

NEWS RELEASE

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Nader Urges Hastert, Lott to Investigate the Commercial Rewards that Feed Media Violence

Ralph Nader and Commercial Alert sent this letter today to House Speaker Dennis Hastert and Senate Majority Leader Trent Lott:

Dear Speaker Hastert and Majority Leader Lott:

Following the tragic homicides at Columbine High School last week, and the mourning over the loss of life there, you said that you would convene a national conference on youth and culture. Such a conference is sorely needed.

But it must not be an empty dialogue. Our country needs better. Throughout the last week, politicians and the media have searched for the causes behind the disaster in Littleton, and have been quick to ascribe it, in part, to the violence in video games, music, the Internet, pop culture, Hollywood, movies, and television.

Such comments, though understandable, do not go far enough. They stop at the symptom, failing to reach the cause. They do not grasp the central fact of our commercial corporate culture: it is produced by people in corporations who are getting rich by promoting products to teenagers; corporations governed by incentives that impel them to respect no boundaries in exploiting the vulnerable minds of teenagers.

Every day, hundreds of companies work with one thought in mind: how to manipulate children and teenagers to purchase video games and music, to watch movies and television.

In their quest for larger audiences and greater profits, the commercial media predictably races to the lowest and basest standards, with ever more blatant displays of violence, sex, crassness, and nihilism in television, cable, movies, radio, video games and music. These are the motivations that relentlessly drive the creation, production and marketing of ever more Doom, Quake, Basketball Diaries, Marilyn Mansons, Mortal Kombat I & II & III & IV, Jerry Springers, Howard Sterns, South Parks and the rest of it.

It is easy to point the finger at the Marilyn Mansons. But they are merely instruments. Focus on the deeper problems. Behind every Marilyn Manson are corporations and corporate executives who cynically draw their large compensation packages from the fruits of such work.

The national conference on youth and culture will be a charade unless you discuss the corporations and the powerful, monied interests that produce this culture, and vigorously insinuate it in the minds and pockets of American youth.

If you have the courage to trace the problem to its source, to focus the national conference on youth and culture upon the commercial rewards which give rise to this culture, and how we might alter these incentives, and harness the power of corporations to produce a culture that nourishes -- not harms -- its teenagers, you will do an important service for this country, its parents, and their children, who are surrounded by and conscripted into debasements and violence by methodical, calculating corporate marketing that our teenagers may not understand, and may not be able to defend themselves against.

If you would like a copy of our book Children First: A Parent's Guide to Corporate Predators, please call Mr. Ruskin at (202) 296-2787.

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Commercial Alert was founded last year to oppose the excesses of commercialism, advertising and marketing. The web address for Commercial Alert is <<http://www.essential.org/alert/>>.