

Opening Statement
Senator Sam Brownback
Marketing Violence to Children Hearing
September 28, 2000

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\$ Mr. Chairman, I appreciate your holding this hearing today, and for ensuring that we can have this Afull and frank@exchange of views with those in the movie industry. Up to this point, it has been hard to do so.

\$ I assume that just about everyone here is now familiar with the FTC's report. In looking at the movie industry, the FTC found that the practice of marketing hyper-violent movies to underage audiences is, in their words, Apervasive and aggressive.@ It shows that entertainment companies are literally making a killing off of marketing violence to kids.

\$ Each of the witnesses here today represents an enormously powerful studio. You head up the companies that shape how Americans think, and what they think about B far more so than we do here in the halls of Congress. Movies have the power to edify, uplift, and inspire. But all too often, that power is used to exploit. I've seen some movies that are basically two-hour long commercials for the misuse of guns.

\$ There are many R-rated movies that are not only marketed to children, they appear to be tailor-made for children. So-called Ateen slasher@films, which are set in a high school, and have a cast of teen stars, cannot be said to appeal to adults. Many of them glamorize violence and trivialize its consequences. They target kids with messages that are destructive, debasing, and immoral.

- \$ The target-marketing of violent, R-rated movies to kids is not subtle -- it is aggressive, relentless, and widespread. Some studios have had children as young as ten in focus group meetings. Advertisements for these films have run in teen magazines, been posted on teen-oriented web sites, and aired on TV shows that are the most popular with teenagers. Walk into any toy store in America, and you are likely to find toys, dolls, Halloween costumes and action figures based on characters in R-rated movies.
- \$ I have in my hand, Mr. Chairman, an eye-opening study conducted by the Parents Television Council, which tracked how many R-rated movies were advertised on network television during the *Family Hour* (!) over the last three weeks. What they found was that of the 54 movie ads that aired during the family hour, 45, or 83%, were for R-rated films. I'd like to enter this study into the record. And that's just in the last 3 weeks.
- \$ Yet each time we have heard from any representative of the motion picture industry, they have insisted that it is totally up to parents to police what their children watch. Of course parents have primary responsibility for protecting their kids from harmful, violent entertainment. But that doesn't mean that entertainment companies bear no responsibility at all. Indeed, the whole point of target-marketing to kids is to go around the parents and straight to the kids -- to leave parents out of the loop. It is disingenuous at best for movie executives to insist that parents must shoulder all the responsibility and then make it ever more difficult for them to get information on violent content.
- \$ Marketing violent entertainment to kids is not just distasteful, it is destructive. Common sense tells us that exposing children to entertainment which glorifies

brutality and trivializes cruelty, which glamorizes the abuse of women, and which depicts torture as titillating, cannot be healthy for children. We cannot expect that the hours spent in school will mold and shape a child's mind, but that the hours spent in front of a screen won't. We cannot hope that children who are entertained by violence will love peace.

\$ But this is not only common sense, but a public health consensus. In late July, I convened a summit of the most prominent public health organizations in the country. They all signed on to a joint statement which says, and I quote: "Well over 1000 studies... point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children. The conclusion of the public health community, based on 30 years of research, is that viewing entertainment violence can lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values, and behaviors, particularly in children."

\$ There is not longer a question as to whether exposing children to violent entertainment is a public health risk. It is. The question is: what are we going to do about it?

\$ That is why I want to appeal to each of you individually -- appeal to your sense of conscience and corporate responsibility. Many of you have children. You know that exposing kids to violent entertainment can be a public health risk. And so I ask you: Why not just stop? Stop marketing movies which glamorize violence to kids. Stop making these hyper-violent "teen slasher" movies. Stop putting your formidable resources and brigades of lawyers and lobbyists into finding ways around the few existing guardrails. Just stop it.

\$ I don't believe in government regulation; I support industry self-regulation. But

for self-regulation to work, it has to be meaningful, and it has to be widely practiced. From what the FTC report shows us, the movie industry has a long way to go. And judging from this inadequate response, they show little inclination to get moving.

\$ I find it amazing that the industry won't simply pledge to stop marketing violent, R-rated movies to kids. But so far, they haven't. It means very little to say that you'll look into it... That you'll appoint some staff member to review it.... Or that you'll encourage retailers to do it. Please don't think you're fooling anyone. If you were serious, you would say that you will stop marketing violence to kids on TV, on trailers, in teen magazines, on teen internet sites, in teen-oriented street promotions, and through toys, dolls, costumes and action figures. I hope that you can give us an assurance that you will do this before the end of the hearing today.

\$ It may be naive of me, but I would hope that this report would start a movement within your industry to start a race to the top, instead of a race to the bottom. That you will start looking at films with an eye as to whether they are worthy of the support of a responsible company -- rather than focusing on what you can get away with, or how much money you can make off of an exploitive and irresponsible film. You can make a difference. And for the sake of our children, I hope you will.