



For Immediate Release

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**TV Watch Statement on Government's Role in Controlling What's On TV:
President Bush signs broadcast indecency bill into law, but is that what Americans really want?**

When the FCC slapped local broadcasters with a record \$3.5 million in fines this March, it said it was reacting in part to an increase in public complaints about broadcast television. But a closer look at the pattern of complaints the FCC receives shows that the vast majority of individuals file complaints at the prompting of just two special interest groups, and complainants often admit they didn't watch the episode in question.

TV Watch Executive Director Jim Dyke released this statement today:

"Those who cite 'massive' complaints about what's on TV as a way of justifying increased government intervention should be extremely concerned. The government's own data show that the vast majority of complaints come from a handful of people encouraged by activists to complain about these shows, and not the viewers themselves. The disparity between the millions who tune in and the few complainants is further evidence that Americans do not believe the government should control what they watch on TV."

For example: How 4,211 e-mails led to a record \$3.5 million in fines against local broadcasters¹

- More than 98 percent of the government-released emails about *Without a Trace* (CBS) were identical versions of the form complaints created by the Parents Television Council (PTC) and the American Family Association (AFA).
- Not a single one of the 4,211 government-released complaints against *Without a Trace* was submitted until nearly two weeks after the episode aired – an episode watched by 8.2 million Americans. Only when the PTC and AFA issued "e-alerts" asking members to forward a prepared complaint, on January 12 and 17, did the FCC begin receiving complaints about the broadcast.
- Only in two out of the 4,211 email "complaints" did the author admit to having actually seen the program in question, and even those two complaints referred only to the brief, out-of-context segment provided by the PTC on its website.

For example, a complaint filed against CBS affiliate KMOV admitted that "I did not actually see the show since I usually watch the History Channel or old movies on AMC or FMC or TCM, but I am outraged that our youth are exposed to this. I did watch a clip via the parentstv.org link and was disgusted."

Special interest groups manipulate the FCC complaint process

- The American Family Association launched an online campaign against *Las Vegas* (NBC) and other shows in February and March 2006. As a result, the number of indecency complaints filed at the FCC during February and March 2006 jumped to nearly 140,000, from a typical average of less than 2,000 per month.²
- In February 2005, a PTC campaign launched against a single TV episode of *CSI* accounted for 89 percent of the total complaints the FCC received that month.³

¹ Source: Motion to Vacate Notice of Apparent Liability and Supplement to Opposition of 93 Local Television Broadcast Stations Affiliated with the CBS Television Network (EB-05-IH-0035 before the Federal Communications Commission, 12 June 2006)

² Source: FCC Quarterly Report on Informal Consumer Inquiries and Complaints, First Quarter 2006

³ On its website, the PTC claimed that its members sent 12,971 complaints to the FCC regarding that episode. In the same month, the FCC reported receiving 14,480 complaints overall.

- According to an FCC analysis obtained by *Mediaweek*, over 99 percent of indecency complaints filed before the FCC in 2003 came from the same interest group: the PTC. With the exception of complaints filed about the Superbowl “wardrobe malfunction,” the trend continued into 2004.

What is the PTC?

- In recent years the Parents Television Council has asked the government to penalize broadcasters for such popular and Emmy Award®-winning shows as: *The Simpsons*, *CSI*, *The Amazing Race*, *NYPD Blue*, *Futurama*, *American Idol*, *Survivor*, *Frasier*, *Dawson’s Creek*, *Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me*, *Scrubs*, *Gilmore Girls*, *One Tree Hill*, *Will & Grace*, *Charmed*, *King of the Hill* and others.
- In 2002 the PTC paid \$3.5 million in fines when it settled a libel lawsuit filed by the World Wrestling Entertainment. As part of the settlement, the PTC apologized for misrepresenting the relationship between advertisers and the WWE, including the false claim that sponsors had stopped advertising because of the PTC’s campaign.
- In 2006 the PTC was widely criticized for claiming that an innocuous episode of *SpongeBob SquarePants* contained “what many parents call ‘potty mouth’ or mild swearing and euphemisms for adult foul language.” The episode in question, “Sailor Mouth,” was actually about the program’s protagonists learning why they *shouldn’t* use bad language and didn’t include any swear words.