

May 7, 1993

Mrs. Terry Rakolta, President
Americans for Responsible Television
1876 Rathmore
Bloomfield Hills, MI 48013

Dear Terry:

A staff person from Sen. Markey's office called me but I had a conflicting speaking engagement on the day of the hearings. They waited too long; maybe next time. Simon, Durenberger, and Dorgan (North Dakota) are all hopping on the bandwagon you have started!

It is now time for a strategic plan to build on your success. I propose a three-pronged project directly related to our shared interest in reducing violence on television. The basic assumptions that underlie the project are stated in my op-ed piece in the February 26 issue of the New York *Newsday*, which I enclose:

"...Humankind may have had more bloodthirsty eras but none as filled with images of violence as the present. We are awash in a tide of violent representations the world has never seen. Of course, there is blood in fairy tales, gore in mythology, murder in Shakespeare. Violence is a legitimate cultural expression, even necessary to show the tragic consequences of deadly conflicts and lethal compulsions. But the historically limited, individually crafted and selectively used symbolic violence of great drama and good journalism, often conveying a tragic sense of life essential for human compassion, has been swamped by "happy violence:" no pain, no permanent damage, just swift, effective, sanitized entertainment leading to happy endings.

"Children who are steeped in the violence of cartoons and other fare soon graduate to scarcely less violent adult programming. The consequences of this cradle-to-grave exposure are three-fold. For a few (whose acts provoke frightful publicity), violence seems an effective quick-fix to any problem. Many more become desensitized to violence and lose the ability to protest or to resist...Heavy viewers live in a meaner world than their next door neighbors who watch less television, and act accordingly...

" Don't just blame the kids or even only the parents. For the first time in human history, most of

the stories are told not by parents, schools, churches or communities with something to tell but increasingly by global conglomerates ...Most highly rated programs are not violent but they are more expensive to produce and don't travel as well on the global market. Violence is good business because it is relatively cheap to produce, it needs no translation or thoughtful comprehension, and it speaks action in any language. Shows can be sold dirt-cheap abroad, where big media profits come from.

"Cheap 'happy violence' is the result of a *de-facto* censorship foisted on our children, our culture, and our creative people by global marketing formulas... Parents need the help of schools to teach media literacy. We all need to act as citizens..."

The last point is made more explicit in my testimony before the House Judiciary Committee's Subcommittee on Crime and Criminal Justice, chaired by Charles Schumer of New York, on December 15, 1992:

"...Public policy must take account of the fact that a *de facto* censorship imposed by marketing strategies stifles creative diversity as much as any government censorship would. Only education in media literacy and a grass-roots citizens movement can address this predicament..."

That is where ARP and our own activities come in. My proposal involves (1) updating the Violence Index, (2) revealing the real economic basis of mass-produced violence, and (3) planning a national conference involving many media-oriented citizens groups to draft an action program.

(1) Updating the Violence Index

As you know, our research team has been tracking violence in network dramatic programming since 1967. The research began with a study for the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence and continued until recently under a variety of government and foundation grants, the last of which expired this spring. Network prime time and weekend daytime programs have been analyzed from the beginning. Recently cable-originated dramatic programs and network daytime serials were included.

The first prong of the proposed project will bring major parts of the study up to date through the 1992-93 season, and result in a 25-year summary of trends, including the latest information of considerable news value. (We have not published a Violence Index since 1989.) Only the computer analysis of the last two seasons is needed to

complete that phase of the project. The budget required for that task is about 3,000.

(2) The reasons for television violence

The second prong of the project will focus on the conventional rationale for the continued pervasiveness of television violence. The rationale is that violence is popular; it is "what the public wants."

Trade data and informed opinion challenge that claim; we propose to test it. A specified number of randomly selected highly violent programs will be compared with the same number of randomly selected non-violent programs. The comparison will include ratings (controlling for airtime), cost of production, domestic and foreign earnings. Audience ratings will also be correlated with frequency of violence. The purpose will be to assess the relative importance of popularity vs. cost of production and sale on the world market. If the findings indeed demonstrated that forces other than popularity drive the mass-production of television violence, and, when given a fair chance, audiences make other choices, the major rationalization for the pervasiveness of violence could be effectively refuted. I estimate the cost of that study to be about \$2,000.

(3) Citizen action

The Television Violence Act sponsored by Senator Paul Simon urges industry self-regulation and will soon expire. But the industry has no compelling reason to alter its policies; its "self-regulation" resulted in very high levels of violence. ARP, in collaboration with the Cultural Environment Movement, can help to build a broad public coalition and constituency for change.

The first task is to demonstrate that, except for minor fluctuations, violence remains at high levels, despite all previous attempts to reduce it. That will be done in the first prong of this project. The second task is to ascertain whether the pervasiveness of violence reflects creative freedom and popular preference or the constraints of global marketing imposed on our children and the cultural climate of our lives. That will be done in the second prong.

The results will be announced at press conferences and national events of high visibility. That will help build the coalition to be launched at a national conference, planned as the third prong of this project,

The conference will draft a platform as the basis for coordination, collaboration, and joint action. This draft will be submitted for the consideration and approval of

participating and other media-oriented citizens, educators, and professional groups (such as the health professions concerned with violence as a public health problem). The budget for that remains to be developed after further discussion about the size, scope, and venue of the conference.

You and ARP have created a cultural and political climate for meaningful change. I think that our combined efforts can now make a significant difference. It only requires very moderate funding for which I have no immediate sources. Application to foundations is a time-consuming and uncertain process that would make us lose the momentum that exists now. Please let me know if you have any leads or suggestions for the timely funding of our project.

Sincerely yours,

George Gerbner
Professor of Communication and Dean Emeritus

August 13, 1993

Dear Terry:

Thank you for your positive response to my letter and proposal of May 7, 1993. Based on the budget estimates noted in that letter, and on the basis of our subsequent discussion about the nature of the project, we will be pleased to proceed as follows.

1. The violence index will be updated through the 1993-94 season.

2. A special report about violence against women on television will be prepared for ART.

3. I will cooperate with ART in releasing and publishing the study at a mutually convenient time. Any additional expense and per diem cost, if any, that may be incurred in connection with the release, will be compensated by ART.

4. ART agrees that any publicity, newsletter item, or other statement concerning our joint project, its results, and its release will be subject to my review and approval.

Please indicate your approval by endorsing a copy of this letter and returning it to me together with payment.

I look forward to working with you on this important project.

Sincerely yours,

George Gerbner
Professor and Dean Emeritus

Approved

Mrs. Terry Rakolta

John and Terry Rakolta
1876 Rathmor
Bloomfield Hills, Michigan 48304

March 24, 1994

Mr. and Mrs. George Gerbner
234 Golf View Road
Ardmore, PA 19003

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Gerbner,

Do you feel the solution to crime, health care and economic growth is **MORE GOVERNMENT?**
We don't!

We believe expanded government creates more problems than it solves. If you agree, we hope you'll join us in meeting someone who can help slow the Washington juggernaut.

Ronna Romney, candidate for U.S. Senate, is recognized for her strong anti-tax and pro-business positions. Consistently, she has fought against career politicians and "business as usual" in Congress. Ronna is determined to slash excessive government regulations and spending. ***And we are determined to help her.***

Ronna will be a citizen legislator -- not a career politician. She has raised five children, chaired two Presidential commissions, co-authored two books and co-chaired the drive for Term Limits in Michigan. She is a former WXYT-radio talk show host with political wisdom, common sense and outstanding name recognition.

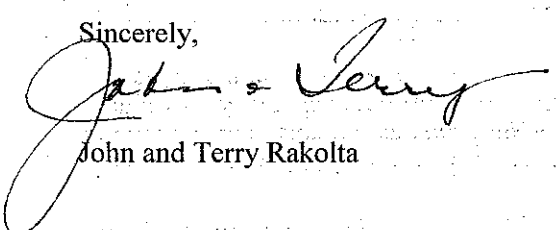
The February 4, 1994 issue of ***Rothenberg Political Report*** says Ronna "is well positioned to win the GOP nomination and the seat in November."

Along with Burt and Suzy Farbman, we are hosting a reception for Ronna on Monday, April 18, 1994 from 6:00 to 8:00 p.m. at my home at 1876 Rathmor in Bloomfield Hills. The minimum contribution is \$500 per person. Please make your check payable to "Romney for Senate" (no corporate checks, please) and return it to me as follows:

Romney for Senate
c/o John Rakolta, Jr.
613 Abbott Street
Detroit, Michigan 48226-2521

We hope you'll join us -- we look forward to seeing you on April 18.

Sincerely,


John and Terry Rakolta