

Commercial Alert
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October 12, 1999

The Honorable Dennis Hastert, Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
The Capitol, Room H-232
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Trent Lott, Majority Leader
United States Senate
The Capitol, Room S-230
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Hastert and Majority Leader Lott:

In 1980, Congress revoked the authority of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to enact rules against advertisers who take advantage of the vulnerabilities of impressionable children.

There is no justification for this law. Congress should be on the side of children, not those who would exploit them for monetary gain.

We urge you to repeal this law.

As you know, advertisers barrage children each day with an onslaught of psychologically sophisticated messages to generate desire for products. Many of the problems that beset our children arise from their obedience to the messages they receive. They are doing precisely what the ads tell them to do. For example:

Violent entertainment. Advertisers flood children with ads for violent entertainment, including violent video games, movies and television. Following the recent spate of school shootings, some media experts and others have suggested that violent entertainment may be contributing to violence both in and out of school. For example, Lt. Col. Dave Grossman, co-author of *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill*, argues that some video games “teach children the motor skills to kill, like military training devices do. And then they turn around and teach them to like it -- like the military would never do.”

Alcohol. Alcohol is a major cause of death among teenagers, contributing to motor vehicle crashes, other injuries, suicide, date rape, and family, school and other problems. The FTC recently reported to Congress that the alcohol industry often advertises to audiences with large numbers of children -- as anyone who has watched a football game on TV can tell you.

Tobacco. The deadly effects of tobacco advertising on American children are well-documented by the FTC and the Journal of the American Medical Association. RJR Nabisco’s Joe Camel ads

helped seduce hundreds of thousands of children into a lifetime of smoking. Each day, another 3,000 children start to smoke; about a third of them will have their lives cut short due to smoking-related illnesses.

Junk food and fast food. Children are inundated with ads for Whoppers, Happy Meals, Coke, Pepsi, Snickers bars, M&M's, and other junk foods and fast foods. These ads may contribute to skyrocketing levels of childhood obesity. About 25 to 30 percent of American children are now clinically obese. Similarly, childhood diabetes is also on the rise.

It is a cause for shame that advertisers in this country would devote their talents and energies to prod unsuspecting children in these directions. It is beyond comprehension that the U.S. Congress would protect such behavior. We urge Congress to restore the FTC's authority to enact solutions to this problem before it gets worse. Congress should affirmatively *direct* the FTC to undertake such action, and provide funding to enable it to do so.

Sincerely,

Center for a New American Dream
Center for Media Education
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Center on Alcohol Advertising
Commercial Alert
Junkbusters
National Institute on Media and the Family
New Mexico Media Literacy Project
Public Citizen
STAT: Stop Teenage Addiction to Tobacco
Teachers Resisting Unhealthy Childhood Entertainment (TRUCE)
TV-Free America