

THE STATE OF TELEVISION TODAY

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I am, again, glad to join my colleague from North Dakota, Senator CONRAD, in commenting on the state of television today. I do not know that the Conrad-Lieberman review of the fall television season will rival Siskel and Ebert's review of movies. But I would say Senator CONRAD and I are quite clearly saying we give this fall TV season two thumbs down. That is, really, what I want to talk about today.

Three months ago this body voted overwhelmingly, on a bipartisan basis, in support of V-chip—or C-chip, C for choice—legislation that Senator CONRAD and I initiated. With that vote we said, in effect, that too much of television in America today has become so wild, so vulgar, so morally repugnant that it has actually become a threat to our children, a threat from which they need protection.

As Senator CONRAD indicated, there is new evidence out today on the extent of violence in television in the form of a study released by the Center for Communication Policy at UCLA which, while it does note some improvement, shows by its content that violence remains a serious problem in TV programming. But the American people do not need a study to tell them what they already know about the state of television today. Not only does violence remain a problem, but vulgarity is increasing as a problem.

I hear complaints whenever I go home and talk about this subject. Poll after poll depicts a citizenry fed up with the plummeting standards of the TV industry and the constant barrage of foul programming that is being thrown at our children.

Mr. President, our purpose—Senator CONRAD's and mine—in raising this issue today is to call our colleagues' attention to the industry's curious reaction to the public's anger about the state of television programming. For the fact is that the broadcast networks this week are embarking on a new fall season that is far more crude, more rude, and more offensive than anything we have seen before.

That is the conclusion reached by the television critic at Connecticut's largest newspaper, the Hartford Courant, James Endrst, who characterized a collection of new series this fall as the product of a "slow but steady slide into the gutter involving the Nation's most pervasive and persuasive medium." He went on to say that "viewers may be struck not so much by the shows, but by the scenes—TV moments signaling an aggregate acceptance of rude language, foul imagery and gross behavior in the entertainment mainstream."

It reminds me of Senator MOYNIHAN's searing and profound comment that we are defining deviancy down by lowering the standards of what we accept on television, particularly in what used to be family programming hours. We are lowering the standards of what is ac-

ceptable in our society, and we are sending a message to our children.

The Cincinnati Enquirer's editorial page bluntly talked about the "reeking crud of puerile trashcoms" that are so common this fall season. And Tom Shales, respected critic from the Washington Post, used the words "depraved" and "soul-killing" after viewing some of the same shows.

Mr. President, I would encourage my colleagues to watch some of these new shows, new shows that are premiering this week. Those of you who once may have watched "Car 54, Where Are You?" will probably end up asking "Common Decency, Where Are You?" on television today.

Mr. President, I am going to reference and read from a few lines from these shows, and perhaps I should issue a warning to any children that may be watching on C-SPAN or their parents to remove them from the sets. So I am going to quote from shows that are shown in the family hour on television today. It makes me feel like my childhood was a long time ago, and I am sure parents are yearning again for the time when they could turn on the television and not worry about being embarrassed to sit there with their children and hear what they hear—being worried about letting their children watch without them.

So let me cite from some of the shows that are new to the television this year.

ABC's "Wilde Again" in which the lead character advises her stepdaughter to "call me what you called me when we first met, 'Daddy's little whore'." Or, you can watch another ABC offering, a nighttime soap called "The Monroes," which in its premier last week showcased a woman making what we once referred to as an obscene gesture with her middle finger. That may be the most fitting symbol to characterize what too much of television is saying to the American public today, and also to our concerns about the degradation of our culture.

One of the most controversial new shows is a sitcom on CBS called "Bless This House." And it is controversial for good reason. On its premier last Monday night, the mother on the show tells her daughter that she would not need her own bathroom if "you didn't spend all morning staring at your little hooters."

What makes the crassness of "Bless This House" profoundly disturbing is that the network has made a decision to air the show at 8 p.m. during what we once thought of as the traditional family viewing hour.

Some of this stuff is obviously appropriate for adult viewing. But to put it on at 8 p.m. when families have been watching television is an insult to those families. The networks' commitment to that concept of the family television viewing hour has obviously eroded. But the fall season has slipped even further, as is evident from the number of what I would call sopho-

moric sitcoms that are being aired between 8 and 9 p.m. For instance, joining "Bless This House" is another CBS series, "Can't Hurry Love," which has featured in its premier episode some truly outrageous language from the lead characters.

Mr. President, the abandonment of the family viewing hour is evident also in the networks' decision to shift the number of established sitcoms with adult themes—such as "Cybill" on CBS and "Friends" on ABC—to this earlier time period. Those two shows which I have watched can be very engaging, very witty, and very entertaining. But they are often clearly not appropriate for children, particularly younger children. That is exactly the point which Senator CONRAD and I are trying to make.

I must say just as jarring as the language on new shows are some of the comments from network officials to justify their programming decisions. One high-ranking official at ABC said, "The society to some extent, has become crasser, and we move with that." That is not what I understood the purpose of entertainment to be, particularly not in the family viewing hours.

An executive from NBC explained that "life includes sexual innuendoes." And another NBC official also went so far as to say, "It's not the role of network television to program for the children of America." But the children of America are watching those programs. That official added that most small children "are watching Nick at Nite." Most of them do not watch network television in prime time.

If many young children are indeed watching Nickelodeon or the Disney Channel, it's because their parents are deeply troubled by the content of the major network's programming, and are searching for refuge from the tawdriness that characterizes too much of television today.

But the reality is that many children are watching broadcast television and these tasteless trashcoms, and the legion of perverse and near-pornographic talk shows that air each afternoon. No matter how hard parents work to monitor their children's viewing, habits, and no matter how many technological gadgets they have at their disposal, many children will continue to watch these channels, and their behavior will continue to be influenced by what they see on TV.

Mr. President, I realize that the TV industry is not a monolith. There are many responsible leaders in that community, just as there are some outstanding, thought-provoking series on the major networks. Some of them, such as the hit ABC comedy "Home Improvement," showed that you can be successful and funny, without being vulgar.

PBS obviously continues to offer both adults and children a number of engaging, challenging, thought-provoking, and entertaining series. And even among the new network offerings NBC

is earning favorable reviews for a family-oriented program called "Minor Adjustments," a show about a child psychologist which will appear on Sunday nights.

But there is a clear direction that the networks are moving in. It is not just Senator CONRAD and I who see it. It is all or most of the TV critics who have reviewed this current fall season. We have reason to be deeply troubled about it. I can tell you that I am troubled about it not just in my capacity as an elected representative, but as a father of four kids, one of whom is 7 years old. Television executives need to recognize that they are part of a larger civil society to which they, like we, have obligations, and that the first amendment is not a constitutional hall pass that excuses them from their responsibilities to that civil society.

Mr. President, in the end, the new fall season I hope will clear up any doubts that our colleagues have about the need for the leadership, or the V-chip, and the need to help parents protect their kids as best they can from the messages that television is sending them that are so often inconsistent with what the parents are trying to send and teach their own children.

When the telecommunications bill comes out of conference, I hope my colleagues will join us in calling on the networks to acknowledge their responsibility to society and the impact that they have on our society and to remember this important point. They are obviously private businesses, but they are using the public airwaves, and they should not use those airwaves to hurt the public. The networks need to be reminded that they would not exist if the public and we, their representatives, did not grant them access to those airwaves.

No one here wants to talk about censorship. No one here wants to talk about constraining the freedom of the networks to program. But the reality is that the networks are moving so far away from reflecting the values commonly shared by most people in this country, let alone the interests of most people in this country, that they are inviting a reaction unless they discipline themselves.

Mr. President, one of television's finest moments was the Edward R. Murrow documentary "Harvest of Shame," which was broadcast four decades ago. I am afraid that the 1995 fall season might also be titled the "Harvest of Shame." I hope its excesses will inspire a reaction from the American people, a reaction from us, their representatives, here in Congress, and ultimately a reaction from those who can do most to diminish this problem, and that is those who own, operate and program our television networks today.

I thank the Chair. I yield the floor, and I note the absence of a quorum.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, will the Senator withhold.

Mr. LIEBERMAN. Mr. President, I withhold my notation.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Mississippi.

AGRICULTURE, RURAL DEVELOPMENT, FOOD AND DRUG ADMINISTRATION, AND RELATED AGENCIES APPROPRIATIONS ACT, 1996

The Senate continued with the consideration of the bill.

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, the situation, for the information of Senators, is that we are at the point now where we can proceed to take the remaining amendments up and consider them, dispose of them, and move to final passage.

There are several amendments that have been listed in an agreement we entered into yesterday limiting amendments that we understand will be called up and we will have to consider them.

Senator STEVENS has an amendment on the salary of an Under Secretary position at the Department of Agriculture. That will be offered soon, we understand. Senator McCain has an amendment dealing with education funds for tribal colleges, and we are happy to consider that amendment at any time the Senator would like to offer it. We may very well be able to work that out without a rollcall vote. We hope we can.

I am saying all this to let Senators know that we are making progress. We are getting to the point where we hope we will be able to move to final passage on this bill in the early evening so we will not have to stay in late on this bill tonight. We want to finish the bill tonight. The majority leader has indicated that we will stay in until we finish the bill. I am simply saying I am encouraged that we may be able to finish this bill early this evening if Senators will come and offer their amendments.

Mr. McCain addressed the Chair.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Arizona.

Mr. McCain. Mr. President, I would like to thank the manager of the bill and Senator BUMPERS for their patience. I should be ready to propose this amendment within a few minutes as soon as I get one additional piece of information.

Would the Senator from Mississippi want me to suggest the absence of a quorum while we talk?

Mr. COCHRAN. Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that further proceedings under the quorum call be dispensed with.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. GRAMS). Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I understand that my colleague from Ari-

zona, Senator McCain, will shortly be offering an amendment to provide funds for American Indian postsecondary institutions. And I want to speak very briefly in support of this amendment.

Mr. President, Senator McCain, as chair of the Committee on Indian Affairs, is offering this amendment which I am proud to cosponsor which will provide funds to those institutions that are authorized in the Equity in Educational Land Grant Status Act of 1994. That act was included as part of the Improving America's Schools Act, which we also passed in the last Congress.

Mr. President, I sponsored that legislation in the last Congress to rectify what I saw as an unjust situation. That is, that every State and territory in the country had a land-grant college that received funds by virtue of that designation, but none of the Indian-operated institutions were designated as land-grant institutions in spite of the very important work that they did preparing people for careers in agriculture.

Mr. President, we had the anomalous situation where the University of the District of Columbia was a land-grant college, but those institutions in my own State and elsewhere in the country which were dedicated to training Indian Americans to pursue careers in agriculture, as well as other careers, were not so designated. So the Equity in Educational Land Grant Act authorized land-grant programs for the 29 tribal and Indian-serving institutions, which came to be known as the 1994 institutions as a result of our passage of that legislation last year.

Those institutions serve 25,000 students from 200 different tribes. The legislation then passed in October 1994 had bipartisan support and had the endorsement of the Department of Agriculture, the National Association of State Universities and Land-grant Colleges, the 1890 historically black land-grant colleges and the existing land-grant colleges in States with tribal colleges.

The appropriation that Senator McCain is calling for here would make funds available for four different purposes, as I understand it, for payment into the endowment, which would be much-needed; a certain amount of funding to strengthen curriculum in food and agriculture sciences in these 1994 institutions; a certain amount for capacity-building grants; and, again, a separate amount for competitively awarded extension programs administered through the existing State land-grant colleges in cooperation with these 1994 institutions.

The offset would be from a very small amount of the dollars provided for the benefit of the land-grant college system. I am persuaded that these funds will be well spent. The programs that the amendment provides for in all 29 colleges are roughly equal to the