



NEWS

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See *MCI v. FCC*, 515 F.2d 385 (D.C. Cir. 1974).

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COMMISSIONER ADELSTEIN OUTLINES AN AGENDA TO PROTECT AMERICA'S CHILDREN

Washington, D.C. - Today at the Media Institute, Commissioner Adelstein discussed elements of an agenda to empower families and protect children in the digital age of television. Entitled "Stuck in the Mud: Time to Move on an Agenda to Protect America's Children," the speech highlighted concrete steps the Commission, Congress and the industry should take to enhance the viewing experience for families and children on TV and also on the Internet and other platforms.

Acknowledging that the FCC has failed to develop and implement a sustained agenda to protect children since issuing the report on violence and children, Commissioner Adelstein said that "many parents feel like they are losing control, and they're frustrated by a seemingly relentless march of coarse material that is too violent, too sexual, too unhealthy or too commercial for their children."

To address these concerns, Commissioner Adelstein proposed that the Commission, in partnership with industry and public interest stakeholders, take the following steps:

Examine Existence and Availability of Advanced Blocking Technology. Consistent with Senator Mark Pryor's legislation, the Child Safe Viewing Act, which was approved unanimously by the Senate Commerce Committee, the Commission should launch a proceeding immediately to examine comprehensively the existence and availability of advanced blocking technologies and to encourage parents to use them.

Develop National Media Literacy Campaign. The Commission needs to allocate resources to the Media and the Consumer and Government Affairs bureaus to develop a nationwide campaign to inform U.S. households and parents about media literacy and parental controls, such as the V-Chip and other blocking technologies, in coordination with the broadcasting and cable industry, and request additional resources as needed to do so by Congress.

Update and Clarify TV Ratings and Content Labels. Ratings and parental controls should be simple, accessible and easy to use so more people take advantage of them. The TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board should update and clarify the current rating system and the content labels. Even parents who are aware of the V-Chip technology find the TV Parental Guidelines, which were approved by the Commission, to be confusing and unhelpful.

Rate Entertainment Programming, Promotions and Commercials. TV content – entertainment programming, promotions and commercials alike – needs to be rated. The Commission and the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board need to take steps to improve the accuracy and consistency of the ratings. Broadcasters and multi-video operators must ensure that they do not show inappropriate promotions and commercials during programs viewed by young viewers.

Unified Ratings System: A comprehensive approach to protecting America’s children must include improvements to the V-Chip that can provide the basis for a unified ratings standard across all platforms, including broadcast, cable, satellite, DVRs and, to the extent possible, the Internet. For parental controls to succeed, they must be easy to understand, easy to use, and universally accessible.

Promote Third-Party Ratings Systems. The Commission and industry should promote third-party ratings systems that take advantage of the capability of digital TVs. The goal should be to integrate independent ratings into the interactive program guide.

Launch Embedded Advertising in Children’s Programming Proceeding. The Commission should release a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on sponsorship identification and embedded advertising. Specifically, it needs to solicit public comment on whether our existing rules governing commercials in children’s programming adequately promote the policy goals underlying the Children’s Television Act and the sponsorship ID rules. This is especially important with respect to embedded advertising in children’s programming.

Finalize Interactive Advertisement Targeting Children Proceeding. The Commission should quickly move on the 2004 Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on how to implement sensible restrictions on interactive ads targeting children. The Commission tentatively concluded that interactive ads targeting children should be banned. With the growing convergence of television and the Internet, we need to promulgate rules before interactive advertising becomes an established business model.

Host En Banc Summit. The FCC should host a Summit on Protecting America’s Children to encourage all stakeholders to bring their best ideas forward and develop best practices.

Commissioner Adelstein said, “Just because there are no easy answers and no panacea, doesn’t mean we should just give up. The task before us is as enormous as it is urgent. It needs our focus and action now.”

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