

**REMARKS OF
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BEYOND CENSORSHIP: TECHNOLOGIES AND POLICIES TO GIVE
PARENTS CONTROL OVER CHILDREN'S MEDIA CONTENT
KAISER FAMILY FOUNDATION/NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION
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Good morning and thank you Kaiser Family Foundation and New America Foundation for bringing us together today and for all the trail-blazing work you do in behalf of enlightened public policy. And thank you for a seat at the table with this “dream team” of Senate leaders and other experts who have done so much to advance the cause of children and media. I am honored to be here with all of you.

At the FCC we continue every day to hear from parents across the country about child-unfriendly programming on the people's airwaves. They are concerned about Big Media's race to the bottom; they wonder if there even *is* a bottom. They have a right to be concerned. With young people watching more than 1000 hours of TV a year, with a bombardment of sex and violence wrapped between tens of thousands of commercials, parents wonder what ever happened to the security of knowing that when they turn on the television, they won't be shocked or embarrassed by what the airwaves bring to their children. TV, radio, cable and now the Internet are perhaps the most powerful forces at work in the world today. When used for good, they enlighten minds, convey powerful ideas, educate and lay the foundation for human development. But when they are used to misinform and mislead they can—and do—inflict lasting harm.

Who is responsible for protecting kids from inappropriate media? My answer is that we all have roles to play. It will take our combined efforts to ensure that children have greater access to positive educational programming—and less access to pre-canned, nationalized and vulgarized fare that is aimed chiefly at selling products.

First, parents can do more. Begin with household rules, of course. Then use the technology tools. With accurate and understandable tools, parents can monitor, and to some extent control, what their children see and hear. The V-Chip still has potential but not enough takers. A new generation of technology tools could help. Ratings systems could do more if uniformly applied. We need to make sure that all these tools are easy to use, so parents stretched thin trying to protect their children from coarsened programming can have the resources to be effective.

Second, industry can do more. For openers, it can provide the tools and teach us how to use them. But the industry's stewardship of the people's airwaves doesn't stop there. Industry needs to step up to the plate and begin exercising some self-discipline during the hours when children are likely to be in the audience. That means more family-friendly programming. It means doing something, at long last, about gratuitous violence. It means protecting youngsters from viewing unsuitable ads and promotional material.

And it means broadcasters reestablishing meaningful voluntary industry codes of conduct like they had for 60 years for radio and 30 years for television. Cable could step up to this dialogue, too.

Third, when broadcasters step over the line, the FCC has a duty to act. We have a mandate to protect children from indecent programming. That's the law—not for the FCC to debate but for the FCC to enforce. It's a difficult and sensitive issue—we all know that—but I believe if we all do our jobs and do them well, there will be less—not more—need for the FCC to step in.

Fourth is the role of Congress to shape the laws, to change them when our people's representatives deem that timely. Indeed, even as we speak today, Congress is focusing on parts of this issue. But it could lead the way in putting the public interest back on the public airwaves.

Two more points: The more I grasp the pervasive influence of media on our children, the more I worry about the media literacy gap in our nation's educational curriculum. We need a sustained K-12 media literacy program—something to teach kids not only how to use the media but how the media uses them. Kids need to know how particular messages get crafted and why, what devices are used to hold their attention and what ideas are left out. In a culture where media is pervasive and invasive, kids need to think critically about what they see, hear and read. No child's education can be complete without this.

Finally, the media issue that trumps all others in affecting kids—media ownership. Very soon the FCC will take another crack at determining how America's television, radio, newspapers and even the Internet will look for years to come. Who will control the media? How many—or rather—how few companies? For what purposes? How do we get real local and community news? Clashing points of view? Local creativity? Innovation and diversity? What about family-friendly fare?

Three years ago the FCC stumbled badly when it decided, over the objections of Commissioner Adelstein and me, to surrender the awesome power of our news, information and entertainment to a handful of mega-media companies—a horrid idea that prompted 3 million worried Americans to contact us in opposition. The Senate quickly voted to overturn these ill-considered rules, the House would have if it had been allowed to vote, and then the decision was sent back to us by the Third Circuit Court. So we're back where we started three years ago and the outcome is up in the air and up to you. If you want a world where parents have input into media content, a world where media is about more than selling eyeballs to advertisers, a world where there is wholesome programming for children, then you need to participate proactively in this issue. Insist upon public FCC hearings. Insist upon getting answers to the tough questions ***before*** we vote. Insist—I intend to—on examining the relationship between media consolidation and family-friendly programming. Don't we owe our kids that much? The involvement of everyone in this room is vital to the future of the media, the future of our children and the future of our country.