

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT,
THE FIRST LADY,
THE VICE PRESIDENT AND MRS. GORE
IN OPENING AND CLOSING STATEMENTS AT
THE CHILDREN'S TELEVISION CONFERENCE
East Room
July 29, 1996

Good morning. Thank you. Good morning. We're delighted to see all of you here for this historic meeting. A lot of you have come a long way, some of you on the red-eye, and I appreciate the efforts you've made to be here.

We're here for a clear purpose: to improve and expand educational television for our children. The ability of the United States to make the 21st century the age of greatest possibility in our nation's history depends in no small measure on our ability to build strong families today; to help our parents to succeed not only in the workplace, but in their most important job, raising good, well-educated, well-balanced, successful children.

That is why we have worked so hard to give our families more control over one of the most influential forces in our nation, television. As all of you know better than I, it is now a major part of our national landscape. A typical child watches 25,000 hours of television before his or her 18th birthday. Preschoolers watch 28 hours of television a week, and at least during the Olympics, so do Presidents.

We have dedicated ourselves to giving parents the power to screen out television they believe their children should not see. That's what the V-chip was all about. I was proud to sign the telecommunications law with the V-chip requirement to give parents the ability to stop programming that they think is inappropriate for their young children to see.

You in the entertainment industry have certainly been doing your part. Meeting here in the White House five months ago, you volunteered to rate shows for content. You came together as responsible, corporate citizens to give America's families an early-warning system. Parents who use the V-chip will now be able to block objectionable shows before it's too late.

Together these initiatives constitute an invaluable arsenal for America's parents. And I'd also like to point out that this is a challenge being met in the appropriate way by people working together and coming together, not fighting and drifting apart.

But that is only half the battle. As Americans we have to define ourselves not simply by what we stand against, but more importantly by what we stand for. Now, we have the opportunity to use the airwaves for something positive -- educational

programming as great as our kids. Television can be a strong and positive force. It can help children to learn. It can reinforce rather than undermine the values we work so hard to teach our children, showing children every day what it means to share, to respect themselves and others, to take responsibility for their actions, to have sympathy with others who have difficulties, even to recognize that "it's not easy being green."

This morning I would like to hear from you about what we can do to broaden the range of quality educational programming for children. I hope we can focus on three specific issues. First, I'd like to talk about the new research that shows how kids can learn valuable lessons from TV over the course of their young lifetimes. Second, I'd like to find out more about what good shows look like. Third, I'd like us to talk about how we can break down the barriers to the development and production of quality educational programming for children.

Before we begin, I would like to make an announcement. For the past year I've been calling upon the Federal Communications Commission to require broadcasters to air a minimum of three hours of genuine educational programming a week -- three hours a week, 180 minutes a week, about 2.5 percent of the entire schedule. Such a requirement would halt a steep and troubling decline.

As recently as the early '80s, the three major networks aired several hours more than that of children's educational and informational shows. But by 1990, they were down to two hours a week or less than two hours a week. The number is inching up now, but we must do more. The airwaves that broadcasters use, after all, belong to all of us. And in exchange for their use, broadcasters are required to serve the public interest. I cannot imagine anything that serves the public interest more than seeing to it that we give our children at least three hours of educational television a week.

That's why it gives me great pleasure to announce that the four major networks, the National Association of Broadcasters, and some of the leading advocates for educational television have come together to join me in supporting a new proposal to require broadcasters to air three hours of quality educational programming a week.

This proposal fulfills the promise of the Children's Television Act -- that television should serve the educational and informational needs of our young people. It gives broadcasters flexibility in how to meet those needs. And it says to America's parents, you are not alone; we are all committed to working with you to see that educational programming for your children makes the grade.

I urge the FCC to adopt this proposal, to make the three-hour rule the law of the land. Television can build up young lives rather than tear them down.

I'd like to say a particular word of thanks to Congressman Ed Markey for his work on this issue, and a very special word of appreciation to the Vice President for his tireless efforts, along with Greg Simon, to bring about this agreement. I thank them very, very much. Today we can work to imagine television as a force for good, to imagine what television for children would look like if it resembled what we imagined it was when we were children or when you first got started in this business.

In recent days, as families have gathered to watch the Olympics, we have all been reminded about the good that television can bring into our homes, how it can bring us together, how it can inspire and educate us. This should be our standard. I'm anxious now to get to work.

And I'd like to invite three people to come up here for some comments of their own about the agreement that has been reached: Eddie Fritts, the president of the National Association of Broadcasters; Les Moonves, the president of CBS Entertainment; Peggy Charren, the founder of Action for Children's Television.

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THE PRESIDENT: The first subject we're going to talk about is the influence of television on children. We have some good presentations here. I would like to call on the First Lady to begin.

MRS. CLINTON: Thank you. What a great way to begin this meeting with that announcement. And now we turn to talking about what we mean by quality television.

As the President has pointed out, the technology of television is not intrinsically good or bad. But it does have the potential to do both, particularly to be a powerful force for good in our children's lives. But it depends so much on the decisions made by people in control of that technology, and what their values are and whether or not they know how to produce and then enlist audiences for quality television.

Thanks to a growing body of research, we know what quality television can do for children and what a compelling impact it can have on the educational and intellectual development of children.

I would like to turn to someone who has spent quite a bit of time studying this issue. Along with her husband, Professor John Wright, Professor Aletha Huston are co-directors for the Center for Research on the Influence on Television on Children at the

University of Kansas. They've been to the White House before to talk with us about their important work. They're among the researchers who understand the positive effects that television can have on children.

Dr. Huston, you have been studying television and children for years and your early studies confirmed what many of us experience in our own homes, that educational programs help prepare preschool children for school. Could you share with us the findings from your most recent study that you think would be of the greatest interest to parents?

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MRS. CLINTON: Many of the advertisers, such as your company and the others who are here today, do your own research. And you're targeting a certain audience and you're targeting the parents of children as well as children themselves, so you would bring to the table, to this kind of advisory role, some very good information. And so getting the advertisers involved at an early stage, as you're suggesting, might be very helpful in terms of the quality of programming and then eliciting the sort of support from advertisers that is needed.

THE PRESIDENT: Thank you very much. I think, to stay on schedule, we need to move to the next topic. It's clear that there's a consensus here and that the evidence supports the fact that television can be, has been, and is in many cases a positive force in children's lives. So I think we ought to discuss a little bit about what makes a successful children's television program. And I'd like to ask Mrs. Gore to lead the discussion, and I'll turn it over to her now.

MRS. GORE: Well, thank you, Mr. President. And again, thank you so much for your extraordinary leadership on this issue, or we would not be where we are.

As I listened to Dr. Huston and Dr. Jamieson speak earlier, as well as the other experts, I began thinking about what Al and I did with our children when they were younger. And one thing we did was we recognized that our guidance was an opportunity to establish critical viewing at an early age. And the children -- I asked them, I said, do you remember the shows that you really enjoyed that were on educational television. And they said, of course, "Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood," "Sesame Street," at that time "3-2-1 Contact," and "Picture Page," that Bill Cosby did, and "Bill Nye, The Science Guy." Basically, other than these programs, the TV set was "supposed to be" -- and we all know what that means -- off-limits to them.

Given the study results that were mentioned earlier, Al, I guess you and I are going to have to share some of the credit with Big Bird for our children's later educational talents and the grades that they got in school.

Of course, as children get older and as our children got older, the dynamics changed dramatically. And while their viewing remained limited, the shows they watched were determined more by negotiations between the children and the parents than by parental edict. I think probably most people would relate to that. And I don't have to tell all of you that are parents that the television battles were only one of the many battles that are fought in the home.

Now when our children began to be at that age where they were engaged in critical viewing, I became more aware, as did Al, of what was really on television, what was out there and available to them, whether it was programming or whether it was frightening previews for movies, or no matter what. I mean, they brought that to my attention.

I began working with other people -- many of whom are here today -- years ago to raise awareness about the potential harmful influence of increasingly explicit sexual violence and violence in the media. And I guess because people identify me with this issue somewhat, I hear from parents all across the country and I can tell you just anecdotically, they are still very, very concerned. And they see for the first time a real glimmer of hope that the industry itself is listening to them, is hearing their concerns. And they are agonizing over their children's quality of life and the popular culture in which we all must navigate and which we must guide our children.

I can relate as a parent to the feelings of powerlessness that so many people feel. And everybody in this room is in a position to make them feel more powerful in their own home, given the tools that are going to be given to them.

We are here to talk about a real gift to the American parent, and that is the V-chip. The V-chip, in my view, and I think in most people's view, will help protect children. But they also should -- we also should think of the V-chip as a way to direct children to programs that reflect their values and their desires for entertainment, their priorities and their definition of what is good entertainment.

And I know that there are parents all around this country that are just as excited as I am about this extraordinary group of people gathered today with the goal of making television more positive, a richer medium, one that can help bring our children out of the crisis that we all know is gripping America in terms of their relation to the popular culture and their relation to their education.

So I want to congratulate each and every one of you for making this a priority in America. I think it's extremely important.

I would now like to turn to a person who is well-known for making television programming entertaining as well as, as Dr. Poussant said, value-laden, and a show that taught kids about life experiences. And that, of course, is Bill Cosby. And I'd like to ask you what are the ingredients, how did you succeed. We want more of what made us love you so much.

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MRS. GORE: Now, Mr. President, we've finished with this particular part of the program, and would like your comments.

THE PRESIDENT: First of all, I love this. I wish we had all day to listen to you all talk about this.

We want to talk now about whether there are barriers to more and better children's programs, and if so, what they are. And I guess I would like to begin by welcoming the advertisers that are here and thanking them for their commitment to this announcement we've made today and to this cause generally. I thought what Ms. Laybourne said about being a worrier -- a lot of the things she said I thought were quite on point. And I think that the role of advertisers in sort of changing the whole look of how we approach this issue could be quite critical. So I'm delighted that you're here.

And we're now going on to a section about how we should define and recognize and then deliver quality on these programs, and what barriers there are and how we would go about taking them down. And so I'm going to call on the Vice President to take over the last section.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Well, thank you very much, Mr. President.

Let's spend a little time in this segment talking about the barriers to more and better children's programming. In many ways, today's session is a counterpart to the White House summit on television that the President hosted several months back. With the V-chip, as others have pointed out, families will have an opportunity to block programming they feel is inappropriate for their young children. And as Tipper pointed out, they will also have the opportunity to select good programming, quality programming that they believe is beneficial for their children.

How will the industry respond to this new reality -- advertisers, programmers, broadcasters, network executives, the cable industry, et cetera? In order to answer that question, we have to understand or take a little time to better understand why it didn't happen before, what the barriers are and how we can overcome them. If with the V-chip some programmers and advertisers for the first time have to worry that inappropriate

programming is going to lead them to lose some of the audience that would otherwise be hypnotically transfixed by the programming, but because parents will have more tools at their disposal, now they're going to have to look at the possibility of the certain percentage of the audience being lost, that will begin to change some of the dynamics.

But there are other aspects to this, and it's critically important to focus on the positive as well as just the negative. We know from the research that the First Lady and her panel discussed earlier that not only is negative imagery bad for children, but more importantly, in keeping with today's summit, positive programming, educational programming can really help children learn. It has many positive benefits.

And we know from the panel that Tipper has just conducted here that there are a lot of successes, and we know good children's programming when we see it. LeVar Burton brought up the concern about what is the definition. It may well be that when the FCC acts they will be able to make reference to good, private sector efforts like that of the Annenberg School, and say, well, this program or that program is cited as good quality children's programming. But according to a lot of these private sector groups that spend full-time looking at this, it doesn't really pass muster. So it may be that a uniquely American solution for that problem can be found.

Gerri Laybourne expressed concern about regulation, and, indeed, that's why the agreement that the President announced at the beginning of this session is so important -- because the industry is now on board. And Peggy Charren and these network executives and programmers and the others are all together saying, yes, this is now a national goal and we're all going to play our part. So it's got to go far beyond regulation.

But with the industry on board and with everybody moving in the same direction it's good to talk about why this hasn't happened before, without the President's leadership, without everybody getting together. The fact is, there are a lot of barriers and people in the industry know -- producers who have made great programming and for economic and structural reasons it hasn't gotten on.

Linda Ellerbee* has built a career taking on hard issues, sort of like this one. Her show, Nick News, provides youth with a different view of the world. And I'm sure if it were easy to do, she wouldn't be doing it. But I'd like to ask Linda Ellerbee to start off the discussion of what these barriers are and why it hasn't happened before and what direction do we need to move in now.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: We've run out of time. There are others who would want to speak, but, Mr. President, I think it's obvious from the three panels that we've just heard that this is the beginning of a new era for children's television in America. And coupled with the V-chip and the ratings announcement several months ago, I think this is really revolutionizing children's television.

So that's the end of this panel, and we'll turn it back to you.

THE PRESIDENT: Let me thank all of you, first of all, for coming. And those of you who participated in this historic agreement, I'm very grateful to you. You have done a good thing for your country today.

I do not want to leave us on a down note, but I want to put this in the context of what I think the real stakes are of what we're discussing here. And I leave you with this thought, a challenge to think about another barrier that has nothing to do with the production of the programs or even getting advertising, which is: How are you going to get these programs to the kids that need to see them the most, the kids that are most at risk in our society, and how are you going to reach their parents?

And I want to just ask you to think about these two facts. One is, while we are, at least inside our administration we are very happy that the crime rate has gone down for four years in a row in America -- it's a wonderful thing, four years in a row of a drop in crime rate -- the rate of random violence among people between the ages of 12 and 17 is going up. Cocaine use has dropped by a third, but the rate of random drug use among people between the ages of 12 and 17 has been going up since 1991. Fact one.

Second thing. When school starts this fall, 51.7 million children will enroll in schools. And it's the first time since I, the oldest of the baby boomers, since the baby boomers will fully in school that there has been a class of schoolchildren bigger than the baby boom generation, which means we have a few years to turn these trends around or reap a whirlwind from it.

Basically, if you look at all the aggregate statistics in our country, it seems that most things are moving in the right direction after years of being troubled. But there are just so many of these kids out here that are either virtually raising themselves or their parents -- almost all of whom, I believe, would like to do a good job -- they want to do a good job, but they're not sure how they should do it. So one huge barrier here that we have not discussed beyond it's sort of beyond our purview, but that a lot you who are brilliant at marketing things to people and reaching people is how do you reach the parents?

You know, I had a pretty good education, but I learned a lot because Chelsea was into Sesame Street and Where in the World is Carmen San Diego? When I met the co-leaders of San Marino at the Olympics, I knew where it was because Chelsea got me into Where in the World is not because I had a degree from the Foreign Service School at Georgetown. I'm just saying, how do we reach the parents? This is a serious issue.

And secondly, if you cannot reach the parents, is there some way to reach the kids anyway? We're trying to give schools more funds, for example, to open early and stay open late. Is there some way to redirect the programs in there so that -- and work with the schools so that they will show the programs to the kids in the after school area. You really need to think about this because the kids that need what we're doing the most may have barriers that we haven't even discussed today.

I want to make one last point. I think it would be very good for the adults of this country, including all of us who work in the White House, if Mr. Rogers' poem could be read once a week on prime time television.

Thank you and God bless you all.