

Opening Statement
Senator Sam Brownback
Public Health Summit on Entertainment Violence
July 26, 2000

- I want to welcome each of you to an exciting and unprecedented event: the first Congressional Public Health Summit on Entertainment Violence.

- Standing with me are several Senate and Congressional colleagues, and representatives from our nation's most prominent and prestigious public health organizations –**Dr. Michael Rich** from the American Academy of Pediatrics, **Dr. Michael Brody** from the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, **Dr. Jessica Henderson-Daniel** and **Dr. Karen Dill** from the American Psychological Association, and **Dr. J. Edward Hill** from the American Medical Association. Each of them represents a distinct branch of the public health community – which has conducted its own studies, research, and analyses. And all of whom have joined together today to articulate and share the understanding of their fellow medical and public health professionals.

- This summit has a specific focus: to set out what we know about how violent entertainment affects our society in general, and children in particular.

- For a long time, there has been a great deal of misinformation about what, exactly, the impact of exposure to violent entertainment is. When I have raised the issue of whether movies, TV, music, and video games which glamorize violence can harm children with those in the entertainment industry, the response is predictable. They say that the studies are inconclusive. That no one knows for sure. That kids know better. That there's no proof of harm.

- But *the verdict on virtual violence is now in*. This summit will reveal exactly what the consensus of the public health community is: *that violent entertainment is a public health hazard*.
- We do not allege that watching a violent movie or playing a violent game predetermines that a child will become violent. This statement is simply an encapsulation of common sense: what we see, hear, and experience shapes our attitudes, our assumptions, and our perspective, which in turn, affects our behavior.
- We know that the typical American child spends an enormous amount of time each week watching television and movies, listening to music, and playing video games. By the estimates of some of the groups here, the average child spends more than 30 hours a week being entertained. In contrast, the Carnegie Foundation reported that the average American child spends less than 20 minutes a day alone in conversation with their mom, and less than five minutes a day alone in conversation with their dad. By these estimates, it is no exaggeration to say that some kids spend more time listening to Marilyn Manson than to Mom, and more time playing “Doom” than playing with Dad.
- Around the room are some examples of some of the music lyrics kids are listening to. These may seem over the top, but they are among the most popular in the land. In fact, this album by Eminem is the most popular in the land – it has been #1 on the *Billboard* charts for the last six weeks.
- Obviously, parents have the primary responsibility to raise their children, and protect them. But parents need good information to make good choices for their children. They deserve to know whether violent movies, TV programs, music and video games can pose health risks to their children – and if so, what kind of risk it is, and how great it might be. The more information they have, the more informed their choices will be.
- This summit aims to provide parents, and consumers, with such information. Up to this point, there has been a good deal of misinformation floating around. Which is why we

have gathered the most prominent, prestigious and respected medical and public health organizations in the world here today, to discuss this issue.

- We are not here to dictate to Hollywood what they can or cannot do. I do not believe that is the role, or the right, of us in Congress. But the public has the right to know the truth about the public health risks and dangers of exposing their children to violent entertainment. The impact of violent entertainment merits more public discussion – because it affects the public. It is my hope, and strong belief, that this summit today will be a watershed in the way people think about entertainment violence – and that through empowering parents with more information on the health risks it poses, they will be better equipped to protect their children.