

# NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:  
Tuesday, January 16, 2001

For More Information Contact:  
Gary Ruskin (202) 296-2787

## **Commercial Alert Asks: Will Ashcroft Stand Up for Children or Corporations?**

Commercial Alert sent letters today to Members of the U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, urging them to ask John Ashcroft, President-elect George W. Bush's nominee for Attorney General, to explain his views on the role of that office in standing up for the nation's children and families against the aggressive assault of the commercial culture. The letter follows.

Dear Senator:

Our children are in the cross-hairs of the entertainment and advertising industries. These industries have enlisted sophisticated psychological research techniques, the most potent devices of media influence and persuasion, and increasingly the most brazen means of delivering their commercial messages to vulnerable and impressionable children. Together, they promote hedonism, violence, sensuality and anti-social behavior, as well as the addictions of alcohol, gambling, tobacco and overconsumption generally.

As our nation's top law enforcement official, the next Attorney General will have considerable power to stand up for families and children and against the aggressive marketing of violent entertainment, gambling, pornography, alcohol and tobacco. We urge you to inquire whether John Ashcroft, President-elect George W. Bush's nominee for Attorney General, is up to this great challenge.

**Marketing of Hollywood movies and violent entertainment to children.** Last year, Mr. Ashcroft ran campaign ads in support of efforts to help parents prevent "Hollywood's decaying influence" on our society. As Attorney General, he would have extensive powers to curtail the influence of Hollywood and the entertainment industry on our children, by working to restrict their ability to seduce children through suggestive advertising. Does he intend to do so? If so, how?

Hollywood has even enlisted the power of the state and the compulsory education laws to coerce children to watch ads in the public schools. For example, on December 8, the in-school marketing company Channel One promoted the movie "Dude, Where's My Car?," which glorifies the sexual fantasies and drug use of two pot-heads who party so wildly that they can't remember anything about the night before. Would Mr. Ashcroft look for ways to curb such coercive marketing of Hollywood movies to schoolchildren?

Mr. Ashcroft has been a forceful critic of the marketing of violent entertainment to children. Following the Federal Trade Commission's devastating report on such marketing, Senator Ashcroft said that "Entertaining children with graphic mayhem, murder, corrodes children's minds." He said that media company self-regulation is "right first step to take, but more could be done." What is that "more"? Does Mr. Ashcroft intend to step to the plate? Would he litigate to try to stop the blatant marketing of violent entertainment to children? Would he support efforts to

hold media corporations liable for copycat violence, or violence instigated by the viewing of violent entertainment? Would he support Indianapolis's ordinance that bans minors from playing violent or sexually explicit video games without parental consent? Would he support requiring TV stations to run public service announcements, as a condition of licensure, presenting the views of community leaders on violent programming, before such programming or advertising?

**Pornography.** Mr. Ashcroft has a strong record of opposition to pornography. That is encouraging, given that some of the world's largest corporations produce or distribute pornography. For example, last year *The New York Times* reported that "The General Motors Corporation, the world's largest company, now sells more graphic sex films every year than does Larry Flynt, owner of the Hustler empire. The 8.7 million Americans who subscribe to DirecTV, a General Motors subsidiary, buy nearly \$200 million a year in pay-per-view sex films from satellite..."

How would Mr. Ashcroft use his position as Attorney General to reduce the advertising and distribution of pornography? For example, would he support eliminating the federal tax deduction for ads for pornography?

In his inaugural address for his second term as governor of Missouri, Mr. Ashcroft said that "the volume of pornography prevalent in our society is implicated in sexual assaults against women and children in our state." Would Mr. Ashcroft initiate and support Justice Department efforts to hold pornographers liable for such harms?

**Tobacco advertising.** The deadly effects marketing of tobacco to children are well-documented. Each day, another 3,000 children start to smoke; about a third of them will grow sick and die from smoking-related illnesses. The U.S. Supreme Court has recently agreed to hear the case *Lorillard Tobacco Co. v. Reilly*, regarding the ability of a municipality to ban tobacco billboards and signs within 1,000 feet of schools and playgrounds. Would Mr. Ashcroft support or oppose such limitations on tobacco advertising?

**Gambling.** Mr. Ashcroft has a strong record of opposing legalized gambling. As Governor of Missouri, he opposed both riverboat gambling and a state lottery. In 1998, Mr. Ashcroft expressed displeasure that GOP chose to hold a meeting in Biloxi, Miss.: "Our party should not sell its soul to the gambling lobby of this country...The truth is that gambling is a cancer on the soul of our nation." What would Mr. Ashcroft do to reverse the spread of legalized gambling and the advertising of gambling and lotteries? Would Mr. Ashcroft use the power of the Attorney General to hold gambling companies liable for deaths and injuries related to gambling?

**Alcohol advertising.** In 1999, the Federal Trade Commission reported to Congress that the alcohol industry often advertises to audiences with large numbers of children -- football games, for example. In June, 1996, Joseph E. Seagrams & Sons Co. broke a 48 year old voluntary ban on advertising hard liquor on television. Five months later, the Distilled Spirits Council of the United States (DISCUS) re-wrote its Code of Good Practice to allow its member distillers to advertise on radio and television. Would Mr. Ashcroft oppose the advertising of beer, wine and hard liquor on television in general, or on TV programs that have substantial numbers of children watching?

Millions of parents are concerned about these issues, along with teachers, clergy, grandparents, and Americans generally who are worried about our culture, our values and our future. They feel that childhood is too important to be left to these manipulators and seducers. The media and advertising industries continue their relentless creep into every nook and cranny of our children's lives. The question is, is Mr. Ashcroft prepared to stand up for our children and our families?

Sincerely,

Gary Ruskin  
Director  
Commercial Alert

<-----letter ends here----->

Commercial Alert opposes the excesses of commercialism, advertising and marketing. Commercial Alert's website is at <<http://www.commercialalert.org/>>.