

**Prepared Remarks of FCC Chairman Kevin J. Martin
at announcement of
Task Force on Media and Childhood Obesity: Today and Tomorrow**

**U.S. Capitol
Washington, DC**

September 27, 2006

Thank you, Senator Brownback, for inviting me to join you here today for the launch of a task force charged with addressing the role of media in childhood obesity.

Both Congress and the Commission have taken steps to ensure that broadcasters are mindful of the unique needs and vulnerabilities of children. Indeed, in the Children's Television Act of 1990, Congress enacted limits on the amount of advertising that could be shown during children's television programming.

By the time the average child is 18 years old, he or she has spent between 10,000 and 15,000 hours watching television and has been exposed to more than 200,000 commercials. Congress also noted that it is well established by scientific research that children are uniquely susceptible to the persuasive messages contained in television advertising.

Today, children watch two to four hours of television per day and view 40,000 ads per year. And the majority of these commercials are for candy, cereal, soda and fast food. And while the amount of television watched by American kids has been increasing in the past twenty-five years, so have their waistlines. Just this month the Institute of Medicine found that one-third of American children are either obese or at risk for obesity. This is consistent with the Center for

Disease Control's findings a few years ago that, since 1980, the proportion of overweight children ages 6-11 has doubled and the number of overweight adolescents has tripled.

While children's television viewing has significantly increased, their susceptibility to television ads has not decreased. According to the Kaiser Family Foundation, children under 6 cannot distinguish between programming content and advertising. And children under 10 do not have cognitive ability to understand a commercial's persuasive intent.

Small children can't weed out the marketing messages from their favorite show, especially when marketing campaigns feature favorite TV characters like SpongeBob and Scooby-Doo. There is no doubt that children's advertising is big business. The Kaiser Family Foundation also found that fast food companies alone spend \$3 billion per year targeting kids.

The research linking childhood obesity with media and advertising to children troubles me as a parent and as Chairman of the FCC.

That is why I was so pleased to accept Senator Brownback's invitation for the Commission to participate in a new joint task force that will build on the good work that has already been done on this topic; some of it done by people here with us today.

As the Senator mentioned, the task force will assemble representatives from the food, television, and advertising industries, along with consumer advocacy groups and health experts, to work together to address this important issue. When the task force has completed its work, the FCC

will issue the task force report to summarize what we have learned, encourage best practices for industry and continue to educate American parents. We all have a responsibility to promote and protect our children's welfare.

So I appreciate all the organizations that have joined us in this effort, some of whom are represented here today: The American Psychological Association, Children Now, Disney, the Beverly LaHaye Institute, and Parents Television Council. Thank you for coming. I also want to thank Senator Brownback and Commissioner Tate for championing this issue. Thank you.

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