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SUGGESTED DATA FOR NATPE ARTICLE

As President of the Americans for Responsible Television (ART), I appreciate the opportunity to be a participant at your prestigious NATPE convention. The general purpose of ART is to encourage the responsible use of our public airwaves by the license holders and to promote family values on TV.

We try to accomplish our goals through concerned (and sometimes outraged) citizen action rather than urging government intrusion through legislation or regulation.

We believe that if broadcasters can invoke first amendment rights to flood the airwaves with sex and violence accessible to children, then we should be able to exercise our own first amendment rights to oppose the significant role TV, the most pervasive and influential medium, is playing in de-sensitizing society to violence, rape, murder and sexual promiscuity.

We dislike being cast in the role of citizen pressure groups trying to impose our personal tastes on the public -- because we are a large and important part of that public -- of the millions registering a public outcry against the persistent over-emphasis of sex and violence on TV and radio. This outcry is reflected by the increased critical actions of Congress, the FCC and hundreds of responsible citizen groups trying to curb objectionable TV programming that is causing a moral dry rot in America.

Briefly, please note the following pertinent statements:

Senator Robert C. Byrd, senior Democratic member and president pro tempore of the United States Senate, in a recent U.S. Today interview said it best --

"The crudeness, cursing, profanity, vice and violence we tolerate today on our television screens will be the crudeness, cursing, profanity, vice and violence that we will be forced to endure in our real lives in the years ahead.

By the current tolerance of this diminution of taste and values on television, we are teaching our children that the basest level of human behavior is the accepted norm.

I hope someone will heed my outrage before the medium of television itself is beyond self-reform and self-correction."

There is an implied threat in Senator Byrd's remarks that is shared by not only a majority but practically all Congressmen and Senators.

For example, Congress overwhelmingly enacted an around-the-clock 24-hour ban on indecency on the air. The FCC endorsed and implemented the legislation quoting ratings and surveys that found children constituted a large part of the broadcast audience even after midnight! The U.S. Court of Appeals for D.C. voided the FCC ban. However, most significantly, the Solicitor General has asked the Supreme Court to review the Appeals Court ruling. So the U.S. Supreme Court itself will be the final arbiter of this significant issue.

I agree with Senator Byrd and most other congressional leaders in appealing to the television industry to remember that broadcasting is a public trust -- The sex trash, vileness and violence flooding TV today could be considered a violation of the public trust.

Newton Minow, former FCC Chairman, who characterized TV as a vast wasteland over 30 years ago addressed the National Press Club last fall. He said "In 1961 I worried children would not benefit much from television, but in 1991 I worry that my grandchildren will actually be harmed by it."

Talk show host David Frost described TV as "an invention that permits you to be entertained in your living room by people you wouldn't have in your home."

Commissioner Jim Quello, FCC Dean, speaking before the Federal Communications Bar Association last fall, amused the audience with "Today instead of prime time in the public interest, we have slime time TV serving the public interest and accessible to children." He went on to say "In personal appearances the past 14 years, I have urged frustrated citizens groups to register their objections directly with TV stations, networks, cable systems and, most importantly, with advertisers. They can frequently get positive results without FCC or Congressional intervention. If these citizens groups represent the views of a broad cross-section of the American public who are fed up with the excesses they see on TV, then program producers, broadcast executives and advertisers would do well to listen. This is nothing more than the public marketplace at work. Media execs who complain won't get much sympathy from government officials."

David Levy, distinguished Executive Director of the Writers, Directors and Producers Guild in Hollywood and President of Wilshire Productions in a January article displayed characteristic sensitivity to gratuitous violence in exhorting: "Isn't it time for a gradual disarmament on our television screens -- no matter what the source -- network TV, syndicated television, local programming, cable pay-TV? Isn't it time for less visibility of a product whose only purpose is to maim or kill?"

Levy continued "How about a return to real storytelling in which murder and mayhem aren't the major ingredients? How about the kinds of stories written by television's best remembered writers: Rod Serling, Paddy Chayefsky, Reginald Rose, Budd Schulberg and dozens of others?"

"Let's encourage network executives to lead the on-the-air disarmament and to stir the juices of writers and producers who would be eager to fashion drama that is meaningful and entertaining. Television has the power to positively impact society and to alter the negative side of our cultural environment."

Thank you, Mr. Levy. It is a most appropriate closing for this brief plea for more pro-social responsibility in broadcast programming.

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