

Week Ending Friday, February 16, 1996

**Remarks in a Roundtable Discussion
on the V-Chip With Families in
Alexandria, Virginia**

February 9, 1996

The President. First of all, I'd like to thank our hosts for welcoming us in and to all the members of the press and our guests here. As you know, yesterday I signed into law the Telecommunications Act of 1996 which was the first major overhaul of our telecommunications laws in six decades.

That bill will do an enormous amount of good for our country. It will, for consumers, open up vast new opportunities for entertainment, vast new opportunities for information, vast new opportunities for different kinds of communication. It will create many, many thousands of high-wage jobs. But it will also bring a lot more images and messages into every home in America.

One of the things that the Vice President, Mrs. Gore, and I like so much about this bill is that in addition to getting the benefits of the telecommunications revolution, it gives more power to the parents to control what their young children see on television by requiring all new television sets to have a V-chip in them.

And so we wanted to come here today to discuss with these folks how they feel about it and to give them and to give you a chance to see how this will work. So, I'd like to turn it over to the Vice President and give him a chance to make a demonstration and some comments.

[Vice President Gore said that the V-chip legislation gives parents the ability to make categorical choices about what their children can watch. He then demonstrated the V-chip concept by programming the host family's satellite television system to block movies exceeding a designated rating limit.]

The President. Let me explain. This technology—you get this if you hook into a sat-

ellite where you may have access to large numbers of channels and a large number of movies. The difference in this and the Telecommunications Act is that it requires this V-chip which I want to show you. This is a V-chip. And it will be required to be put into all new television sets so that as every family in America buys a new set, they will have this. The V-chip basically is a power to the parent, a technology marvel. It enables everybody to have all the benefits of television. It will enable everyone to have the benefits of the new developments coming out of the telecommunications revolution, but it will give parents more control over the content of the programming to which their young children are exposed.

Let me say I think it's quite important. Just this week we have seen another major study chronicling the destructive impact on young children of hours and hours and hours of mindless violence and the so numbing impact it has on our young children.

So that's what the V-chip is designed to do. It will add about a dollar to the cost of every television set—a little less, actually. And we replace our TV sets at the rate of about 25 million a year, so as you can see, it will rapidly come to be a very important part of American family's arsenal of tools for raising children.

And there's another benefit that this will bring as well. I have challenged the leaders of the entertainment industry to come and meet with me about this, to talk about how we can develop a rating system for television programs like we have a rating system for movies. And we believe as more and more families get this and exercise their options under it and as more and more information is available to parents, that it will change the programming so that even parents who can't afford to buy a new television this year or next year as the V-chip comes out will begin to benefit from it.

So that's what the V-chip is. I guess I want to bring you back to Al, and he wants to say a few words before we turn it over to—

[Vice President Gore introduced Tipper Gore, who expressed her long-standing concern about children's exposure to graphic and violent television programming and thanked the President for enabling families to protect their children in their own homes. She then invited the participants to comment. The first participant said she was excited about the opportunity to decide what would come into her home through the airwaves. An elementary school principal and father said that television had more power to influence children than schools did in terms of time and the V-chip represented a giant step in saving the children. He also raised the issue of candy produced in the form of syringes.]

The President. What you said about the candy, that makes a point about what I think is important about the television violence study. It seems to me—and what you said about the hours—it's not so much—and I know a lot of people in the media who produce these programs get very defensive. They think they're being unfairly attacked. They talk about there's always good content, often a good moral to the story of some of these things. But it's the cumulative impact of it. I don't think they see it from the parents—perspective of the parents. It's not that our kids couldn't handle this program, that program or the other program. It is a total impact of hour after hour after hour, day after day.

And the candy thing you mentioned made the point to me that—what it means is that people began to think of things as normal that we should never accept as normal, so we began to accept a level of violence in our society, that it's normal. It's not true. And that's the thing that bothers me. We have to go back. Now, one of the things that we've really worked hard on in our administration is trying to help communities reduce the crime rate. And I think we ought to—we need to keep at it until we go back to a time when people think that violence is abnormal, not normal; when crime is the exception, not the rule.

And I think that it's much harder if kids—like 5 hours a day, 6 days a week, for 15 years, they're dominated by this notion that it's a violent, brutal world, people do whatever they can get away with doing.

[Vice President Gore mentioned the estimate that a child would witness 20,000 simulated murders on television by high school graduation, and then asked if anyone had ever had to comfort a child whose sleep was affected by what they saw on television. Several participants answered that they had, and the last one complained that even if the programming was acceptable, the commercials could be a problem.]

The President. I must say, since I don't watch as much television as I used to, I was sort of unaware of that. But it's so interesting you said that, because my best friend from childhood called me yesterday, a guy I went to grade school with, and he has three wonderful children. They're various ages like your children. His oldest child is my daughter's age, and he has two younger ones. He said the same thing. He was talking about a show he was watching with his youngest child, a little girl, and he made the same point you did, that—no one had ever said this before, the disconnection between the programming content and the ads.

[The participant said that she felt she had to be there the entire time her child was watching. Vice President Gore said that broadcasters should fix that, just as movie previews now are rated. Two participants agreed that television ads posed a daily problem. Another participant said that the V-chip ratings system would have a direct impact as a guide even for people without V-chip televisions.]

The President. That's correct.

[The participant asked about the prospect of a V-chip that would be an installable item at a low cost.]

The President. That's a big problem. We're concerned about that. Do you want to talk about that?

[Vice President Gore said that there would be devices to make an older TV compatible with the V-chip system. He added that with

the introduction of the V-chip, the dynamics in the marketplace would change in favor of programming that would not be blocked by the V-chip.]

The President. Keep in mind, though, the ratings, as we all know—all of us who've ever purchased advertising know—advertising rates are tied to rating rates. Income is all related to rating rates. If there are—let's say there are 300 million television sets in the United States, which is, I think, about right. That means within 4 years, at a 25-million-a-year replacement rate, a third of the television sets will have these. If, among the third, just a significant percentage—not even a majority, just a significant percentage of the parents with young children begin to use this along with the rating system, it will affect the overall ratings, and it will have a backup impact that will benefit the parents that don't own it.

Also, I think, to be fair, a lot of our children are still at a position in their life that if we knew enough to know what things to ask them not to watch, they wouldn't do it. I don't think we should minimize the fact that a lot of these problems are caused by blind ignorance.

[A participant said that she avoided unwanted programming at home by not watching television. Vice President Gore then asked the children for comments on how they felt about it. One child responded that he had nightmares after watching scary movies with a friend. Another child said that many parents were overprotective concerning television shows.]

The President. I agree with that. I think kids are a lot more—good kids that have good, loving parents and a good, loving home, they can handle a lot more sometimes than their parents think. I agree with that, but the only thing I would say in defense of the parents is, remember what I said in the beginning, it's not so much that one program. If it was just one program, you know, it wouldn't be—it is the total impact of this on families where there are no restrictions for hours and hours a day, every day of the week, for a whole childhood. It changes your outlook toward the world, and what is and is not acceptable, and what you think about

human nature, and whether you're optimistic or pessimistic, in ways that you don't—you can't know while it's happening to you. That's what I would say in defense of stricter parents.

It's not that kids can't handle one thing, nearly any one thing. You know, you read a lot of examples of children that see horrible incidents on the street, and they grow up to be perfectly fine, wonderful people. It's the total impact. And that's why parents need to have this.

[One young man said he thought it was an excellent idea for younger children, especially when both parents were working. A parent added that blocking certain shows made a statement to children about individual and family values. Vice President Gore agreed that drawing a line is a significant part of parenting. Another participant expressed dismay that violence is presented as entertainment. The school principal noted that violence had become too commonplace and stated the need to teach nonviolence. He also praised the V-chip as a means to cope with unexpected violent or sexual content in movies on cable.]

The President. Let me just say one final thing about this. Maybe we ought to change the name from V-chip to parent power chip.

One of the things that we talk about all the time, to go beyond this, is that all these technological changes that are going on in the world are so wonderful in so many ways, in making opportunities for people to do things they never could do before. But if we're not careful, they also make the majority of the people feel that they're losing control of their lives in many ways, not just this way, in many ways. And I think anything we can do to harness the power of new technology to give people more control back over their lives, their family lives, the workplace, the community, that's a good thing. We don't want people to feel powerless.

One of the things that frustrates people in this country is they feel like there are all these forces out there running around working on their lives, and they have no control over them. And this is maybe just one small step, but it's a way of saying to people that new technologies can put you back in the

driver's seat in your life, not take you further and further out of it.

[A participant thanked the President and the Vice President for support of the V-chip legislation to empower parents.]

The President. It's still the most important work in this society. It's everybody's most important job.

Participants. Thank you.

The President. Thank you very much. Thanks again for having me here.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:05 a.m. at the residence of Ric and Jean Voigt. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

Remarks on the Terrorist Attack in London, United Kingdom

February 10, 1996

The President. Good morning. I have a few words to say about yesterday's terrorist bombing in London. As all of us know, it injured scores of people. Let me begin by saying that I know I speak for all Americans who join Hillary and me in praying for those who were hurt and for their speedy recovery. We also hope that those responsible for this terrible and cowardly act are quickly brought to justice.

There can be no doubt about the purpose of this attack. This attack was aimed at the growing prospects for peace, a just and lasting peace in Northern Ireland. I am deeply concerned by reports that the Irish Republican Army has announced an end to the cease-fire. The cease-fire and the good will and hard work of the parties to the Irish conflict have given the people of Northern Ireland the greatest gift of all: the simple blessings of a normal life.

Since the cease-fire went into effect a year and a half ago, people of all faiths have been able to go about their daily lives without the disruption of searches and roadblocks, and especially without fear of the bullet and the bomb. We must not turn away from that path now.

I know that the overwhelming majority of the people of Northern Ireland, Catholic and Protestant alike, want to stay on the path of

peace. During my visit there last year I could see for myself that the demand for peace was lasting. No one and no organization has the right to deny the people of Northern Ireland a peaceful future, and I am determined to do all that I can to see that the enemies of peace do not succeed.

Last night I spoke to the British Prime Minister, John Major, to express our shock and sadness over this event. I also spoke to the Irish Prime Minister, John Bruton. I assured both of them that America would continue to be committed to work for a negotiated, secure peace.

Let me say again that this terrible incident reminds me of a lesson I have learned in working for peace throughout the world in the last 3 years. The real differences in our world are not between Catholics and Protestants, Arabs and Jews, Muslims, Croats, and Serbs, they are between those who embrace peace and those who reject it, those who look to the future and those who are blinded by the hatreds of the past, those who open their arms and those who are determined to keep clenching their fists.

We all have to choose. The people of Northern Ireland have chosen peace. They do not deserve to have a small group choose bloodshed and violence and wreck the peaceful life they long for. And the people of Great Britain do not deserve to have this violence wreaked upon them. We will not stop in our efforts until peace has been secured.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:47 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House, prior to his departure for Iowa City, IA.

The President's Radio Address

February 10, 1996

Good morning. Today I want to talk with you about our families and our future—a future of great possibilities and strong challenges, challenges we cannot meet with Government alone, but we can't meet them by letting people fend for themselves, either. We have to go forward together.

In my State of the Union Address, I outlined our seven biggest challenges for the future, challenges we must meet if we are going