

GOP Senators want hearings on impact of sex and violence

By Jack Torry
BLOCK NEWS ALLIANCE

Senate Republicans are pushing for a formal probe this fall into whether violence and sex in films, music and video games have undermined parental control of teens.

Although Republicans say that any investigation by a new committee would include a range of cultural issues such as education, children's services and single-parent families, a major focus would be whether the entertainment industry's products increase teen-age violence and misbehavior.

With the backing of Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott of Mississippi, Sen. Sam Brownback, Kansas Republican and a critic of the entertainment industry, wants a new panel to spend a year examining American culture and deciding whether new federal laws are needed.

The committee also would give a stronger voice to the contention by many conservative Republicans that declining values rather than a plentiful supply of guns is the main reason for the brutal shootings this year at high schools in Colorado and Georgia.

"This is not Washington versus Hollywood," said Erik Hotmire, a spokesman for Mr. Brownback.

America and specifically the difficult time that parents are having raising their children in this day and age. Obviously, it would touch on Hollywood and some of the violent entertainment they put out in many forms, such as movies, video games and music."

Mr. Brownback this year sponsored an amendment to the juvenile crime bill requiring the Federal Trade Commission to investigate whether the entertainment industry deliberately markets violent and sexually explicit films and music to teen-agers. With the bill bottled up in conference committee, President Clinton ordered the FTC to conduct the investigation.

"There are more social workers than serial murderers in America," Mr. Brownback said last month at a news conference. "There are more pastors than prostitutes. But you'd never know it from TV. ... When we watch more and more violence, profanity and sleaze, we eventually grow more violent, profane and coarse."

Aides to Mr. Brownback said that the Senate could conduct its own hearings or form a joint congressional committee with the House. John Czwartacki, a spokesman for Mr. Lott, said Mr. Brownback's plan is "an idea that's making the rounds. It has bipartisan support. It's an idea that Senator Lott supports, likes and encour-

initiative takes root."

Sen. Joseph I. Lieberman, Connecticut Democrat, has expressed interest in the inquiry, but most Democrats have reacted cautiously. Molly Rowley, a spokeswoman for Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota, said that Mr. Daschle "thinks this is a very serious subject. He hasn't ruled out the possibility of a [committee]."

The film and record industries are clearly alarmed. They point out that, in addition to the FTC investigation, both the Senate Judiciary Committee and the Senate Commerce, Science and Transportation Committee already have the power to investigate the entertainment industry.

"There are so many different inquiries going on, what is the purpose of adding another one?" asked Jack Valenti, chairman and chief executive officer of the Motion Picture Association of America.

The industry argues that heavy media coverage of recent shootings has led Americans to believe a wave of juvenile crime has swamped the nation. The industry cites government records showing that the juvenile violent arrest rate has fallen every year since 1994.

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