

AAP Remarks

Thank you, Dr. Rosenberg. And thanks to Dr. Mary Anne McCaffree and the rest of the American Academy of Pediatrics for inviting me to be a part of your Legislative Conference this year. I understand that this is the 18th year that pediatricians have come to this event to gain the skills necessary to become effective advocates of children's health concerns, and this could not be a better moment in time for your advocacy! I can think of no better voice to represent these issues than you- the pediatricians treating our children. For all of your extraordinary work, I would like to thank you, not just as an FCC commissioner, but as a proud mother of three. My work with pediatricians spans several decades—of course beginning with our own pediatrician-Dr. David Thombs one of the most respected pediatricians in Tennessee, but also in larger, public policy issues such as expanding ESPDT in our Medicaid program you all have undoubtedly heard about-TennCare; helping write a separate chapter in our mental health code for children and youth, representing abused and neglected children in Juvenile court for many years, and one of my most prized honors: being selected by the TN Chapter as its "Friend of the Child" recipient for work

trying to get the SCHIP program for Tennessee; which 10 years later may finally become a reality!

As you can imagine, I give a lot of speeches about important issues facing the FCC and indeed our country: from our new Homeland Security Bureau, to the digital transition (which, by the way, please go to our website and get the consumer guide before you purchase one of those big expensive TVs that may not work after Feb. 09!!), to some of the largest corporate mergers in US history, to requiring all telecom providers to coordinate E911 calls, to those you probably read about the most: indecency and content related issues on TV.

However, when I went to the FCC, I vowed that I would continue to be a voice for parents and children on issues that we have some authority over. While I am an attorney by training and certainly respect the 1st Amendment, I truly believe that our children are this country's most valuable assets, and the government should treat them as such. You all are the first to know that in order to ensure they reach their greatest potential, we must make certain to create a healthy environment for both their minds *and* their bodies. Obviously, this is a task that every parent faces—and one you assist with almost daily--- but parents cannot do it alone. This is a task that will take our entire society.

With the arrival of digital and satellite television, not to mention cell phones and facebook, we have available to us a seemingly infinite number of platforms of information and entertainment with a click. Along with that, though, our children have gained an exposure to certain imageries and influences that can have a very negative impact on their development. The violence children witness on television can act as a direct counterweight against the attitudes and social lessons that we try to instill in them as parents.

As you may have read recently in the press, Congress asked the FCC to study and report back to them, the effects of television violence on children. The results were, to a mother of 2 boys, not surprising. I especially appreciated the pediatricians and other specialists and researchers who provided strong evidence into the record about the negative effects on children including that the exposure to violent television programs can cause desensitization—losing the ability to be empathetic. Some research confirms that exposure to excessive violence can lead to more aggressive or even violent behavior later in life. While many media companies dispute the research and our report, over 80% of parents agree with us and believe that violent television programs alter their children’s behavior. Such exposure,

as you all know, can also lead to sleep abnormalities, inconsolable nightmares, and even an increased fear of becoming victims themselves. So whether you believe there is a direct corollary to violent behavior, there are numerous negative effects on children ...and *No child deserves that.*

CORE Programming

I don't want to give you the wrong impression, though. This is not about casting blame; this is about harnessing the power and potential of the media to be an exceedingly positive influence on our children. A prime example – in the 1990s, thanks in large part to the collaborative efforts of the FCC, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and others, television stations began airing at least 3 hours of CORE-educational programming for children under age 16 every week, with very limited amounts of commercial time. We have enhanced that recently and even now are working on limitations on the media websites where children are directed. And in 1996, upon the urging of Congress and a number of advocacy groups such as yours, the television industry voluntarily implemented a ratings system for viewers to quickly ascertain the nature of its programming and the age range for which it is appropriate, enabling parents to more easily and more accurately monitor the television viewing of their children.

Ratings Systems

Despite these great strides, though, we still have much more work to do. For example, the ratings system for television programs is significantly inconsistent between networks. Often, one network will perceive a certain level of violence as at least “moderate” and apply a “V” label to the show’s rating. Another network might air the same level of violence and feel that it is less than moderate, applying no warning about violent content whatsoever. Also, of exceptional risk to younger children, much violent content in children’s shows is labeled simply “FV” for fantasy violence. Even fantasy violence, though, can seriously impact a child less than 7 years old. And, sometimes the network will stop with one rating label even if the show actually has sexual content, indecent language AND violence. I think it is time to address these inconsistencies.

To adequately address this problem, the television industry must adopt more consistent, accurate guidelines for rating the content of their programming. These new guidelines should take into account the discrepancies between the networks’ subjective perception of its shows’ content and parents’ assessment – almost 40% of parents feel that TV ratings are inaccurate. At least one study agrees with those parents, citing that 2/3 of high-risk shows with violence were inaccurately rated.

Of course, the debate regarding the impact of violence in the media is not a new one. It actually first drew congressional attention in 1952, when the House convened a hearing on the subject. A year later, the Senate took up the matter. Unfortunately, during the 54 years since then, the entertainment industry has consistently recycled the same rhetoric and spin it used during those hearings, and the problem persists. Though I prefer self-regulation first, the industry has passed on far too many opportunities to do so. The well-being of our children is too important to wait any longer.

Just as in the push for more educational programming, the Academy has great potential to take a leading role in the advancement of more appropriate ratings guidelines. From your unique perspective of both the physical and mental health of children, you can provide state and federal government officials, industry executives, and even parents with a wealth of insights into the proper balance of media exposure for healthy development and methods by which that may be achieved, and I hope you will join in a discussion of improving the entire rating system.

Parental awareness of Violence in the Media

As *you* well know, dealing with children and parents every day, changes on the industry side are only half of the equation, though. Parents must also become more informed about the resources already available to

them to protect their children from violence on television. The ratings system will only be effective if parents understand the descriptor codes. Only about half of all parents are able to identify the “V” as an indicator of violence, and only 12% of parents can define the “FV” as fantasy violence. Almost as many parents, 8%, interpreted “FV” to mean “Family Viewing.”

Additionally, parents are largely unaware of the potential for or even the existence of the V-chip, which parents can use to block out selected programming from their television sets that they do not want reaching their children. Unfortunately, though, 2 in 5 parents are unaware that their televisions are even equipped with the V-chip. Of those who are aware, less than half have actually used it. But of those who have used the V-chip, almost 90% said that it was useful to them in protecting their children from unwanted content.

As parents, we have the responsibility to be aware of what our children watch and to talk to them about what they see in the media. As pediatricians, you have an invaluable role in advocating not only to your elected officials about violence in the media and the tools available to families, but also acting as advocates to parents – informing them about the affects of violent programming on their children, encouraging them to sit down with their children to talk about what they see on television,

explaining the ratings guidelines, or even advising them to just turn off the television sometimes. Nickelodeon, for instance has a “Day of Play” where the screen goes black and it says “GO OUT AND PLAY”. I wish more networks and more parents would do the same; but not just for 1 out of 365 afternoons; but what about limiting TV and computer to the rest of those 364 days a year!

Healthy Lifestyles

In addition to nurturing their mental well-being, though, we must also work to encourage healthy lifestyles and physical well-being. In the past, I focused my energy on advocating for better schools, working toward increasing the rate of childhood immunizations, and representing neglected and abused children. Today, and through our authority to regulate children’s TV, I have turned my attention to a new epidemic that is charging to the forefront of children’s health concerns: *obesity*.

Childhood Obesity

You know the statistics better than anyone in the country. Over 10 million children are obese or at risk of obesity and by some counts 1 in 4 youth and teens are overweight. To parents, the most apparent problem is likely the low self-esteem and even depression that being overweight creates

in young people, but the health consequences are even more staggering. In addition to heart problems, overweight and obese children must contend with significantly higher risks of health defects, such as Type 2 diabetes—which was basically unknown when I grew up—but doubled in prevalence with the rise of childhood obesity.

Costs

While our most pressing concern is that of the well-being of our children, of course, the rising costs associated with this issue must be addressed as well. In a time of concerns over meeting the funding needs of the U.S. health care programs, obesity should be a major focus. While we don't yet know the indirect costs such as child care costs or lost school-time, childhood obesity alone creates over \$150 million in medical expenses. Not to mention that obese children are twice as likely to become obese adults. Obesity-related medical expenses are a growing percentage of our national health care costs, accounting for almost 10% of medical expenses and over \$100 billion dollars, about half of which were covered by Medicare and Medicaid. The pressure on my home state of Tennessee alone is well over a billion dollars a year to be paid for by state health care programs. This national epidemic is putting an unbearable strain on our health care system.

Task Force

So how do we even begin to combat such a colossal crisis? To start, we have to change the eating and fitness habits of our children. Our kids are constantly being bombarded with advertisements for junk foods and soft drinks; not just by the media, but the internet and even inside their own school cafeterias. That's why the FCC and Senators Tom Harkin and Sam Brownback teamed up with your own Marjorie Tharp and representatives from many other organizations, including non-profit groups *and* representatives of the food and beverage and advertising industries, to form the Task Force on Media and Childhood Obesity. Our mission, as you probably know, is to chart out recommendations for advertisers and food manufacturers to approach children through the media with a healthier agenda in mind.

Ad Statistics

The Kaiser Family Foundation recently reported that children between the ages of 2 and 7 watch an average of 12 commercials for food each day. Teenagers see about 17 a day, and 8 to 12 year olds watch 21 food commercials each day. In a time when children are very impressionable and are just becoming independent consumers, that's 7600 food commercials each year! Though parents must take the initiative to monitor their

children's television viewing and to just say "no" when their children ask for foods that are high in fat, salt, and sugar, we can't ask them to stand alone against more than **\$10 billion** of advertising that these industries target at our children every year.

As with the entertainment industry, though, the media and the food and beverage industry are not our enemies. On the contrary, they have the opportunity to become very powerful allies in this fight. For example, the National Advertising Review Council brought together 10 of the largest food and beverage companies, including Kraft, McDonald's, Coca-Cola, and PepsiCo, to establish the Children's Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative, pledging to devote **half their advertising dollars** spent on marketing to children, including Internet and other media forms, to promote **healthier diets and healthier lifestyles**. Nickelodeon has partnered with the Alliance for a Healthier Generation in an attempt to reach out to 2 million kids and encourage them to adopt healthier eating habits and to get more exercise. The Discovery Channel helps families lose weight and has a health challenge annually. Disney has totally changed their properties to serve healthier choices. And there are many more such leaders in the media.

In this fight, there are no enemies. However, there are allies who have not yet reached their full potential.

Children under 8 years old still view 26 junk food ads for every 1 ad about fitness or nutrition. The ratio for preteens is 48 to 1, **and for teenagers, 130 to 1!** Obviously, our children are still receiving an unhealthy, *disproportionate* amount of advertising favoring foods that are high in fat, sodium, and sugar over healthy diets and healthy fitness habits. But how do we know that changes in advertising to children will be effective in curbing their over-consumption of these foods? In the words of Dr. McGinnis, chairman of the Institute of Medicine, “We know it’ll work because advertising works.”

Again, though, while more responsible food advertising practices will help, childhood obesity will not be eliminated simply by changing what they see on television. The responsibility is on all of us – including the government, teachers, parents, doctors, and even the children themselves – to find the solution.

Educational system and Arkansas

Our education systems can, and have, played a major role in this struggle. In Florida, Governor Crist just signed a bill into law mandating at least half an hour of physical education each day in all elementary schools. Those of you from Arkansas have given the rest of us reason to be optimistic. That state, which Gov. Huckabee called the “fatest state in the

union” launched a statewide initiative and began monitoring students’ weight, changing school diets, encouraging active lifestyles, and advising parents of health concerns as a part of the wildly successful Healthy Arkansas initiative, and the rate of childhood obesity was actually halted in its footsteps-in 3 years.

But we still have so much more work to do.

Statistics on TV

Obviously, parents must take personal responsibility as well. In a typical childhood full television and video games, surfing the Web and instant messenger, parents must also learn to turn off the TV and shut down the computer. On average, children spend ***25 hours a week*** watching TV! Compare that to the 30 hours spent in school or the ***meager 17 hours spent with their parents!*** But parents are on the right path. From 1994 to 2003, the number of parents of 3-5 year olds who limited television time rose from 54% to 67%. Parents are beginning to get the message. Luckily, parents aren’t alone. We have pediatricians such as you to advise us on a healthy lifestyle for our children, a responsibility which you must approach not only seriously, but *aggressively*.

Advocacy and Policy

As pediatricians and members of the American Academy of Pediatrics, you are in a unique position to speak with convincing authority on these pressing issues. You deal first-hand with the problems that officials at the state and federal level typically are only able to talk about. You have the ability to act as a direct link between parents & children and policy-makers, helping formulate these policies and then have put them into action yourselves. You've seen the negative effects of violence in the media on young children. You've seen the positive impacts of increased educational programming. And you've even been pained as you've witnessed childhood obesity rates rise among your own patients. I don't think there could be a more convincing source of advocacy than you in America.

The solutions to these problems facing our children will not only be found in the entertainment, advertising, or food manufacturing industries; it won't be found only in our schools or in the government; and it won't be found only with parents either. The answer lies in the cooperation of *all* of those facets of a child's life. This is not any one individual person, government agency, or company's problem. This is all our problem, and we must come together as a *community* to find the solution. Otherwise, we will have failed our children together ... **and they deserve better than that.**

I thank you for your efforts here in Washington and at home and join you in your passion for the betterment of our children's lives. Thank you so very much.

(Brief question and answer session)

(Time: between 17.5 and 18 minutes)