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JOINT STATEMENT OF
MOTION PICTURE ASSOCIATION OF AMERICA
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BROADCASTERS
NATIONAL CABLE TELEVISION ASSOCIATION

WASHINGTON, D.C. --- The television industry has concluded a long negotiation with public advocacy groups and has come to closure on revisions to the TV PARENTAL GUIDELINES.

The following content information, where appropriate, will be added to all non-exempt programming to supplement the existing Guidelines: in the TV-Y7 category -- FV for fantasy violence; in the TV-PG, TV-14 and TV-MA categories -- V for violence, S for sexual situations, L for language, and D for dialogue.

Leaders in Congress have said no legislation regarding television ratings, content and program scheduling should be enacted for several years, so that parents will have time to understand and deal with V-chips in television sets, a mechanism which gives them the ability to block out programs they may find inappropriate for young children. Additionally, advocacy group leaders have said this process should proceed unimpeded by pending or new legislation that would undermine the intent of our joint agreement or disrupt the harmony and good faith of the process just concluded.

We are grateful to Vice President Gore, to Chairman John McCain, to Chairman Tom Bliley, Chairman Billy Tauzin, Congressman Ed Markey, among others, who were helpful throughout this process. We also wish to thank the parents of Peoria, Illinois who, in a May town hall meeting, shared with us their thoughts on the subject of television ratings.

As the industry declared on February 29, 1996, in announcing its plans to design parental guidelines for television, we repeat now: Parents will be the arbiters of these new TV PARENTAL GUIDELINES, which will be implemented no later than October 1, 1997. Obviously, until there is a sufficient number of television sets equipped with V-chips in American homes, no evaluation can be properly conducted.

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SEPARATE STATEMENT OF COMM. HAROLD W. FURCHTGOTT-ROTH

In the Matter of Implementation of Section 551 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996: Video Programming Ratings, CS Docket 97-55

It cannot be gainsaid that the First Amendment prohibits government from either abridging or compelling protected speech. In view of that fundamental constitutional principle, section 551 of the Telecommunications Act prudently provided an alternative to a government-created, government-policed scheme for judging the content of video programming: the establishment of a private, voluntary ratings system by video programming distributors.

Under section 551, if the Commission determines that such establishment has occurred, the provision of the Communications Act that creates governmental ratings guidelines, section 303(w), never takes effect. By this Report & Order, the Commission fulfills its limited statutory role of determining that the industry's ratings rules are "acceptable," section 551(1)(A), and that "distributors of video programming have . . . agreed voluntarily to broadcast signals that contain ratings," section 551(1)(B). Under the Act, our involvement in programming ratings is now at an end.

This Order should *not* be interpreted as a basis for future governmental efforts to compel adherence to the industry guidelines at issue in this proceeding. Once the government becomes involved in pressuring distributors to take part in this program, the program of course ceases to be "voluntary" in any real sense of the word. Participation on pain of governmental penalty is simply not willing participation. And forced participation in content-based regulation of speech runs headlong into the First Amendment, as the drafters of section 551 realized.

In this regard, I salute the courage and fortitude of those programmers, such as NBC and BET, who have resisted political pressure to effectively convert these voluntary guidelines into mandatory regulations. Whether these companies opt in or out of the guidelines is a matter between them, their colleagues in industry, their advertisers, and last but not least their viewers. In the end, programming distributors should look to their own viewing audience, rather than to government, to determine what type of ratings, if any, to employ. When programmers do so, they should be commended, not condemned, for their independence of mind. That, after all, is what the First Amendment is about.

SEPARATE STATEMENT OF COMMISSIONER GLORIA TRISTANI

In the Matter of Implementation of Section 551 of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, Video Programming Ratings, CS Docket No. 97-55, and In the Matter of Technical Requirements to Enable Blocking of Video Programming Based on Program Ratings, Implementation of Sections 551(c), (d) and (e) of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, ET Docket No. 97-206

As I travel around the country, I hear again and again from parents who are concerned about what their children are being exposed to on TV. The facts support their concern. Children spend about 25 hours a week watching TV, more time each year than they spend in the classroom. And much of what they are watching is violent. By the time they complete elementary school, children have witnessed about 8,000 murders and 100,000 acts of violence.

Parents want to protect their children from violent and other kinds of programming that they consider harmful. But the task is daunting. Nowadays there aren't just three channels to monitor, there are dozens. No parent can possibly know what's on all of them all of the time. And in this age of single parent families and families in which both parents must work to make ends meet, it simply isn't possible for parents to always be at home to monitor what their children are watching. These parents want and deserve the ability to protect their children as much as parents who are able to closely monitor their children's viewing habits.

Today's actions will give parents a modern tool to help raise their children in the modern world. Under the voluntary Industry rating system we have found acceptable, parents should be able to receive the information they need in order to determine whether an upcoming program contains sex, violence, offensive language or suggestive dialogue. When used in conjunction with the V-chip, parents will be able to prevent their children from viewing programming that they consider harmful, even when they cannot be home.

The V-chip will not relieve parents of the responsibility of determining what their children watch on TV. It will help them fulfill that responsibility. Those who urge parents to simply turn off the shows they do not want their children to see should welcome the V-chip. The V-chip is essentially a remote control device with a longer range. It allows parents to "turn off" programs that they believe are harmful to their children while they are at work, at a PTA meeting, or at a Saturday night movie. It will not be a substitute for parents; it will help parents do their jobs.

I commend the Industry for developing an Industry-wide consensus on its voluntary ratings proposal. I also commend the Industry for its willingness to broaden this consensus by addressing some of the concerns that the public raised regarding its initial proposal. I note

that there are still some entities, such as NBC and BET, whose decision not to participate in the current ratings system will make it more difficult for parents to program the V-chip using the Industry proposal. I am especially concerned that many parents might not realize that NBC -- one of the major networks with some of the highest-rated programming on television -- does not apply content-based indicators. Such a parent, for example, may attempt to block violent programming using the "v" content-based indicator without realizing that they may also have to select an entire age-based category in order to block violent shows on NBC. Once a parent selects an entire age-based category, however, he or she loses the ability to establish different age-based categories for different types of content (e.g., the ability to restrict violence to a TV-PG level while permitting sexual content up to a TV-14 level). In this way, a parent who attempts to compensate for the NBC approach by blocking out an entire age-based category may be unable to take full advantage of the Industry system. As parents begin using the V-chip, I am hopeful that all video programming distributors will perceive the public interest in making the V-chip a more effective and easy-to-use tool for parents to block programming that they deem harmful to their children.