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12-3-96

TV Ratings
December 3, 1996

Background: The Washington Post ran a story this morning in which it said that the television industry has tentatively agreed to a rating system that will categorize TV programs based on their appropriateness for children of various ages.

* In a meeting with President Clinton in February, 1996, the television industry agreed to explore how to implement a rating system for their programming. The Clinton Administration fully supports such efforts. However, we believe that government should not dictate how that rating system should work, nor should government rate television programs. The American people will decide whether the rating system is adequate or not.

For the briefer only:

On December 19, the President and Vice President will participate in an event at which a rating system will be unveiled. The Motion Picture Association of America's rating system is just a starting point -- any television rating system will probably be more comprehensive and informative, i.e. ratings based on sex, violence and appropriateness for age.

Drafted: MEGlynn -- per discussion with Greg Simon

TV Ratings Talking Points

BACKGROUND

This week the Television Ratings issue has gotten a lot of play as a potential deal is about to be struck. The Vice President has been working behind the scenes this week to help broker a deal on TV ratings having met separately with the parent groups and Jack Valenti representing industry. (Not to be mentioned publicly; The Vice President is also scheduled to call Bob Wright, President of NBC, the only holdout from the industry side.) We feel a deal is immanent. There was criticism in the LA Times story today indicating that the Vice President was an opportunist in these negotiations. But the facts clearly show that we have been in this since we endorsed the V-Chip in 1995. We hope in the near future to schedule a White House meeting where the deal would be announced.

- **Two years ago**, the President joined the Vice President at his annual family conference to announce our support for the V-Chip to block objectionable material based on a yet to be devised television ratings system and ensure that it was included in upcoming legislation.
- **In February of 1996** when the Congress answered the President's call for the V-Chip, the President signed into law the Telecommunications Act which requires all TV sets to have the V-Chip installed and requires a ratings system to make it work.
- To spur industry into creating the ratings system, **in July of 1996** the President hosted a White House Conference on Children's Television at which point the television industry agreed to develop a rating system for television to use with the v-chip.
- When industry developed the rating system **in December of 1996**, industry came back to the White House to announce it with the President. At that time the President and Vice President challenged parents to let us know if the ratings system was useful to them and make suggestions on how industry could improve it.
- **Since December of 1996**, the White House has continued to be involved with trying to reach a solution that is best for American families.
- **The Vice President is actively engaged in trying to persuade industry and family groups** to reach a consensus that is good for parents and doesn't require government involvement. This week he met with nearly a dozen family groups and also met with Jack Valenti representing industry.
- **Members of Congress have also been actively involved** in moving parents and industry together towards this compromise. Senator McCain, Congressman Tauzin, Congressman Markey have been playing a leadership role along with numerous other members of Congress.
- **While details of the agreement are still being finalized**, the makings of the agreement will likely include more specific content ratings like V, S and L for violence Sex and language that would be added to the current ratings now on television and the involvement of parents.

VP's office

TV Ratings
January 8, 1997

- Nothing new on tv ratings, except that they are now appearing in newspapers. The industry has until February 8 to submit the new system to the FCC for review. The FCC will then put the system out for public comment before making its determination as to whether the system is "acceptable" or not. The FCC will then likely take several months to determine acceptability and to look at technical question of interaction with the v-chip.
- The President, however, has said that the most important judgement of the new system will come from the parents of America. He thinks parents ought to be actively involved in using the new system and commenting on it.
- Mike -- Greg Simon wants us to stay away from hypothetical questions about what the FCC might do if they don't find the system acceptable, what we would do in that event, etc. The bottom line right now is the system is better than what we had before -- which was nothing. Now is the time for parents to begin actively using the system and delivering feedback on it.

Drafted: Kathy McKiernan per Greg Simon, 6-6222

PM-TV Ratings,310

TV industry to submit ratings system to FCC

By JEANNINE AVERSA= Associated Press Writer=

WASHINGTON (AP) The government soon will be asked by the TV industry to review its system for rating shows' sexual and violent content.

TV industry executives, speaking on condition of anonymity, said they were prepared to file the plan as required by a telecommunications law enacted last February with the Federal Communications Commission this week, and were aiming for today.

ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox and some cable networks are already carrying on-screen tags suggesting appropriate age groups for shows.

Unveiled last month, the six-tier aged-based system, similar to the one used for movies, was immediately attacked by child advocacy groups and other critics as too vague to help parents shield their kids from excessive sex and violence.

If the FCC finds the TV industry's ratings unsuitable, it can move to appoint an independent advisory board that would create a new system. However, the government cannot require its use.

Critics and other interested parties will have an opportunity to weigh in on the industry's system once it is submitted to the FCC.

Critics hope they can use the FCC review as a way to pressure the industry to make changes in its system. They want the ratings system to include more detailed information about the type and intensity of sex, violence and language in a given show.

But Motion Picture Association of America President Jack Valenti, who oversaw the creation of the TV industry's ratings system, has said it will fight in court any effort to impose another system.

Separately, the broadcasting and cable TV industries Tuesday appointed executives to a 19-member industry-only board to handle appeals of individual ratings. The motion picture industry has not made its appointments yet. Valenti will be the board's chairman.

**** filed by:APE(--) on 01/08/97 at 03:03EST ****

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TELEVISION RATINGS

2/11/97

(The Parents Research Council (part of Media Research Center) held a press conference today to criticize the TV ratings system and say they aren't working. CNN may ask you about this.)

Q: When the ratings system was announced, the President said we needed to give the system some time to decide whether it was working. Has there been enough time?

A: The television ratings system has been in effect for about five weeks. Obviously, this is not nearly enough time to decide whether it's working. For one thing, it's interesting to note that some of the nation's leading newspapers, some of which have carried editorials on this subject, are not even including the ratings in their television listings. So it's pretty difficult for many parents to get this information.

But in any event, this system is still in its infancy, and it's way too early to evaluate it.

Q: Do you believe the FCC should hold hearings right away on this?

A: It's my understanding that the FCC is going to be soliciting comments on the ratings system and holding hearings. How they do that is up to them, but clearly parents and others are going to have a chance to express their opinions, and that's as it should be. Also, it's my understanding that there will be hearings in the Congress on this issue in the near future. So there is going to be plenty of discussion of this issue.

TOIV

Conversation with Simon

cc: McHugh
Scheer
file



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THIS WEEK

Sam Donaldson

June 27, 1997

Mr. Mike McCurry
Assistant to the President & White House Press Secretary
The White House
Washington, D. C. 20500

Dear Mike:

As you know, we at **This Week** are concerned about the way the process has sometimes worked in placing administration officials on the Sunday public affairs programs. We do not believe the process has always been even handed or the policy we were given to understand was in place has always been followed.

Here are some examples of what bothers us.

1) When the second term was organized, our competitor got both the new Secretary of State and the new White House Chief of Staff first, clearly the two "hottest" guests of the time and ones we were all requesting. We don't think this was fair.

2) On the Sunday of the Paula Jones story you were prepared to allow Bob Bennett to go on both **Meet the Press** and **This Week**. But for us to duplicate guests means we are always going to be at a disadvantage because of our later start. Any "news" to be made will have been made and viewers who often watch both programs will conclude they've already seen what we have to offer. So, you'll recall, we made an effort to counter this by interviewing Bennett earlier on **Good Morning American Sunday**. We offered to put him on alone if we could do this.

You would not agree to allow Bennett to be interviewed live on **GMA** but offered to let us tape him early and use the "news" but not his "sound bites" prior to our broadcast time. In a telephone conversation with you, I told you that since you hadn't agreed to our original suggestion we would feel free to interview other guests on the subject. You did not voice any objection.

Yet, the next day (Saturday) you forbade Bennett to tape earlier which not only demolished our ability to stay competitive with a key guest but caused Leon Panetta to back out of his commitment to talk with us on the subject. We can only interpret all this as an effort to protect our competitor no matter what. And we don't think that is fair.

Mr. Mike McCurry
June 27, 1997
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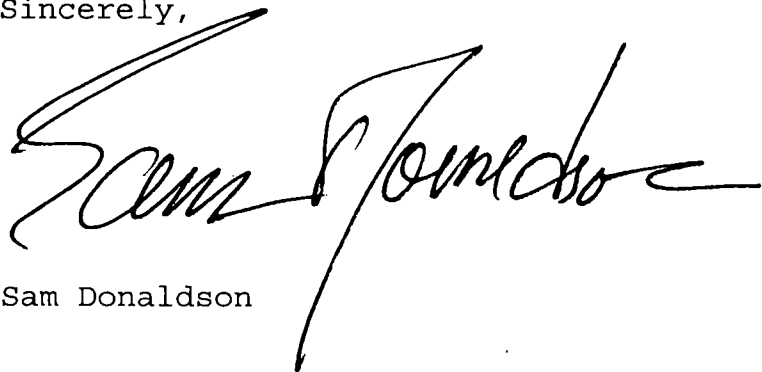
3) You tell us you follow a rotation for top guests but when two cabinet members appeared jointly with our competitor out of rotation, you explained that was because the idea was unique and original rather than being an "automatic" and thus the policy was to make exceptions for such initiative.

Yet, when we attempted to book General Shalikasvili on a subject that was also not an "automatic" and our competitor objected, you said it wasn't our turn in the rotation and Shali would go to our competitor. As it turned out, our competitor "dumped" him in favor of a debate over impeaching President Clinton and we got him back. But what this says to us is that when our competitor comes up with an original idea, you break the rotation. But when we do -- and our competitor objects -- you invoke it. And we do not think that is fair.

In short, Mike, we are not asking for exceptional advantage. We are asking that the playing field and the rules that you impose upon it be absolutely level and consistent. For instance, coming up might be a new White House Chief of Staff and perhaps Secretary Shalala with a news worthy announcement about tobacco - - to name just two possibilities -- and we ask you to consider that we all want such guests and not tilt toward our competitor in placing them.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sam Donaldson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Sam Donaldson

TV Ratings
December 10, 1996

Q: What is your reaction to today's news reports on the structure of the new TV ratings system? Markey and others have expressed concern that it is too vague.

A: The President has a strong interest in the development of a tv ratings system which will give parents the information they need to make sound decisions about their children's television viewing.

We are engaged in an active dialogue with the industry on the development of this system. Based on our discussions, the news reports today do not necessarily reflect what the final ratings system will look like. We are not rendering an opinion on today's stories because they do not represent the final word on this issue.

Q: When do you expect to have a final ratings system proposal? What happens if it is not satisfactory to the President? What recourse do you have?

We expect the industry to finalize their proposal over the next several weeks. We do not think it is possible to say that any one system is going to please everybody. We have a year to test the workability and suitability of the proposed system before the V chip comes into television sets and we would expect there to be reviews and improvements.

If we believe the system to be too vague or overly broad, we will urge the FCC to adopt a broad standard for the ratings system the actual V chip can handle so that the technology can respond to improvements later. The President has said and continues to believe that the television industry should devise its own ratings system without government involvement, but that will not prevent him or any other parent from expressing his opinion on the proposed system after he sees it in detail.