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President goes easy on film industry

Says Littleton was no fault of donors

By Bill Sammon
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

LOS ANGELES — President Clinton told the makers of violent films and video games over the weekend that they are not "bad" people as they showered him with \$2 million.

He assured them they had no personal responsibility for the Columbine High School massacre in Littleton, Colo.

Instead of blaming Hollywood for making violent films, he said, the real blame lies with the theaters and video stores that show and sell them to minors.

The president told the audiences of stars and studio moguls that they should not blame the gun manufacturers, either, but blame instead the Republican members of Congress who won't enact stringent gun-control laws.

The president gingerly suggested at a Saturday-night fundraiser in Beverly Hills that sustained exposure "to indiscriminate violence through various media outlets" can push vulnerable children "into destructive behavior."

But, he quickly added, the producers, directors and actors who ponied up \$25,000 per couple are not at fault.

"Now, that doesn't make any-

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body who makes any movie or any video game or any television program a bad person or personally responsible with one show for a disastrous outcome," Mr. Clinton said. "There's no call for finger-pointing here."

The president was harshly criticized by Republicans and others for taking money from the makers of some of Hollywood's most violent films just five days before he is scheduled to visit Littleton, where two teen-age gunmen last month murdered a dozen classmates and a teacher before ending their own lives.

Although Mr. Clinton had resolved earlier to nudge Hollywood away from some of its violent excesses, he appeared reluctant to broach the sensitive subject during remarks to entertainment executives who included Steven Spielberg, Jeffrey Katzenberg and David Geffen, founders of Dreamworks SKG studio.

"You've helped me through thick and thin for all these long years," the president said. "The people of California were very good to me and Al Gore and to our families and to our administration — twice. And I am very, very grateful."

He said he was "having a good time in Los Angeles."

Although the president complained that underage children are often allowed to rent or view movies that are rated PG-13 or R, he was careful to exempt the Hollywood glitterati from this criticism.

"There's a lot of evidence that these ratings are regularly ignored — not by you, but by the people who actually sell or rent the video tapes or the video games or run the movie theaters," Mr. Clinton said.

The president reserved his strongest criticism for congressional Republicans, who last week voted against legislation that would have required background checks of those seeking to purchase guns at gun shows. He said he has "been to a lot of these gun shows" and "enjoyed them greatly."

Mr. Clinton even prompted the stridently liberal crowd of 100 to applaud companies that make and sell guns.

"The gun manufacturers, who for years sided always with the [National Rifle Association] and always opposed all these measures, have changed," the presi-

dent said. "We can ... thank the gun manufacturers who supported the legislation this time in Congress and had the kind of civic responsibility that we need more of from every American. I appreciate that."

Mr. Clinton's words drew polite applause from Hollywood figures such as Rob Reiner, Lisa Kudrow, Goldie Hawn, Meg Ryan, Dennis Quaid and Kurt Russell. During his remarks on the patio of the posh Greystone Mansion, Mr. Clinton referred to the Dreamworks owners by their first names of "David and Steven and Jeffrey."

So did House Minority Leader Richard A. Gephardt and Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, both of whom gave speeches as guests noshed on baked coconut clusters and chocolate-dipped strawberries, prepared by Wolfgang Puck, caterer to the stars.

The Democratic congressional leaders, staying away from the subject of Hollywood violence, lashed out at Republicans as extremists who unfairly impeached the president and must be deposed from power in Congress next year.

"The group that controls the Senate and the House is extreme, almost radical, in their views on all of the issues that I suspect you care about," said Mr. Gephardt, Missouri Democrat.

Mr. Daschle emphasized that Democrats comprise the party that best represents the views of Hollywood. "Democrats to the core believe in a woman's right to choose," said the South Dakota Democrat. "Democrats believe strongly in the belief that we're never, ever, going to give everybody the opportunity that they truly deserve unless we start at childhood — when we give them the opportunity to grow and to learn in public education."

Earlier in the day, Mr. Clinton visited with Apple Computer founder Steve Jobs, who also runs the animated movie studio Pixar, at his enormous estate in Palo Alto.

The president had breakfast with singer Barbra Streisand and her husband, actor James Brolin, at their lush Malibu home on a bluff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. The president then spoke at a fund-raiser in San Diego before traveling to Las Vegas for two more fund-raisers. He will have collected more than \$3.3 million for Democrats by the time he completes his four-day Western trip and returns to the White House late today.