

Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion With Families on Television
Programming
March 1, 1996

The President. Thank you very much, Mr. Vice President. I might say, aren't we all glad to be in his big, beautiful office here. I love to come over here. I want to thank all of you for coming and to say to you and to the members of the media who are here, yesterday we heard for 2 hours from a remarkable assemblage of people who are involved in the television industry: people who broadcast the programs; we heard from cable people; we heard from the people who write the programs, people who represent the actors, producers. It was an amazing assemblage of people who got together and came to Washington to announce that they had decided to develop a rating system for television programs like the movie rating system and that as the Vice President said, that that would be able to be used then when the V-chip becomes available in televisions.

Now, the V-chip, of course, will start coming into televisions in a couple of years. And we replace about 25 million televisions a year, I think, in America, so it will quickly be a fixture in a significant percentage of America's televisions. But the rating system presumably will still be helpful for parents even before they have the V-chip.

We wanted to have you in here today because we want to get a feel and we want the country to get a feel for what kinds of things parents feel about this rating system and the V-chip, what the young people feel about it, what you expect out of it. What do you think it will do? What won't it do? What would you like to see? How would you like to see it work? And of course, we have some advocates and professionals here who can talk about the impact of this on childrearing in America and on childhood.

I must tell you, this is going to be a very complicated and difficult thing for these people in television to do in the sense that they have—there are many, many thousands of—tens of thousands of programs on all of these television stations, and as we get more cable channels, they will multiply exponentially. So the job of rating them is very different from the job of rating a couple of thousand movies a year. So

as they undertake this task, I think it's important for the people in the entertainment industry and the public at large to get just a feel for how parents feel about it, how young people feel about it, and kind of how it should proceed, because they committed to have this done by the first of next year—no later than the first of next year, and perhaps sooner.

So we really just felt we ought to have this conversation today, and we thank you for joining us. And maybe we ought to start with you, Mrs. Somson. If you could tell the press—everybody, if you could tell the press your name when you speak and how you happen to be here.

[At this point, parent Barbara Somson praised the rating system and the V-chip as tools for enforcement of parental standards for television programs watched by their children. Another parent expressed her hope that the V-chip and the industry meeting on ratings would be a first step toward production of better children's programming.]

The President. I want to talk about the better programming in a minute because I think that's a big part of it, especially when I ask the young people about it. But I want to give the parents who are here a chance to say anything they'd like to say about the V-chip and the ratings issue, and then I want to come back and talk about the V-chip with you. I want you to tell your story.

[A parent said that the V-chip technology would assist individual families in defining their own viewing standards and let them vote for more family programming in a way that advertisers and programmers would understand.]

The President. I'm so glad to hear you say that, because there were—you made two comments; I just want to say that to kind of resonate with the discussion we had with the people from the industry yesterday. Ted Turner said—and he went out and said in public, so I'm not saying anything in private he didn't say in public—that he strongly supported the rating system and what we were doing, what they were doing, but he did think it would be very costly. And

I think it will obviously cost a lot of money to figure out how to do this and then review all these programs, to set up the system. But I think he meant he thought it would be costly over the long run because programs would not have the same viewership and their advertisers would drop.

I think I see it more like you do; it's a voting system. It would be another—it's like the Nielsen ratings, except you won't have—this won't be a sample, you'll be able to actually know. You'll be able to at least sample all the V-chip homes—you take a representative sample—and it might actually change the content of programming so that the market, the market forces actually produce more positive programs.

The other thing you said I think is important, a couple of the folks who were skeptical yesterday talked about how this wouldn't be a panacea, it wouldn't solve all the problems. And one of the men in the broadcasting meeting said—I mean, the industry meeting—he said, "I'm going to take off my industry hat now and tell you that I'm a parent of three small children. I'm not looking for panaceas; I'm looking for a little help." And I think that's the way all of us who are parents look at this. There is no such thing as a panacea; we're looking for a little help.

So you made that point, and I thought it was very good.

[A parent noted that the V-chip could replace her husband's use of the television's remote control to enforce their standards.]

The President. Hillary almost fell off the chair when you said that, the keeper of the remote. *[Laughter]*

Participant. So we're really delighted with both the V-chip and the rating system.

[Another parent said the combination was a vital first step for working parents who could not always be present when their children watched television. The Vice President then introduced Dr. Robert Phillips, deputy medical director, American Psychiatric Association, who discussed the powerful effect of gratuitous television violence on children and thanked the President and the Vice President for their efforts to address the problem.]

The President. Hillary, do you want to comment on that, based on what you said in—

[Hillary Clinton said that more information on the link between television and child behavior would encourage parents to use the rating system and the V-chip in their homes.]

The President. I want to get to the young people here. And let me tell you, it's okay if you disagree with us about this; we want to hear what you really think. But I want to ask the doctor one more question.

Before I had this job, as I used to say, back when I had a life—*[laughter]*—I was Governor of my State when I ran a big prison system and a big criminal justice system, obviously. And then I was attorney general, and before that I taught criminal law. So I've been following issues of crime and violence closely from that perspective for more than 20 years now. For most of my time, it was an article of faith that 75 percent of all the violent crimes in America were created by people between the ages of 17 and 26 and that there was almost a hormonal problem—if you could literally just get violent people and put them somewhere until they were 27, you could let them out and then they would not do that again—that there really almost seemed to be sea changes.

Now we see an astonishing thing with the crime rate going down among people 18 and over and, I might add, drug use going down among people over 18, and violence going up among people under 18, as well as casual drug use. And I think there are plainly other reasons for increasing violent behavior among young people, including the lives that many of them have to live, virtually raising themselves on some of the meanest streets in America. But I gather from what you said that you really believe that the sort of cumulative, almost deadening impact of all this media-generated violence is at least partly the explanation for rising rates of violence among juveniles.

[Dr. Phillips concurred, pointing out that the increase in juvenile crime was a multifactorial problem. The Vice President noted that the upcoming White House Conference on Youth Violence would address other factors involved, thanked the industry for taking the steps that they agreed to, and suggested that the children might have a different perspective.]

The President. I thought maybe we ought to start with Catherine next to me, because Catherine Murphy actually passed the first V-chip

bill—[laughter]—in the United States of America. I think you all need to know that. It wasn't us; it was her. And so I think you ought to hear her story. And I'd like to know how you came to propose this legislation and what you think of it.

[High school student Catherine Murphy described her presentation of V-chip legislation at the Girls Nation Senate she attended, mentioning that it passed but was then vetoed.]

The President. They'll do that to you. [Laughter] Let me ask you this. Do you believe—I want to ask and then I want to go around to the students here—how do you think the V-chip should be used? And how much difference do you think there is in the age of the children in terms of the regulation of the programming?

[The participant described her family's television viewing habits and said that elementary school children watched too much television.]

The President. You watch television a lot?

[A student responded that he only watched the news and a few other programs, but that his peers based their lives on television as a major activity and a model for behavior.]

The President. If you've actually seen that in your friends who believe it—

Participant. Yes.

The President. —that they're acting, they model what they do based on what they see on television.

[The participant confirmed that his peers modeled themselves after television characters, and he then endorsed the V-chip to help parents prevent such behavior.]

The President. What about you? You're 11, right?

[A participant said that he spent hours playing on the computer and asked if there would be a V-chip for computers.]

The President. Let's talk about that because that's going to be a big issue.

[The Vice President pointed out the need for an industry-wide system to rate computer games and to allow parents to screen the Internet to prevent children's access to inappropriate material. Other children then described their friends' television viewing habits.]

The President. What do you think? Do you think your mother should have some influence over what you watch on television, or should you decide?

[A participant said that parents should have influence over what their children watched, and she then described classmates who annoyed her by pretending to be television characters.]

The President. Playing out what they saw on TV.

Participant. Right.

The President. What about you all?

[A 13-year-old said that children tended to act out television shows instead of playing and expanding their imagination. A parent said that although watching television could be safer than some other activities, parents should encourage children to be critical viewers.]

The President. What do you think?

[After a participant remarked that children could be scared by some television programs, the Vice President said the V-chip would give parents a tool to prevent that. Several parents stressed that older children should be taught to make good choices for themselves. Another parent pointed out the benefits of television.]

The President. I'm so glad to hear you say that as well. But that—I don't know how much time we have left, but I think we ought to hear from the young people especially on the flip side of this because we believe it's important. We applaud the industry for developing the rating system and making it compatible with the V-chip. But the Children's Television Act, which was passed a couple of years ago, also calls upon producers of the television programs to develop more and better programs that will be appealing to children in a positive way.

And I just want to make two points and then ask anybody who wants to comment to comment. There were two interesting ideas which came out yesterday. One is, the people who were there—not us; the Vice President and I just watched—but in the room there, in the industry, there was a genuine argument about whether particularly younger people would be as likely to watch any kind of educational program as they would a sort of a violent cartoon or something. And there was a woman there from the Discovery Channel who was a very powerful advocate and said, "That is not true.

If you make education entertaining, it will be watched.” And she gave some examples. That’s the first thing: Would you like to have more positive programming on television?

The second thing I think’s important to point out—one of you sort of inched up to it when you were talking about the Internet, young people on the computer—all these technologies, the Vice President knows 100 times more about this than I do, but it looks to me like they’re all merging. I mean, it won’t be very long before you can call up any movie you want on your computer and before a lot of the things you see on your television screen are interactive. So that I think that basically we’re watching, we’re seeing a process—and that, by the way, will engage more young people because as they become more computer literate, if they have interactive programs on television, it will bring them up, or if they can call movies up on the computer, it will. So we really need to also focus on the positive things that we ought to be doing for our children.

And so, what do you think? Do you think—would young people be just as likely to watch more constructive programs if they were genuinely entertaining, or do you believe there’s just an inherent predisposition to watch the violence?

[A participant stated that interesting educational programming for young children could open doors of opportunity for them later on. Hillary Clinton pointed out the industry’s concern that older children would not choose educational programming for themselves and asked the teens to respond. A 14-year-old stated that she and her friends preferred nonviolent movies.]

Mrs. Clinton. You are an exception—[laughter]—based on the numbers that are out there.

Participant. I think also it has to do with where I live and the family upbringing that I had.

Mrs. Clinton. That’s exactly right.

[Participants discussed targeting programming for high school children, the lack of good children’s programming on broadcast television, and local campaigns to encourage better programming. The Vice President then concluded that the V-chip and the rating system would enable parents to make categorical viewing choices for their children rather than just pull the plug on the television.]

The President. First of all, I would like to thank all of you for being here, especially the young people. Thank you, doctor, it’s good to see you again.

Dr. Phillips. Good to see you, Mr. President.

The President. I want to thank Tipper Gore. When she first proposed a rating system for records, it was considered heresy. And now she’s lived and worked hard at this long enough to make it a matter of American conventional wisdom in television.

And let me say that for Hillary and for me, based on our experience over the last 15 or 20 years, maybe the most important reason to have this conversation today was the point that Catherine made when she first talked about her work for the V-chip, and that is that technology is intrinsically action-oriented but neither intrinsically good nor bad. It depends on the values and the action of the people in control of the technology. And while this gives more—the V-chip and the ratings information will give more power to parents, it’s utterly useless unless they use it.

And so what I’m hoping that this did today is to convince other people in other community settings and every community in our country to begin to discuss these matters and to begin to now, if their community does not have an advocacy group like the one you are involved in, perhaps to form one or at least figure out how friends and neighbors can get together and figure out how they’re going to use this ratings information and figure out how they’re going to use the V-chip as the V-chip comes in.

But I was glad to hear Mrs. Somson say what she did about this. You don’t have to wait for the V-chip to make use of the ratings information. You know, most parents are still influenced—most children still have some influence about what their parents say, and parents are influenced by their children. So I just want to encourage that we need that every place in America.

But this law that was passed and this remarkable effort by the industry will not amount to a hill of beans if the parents do not take action in their homes and if in each community the community activists who know how to make the most of this don’t work with the parents to do it.

Thanks a lot. It’s great to see you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:55 a.m. in the Vice President's Ceremonial Office in the Old Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he re-

ferred to Ted Turner, chief executive officer and president, Turner Broadcasting Service, Inc.

Message to the Congress on the National Emergency With Respect to Cuba

March 1, 1996

To the Congress of the United States:

Pursuant to section 1 of title II of Public Law 65-24, ch. 30, 50 U.S.C. 191 and sections 201 and 301 of the National Emergencies Act, 50 U.S.C. 1601 *et seq.*, United States Code, I hereby report that I have exercised my statutory authority to declare a national emergency in response to the Government of Cuba's destruction of two unarmed U.S.-registered civilian aircraft in international airspace north of Cuba.

In the proclamation (copy attached), I have authorized and directed the Secretary of Transportation to make and issue such rules and regulations that the Secretary may find appropriate to prevent unauthorized U.S. vessels from entering Cuban territorial waters.

I have authorized these rules and regulations as a result of the Government of Cuba's dem-

onstrated willingness to use reckless force, including deadly force, in the ostensible enforcement of its sovereignty. I have determined that the unauthorized departure of vessels intending to enter Cuban territorial waters could jeopardize the safety of certain U.S. citizens and other persons residing in the United States and threaten a disturbance of international relations. I have, accordingly, declared a national emergency in response to these threats.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

The White House,
March 1, 1996.

NOTE: The proclamation is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Message on the Observance of Saint Patrick's Day, 1996

March 1, 1996

Warmest greetings to everyone celebrating Saint Patrick's Day.

On this feast day of the patron saint of Ireland, we remember with gratitude the gifts of the Irish people. For generations, the sons and daughters of Ireland have come to America seeking a new life and a new freedom, bringing with them a deep faith in God, a profound love of liberty, and a determination to help shape the American Dream.

As soldiers and scholars, poets and Presidents, Irish Americans have enriched every facet of American society. Today we honor their many accomplishments, their vital contributions in building the cities, industries, and culture of America, and the long friendship and close ties between the United States and Ireland.

Like millions of Americans, I rejoice in my Irish heritage; and like millions of Americans, I pray for lasting peace in the land of our ancestors. We must not permit the process of reconciliation in Northern Ireland to be destroyed by those who are blinded by the hatreds of the past. As we pay tribute to Saint Patrick's enduring message of faith and courage, I salute the people of Ireland for their devotion to defeating the enemies of peace. In this age of hope and possibility, I am confident that their steadfast efforts will be rewarded with lasting tranquility and the blessings of a bright future.

Best wishes to all for a wonderful holiday.

BILL CLINTON