news from

PAUL SIMON

U.S. SENATOR

FOR RELEASE: April 17, 1986

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ILLINOIS

Sen. Thurmond cosponsors Judiciary bill

SIMON UNVEILS TV VIOLENCE BILLS

U.S. Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., today unveiled legislation that will pave the way for industry guidelines to curb the viewing of television violence by children.

The two-bill package results from a year of meetings with industry representatives, visits to television production facilities and earlier hearings on the issue. The bills would:

1. Provide an exemption from the antitrust laws to broadcast stations (including owners or operators of cable television companies and networks) and trade associations. The exemption will be limited to joint action to review, consider, evaluate and take action concerning broadcasts or material intended for television broadcast to determine or alleviate their harmful effects.

2. Direct the Federal Communications Commission to oversee a definitive study of television violence issues and to report back to Congress within one year.

"The evidence is clear," said Simon. "Viewing too much violence can cause violent behavior and other problems, particularly in those who have emotional problems. We don't want censorship in a democracy, but we also have to deal with this problem in a meaningful way.

"The general rise in the level of violence on television should concern us, but we should also be concerned that it has happened almost invisibly.

"Television can appeal to the best or the worst in us. If we begin placing a little less emphasis on violence to attract viewers, perhaps the industry can begin placing more emphasis on more positive influences."

Innumerable researchers and four federal commissions have reported on the relationship between television violence and aggressive behavior. "By now there is no disputing the connection or the fact that television violence has generally been on the rise," said Simon.

Simon has been active on the issue for three years. In preparing the plan he has solicited comments from all major industry groups. In January he visited Southern California production facilities of the three major networks to see first-hand how content decisions are made.

The Illinois lawmaker is a member of the Senate Judiciary Committee and is senior Democratic member of the Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice.

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PAUL SIMON

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FOR RELEASE: Fri., June 20, 1986

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ILLINOIS

HEARING TODAY ON TV VIOLENCE BILL

WASHINGTON -- The Senate Judiciary Committee today convenes a hearing on legislation that will pave the way for industry-set guidelines to curb the viewing of television violence by children.

The hearing is set for Friday from 9:30 a.m. until Noon in Room 628 of the Dirksen Senate Office Building.

Witnesses will include Bob Keeshan, formerly television's "Captain Kangaroo" and an advocate for quality children's programming; representatives of ABC, CBS, NBC, the National Cable Television Association, and the Associaiton of Independent Television Stations; and a panel of researchers who have done work on the subject of television violence.

The hearing will focus on legislation introduced by Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill., that results from a year of meetings with industry representatives, visits to television production facilities and earlier hearings on the issue. The Simon bill would provide an exemption from antitrust laws to broadcast stations (including owners or operators of cable television companies and networks) and trade associations. The exemption is expressly limited to allow joint action to review, consider and implement industry-wide standards on TV violence or other actions directed to the viewing of television violence by children.

Simon and others cite several recent studies connecting excessive violence on television with behavior problems in children. C. Everett Coop, surgeon general of the United States, has come to the same conclusion.

Cosponsoring the Simon bill is an impressive bipartisan coalition of Judiciary Committee members, including Chairman Strom Thurmond, R-S.C.; Sen. Dennis DeConcini, D-Ariz.; Sen. Howard Metzenbaum, D-Ohio; Sen. Jeremiah Denton, D-Ala.; and Sen. Howell Heflin, D-Ala.

Simon today announced that the Administration will support the bill, with minor modifications.

Simon has been active on the issue for three years. In preparing the plan he has solicited comments from all major industry groups. In January he visited production facilities of the three major networks to see first-hand how program content decisions are made.

"Television is an integral part of our society and of our lives, and few groups have more exposure to it than our children," said Simon. "Television can appeal to the best or the worst in us. Few devices have proven to be as potent a ratings-booster as television violence. If we begin placing a little less emphasis on violence, perhaps the industry can begin placing more emphasis on positive influences."

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I also have to say there are some great examples of family programming -- very successful programming -- like "The Cosby Show" on NBC.

There is no question we can have good, wholesome, solid entertainment that people watch that does not contain violence.

I am not saying that by passing a bill to remove the antitrust exemption that the TV industry will necessarily get together and do something, but I think it will send a clear signal from Congress.

As an aside and to clear any misunderstanding, I also want to make a distinction between violence in entertainment programming and violence on television news programs. The news is part of the real life around us and sends a different message than much of the violent programming.

Television can appeal to the best in us or the worst in us. With a little less emphasis on violence, maybe we can see greater emphasis on more positive influences."

news from

PAUL SIMON

U.S. SENATOR

ILLINOIS

FOR RELEASE: Wedn., Sept. 10, 1986

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SIMON: STUDY WILL BOOST TV VIOLENCE BILL

New findings charting the steady rise of television violence will boost the chances of Senate action on a bill to allow guidelines on television violence.

U.S. Sen. Paul Simon, chief sponsor of the measure, today joined University of Pennsylvania researchers in releasing the new figures, which show that television violence abounds in the earliest network viewing hour -- 8-9 p.m. -- when children are most likely to be watching. The study is the latest baseline study on television violence performed by the Annenberg School of Communications in a series that dates back to 1967.

The Simon bill, which results from a year of meetings with industry representatives, visits to production facilities and hearings on the issue, would exempt industry members from antitrust laws expressly for the purpose of reviewing, considering and implementing industry-wide standards on TV violence .

The Senate Judiciary Committee is expected to vote on the Simon bill as early as Thurs., Sept. 11.

Simon and other cite several recent studies connecting excessive violence on television with behavior problems in children. C. Everett Coop, surgeon general of the United States, has come to the same conclusion.

Cosponsoring the Simon bill is an impressive bipartisan coalition of Judiciary Committee members, indluding Chairman Strom Thurmond, R-S.C.; Sen. Dennis DeConcini, D-Ariz.; Sen., Howard Metzenbaum, D-Ohio; Sen. Jeremiah Denton, R-Ala.; and Sen. Howell Heflin, D-Ala.

"Television is part of our daily lives, and few groups have more exposure to it than our children," said Simon. "Television can appeal to the best or the worst in us. Few devices have proven to be as potent a ratings booster as violence. If we begin placing a little less emphasis on violence, perhaps the industry can begin placing more emphasis on positive influences."

news from

PAUL SIMON

U.S. SENATOR ILLINOIS

FOR RELEASE: Thurs., Jan. 25, 1990

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REPORT SHOWS VIOLENCE STILL A TV STAPLE

WASHINGTON (Jan. 25) -- Violence remains a mainstay of prime time American television and has reached "saturation" levels on children's programs, according to the latest edition of the nation's most venerable survey of TV violence trends, released today.

The findings will boost prospects for final congressional action on a bill aimed at scaling back TV violence, according to the bill's sponsor, U.S. Sen. Paul Simon, D-Ill.

Simon joined researchers from the University of Pennsylvania and the University of Delaware today in releasing the latest audit of television violence on the nation's airwaves, a project launched in 1967 and headed by Dr. George Gerbner of Penn's Annenberg School for Communication.

The new report, covering the 1986-1989 television seasons, shows continuing high levels of violence in prime time network offerings and rising use of violence in children's Saturday morning programs.

Television Violence Act

Simon's Television Violece Act would restore some of the industry's license for self-regulation that has been revoked over the last two decades through stricter interpretation of federal antitrust laws. The bill would grant limited antitrust immunity for three years to networks, cable television, local stations, producers and industry trade groups to allow them to write and apply voluntary, industry-written guidelines on TV violence in non-news broadcast and cable programs.

Simon launched the effort in 1985 after inviting television industry representatives to his office to discuss the issue. Simon selected the antitrust immunity approach after more meetings and after visits to the networks' standards and practices divisions.

The Simon bill has passed the Senate and House and awaits a House-Senate conference to settle a sticking point between the two versions of the bill -- a Senate amendment offered by Sen. Jesse Helms, R-N.C., to broaden the bill to allow guidelines on depiction of sexual activity on television.

The House version of the bill is sponsored by Reps. Dan Glickman, D-Kansas, who attended today's briefing on the report, and by Rep. Edward Feighan, D-Ohio.

Harm to Children

Simon was motivated in drafting the bill by what he calls "a mountain of research evidence" and recent findings by former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop that he says show excessive violence on television harms children.

'Violence a Ratings Booster'

"This report shows an approach like the Television Violence Act clearly is needed as much today as it was five years ago [when Simon first introduced the measure]," said Simon.

(MORE)

"The use of violence is driven mostly by a basic fact of life in the world of television programmers: Violence is a tried and tested ratings booster. Violence adds ratings points and audience share. Violence 'moves the numbers.'

"It's an extremely competitive climate in which each network, each cable operator and each station knows there are tangible risks in bucking any formula that works. No commercial network dares to be the first to reject the use of violence.

"The industry-wide guidelines made possible in this bill can begin at last to reverse the trend toward violence."

The American Civil Liberties Union has emerged as the bill's leading opponent, claiming the bill amounts to the federal government's tacit entry into programming decisions.

Simon counters: "I'm a lifelong civil libertarian. But I also strongly believe a democratic, pluralistic society like ours can finds ways to protect itself against undue emphasis on televised violence.

"Like our politicians, television can appeal to the best in us or to the worst in us. Today's ratings formula, with its emphasis on violence, is harming our children and our society, and the television sets in our homes have become part and parcel of the violence that has spilled into our streets, even into our schoolyards. It's time for the television industry to forge a partnership with America's families to help reduce the atmosphere of violence.

"This deserves Congress' attention as one of the most significant family issues on the nation's agenda," he said.

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news from

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July 28, 1993

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New TV Violence Data Offers 'Hint of Change' On Eve of Industrywide Conference

A new report showing a slight dip in prime time TV violence adds "cautious optimism" to efforts to address the issue on the eve of an unprecedented industrywide conference on the subject, Sen. Paul Simon said Wednesday.

The report, compiled by a team led by Dr. George Gerbner of the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication, tracks violence on three broadcast networks for three viewing seasons, including the current season. Gerbner has documented violence on television longer than any other researcher.

Gerbner credits some of the decline to the Television Violence Act, a three-year waiver of antitrust laws to allow joint efforts by the television industry to reduce violence on television. Simon, D-Ill., authored the law and is its chief Senate sponsor; chief House sponsor of the law is Rep. Dan Glickman, D-Kan. The broadcast networks used the law last December to develop and implement their first joint standards on violence and was used again June 30 for a system of advance parental advisory messages that ABC, CBS, Fox and NBC will initiate this fall for violent programs. The law also enables the industry to meet next week on Monday, Aug. 2nd, in Los Angeles for an unprecedented industrywide conference on TV violence.

"This report brings us back to the basic issue: There is too much violence overall on television," said Simon. "Labeling will be helpful to a degree. But the real answer is to reduce the levels of violence on television. For that, self-regulation -- not government censorship -- is the best solution. In the final months of the Television Violence Act, the broadcast networks have taken initiative and accepted responsibility that remains lacking among others in the industry, up to now, cable in particular.

"On the eve of conference, it's now possible to speculate that the era of indifference may be ending," Simon continued. "The industry is getting the message from the public, from the research community and from the Congress that television violence contributes to violence in our society. I take this modest decline as a hopeful sign and as a hint of the lasting change we hope to eventually see on this problem.

"There's nothing fundamentally new in these figures. Just the hint of change. But, for the first time, we have reason to hope that the next survey will be significantly different. On the basis of the steps that already have been taken, my guess is that these numbers a year from now will be noticeably better, for the new fall season on the broadcast networks," he said. "We should not expect dramatic, overnight solutions. A large industry like a ship, has to slow down before it changes course.

"Three years ago, Dan Glickman and I urged the industry to use this window of opportunity for self-regulation under the Television Violence Act," said Simon. "For the first two years, we saw very little acceptance of responsibility for self-regulation. But we've now come farther in six months than in the previous six years of working on this issue. As we head into this conference, I'm hopeful; but I'm cautiously hopeful. We shouldn't hope for too much from this conference, but we also should not hope for too little."

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