

NEWS RELEASE

For Immediate Release:
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Commercial Alert, Coalition Launches Campaign Against Primedia's Channel One

Commercial Alert and conservative and progressive organizations and activists kicked off a campaign today to stop Primedia's Channel One from exploiting schoolchildren for commercial gain. Channel One is a company that uses the schools to advertise to captive audiences of about eight million children in about 12,000 schools.

The coalition sent letters today to: (1) all Channel One advertisers, asking them to stop advertising on Channel One; (2) the top 50 U. S. advertising firms, asking them not to place ads on Channel One; (3) Members of the U. S. Senate and House appropriations committees, asking them to prohibit the federal government from paying for advertising on Channel One; and, (4) all of Channel One's "partners," asking them to sever their ties to Channel One.

Endorsers of the campaign include Ralph Nader, Phyllis Schlafly, the United Methodist Church, Focus on the Family, the American Family Association, Matt Damon, Raffi, and Peggy O'Mara, the editor and publisher of Mothering magazine, among many others.

Following is the letter to Mr. Alan G. Lafley, president and chief executive officer of the Procter & Gamble Co.

Dear Mr. Lafley:

We write to ask your company to stop advertising on Primedia's controversial in-school marketing program Channel One.

As you know, Channel One shows about ten minutes of news, banter, music and filler, and two minutes of ads, to a captive audience of roughly eight million children as young as eleven years of age, in 12,000 schools each school day.

Compelling impressionable children to view commercials during their limited school time is repugnant, and removing Channel One from our nation's schools is a high-priority education reform across the conventional political spectrum.

Your company's advertising revenues are the lifeblood that keeps Channel One in business. Following are eight reasons not to advertise on Primedia's Channel One:

1. **Channel One misuses the compulsory attendance laws to force children to watch ads.** Joel Babbit, then-president of Channel One, explained in 1994 why advertisers like Channel One: "The biggest selling point to advertisers [is] . . . we are forcing kids to watch two minutes of commercials." Last year, two Ohio children were sent to a juvenile detention facility for refusing to watch Channel One in school.

2. **Channel One wastes school time.** Each 30-second commercial on Channel One usurps over 66,000 hours of students' school time across the country. Channel One consumes the equivalent of one instructional week of students' school time each school year, including one full day watching ads.
3. **Channel One promotes violent entertainment.** It is irresponsible for Channel One to advertise violent movies, such as "Supernova," "The Mummy," and James Bond's "The World is Not Enough," when millions of parents are rightly worried about school shootings and violence.
4. **Channel One wastes tax dollars spent on schools.** A 1998 study by Max Sawicky and Alex Molnar, titled "The Hidden Costs of Channel One," concluded that Channel One's cost to taxpayers in lost class time is \$1.8 billion per year. Every one of your company's Channel One ads is a theft of taxpayer money that should be spent on educating children.
5. **Channel One promotes the wrong values to children.** For example, Channel One advertised "Dude, Where's My Car?," a movie glorifying two potheads who got so stoned that they couldn't remember where they parked their car. In February, it advertised "Monkeybone," a crass movie about the battle between a cartoonist and his penis, symbolized by a monkey. Still worse, Channel One promotes the commercial culture in general, and teaches a curriculum of materialism, that buying is good, and will solve your problems, and that consumption and self-gratification are the goals and ends of life.
6. **Channel One is bad for children's health.** American children are suffering from an epidemic of obesity. Channel One likely makes this epidemic worse by aggressively promoting junk food and soda pop. Channel One often advertises Pepsi, despite a recent study in The Lancet that directly links the consumption of soda pop to childhood obesity. Given skyrocketing levels of childhood obesity and Type II diabetes, it is wrong for schools to teach children to eat high-calorie junk food.
7. **Channel One corrupts the integrity of public education.** In effect, Channel One appropriates the authority of schools and transfers it to the advertisers of these controversial products. By inviting Channel One's huckstering into the classroom, schools implicitly endorse what Channel One advertises, at high cost to the moral authority of teachers, administrators and schools.
8. **Channel One promotes television instead of reading.** The latest National Assessment of Educational Progress reading test showed that two-thirds of fourth-grade children could not even read at a proficient level. Children already watch too much TV, on average, about 19 hours and 40 minutes each week. Schools should encourage children to read, not to gaze at a TV set.

Channel One claims that it teaches current events and anti-drug messages effectively. Even if these arguments were true, there are other ways to teach children such lessons that do not involve compulsory watching of harmful ads in schools.

Many organizations oppose Channel One or its use of the schools for commercial advertising. The National Council of Teachers of English opposes "intrusions of commercial television, such as Channel One, in the classroom." The National PTA, National Association of State Boards of Education, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development and other educational organizations oppose commercials in the classroom. In 1999, the Southern Baptist Convention, our nation's largest Protestant denomination, passed a resolution urging parents "to seek effective ways to protect their children" from Channel One's "advertising assault."

In its latest public relations effort, Primedia's Channel One professes to be a conservative, pro-family company. That claim is especially laughable since Primedia has merged with About.com, which distributes hard-core pornography on the Internet.

Even if you feel your company has the right to intrude on schoolchildren during their class time, we urge you to consider the public embarrassment and backlash your company may experience if you continue to misuse the school day, and continue your company's public association with Primedia's Channel One.

For the sake of our nation's children, we strongly recommend that you stop advertising on Primedia's Channel One, and issue a public statement encouraging other advertisers to do the same. We are grateful for your attention to this matter and look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience. Please direct your response to Jim Metrock of Obligation, Inc. at (205) 822-0080 or Gary Ruskin of Commercial Alert at (503) 235-8012.

Sincerely,

Enola Aird, Director, The Motherhood Project, Institute for American Values

Joan Almon, Coordinator, Alliance for Childhood

Patricia Aufderheide, Professor, American University

David Bollier, author, policy strategist

David Bosworth, Associate Professor of English, University of Washington

Wally Bowen, Founder, Citizens for Media Literacy

Michael Brody, Chair, Television and Media Committee, American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry

Brita Butler-Wall, Executive Director, Citizens' Campaign for Commercial-Free Schools

Bettye M. Caldwell, Past President, National Association for the Education of Young Children

Nancy Carlsson-Paige, Professor of Education, Lesley University

Jason Catlett, President, Junkbusters Corp.

Ronnie Cummins, National Director, Organic Consumers Association

Matt Damon, actor

Gloria DeGaetano, CEO, The Parent Coaching Institute; author of *Television and the Lives of Our Children* and *Stop Teaching Our Kids to Kill*

Leon Eisenberg, Professor of Social Medicine and Professor of Psychiatry Emeritus, Harvard Medical School

David Elkind, Professor of Child Development, Tufts University; author, *The Hurried Child*

Amitai Etzioni, University Professor, George Washington University; author, *Next: The Road to*

the Good Society

Michael Feinstein, Mayor, City of Santa Monica, California

Roy F. Fox, Assoc. Prof. of Literacy Education, U. of MO-Columbia; author, *Harvesting Minds* and *MediaSpeak*

Gilbert L. Fuld, former Member, Board of Directors, American Academy of Pediatrics

John Taylor Gatto, author, *The Underground History of American Education* and *Dumbing Us Down*

George Gerbner, President and Founder, Cultural Environment Movement; Dean Emeritus, Annenberg School of Communication

Rev. Tom Grey, Executive Director, National Coalition Against Gambling Expansion

Lt. Col. David Grossman, former Professor of Psychology, West Point; author, *On Killing* and *Stop Teaching our Kids to Kill*

Jaydee Hanson, Assistant General Secretary for Public Witness and Advocacy, General Board of Church and Society, United Methodist Church

Jane M. Healy, author, *Failure to Connect* and *Endangered Minds*

Mark Hickson, Professor and Chair of the Department of Communications Studies, University of Alabama at Birmingham

Carol Holst, Program Director, Seeds of Simplicity

Michael F. Jacobson, Executive Director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest; co-author, *Marketing Madness*

Sut Jhally, Founder and Executive Director, The Media Education Foundation

Carden Johnston, Chair, Task Force on Commercialism in the Classroom, Alabama Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics

Jean Kilbourne, author, *Can't Buy My Love: How Advertising Changes the Way We Think and Feel*

Rebecca T. Kirkland, Professor of Pediatrics, Chief of Academic General Pediatrics, Baylor College of Medicine

Naomi Klein, author, *No Logo*

David C. Korten, author, *When Corporations Rule the World*

Velma LaPoint, Associate Professor of Human Development, Howard University

Diane Levin, Professor of Education, Wheelock College; author, *Remote Control Childhood*

Jane Levine, Founder, Kids Can Make A Difference

Susan Linn, Associate Director, Media Center of the Judge Baker Children's Center; Instructor in Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School

Dana Mack, Senior Fellow, Center for Education Studies; author, *The Assault on Parenthood*

Bob McCannon, Executive Director, New Mexico Media Literacy Project

Robert McChesney, Research Associate Professor, U. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; author, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*

Ken McNatt, President, Students Against Commercialized Classrooms Organization (SACCO)

Robert A. Mendelson, Clinical Professor, Oregon Health Sciences University

Michael Mendizza, Co-founder, Touch The Future

Jim Metrock, President, Obligation, Inc.

Mark Crispin Miller, Professor of Media Ecology, New York University

Tom Minnery, Vice President of Public Policy, Focus on the Family

Alex Molnar, Professor of Education, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee; Director, Center for the Analysis of Commercialism in Education

Kathryn C. Montgomery, President, Center for Media Education
Diane Morrison, Research Professor, School of Social Work, University of Washington
Ralph Nader
Mary O'Brien, author, *Making Better Environmental Decisions*
Peggy O'Mara, Editor and Publisher of Mothering Magazine
Gary Palmer, President, Alabama Policy Institute
Shelley Pasnik, children's media writer and researcher
Neil Postman, Chairman, Department of Culture and Communication, New York University;
author, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*
Alvin F. Poussaint, Professor of Psychiatry, Harvard Medical School
Raffi, the children's troubadour, Founder and Chair, Troubadour Institute for Child-Honoring
Hugh Rank, Professor Emeritus, Governors State University; author, *Persuasion Analysis*
Lee Richardson, former President, Consumer Federation of America
Gary Ruskin, Executive Director, Commercial Alert
Phyllis Schlafly, President, Eagle Forum
Don Shifrin, past President, Washington Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Tamara L. Sobel, Project Director, The Girls, Women and Media Project
John Stauber, founder, PR Watch; co-author, *Trust Us, We're Experts* and *Toxic Sludge is Good for You*
Inger Stole, Assistant Professor, Dept. of Advertising, University of Illinois at
Urbana-Champaign
Victor Strasburger, Professor of Pediatrics, University of New Mexico School of Medicine
Sue Lockwood Summers, Director, Media Alert!
Frank Vespe, Executive Director, TV-Free America
Linda Wagener, Associate Dean, School of Psychology, Fuller Theological Seminary
David Walsh, President, National Institute on Media and the Family; author, *Selling Out America's Children*
Donald E. Wildmon, President, American Family Association, Inc.
Nancy Willard, Project Director, Responsible Netizen, Center for Advanced Technology in
Education, University of Oregon

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Ralph Nader founded Commercial Alert in 1998 to keep the commercial culture within its proper sphere, and to prevent it from exploiting children and subverting the higher values of family, community, environmental integrity and democracy.

For more information, see Commercial Alert's website at
<<http://www.commercialalert.org>>.