

STATEMENT for Senator Cleland
September 27, 2000
Marketing Violence to Children

Mr. Chairman, thank you for gathering these representatives from the movie industry to testify today. The motion picture ratings system, established in 1968, is the oldest such system and the best known of all the entertainment ratings systems. However, popularity does not excuse the actions revealed in the FTC report. I am talking about using children as young as 10 in focus groups reviewing R-rated movies. I am talking about attempts to market a film showing devastating bomb blasts and using strong language and sexual innuendo to children 6-11 on Nickelodeon. I am talking about one studio's internal marketing report which states, and I quote:

Our goal was to find the elusive teen target audience...To do so, we went beyond the media partners by enlisting young, hip Teen Street Teams to distribute items at strategic teen hangouts such as malls, teen clothing stores, sporting events, Drivers Ed classes, arcades and numerous other locations.

This type of behavior is inappropriate if not ethically questionable. The marketing areas over which this industry has control, it should control.

Although there is a role for parents in this mix, the industry can act as well. I am encouraged by the early decision by Disney not to show trailers for R-rated films on its ABC network before 9 p.m. I am also encouraged by the 12 initiatives the MPAA announced yesterday in response to the FTC report. These initiatives seek to provide more information to parents about the degree of violence in movies and to provide more studio oversight over internal marketing and advertising practices. They include efforts to encourage their vendors--theater owners and video retailers--to better enforce the rating system, and to include on video cassettes and DVDs of new releases not just the movie's rating, but also the reasons for the rating.

Last week, I offered an amendment that this Committee supported to allow the FTC to re-visit the issue of marketing violence to children in 18 months. This amendment offers the industry opportunities to show through action your support for vigorous and vigilant self-regulation. In closing let me repeat what I said earlier: I sincerely believe that the industry can make money and still offer a socially responsible product to our children. Mr. Chairman, I look forward to hearing from our witnesses.