed back against commercial signs spreading across Diamond Head, the Pali, and Punchbowl. By 1927, the last billboard company in Hawaii had been dismantled. The Legislature codified that choice: some things are simply not for sale.

SB 2074 and SB 2353 would begin to undo that.

SB 2074 would authorize the leasing of “naming rights” for the new Aloha Stadium and direct advertising revenue into a special fund. That may sound modest. But it embeds commercial identity into a public facility without standards governing those agreements, without public input before deals are struck, and with no practical way to undo them once signed.

## Don't miss out on what's happening!

Stay in touch with breaking news, as it happens, conveniently in your email inbox. It's FREE!

Ente

Sign Up

By clicking to sign up, you agree to Star-Advertiser's and Google's [Terms of Service](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). This form is protected by reCAPTCHA.

Earlier versions went further, removing the only provision limiting exterior signage and opening the door to broader advertising. That authorization was removed at the final stage in the House Finance Committee, after the bill had been expanded to allow it.

SB 2353 goes further still. It authorizes digital, illuminated, animated outdoor advertising throughout the Stadium Development District, adjacent to communities, the H-1 Freeway and Kamehameha Highway, and near Daniel K. Inouye International Airport.

The House added a narrow restriction on signage placed on top of the stadium facing a state highway, but that is not a meaningful safeguard.

The bill still contains no enforceable limits

on content, size, brightness, placement, or hours of operation — a gap the House Finance Committee acknowledged. It also does not address how these displays will be experienced in surrounding neighborhoods.

It authorizes the activity now and studies the impacts later.

A study is not a safeguard.

Together, these bills establish a public development zone where advertising becomes part of the financial structure of the place itself. Earlier drafts of SB 2353 extended into Waikiki before being scaled back — a reminder that once these frameworks are established, their reach tends to expand, not contract.

Once that model exists, it will not remain in one district. This is how long-standing protections erode through incremental exceptions that become the new norm.

The concerns are not theoretical. Public testimony across multiple sessions has been consistently and overwhelmingly opposed. The state's attorney general has flagged a similar bill as constitutionally vulnerable. The state Department of Budget and Finance has raised bond-related risks. This newspaper's editorial board found that

SB 2353 had close to zero limiting parameters and does not pass muster.

Even optimistic projections place advertising revenue at \$2 million to \$3 million annually, against a broader project exceeding \$2 billion. The revenue is marginal. The change is permanent.

The fundamental choice before us is whether we are willing to give up our shared public visual space in exchange for corporate advertising that intrudes on what makes Hawaii different.

For more than a century, Hawaii has protected its shared visual environment as part of the public trust. These bills would begin to give it away.

The conference committees must say no.

**Winston Welch is executive director of The Outdoor Circle, founded in Honolulu in 1912.**



2 COMMENTS



