

Online firms to help police child porn

Gore promotes better filters for Internet

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WASHINGTON — Vice President Al Gore, saying parents might someday “shut off the Internet if they think it’s unsafe for kids,” announced that online firms will start reporting child pornography sites to law enforcement officials.

Gore said the new government-industry program calls on firms to start acting as “Internet police” to help law enforcement officials “capture and punish those who abuse the Internet to harm and hurt our children.”

Steve Case, president of America Online, the nation’s largest Internet service provider, said the new policy asks Internet companies to remove child porn from their bulletin boards and services and to notify federal and state authorities of sites that could be harmful to children.

“Ten million children are already on the Internet, four times as many as three years ago, and soon kids will be more connected to the Internet than any other segment of our population,” Gore told a conference on ways to make the Internet safer for children without regulation. “We need to make the Internet a more family-friendly place — or we won’t see this global network grow and realize its wondrous potential.”

Gore also announced the creation of a national, toll-free hot line to alert parents to online child pornography and sexual exploitation.

But while he praised companies for

THE HOT LINE

The toll-free hot line for the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children: 1-800-843-5678.

developing smut-blocking software, Gore said the industry must do more to ease the fears of parents about the global network.

Many filtering tools now on the market, he said, aren’t effective enough and not enough parents know how to use them. He cited other Internet problems of children who are vulnerable to pedophiles who use assumed names in online chat rooms, and sexual material sent in e-mail.

Gore urged the industry to improve filtering software, to flag kid-friendly sites in user-manuals and to make improved smut-blocking tools widely available.

Unless such steps are taken, Gore told the more than 400 industry representatives at the conference, “You might as well prepare yourself for a massive, nationwide backlash that will stunt the growth of this exciting resource.”

Gore also challenged the industry to come up with ways to protect kids from exploitative online marketing and to protect children’s privacy.

The two-day “Internet Online Summit: Focus on Children” conference, sponsored by a coalition of high-technology companies and public policy groups, is focused on how to rely on technology, education and existing laws to screen children from inappropriate material online — without regulation. Sponsors say the conference is being held in response to President Clinton’s call last summer for the industry to do more to make the Internet more child-friendly.

Monday some conservative groups



ASSOCIATED PRESS

Vice President Al Gore joined children at a computer yesterday at a Washington conference on ways to make the Internet safer for youngsters. “If Internet sites for kids continue to feature advertising blurred into entertainment . . . parents may soon shut off the Internet,” Gore warned.

said the conference is little more than a public relations effort to promote new Internet products and stave off government regulation.

Gore acknowledged those criticisms, saying: “There is a danger that (the conference) could degenerate into a discussion about how to avoid regulation.” He suggested that the best way to avoid regulation is

for industry to “devote the same resources and commitment to designing parental controls that it would devote to the design and launch of any new product.”

In June the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a law designed to ban material harmful to children from the World Wide Web, the global informa-

tion network that can transmit words, video and sounds.

The court said the 1996 Communications Decency Act improperly restricted the free-speech rights of adults.

A revised version of that law was introduced in the Senate last month by Sen. Dan Coats, R-Ind.

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