

Opening Statement
FTC Report on Marketing Violence to Children
Senator Sam Brownback
September 13, 2000

- Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the widespread interest in today's hearing. It's been said that every good idea goes through three stages: first, it is ridiculed. Second, it is bitterly opposed. And last, it is accepted as obvious. Over the past two years, I have chaired three hearings in this committee on the effectiveness of labels and ratings, the impact of violent interactive entertainment products on kids, and the first hearing on whether violent products were being marketed to children. When we started out, these ideas were ridiculed. Bitter opposition shortly followed. And today, in reviewing the FTC report, the fact that harmful, violent entertainment is being marketed to kids is now being accepted as clear and obvious. We've come a long way.

- I appreciate the industry executives who have come here today. I wish that the many other executives who were invited to testify would have seen fit to show up. I have to say, Mr. Chairman, that many in the entertainment industry has shown themselves to be remarkably unresponsive to this Committee. At each of these three hearings on violent entertainment I chaired in this committee, we invited numerous industry executives – including representatives of Time-Warner, Seagrams, Universal, Sony, Viacom, BMG, Nintendo, Hasbro, ID Software, Midway Games, and Interscope Records. Unfortunately, none of these enormous

communications companies could be bothered to communicate with the United States Senate. And today, I see that not one single movie studio representative managed to show up.

- Mr. Chairman, this is disgraceful. I appreciate the industry executives who have made it here today; I am deeply troubled by the fact that so few of them choose to do so. Their absence today is a sharp contrast to the presence of so many concerned parents. And their silence on an issue of such importance to so many speaks volumes about their disregard both for concerned parents and vulnerable children.
- This is an important hearing, and an important report. When I introduced legislation last year, which was cosponsored by several of my colleagues here today, to authorize this FTC report, I did so because the anecdotal evidence was overwhelming that violent, adult-rated entertainment was being marketed to children. It's been said that much of modern research is the corroboration of the obvious by obscure methods. This study does corroborate what many of us have long suspected – and it does so unambiguously and conclusively. It shows, as Chairman Pitofsky noted, that the marketing is “pervasive and aggressive.” It shows that entertainment companies are literally making a killing off of marketing violence to kids.
- The problem is not one industry, but can be found in virtually every form of entertainment: movies, music, and video and PC games. Together, they take up the majority of a child's leisure hours. And the messages they get, and images they see, often glamorize brutality, and trivialize cruelty.

- Take, for example, popular music. The FTC report notes that all of the stickered music they surveyed was target-marketed to kids. Around the room here on easels are some examples of that music. This stuff is not for the faint-hearted. But the music industry has decided it's for children. Nor are these obscure songs. The lyrics from Eminem (*pronounced M & M*) are from an album that is currently at number 3 on the billboard chart, after spending two months this summer at number one. He received 3 awards from MTV last week. The other two featured artists – DMX and Dr. Dre (*pronounced "Dray"*) are currently in the top 30 on the charts, and peaked at number 1 and 2, respectively.
- As I read over this report, I see that *100 percent !* of the stickered albums that the FTC surveyed were target-marketed to kids. This is both troubling and fairly predictable. Troubling in that the lyrics you see around the room are target-marketed to young kids – mostly young boys – whose characters, attitudes, assumptions, and values are still being formed, and vulnerable to being warped. And predictable in that there are few fans of such music that are over 20.
- Movies are equally blatant in their marketing to kids, and appalling in their content. Movies have great power – because stories have great power. They can move us, change our minds, our hearts, even our hopes. The movie industry wields enormous influence, and when used responsibly, their works can edify, uplift, and inspire. But all too often, that power is used to exploit. I've seen some movies that are basically two-hour long commercials for the misuse of guns.

- The movie industry has had the chutzpah to target-market teen slasher movies to child audiences -- and then insist that the R-rating somehow protects them. From reading this report, it seems clear that the ratings protect the industry from the consumers, not the consumers from the industry.
- Or take video games. When kids play violent video games, they do not merely witness slaughter, they engage in virtual murder. Indeed, the point of what are called “first person shooter” games – that is, virtually all M-rated games -- is to kill as many characters as possible. The higher the body count, the higher your score. Often, bonus points are given for finishing off your enemies in a particularly grisly way.
- Common sense should tell us that positively reinforcing sadistic behavior, as these games do, cannot be good for our children. We cannot expect that the hours spent in school will mold and instruct a child’s mind but that hours spent immersed in violent entertainment will not. We cannot hope that children who are entertained by violence will love peace.
- This is not only common sense, but a public health consensus. In late July, I convened a public health summit on entertainment violence. At the summit, we released a joint statement signed by the most prominent and prestigious members of the public health community – including the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, the Academy of Family Physicians, the American Psychiatric Association, and the Academy of Child and

Adolescent Psychiatrists. I want to read you part of the statement, signed by all of the above organizations:

- “Well over 1000 studies... point overwhelmingly to a **causal** connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children. The conclusion of the public health community, based on over thirty years of research, is that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values and behaviors, particularly in children.”
- There is no longer a question as to whether exposing children to violent entertainment is a public health risk. It is -- just as surely as tobacco or alcohol. The question is: what are we going to do about it? What does it take for the entertainment industry, and its licensees and retailers, to stop exposing children to poison?
- There is an additional element that this generally excellent report fails to cover: and that is the cross-marketing of violence to kids. That is, there is ample proof that the entertainment industry not only directly targets children with advertising and other forms of promotion, but also markets to them via toys. Walk into any toy store in America, and you will find dolls, action figures, hand held games, and Halloween costumes based on characters in R-rated movies, musicians noted for their violent lyrics, and M-rated video games. Let me give you just a few examples..... [Show games]
- This is an equally egregious aspect of marketing violence to children, and one that has not yet been adequately investigated. We need to do so. I look forward to working with the FTC to ensure that this is done.

- Another immediate step we need to take is to ensure that these industries can enter into a code of conduct. Consumers and parents need to know what their standards are – how high they aim, or how low they will go. I’ve introduced legislation, S. 2127, that would provide a very limited anti-trust exemption that would enable, not require, but enable companies to do just that.
- There are other steps we should consider, but a rush to legislation is not one. Frankly, imposing six-month deadlines on an industry one is actively fleecing for money is unlikely to bring about lasting reform. We need to encourage responsibility and self-regulation. We need a greater corporate regard for the moral, physical and emotional health and well-being of children.
- This report is an important step in that direction -- because although it concentrates on the tip of the iceberg, it sheds light on the magnitude of the problem. It shows kids are being exploited for profit, and exposes a cultural externality in this market.
- Ultimately, we have asked entertainment executives to come here to work with us, and to appeal to your sense of citizenship, and to your corporate conscience. Our appeal is this: please do the right thing. Stop making hyper-violent entertainment which glamorizes cruelty, degrades women, and trivializes abuse. And stop marketing such vile stuff to kids. Just stop it. You don’t need to do it, it is morally wrong to do it, and you are hurting kids. So just stop.

