

Remarks of Commissioner Deborah Taylor Tate
At Internet Safety Briefing
“Empowering Parents to Protect Children Online”
October 2, 2007

Thank you all for being here today. I have spent most of my professional career working on issues to improve the lives of children and families, and I continue to be a voice for parents and children at the FCC. Our children are indeed our country’s most valuable natural resource, and we should treat them as such. In order to ensure they reach their greatest potential, we must ensure that they have access to a wealth of educational information in an environment that protects their physical safety and healthy mental development.

Earlier this year, I watched a Dateline special which highlighted many of the dangers associated with Internet use. I was disheartened to discover that 1 in 5 youth, aged 10 to 17, has been sexually solicited online. I am desperately interested in this problem, both as a mother of three, including a college-aged daughter, and a woman who has dedicated my life to improving the world for our children. The Internet and broadband have brought the world to our children. With a click of a mouse, they have access to information about almost anything, and in almost any format. In an instant they can be researching the solar system, or viewing images of the Sistine Chapel, or learning about current events. The opportunities are endless. I, like many parents across the country, never really thought past beneficial opportunities the Internet offers. Today, however, I realize that this technology also presents challenges and dangers.

Parenting is a hard job, and it just got harder. Turning off a television, or taking it out of a bedroom, may take some gumption, but overseeing every avenue that a child can walk down on the Internet is daunting. As parents, none of us would allow our children to leave the house without knowing where they’re going, yet many parents allow their children to explore the Internet without recognizing the very real dangers that cyberspace poses. Too many of us have been laboring under the myth that the Internet is a “safe place” for our children. Through discussions like the one we are engaging in today, we can help parents be more aware of their children’s online activities, and be able to talk to their children about what they access across multiple platforms.

Yes, I believe parents have a responsibility to parent. However, parents cannot do it alone. As the source of an endless highway of information and entertainment, cable and Internet providers also have a

responsibility to assist families in educating their children about the dangers of the Internet, especially the potential dangers of online chatting and posting personal information on blogs and social networking sites. I have been pleased to see members of the industry take initial steps toward this goal.

Microsoft has improved parental controls for its Windows Vista software. Vista allows parents to control which games their children can play online, which programs they can use, and which websites they can visit. Vista also allows families to set up separate user accounts. Parents can set up an account that allows them to have full access to Web content, while limiting the content accessible to their children's accounts.

In February, I attended the launch of the Family Online Safety Institute headed by Stephen Balkham at Kaiser Family Foundation. The Family Online Safety Institute is an international organization that has made ground-breaking improvements in online safety issues. The Institute is committed to innovative, industry-driven solutions, and bringing together the many pre-existing parental education programs to figure out what works- and what doesn't. Perhaps the most encouraging point about this organization is its supporters: companies like AOL, AT&T, Verizon, Microsoft, and Cisco.

In June of this year, the National Cable & Telecommunications Association and Cable in the Classroom announced the launch of a major initiative regarding online safety and literacy, called *Cable Puts You in Control: PointSmart. Clicksafe*. This program is designed to inform parents and educators about the tools available to make the Internet a safe and enriching experience for children, and to raise internet literacy awareness. I welcome initiatives like this and encourage every cable operator and programmer to adopt the code of conduct and best practices, and offer consumer education regarding media literacy.

Also in June, COX Communications, the nation's third largest cable company, in conjunction with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, held the Second Annual National Teen Summit on Internet Safety. Fifteen high school students from Cox communities nationwide participated in discussions on Internet safety and behavior led by children's advocate John Walsh and Miss America 2007 Lauren Nelson. Nelson, whose platform is Internet Safety, shared a personal story with the teens, and explained how important it is to use caution while on the Internet.

Phone companies are also stepping up to the plate. Alltel allows parents to restrict children from accessing inappropriate websites on their cell phones with *Alltel Access Web Parental Controls*. These controls allow

a child's cell phone to access only family-friendly websites. In addition, you can block access to internet chat rooms.

I believe that each of these initiatives are having a positive impact. If we all continue to work together, we will help parents ensure that every "click" is a safe one.