

STATEMENT BY SENATOR CLELAND  
Marketing Violence to Children  
September 13, 2000

Mr. Chairman, thank you for holding this hearing in response to the recent Federal Trade Commission (FTC) report on marketing violent entertainment to children. I appreciate your willingness to invite all of the interested parties here to testify on a subject that I feel transcends political parties or interests. As we all know, this report was requested as a result of the horrific shooting spree we witnessed at Columbine High School in Colorado eighteen months ago.

When America watched teen-age children run from their school house like a war zone because of the rampage of two of their classmates, I believe we saw a sea change in America's opinion of decency in the entertainment industry. For the first time, safety became the number one issue in people's education concerns, and parents were in the horrible position of being afraid to send their children to school in their own community. As media reports about the shooters began to come out, people wanted to know how two children could be capable of such brutal actions. One factor appeared to be the strong influence on the boys of movies, music and computer games that had shockingly violent themes and images.

Quite frankly, the FTC report offers startling insight into the entertainment industry's marketing practices to minors. The bottom line, according to the FTC, is that the entertainment industry routinely and aggressively markets to children the very movies, videos, and records that the industry itself has labeled for mature audiences only. Moreover, the entertainment industry advertises these movies, records and video games on television programs, in magazines, and on Internet sites most likely to reach children under 17 years of age.

I looked up one of these web sites with the innocent sounding name, happypuppy.com. Happy Puppy bills itself as the first-ever commercial video games site and the "true voice of today's gamer." Just consider one of the videos Happy Puppy is promoting--*Axercise*. "So I downloaded an ax murderer," the promo states. "There's an ax murderer loose in the dorms, and he's after your neck in *Axercise*. Click through to start the chase."

The FTC report also reveals a disturbing trend among some video game producers. Some of these companies are creating toy action figures based on "M" or "mature" rated games. They state unequivocally on the box that the toy is suitable for "ages 4 and up." Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit for the record an August 13<sup>th</sup> article from The Washington Post entitled, "It's not just a Toy, it's an Indoctrination," and I would like to read from this article:

Primagen is a green creature with five tentacles plus one lobster-like claw and one three-fingered hand. Its blue face--a cross between that of a turtle and ET--looks a bit sad. The

label on the package says Primagen is a Turok character--not that you know what a Turok is--suitable for "ages 4 and up." If [parents buy this action figure], you will be bringing home a Trojan horse. For inside Primagen's box is a "game code," or tip sheet, for *Turok 2: Seeds of Evil*--which is, in fact, an explicitly gory, frighteningly violent video game that is industry-rated "M"--for "mature" players at least 17 years old.

If the video game is for people 17 and up, why is the "game code" in a toy marketed to 4 year olds? To me, this is clearly a deceptive trade practice--just as is the case cited in the FTC report in which an unnamed Hollywood studio reveals that its marketing goal for an R-rated movie--and I quote--"was to find the elusive teen target audience and make sure everyone between the ages of 12-18 was exposed to the film."

The FTC report recommends no Congressional action, but instead improved self-regulation by the industry. While I echo Chairman Pitofsky's sentiments that Congress does not need to be the federal "thought police," I believe we do need to consider enforcement actions against entertainment companies if they do not voluntarily stop marketing violent movies, music and video games to America's children. I personally believe that the industry can make money and still offer a socially responsible product to our children.

We have many witnesses to hear from today, Mr. Chairman, and I look forward to their testimony.