

Leave television violence control to parents

by *The Detroit News*

We'd like to believe that the problem with violence in society is tied largely to television and that censoring the images we see on TV will solve the problem, particularly as it relates to children. But we know better. The Federal Communications Commission, however, does not.

The federal agency insists that strict regulations against violence on television are needed and that government is best suited to impose those rules and regulations, according to a report issued by the FCC in late April that is expected to be used as the basis for legislation introduced in the next few weeks. The argument is that because parents aren't using the widely available technologies to keep their kids from watching violent TV shows, restrictions on programming and content must be legislated to protect them.

FCC Chairman Kevin Martin has been pushing for greater control of the broadcast airwaves for more than a year and if given the opportunity would extend that reach into the cable and satellite television markets, as well.

He suggests that so-called violent "entertainment" television shows that are broadcast on the free airwaves be restricted to hours after 10 p.m. The government would set the definition of "violence" and there would be exclusions for such things as real-life violence shown in news stories or, as with the case with indecency, exceptions for those things deemed artistic or literary. Fights in hockey or baseball or deadly crashes in car racing would not be deemed inappropriate. Martin and others say that the V-chip, which has been mandated on every television built since 2000 and allows parents to block specific programming, is too confusing for many and not widely used. The same holds true for the blocking options on digital cable television and satellite receivers, according to the report. In addition, there aren't uniform ratings in place and the warnings now employed occur for such a brief time at the beginning of most shows that they're ineffective.

While some of those observations hold true, they don't warrant government intervention. Even the most technologically impaired among us can muster the basic protections: hitting the "off" button or changing the channel. Remote controls don't even require that we get up.

The problem isn't programming, it's parenting, and government can't - and shouldn't - try and take over that role.

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