

## **Letter to the Editor: Choosing What's on TV: Should Big Brother Hold the Remote?**

By Jim Dyke  
The National Ledger  
May 3, 2006

There was a time, the rumor went, when mothers, fathers and children argued nightly over who got to hold the remote. But in 2006, what was once a domestic battle had been taken outside the walls of American living rooms. Where it went, did not matter; all that mattered was that someone else was watching, and deciding.

In this Orwellian reality, a small, but influential, contingent thinks the government should police what's on your TV. This group, which includes the Parents Television Council, takes every opportunity to call hit shows "smut" and "sewage." That, of course, is a matter of taste. But when the PTC manipulates the FCC complaint process and then blasts networks for appealing the fines in Federal Court, their prescription turns out to be a matter of ideology.

Should the government punish popular programs that a few viewers dislike, or should we encourage all adults to control TV in their own homes, so everyone can watch according to their own personal tastes and values? Americans have a clear preference on this question.

82 percent of voting Americans would much rather be free to set their own household rules. They overwhelmingly believe in parental limits, parental standards and parental scruples. That includes the freedom to decide if and when to watch such PTC targets as *The Simpsons*, *Desperate Housewives* and *CSI* – shows that are designed for adults and rated accordingly. It's a subjective, personal decision, not unlike deciding what your kids can and can't eat for dinner.

When the FCC considers a case, the commissioners are legally required to consider the context of the incident. This puts government appointees in the position of deciding when it is OK to swear on TV and when it is not based on "context." The result: the swearing of soldiers in *Saving Private Ryan* is decent, but the swearing of blues musicians in a documentary is not.

That these subjective decisions are so difficult is as evident on Main Street as it is at the FCC. The latter's recent decisions revealed that the commissioners themselves disagree on what's indecent. Ultimately, they're not so different from the countless moms and dads who can't always agree on what's right for their families.

If a handful of government officials don't see eye to eye, how can we expect to impose a single standard on an entire nation?

That's why you, as individual Americans, hold the fundamental right to choose your own entertainment, and the good old-fashioned freedom to change the channel when something you don't like comes on. What's more, those who want to avoid it altogether can do so too; television, cable and satellite blockers and DVR's make it easy to control what's on and when. With so many choices, the entertainment in your home can be as dirty or as clean-scrubbed as you want.

When groups like the PTC misinform audiences about the effectiveness and simplicity of parental controls, they're saying the government needs to control TV because parents can't. But parents disagree, and let's face it – no one knows the business of raising kids better than they do.

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