

Keeping the Night Sky Dark

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A veto by Gov. Janet Napolitano on Monday is keeping the night sky dark.

We're glad she did what she did. Her veto of HB 2461 protects a precious part of Arizona—night skies that lend to astronomical research.

The bill the governor vetoed would have allowed illuminated and flashing billboards along Arizona roads.

This would have further tainted our night sky with light pollution.

Local astronomers have been vocal about light pollution and the need for light fixtures that minimize the impact on the night's sky.

We can't agree more.

Many people have moved to Arizona to look at and study the skies. Why? Because it offers a venue that in many places is untouched by the glare of city lights.

We need to cater to this activity, not impact it. And we don't need advertisements along our roadways that distract drivers and tarnish the night sky.

The Legislature also proposed two other bills—HB 2462 and SB 1193—loosening regulations on billboards.

HB 2462 was approved by the governor. SB 1193 was vetoed.

Local governments have discussed this issue and some have acted on it. The governments require light fixtures that won't spill extra light into the night sky.

The governor also made a good point when vetoing the bill: Astronomical research pays off for the state.

The University of Arizona, including the UA South campus in Sierra Vista, has facilities with equipment to observe the sky.

More than \$1 billion has been invested in Arizona to research the universe. Two Southern Arizona facilities that are well known include the telescopes on Mount Graham near Safford and the Kitt Peak Observatory complex west of Tucson.

And who knows the true economic impact of the amateur astronomers from throughout the state and nation who visit to take a glimpse of the universe. The Sierra Vista area has seen its own influx of amateur astronomers.

We see no reason to have illuminated and flashing billboards along our highways. If anything, it is just another proposal that gives away a part of our state's beauty. The idea needs to stay sidelined, for the sake of astronomy, our rural nature and our state's future.
