Television and Children's Media Policy: Where Do We Go From Here?

Introduction

On Friday, February 28, 2003, the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania hosted a timely morning discussion on the subject of Television and Children's Media Policy.

The discussion brought together policy makers, scholars, advocates and broadcasters who presented their perspectives on the effectiveness of current public policies, such as the V-Chip and TV ratings system, designed to help parents who want to supervise children's media use and their opinions on what, if any, new reforms are needed.

Amy Jordan, Senior Researcher, Annenberg Public Policy Center moderated the event.

Panelists included:
Kathleen Q. Abernathy, Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission
Jill Luckett, Vice President, Program Network Policy, National Cable & Telecommunications Association
Edward J. Markey, D-MA, Ranking Democrat on the Telecommunications and the Internet Subcommittee of the Energy and Commerce Committee
Patti Miller, Director of the Children and Media Program, Children Now
Vicky Rideout, Vice President of the Kaiser Family Foundation
Emory Woodard, Assistant Professor, Villanova University

The transcript for the event follows.

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AMY JORDAN, Senior Researcher, Annenberg Public Policy Center: Thank you for joining this roundtable discussion on the future of television and children's media policy. This is an important time to have a discussion about children and media. The experience of being a child today is different than it was even 10 years ago. And in fact the experience of being a parent is different than it was.

Speaking as a parent I can say that we bring so many media into the home and we watch our children look at a screen upwards of up to four and a half hours a day. We have to wonder, we have to worry, is the amount of time children are spending with the medium making them obese? Is it detrimental to their intellectual development? Is children's time with television negatively affecting their social lives? The research suggests this might be true. On the other hand the research suggests that making careful choices and allocating time spent with media wisely can truly enrich the lives of children. So as people who care about children, it is our place to figure out if we can help and how we can help. The people sitting at this table today are committed to doing just that.

Before I begin, I want to introduce two of my colleagues. Emory Woodard, formerly a post-doctoral research fellow at the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania and currently an assistant professor at Villanova University. He's been my collaborator on several of the children and media studies conducted at Annenberg, including the one that I'll describe this morning. And Lorie Slass, director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center's Washington offices, who organized today's event.

Since 1996, the Annenberg Public Policy Center has been actively working to understand the various ways in which media policy influences the content of television for children and influences parents' ability to oversee their children's television viewing. New media policies have come at a time when content analyses show high levels of sex and violence on television, a trend reflected in surveys that reveal that parents are concerned about the influence of the medium on their children. So naturally we must ask this question, can public policy address public concerns? Specifically, if parents have tools available to manage their children's viewing, will they use them? I'd like to take a few moments this morning to describe our most recent attempts to answer this question.

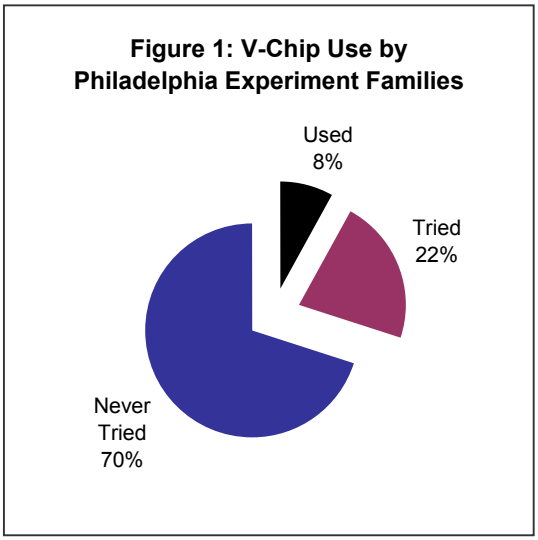
We conducted a study designed to investigate parents' response to the introduction of the V-Chip in the year 2000. This is the device that was mandated by the Telecommunications Act of 1996 and designed to be used in conjunction with the TV ratings that I think most of us are familiar with, so that if parents wanted to block out programs they could do so, based on these ratings. In this experiment we

recruited families with seven- to 10-year-old children to participate in the yearlong study of what we called the Study on Family Life. We offered, as an incentive, a television set, with a V-Chip of course, and we collected data in many forms, from visits to families in their homes, extensive telephone interviews and time-use diaries. We assigned families to one of three conditions, using a random procedure.

One set of families was shown how to program the V-Chip and was taught the meaning of the ratings. So we actually took the remote control and put it in the hands of mothers and walked them through how to program the V-Chip and what the different age- based and content-based ratings meant. These families constituted the high-information group. A second set of families was shown a variety of features of the television set, including the parental controls option that had the V-Chip feature, but they received no special training in how to program it or special information about what the ratings meant. They constituted the low-information group. A third set of families was not given television sets but instead received monetary compensation for their time, and they constituted the control group. We tracked them over the same period of time.

So in all, we followed 150 families over the course of a year. What did we find? Let me start with the control group. During this first year in which the V-Chip-equipped television sets became widely available, five out of the 40 control families acquired a V-Chip-equipped set. Two of the 40 families knew that they had it and no one used it.

Figure 1: V-Chip Use by Philadelphia Experiment Families



Now, the experimental families, those who received the V-Chip-equipped television sets, at the end of the year we observed that 70 percent of families never used the device at all, 8 percent of the families had it operating when we made our final home visit; and the rest, 22 percent, tried it but said that either it wasn't for them or that they couldn't get it to work. Those who had been taught how to use the V-Chip were more likely to try it than those who had just been told that they had it, although the overall numbers of users is small enough that it is difficult to draw definitive conclusions.

So why wasn't the V-Chip more widely used? Well, some parents didn't see the need. About one in four said that they trusted their children not to watch problematic shows. And of course we wondered if the results would have been different if we had been working with families that had adolescents or teenagers.

Families also remain confused about some of the ratings. Ninety-four percent didn't know the TV-Y or TV-Y7 designation for children's programming, and 96 percent did not know the meaning of the content descriptor D. So seeing a rating like this might not necessarily mean much to a parent.

We also found that the technology itself was an obstacle. The RCA model that we provided to parents required that they traverse five different menus to correctly program the V-Chip. The remote, in fact, had 40-some buttons to decipher. And if you skipped a step with one of the five menus, the V-Chip would not engage. Several parents missed the critical last step, so in fact they never saw this screen indicating that a program is blocked.

Still, we wanted to know whether the V-Chip would be useful to parents, so we set out to remove that technological obstacle. Once again we went back out into the field and into the homes of 28 families who were part of the original 150 families in the study and we programmed the V-Chip, using their own blocking choices. Families agreed to keep the V-Chip engaged for a month, and then at the end they came to Annenberg and they participated in focus group discussions with us. They talked with us about their experiences. So first let me sum up in terms of numbers and then in terms of their observations.

Before the focus groups began, mothers filled out a pencil-and-paper survey. They were asked to rate their level of satisfaction with the device on a scale from one to 10, one being least satisfied and 10 being most satisfied. The median level of satisfaction was 8 and the mean level was a little over 7, indicating that most mothers were satisfied with their experiences with the V-Chip. Next we asked mothers whether they were likely to continue using the V-Chip now that the study was over and they weren't required to keep it engaged. Sixteen of the mothers – a little over half of the 28 – said that they would be "very likely" to continue using it, seven said that they would be "somewhat likely," and two said that they would be "not at all likely."

These findings may also mean that for the V-Chip to be useful to a larger group of parents . . . we may need to simplify things – simplify the ratings, simplify the V-Chip.
– Amy Jordan, Annenberg Public Policy Center

On the whole then, mothers in the follow-up study seemed satisfied with the device. They liked having greater control over the kinds of things that their children see, and particularly noted the potential of the device to block out things that their children might come across accidentally. In a few instances, the blocking device forced them to recalibrate their judgment of whether a program was appropriate for their child, but on the whole they found that children's routine viewing habits were only minimally affected by the V-Chip.

Mothers had some hesitations, however. They pointed out that children who are truly motivated to see a blocked show can find it pretty easily on a non-V-Chip-equipped television set that's in the home, and the families in our study had an average of four television sets in their houses. They also complained that the V-Chip didn't always block content about which they did have concerns, including commercials and promos for upcoming television shows and news.

So can public policy address public concerns? Specifically, if parents have tools available to manage and guide their children's viewing, will they use them? We see from this research that 30 percent of the families tried the V-Chip; 70 percent did

not; 8 percent used it consistently. What does this mean? Well, it may mean that the V-Chip is not for everyone. The families in this particular study had children between the ages of seven and 10, and many people felt that they didn't need to be concerned about their children's viewing at this age. Several mothers in our debriefing conversations said that they felt they might use the V-Chip when their children are older, for example when they are teenagers and home alone.

It may also mean that there is still some work to be done in helping parents understand the tools that they have available. I had the experience early in this research of going into a store and asking about V-Chip-equipped television sets, and the salesperson that I spoke to did not know what a V-Chip was and didn't know how to program it. So we expanded our horizons and we went into seven different stores in the Philadelphia area, and very few people knew what the V-Chip was, and no one could show us how to program it. So I think there's still some work to be done in that area.

These findings may also mean that for the V-Chip to be useful to a larger group of parents, a group of parents who haven't been trained by researchers from the University of Pennsylvania, we may need to simplify things – simplify the ratings, simplify the V-Chip. And finally, the research may indicate that we may need to think about additional, or alternative, creative ways to address the needs of children and families in this increasingly media-dense world.

I don't think that there are any easy answers, but I do think that we have many important questions to ask. This morning we have an opportunity to ask a group of people who have been thinking about and grappling with these issues for some time. I have asked each of the participants to provide their perspective on children's media in opening statements, and then we'll have a general discussion, which I'm expecting will end in time for a question and answer period.

I would like to briefly introduce our panelists one at a time, but I know you want to know more about them. Their complete bios are in your packet, along with statements that reflect the kinds of things they're saying today.

I'll begin with Commissioner Kathleen Abernathy. Commissioner Abernathy was sworn in as commissioner in May 2001, and has been busy in all policy areas under the FCC's jurisdiction, including holding the chair of the Federal State Joint Board on Universal Service. She has shown an active interest in children's media policy, encouraging input from academics and advocates alike. Perhaps with a school-age daughter of her own she realizes exactly what kinds of things parents are up against in this media-dense environment. But Commissioner Abernathy is clearly a woman who can make a difference. Electronic Media magazine named her "one of the most powerful women in television." Thank you for joining us, Commissioner Abernathy.

KATHLEEN ABERNATHY, Commissioner, Federal Communications Commission: Thank you very much for inviting me here today and for being able to participate in this roundtable to talk about media and the future of our children. Annenberg does tremendous -- I'll call it stuff – research, studies, assistance to all of us. First I want to commend them on their efforts and then I want to be able to talk a little bit about what we're doing at the FCC, but I also look forward to learning from all of you and hearing your thoughts about what's going on out there.

It will take all of our combined efforts to secure our children's future, so I thought what I would do is take a few moments to focus on the role of the FCC in this partnership and to discuss two areas in particular where the commission is focusing on how families can benefit from television's digital age.

The first is children's television programming rules, and the second is ratings and the V-Chip technology in general. The Commission recently requested that parties update the record of our current proceeding on children's television programming rules to incorporate information on digital broadcasting. Digital broadcasting brings many advantages to the public and to the industry, including the ability to multicast and to offer interactive capabilities. Thus we need to look at how our current policies are affected by these new technologies.

For example, in the past we have been concerned that local or network preemptions may thwart the goals of the Children's Television Act of 1990 by preempting children's shows, and you don't know when they're going to show up. So we're asking ourselves, will preemption someday become a thing of the past in light of a digital broadcaster's ability to multicast? That would be great; you'd always know the show would be on at a certain time, but we also have to be aware at the FCC that advances in technology bring not only benefits but also unexpected harm. Thus we're asked how our rules on commercial limits should be interpreted, given the potential for interactive capabilities that could include the direct sale of goods and services over the television to children. And given my daughter's already clear passion for shopping, this is something that I have great concerns about.

I'm also pleased that the Commission recently asked for public comments on how the Commission can ensure that V-Chip functionality is available in the digital world, and I know that those on the Hill, including Congressman Markey and others, want to make sure – we know we've got this one tool; let's make sure it works. So we want to be able to benefit from our experience with the current rating system and figure out how we can apply that in the digital world.

Closed V-Chip technology, which is part of many analogue sets, is unable to identify any changes that may be made to the existing rating system, whereas an open V-

Chip technology would allow television sets to incorporate future modifications. So recognizing that the ability to adjust the content advisory system is beneficial, the Commission recently sought comment on how it could ensure that flexibility is maintained in any digital television standard that we adopt.

And then, before closing, quickly I also want to mention that in addition to specific rules that the FCC passes, I have found that we have the ability to have some influence on what the industry does. Folks will come in and talk to me now that I'm a commissioner who probably wouldn't have returned my phone calls before – and that's both good and bad.

The other thing that has come up is just, how do parents know about the programs that are on TV for their kids? And that's been an issue. I went through *TV Week* last night to try and identify all the educational programs that I could, just based on their names – which is not terribly efficient – and it was difficult. And I'm not sure if I guessed right, nor am I sure if they were targeted to the age of my child. So we've been in informal discussion with the broadcasters who, I think, have some pretty phenomenal products out there that most moms can't find. So I'm in talks with them about some ways that we can brainstorm to better improve access to that kind of information. Again, we won't have to pass any rules -- the broadcasters have every incentive to let folks know really what they are doing in this arena -- so we need to figure out a better way to get that information out there. They have all been responsive. That's the good news. As I said, I don't think it's because I'm just really a nice person. But at any rate, they've all been responsive, they're all talking to us, and I think we may be able to see some progress in that area.

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So in closing, there's no doubt that as children become more sophisticated in their use of technology, all of us -- parents, teachers, researchers, elected and appointed officials – we're going to have to redouble our efforts to ensure that we can adequately supervise and direct our children's television viewing.

Thank you very much.

MS. JORDAN: Thank you. Let me introduce now, Jill Luckett. She's vice president of Program Network Policy at the National Cable and Telecommunications Association, and she has much experience with media policy as an advocate for the programmers' public policy positions with NCTA, and before Congress and regulatory agencies, including the FTC and the FCC. She has spent time as special advisor to FCC commissioner, Rachelle Chong, and has worked as a legislative director for Senator Bob Packwood. And she's given me some great ideas on the kinds of things my kids can do when there's 20 inches of snow outside and I don't want them to spend that eight hours in front of the screen.

JILL LUCKETT, Vice President of Program Network Policy at the National Cable and Telecommunications Association: Thank you, Amy, and thank you for letting me join this very distinguished panel. The availability of high-quality content designed specifically for children and families really has grown tremendously with the advent of new technologies, and you won't be surprised that I'm going to focus on cable television and its role in providing that kind of content.

With the advent of cable, for the first time came networks that were designed solely for children and families, and that was a new thing. Broadcasters had more mass media focus, and with cable we were able to provide more niche services, and we've seen a tremendous growth, and particularly with the upgrade of cable systems and digital technology, that proliferation has grown even more. We've seen new networks like Noggin and Discovery Kids, Wham!, National Geographic – all kinds of things that have terrific programming for kids and families. Also, on the Internet side, which has become another issue that there's been a great deal of focus on, Internet has provided children and families with a lot of new information, and the development of interactivity in the high-speed cable modem has allowed us to use the Internet as a powerful new learning tool.

With the proliferation of all of this content, there's an upside and a downside. There is more programming that's aimed at kids and family, but there is a lot of programming and content that's not aimed at kids and family, and that many parents don't want their children to have access to it, and that makes the development and use of tools that help parents control what comes into their home that teaches them how to use the content even more important. That's one of the things we're here to talk about this morning. I think there are several tools – and I know we're going to talk a little bit more about that later so I won't go into a lot of detail, but the V-Chip and the TV ratings are one of those tools, and the cable industry has been at the forefront of that. We look forward to talking to you and others, policymakers, about how we can make that tool more useful for parents.

MS. JORDAN: Thank you. Patti Miller is the director of the Children & Media program at the California-based Children Now. She coordinates the many research projects that are carried out under Children Now's auspices related to children and television, including recent projects on media diversity. She is highly attuned to the developments in the field of children's media, and works tirelessly to keep open the lines of communication between policymakers, advocates, academics and television professionals. And that means that she crisscrosses time zones like nobody's business. But she does have the energy to keep thinking and organizing and motivating when the rest of us would have collapsed from exhaustion.

PATTI MILLER, Director of the Children & Media program at Children Now: Thanks, Amy. I think it's a critical time for the future of children's media policy. If you look at what's going on right now and will be going on in the current month, key decisions affecting programming for kids are going to be made with policies that govern the industry as a whole -- for example, media ownership, the conversion to digital television -- and I think the challenge is going to be, how do we make sure children's needs are prioritized and protected? I think America's children are at risk of being ignored amidst unprecedented technological opportunity and endless commercial opportunity. So I think what we really need to do is step back and ask, what do future policies mean for television for kids, and also take a look at the current policies in place and how can they be more meaningful for kids.

Media ownership is an area that we've been focusing on a lot over the last few months, and Children Now, in coalition with groups like the Center for Media Education and the American Psychological Association, are looking at how consolidation will affect kids' programming. We really think that it will have an impact on kids' programming. We're already seeing a lot of re-purposing going on in the consolidated media environment. Television programming is being shared between broadcast and cable, diminishing diversity for the child audience. We're also concerned about commercialism in an increasingly consolidated environment. So we want to make sure, as we look at the current ownership rules, that kids' programming is considered, and the impact on kids' programming.

I think also digital television, while it provides amazing opportunity with the technological innovation -- I mean, the idea that you can datacast and streamline text while you're programming content is amazing. But I guess the question is, what does this mean for kids? In a digital environment, broadcasters are going to be able to multicast, airing up to six channels simultaneously, and I guess the question we would want to know is, what are the implications for the Children's Television Act? What are going to be the rules about the minimal requirement of educational programming for children? That's another area where we're really concerned: about making sure that kids' needs are considered.

As Commissioner Abernathy mentioned, digital television raises questions about advertising and kids being able to buy things directly. I mean, instead of just watching *Friends* they'll be able to click on Rachel's blouse and purchase it right there. I think it raises a lot of questions about how we are going to protect kids from advertising and from manipulative advertising as well. So I think there's a lot of room to consider the needs of kids, and I think we need to make sure in the coming months, as these broad policies are looked at, that we focus on the impact on kids. And we've written comments on the ownership issue and are planning to write comments on digital television and the implications for children's media.

And then finally, the current policies on the books are really, great things, and I think what we need to do is figure out, how can we harness what's there for kids right now and make sure that it's used properly. The big theme, I think, when you look at both the V-Chip and TV ratings and kids' educational programming, is that parents need more education to be able to really use what's available for them. And I think, as Commissioner Abernathy mentioned with the TV Guide, you're not seeing the listings about what's E/I, and 63 percent of parents said they didn't know about E/I requirements. So I think there's a lot of work to be done to educate parents about what currently exists and how they can use it to make better decisions for their kids in terms of their television watching.

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So those are some of the areas we're really interested in and, again, I think it's just really important to make sure in any policy that we're thinking about how our kids are affected and making sure that they're prioritized.

MS. JORDAN: Thank you.

I'd like to introduce Congressman Edward Markey. Congressman Markey is the highest-ranking Democrat on the House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and the Internet. And during his time in the House of Representatives, he has written and championed much of the legislation related to children's media policy. Congressman Markey is the author of the 1996 V-Chip law, and has worked to ensure that commercial broadcasters include educational programming for children in their lineups. He has been called "a legislative hero" by the Children's Defense Fund, and our good friend, Peggy Charren, founder of the Action for Children's Television, likes to simply call him 'Superman'.

CONGRESSMAN EDWARD MARKEY, (D-MA): Thank you so much, and thank you, Peggy, for calling me that. And thank you so much for all of the work that you are doing in helping to identify the deficiencies and the opportunities, which these technologies offer to parents. I have been, for better or worse, on the Telecommunications Subcommittee in Congress for 27 years now, after I was elected in 1976, and I was the chairman from 1986 through 1995, and I've been the senior Democrat with the Republicans in control from 1995 until 2003. So I clearly have been in the room for every single piece of legislation, which has been put on the books that affects children and the media or telecommunications policy in general.

And the truth of the matter is that there is a Dickensian quality to all of this. It's the best of wires and it's the worst of wires simultaneously. You have all this wonderful, enriching information, and you also have all of this degrading and debasing information, all simultaneously existing and growing as there are more and more ways in which the new technologies make it possible for information to go into the homes and the schools of the United States. So this is going to be a long

twilight struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil, and it will never end, and in fact continue to escalate because of the increasing complexity which the technology presents as a problem for parents and for policymakers.

In 1990, when I authored the Children's Television Act, which now requires three hours of educational or informational programming to be produced every single week by every single broadcaster in the United States, the broadcasters opposed that for several years before I was able to get it passed. When I authored the V-Chip in 1996, it was opposed by the broadcasters. In 1996, when we passed the Telecommunications Act and we required something called the E-Rate -- that is a fund to be constructed that would ensure that every child on every desk, regardless of race, regardless of income, would have access to computer technology in their classroom -- that as well received tremendous opposition. Well, today, the E-Rate is considered to be a huge success, and it's about $2 billion a year, and it skews largely towards the poorest children in the country, because, as we know, the wealthiest already have computer technology at home and in their schools. But when we are reaching a point where, within another 15 years or so, over 50 percent of all of the children within the United States are going to be minorities – and at that point minorities no more because they will be the majority – it's very important for us to ensure that we are educating – informing all of those children at the highest possible level. And that has to be our objective as telecommunications policy.

Now, with regard to the V-Chip, when I introduced it in 1993 it actually had broad bipartisan support. Almost every Democrat and every Republican supported me because it just seemed like a simple thing to do: let's just build it into the set and parents can determine themselves whether or not they want to use it, and it will, for the most part, only be parents with children under the age of 10 or so. Well, we then heard from Hollywood and from the broadcasters that it was going to result in this huge censorship of the media; it was going to revolutionize creativity, that no one again would ever put on a creative *Law and Order* at 10:00 at night. And I said, it's not going to have any impact on that programming at all. As a matter of fact, it's only going to get more and more rough in terms of its language and its content because that's the direction in which it's going. What we need is just the technology that the parents who want to use it can use in order to block out the programming that they don't want to see, but it was never meant to result in any great censorship unless you consider parents that don't want their children to do certain things to be censors, and I guess in that sense they are. But they're not going to stop Hollywood or the broadcasters from putting on the programming which they intend on putting on because they're targeting 18- to 34-year-olds, young adults, to watch programming that is – let's put it like this – not aimed at the highest possible intellectual, cognitive reach that human beings are programmed to achieve, right? So, we all understand that, but maybe not for the average eight-year-old or seven-year-old.

So what we found in the study was quite interesting. We found that it was hard to manipulate; that people get discouraged by its complexity; that it hasn't been simplified, either technologically or really in terms of the rating system, that isn't as friendly as it could be. We also found – and I think you pointed this out – that the set makers don't advertise it, the salespeople don't know anything about it and, for the most part, the TV and cable and others don't even advertise it in terms of it being a feature which would be something that the parents who are watching television at that time might want to take advantage of. So those are all problems. I think the broadcasters have a huge responsibility, as does the cable industry, to constantly be trying to educate newer generations of parents who are just reaching the point where their child is six or seven or eight and they might want to take advantage of it but have no idea that it even is a technology which is available.

So I guess your experiment proves a number of things. It proves that the more information parents are given the more likely it is that parents are going to use it. So that's kind of heartening, that the percentage keeps going higher and higher in terms of the parents who use it if they understand it. And second, if you have little or no information about it, you have little or no likelihood that you are going to use the technology. So we have to find better ways of informing parents about it. We need the help of the broadcasters, we need the help of the cable operators, we need the help of Hollywood on theses issues, and we can do it as we have been doing it all along, in a very First Amendment-friendly way that ensures that it's not "big brother" making the decision as to what is being seen by children in America, but it's "big mother" and "big father" just knowing how to program the TV set to be able to block out this information.

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– Congressman Edward Markey

And as Commissioner Abernathy pointed out, as we move to this new digital television era, it's very important that the technology be developed in a way in which it has a flexibility, it has an adaptability -- that is, that we don't want to be locked into a technology that makes it impossible to change the way in which parents interact with it. So it's going to be very important that the advanced television systems retain the full flexibility and openness of digital DTV. So on the one hand, you're going to have broadcasters and cable industry people who are going to be saying, "oh, digital television, it's going to be great; we're going to be able to offer you all these wonderful new things and there's almost an infinite number of possibilities with regard to how it can be used." Then you say, well, will it be possible then to upgrade and simplify the way in which parents are able to block out programming they don't want their children to see? They're going to go, "oh, so complicated. I don't know how we'll be able to do that. That's just too hard."

Well, that's going to be the challenge of policymakers, just to stand up to them – stand up to the television set manufacturers, stand up to the broadcasters and the

cable industry and just say, the price you're going to have to pay in order to move to this new era is to give the parents the ability to be able to change with the times, to have it be more simple, more usable, and ultimately a tool which the parents who want to use it can use it, remembering that there are many, many parents who trust their children and don't want to use it or aren't going to actually put as high a priority on it compared to all the other parenting responsibilities which they have, but for those who do care, that it is a technology which is available and usable for them.

And so, that will become the big public policy issue looming right over the horizon: will the advanced television systems, as they are defined by the FCC and others, be friendly to parents in our country?

Thank you.

MS. JORDAN: Thank you.

Vicky Rideout is vice president and director of the Program for the Study of Entertainment, Media and Health at the Kaiser Family Foundation. She has directed cutting-edge research on children's use of media, including parents' use of the V-Chip, the TV ratings, and the implementation of the TV ratings system. Her efforts generate thoughtful discussion on a variety of topics, from sex in the media to public service advertising, and she has kept critical media issues on the public agenda. Vicky has inspired us all to think broadly about how policy for children can work in a changing media environment.

VICKY RIDEOUT, Vice President and Director of the Program for the Study of Entertainment, Media and Health at the Kaiser Family Foundation: Thank you, Amy. And I guess the first thing that I wanted to say was that since we're here talking about children and media, I did just want to note the sad passing of Fred Rogers yesterday. I guess he was, in many ways, the one adult that kids could always count on to pay attention to them. But thanks to TV, he'll remain alive for kids forever, I guess. And also, Amy, I just wanted to really thank you for this research and commend you on it. It's a really fascinating piece of research – and Emory – really nice job that you guys did on this.

And I guess I would point out two things from your research. Research has consistently shown that, of all families who know they have a V-Chip, about a third of them will try to use it. That has been in the studies that the Kaiser Family Foundation have done, which have been sort of larger scale, nationally representative surveys, and in this study that the Annenberg folks are just releasing today. That is a consistent finding.

I guess the question on the table is, is that a good result for a public policy? And I think it's important to note that the V-Chip is really essentially an orphaned technology. There is nobody who has any kind of an incentive to promote the V-Chip, and I don't think that there will be effective promotion given to the V-Chip unless policymakers mandate it. And that's just a reality because nobody does have an incentive to do that. I don't think there has ever been an audio/visual technology that's been introduced in this country into the marketplace with virtually no promotion and has ended up being used by a third of potential customers. I mean, that's quite a rare. If you told the television networks that they needed to go out and promote their fall lineup and use the same amount of airtime and promotional capacity that they used to promote the V-Chip, I think there would be a revolt, and even with the promotion that they do do for their fall lineups now, if any of them ever got a third of the viewers to watch their shows, that would be a tremendous result. So I guess it kind of depends how you look at it.

"If you told the television networks that they needed to go out and promote their fall lineup and use the same amount of airtime and promotional capacity that they used to promote the V-Chip, I think there would be a revolt . . ."
– Vicky Rideout, Kaiser Family Foundation

And the second thing that I think is important to note that is a very consistent finding from the research is that many parents don't know they have the V-Chip, and in our studies it's been about half of parents who have a V-Chip who don't know they have it, and in your study – in your sample it was only five parents, but of those five who went out and just happened to purchase a V-Chip, about half of them didn't know there was a V-Chip in it either – a TV with a V-Chip -- they didn't know they had the V-Chip in it.

And then the third thing that the research is consistently showing is that parents don't really understand the ratings that we have now. And it's particularly a problem with the ratings for the younger kids – the TV-Y and the Y7 – and I think that's just really important to acknowledge. And it's especially a problem with the FV rating, which is the rating – the one rating that we have that designates that there is violence in children's programming. And after all, that's what the V-Chip was all about, and that is one of the least understood categories that we have. In the Foundation's studies in the past, we found that 34 percent of parents thought that that meant family viewing, and what it means is fantasy violence. And the other rating that's particularly problematic is the D rating, where we've consistently – again, your research and ours has found that about 5 percent of parents know what it means. What it means is that's the one rating we have that designates when there's a lot of talk about sex – sexual content in television shows, and we know that's something that's of real concern to parents but they don't have any idea that the rating system is letting them know when that kind of content is there.

So I think those are the problem areas that need to be addressed. I think the single most important step that could be taken now by policymakers is the open V-Chip platform, just because it would preserve options for there to be any changes in the future. I do think we need to consider a redesign of the rating system to make it simpler and easier to understand. I mean, I think that the evidence has been coming in very consistently that there's a problem with it, and in order to preserve

that option there has to be an open design on the V-Chip now or it will be completely rendered obsolete.

MS. JORDAN: Thank you very much.

I'd like to open our larger discussion, and start with Emory Woodard, who spent more than a year in the field talking with mothers and children and getting a sense of the kinds of knowledge they have about what's out there for children and their comfort levels with the V-Chip itself. So I want to start by asking Dr. Woodard, do parents have the information that they need and the tools that they need to supervise their children's viewing? And, based on your experiences in the field and your knowledge of children's television that's available, what would your answer to that be?

EMORY WOODARD, Assistant Professor, Villanova University: Well, I'd like to respond to the question by basically underlining what a lot of my esteemed colleagues have already said. I think that we really cannot answer the question at this point. And I base that on my experiences as a collaborator on the V-Chip experiment that we presented earlier, along with my experience on other Annenberg Public Policy Center studies. I think that we can't answer the question because parents remain unaware of the resources provided them. There are a variety of resources out there but they're simply unaware of those resources. And as a consequence, it's difficult to evaluate whether, in fact, they could be useful and satisfy the needs of parents attempting to direct or supervise their children's television viewing.

I think that the rating system, at least from preliminary indications, at least accurately indicates the appropriate age of the target audience for a program. The technology of the V-Chip is a bit cumbersome, but for the determined parent it's accessible; they can use it, as we found in our follow-up study. And the three-hour processing guideline seems to successfully encourage the broadcasters to air more educational programming. But, as was indicated earlier, there's really inadequate promotion of these resources, perhaps because it's unclear who should be responsible for this promotion, and then there is really insufficient funding available to support the type of promotion that would gain the attention of parents.

It seems, from our studies, that only parents in the most comfortable situations -- those parents with high levels of income, those parents with multiple caregivers available and those parents who have free time – have the wherewithal to seek out the kinds of resources that we're talking about. Moreover, the media environment is getting increasingly complex and is not navigable by the average parent. In the majority of homes with children, there are between 50 and 80 television channels, VCR and DVD players, PCs, videogame equipment and access to the Internet. Each of these outlets has a variety of rating systems, passwords and trouble spots, and parents are frankly just being overwhelmed. So as a consequence, I think it's

difficult to assess whether or not these resources are adequate because parents just don't know they are available.

I think the lessons that we're learned from the V-Chip study, and some other experiences, are a little mixed. In terms of the V-Chip study, I think we found that you cannot simply plop a technology within the living room and assume that parents are going to adopt it and use it within their everyday practices. I think that in order for us to move to the next step of engagement, we might want to look to our experience with the MPAA ratings, the movie industry ratings. In that scenario, each movie or each movie has a rating attached to it, and that rating is aggressively marketed, along with the aggressive marketing of the film. And as a consequence, surveys indicate that between 80 and 85 percent of parents rely on those ratings to direct which movies their children can and cannot see. So again, to underline some of the comments made earlier, I think that we can't answer the question yet, but with adequate promotion perhaps we will be able to answer the question in the future.

"We do need to look at other ways of educating parents about how to learn about TV programming, how to watch it with their kids, how to help describe the techniques used in television."

– Jill Luckett, National Cable Television and Telecommunications Association

MS. JORDAN: Thank you. I want to ask Jill Luckett what your perception is of not only what information parents have and what tools they have, but also what's available to children. Do children have what they need in terms of their intellectual and social and physical needs for their development?

MS. LUCKETT: I would agree with a lot of what Emory said. There clearly are tools. There are multiple tools – the rating system, the V-Chip, media literacy projects, their digital set-top boxes have control features, but as we've all discussed, the constant challenge is educating parents about what those tools are, and I do think there's still more work to be done in that area, and your research I think is interesting in that it seems to suggest that even when parents do know about it, as you said, the V-Chip isn't for everybody.

And so, given that not everybody is going to use a blocking tool, then we do need to look at other ways of educating parents about how to learn about TV programming, how to watch it with their kids, how to help describe the techniques used in television. That's a lot of what media literacy is about, and we've been engaged in that process since the early 1990s, in a partnership with the National PTA. So there are a variety of things that we can do and need to continue to do to do a better job of educating parents.

In terms of children's needs -- I mean, I look at this somewhat personally. I have two children who are now 10 and 13, and I didn't set my V-Chips until about six months ago when I decided that it became more necessary, as the 13-year-old decided that it was interesting to flip around the channels. Before he would simply flip from the things he liked to watch, which were all acceptable because we had talked about what to watch, but as he's gotten older, he's decided to experiment a little bit, and so I set the V-Chips.

I think -- and because I don't have real young children anymore -- there seems to me to be a wide array of programming. Is it all educational? No, of course not, but there's a lot of – there is a lot of educational, commercial-free programming available, both on PBS and on cable, and there's also a tremendous amount of highly creative, very entertaining – I watch a lot of kids' shows, and I think they're very entertaining and creative. Not all of that obviously helps kids develop educationally and emotionally, but some of it clearly does, and what's the right – what's enough? I don't know. I generally do not have a problem finding an appropriate show for my children to watch at almost any time of the day that they're awake.

MS. JORDAN: Well, there certainly are a lot of children's television programs available. I know one of our recent content analyses showed more than 300 separate titles specifically designed for kids airing in an average week in Philadelphia, which is a large market. But I know, Patti Miller, you've been thinking about what's available for children on commercial broadcast stations, specifically the kinds of programs that are airing to fulfill the processing guideline known as the three-hour rule. Do you think that kids have what they need available to them, even children who don't have cable?

MS. MILLER: You know, it's clear kids are consuming an inordinate amount of media, almost three hours a day of TV, and I would say, no, I don't think that they do. I don't think they have sufficient programming to develop their cognitive, emotional and intellectual selves. Commercial broadcasters, while they have a three-hour minimum requirement, it'll be interesting to see how well they're meeting that requirement, but I also just think it's just not enough, even if they are.

We know the positive benefits of educational programming for children and what it can do for kids in terms of their academic achievement, their social and intellectual development, and we don't have enough of this kind of programming. When you think about emotional selves, I mean, kids are exposed to relentless commercials – 40,000 commercials a year on television alone that they're exposed to. We know kids are highly vulnerable to commercial influences. What kinds of messages does it send to them about healthy nutrition? I mean, I just think that there's a lot of troubling things out there for kids. When you think about their physical selves, you think about the unbelievable amount of violence in the programming that kids are seeing. We know that violence is a – violent media is a public health issue, but yet kids are exposed to just an unbelievable amount of violence in the programming they're consuming. So I don't think there is enough good programming out there for kids.

And also, I just want to make the point that 20 to 25 percent of kids in this country don't have access to cable still. And while we talk about cable as providing this plethora of programming, I think, one, a lot of kids don't have access to it, and for the kids who do have access to it, as I mentioned in the introduction, we're seeing a lot of programming being shared between broadcasting and cable. I actually think we're seeing less diversity because so much of the programming is running both on broadcast and cable. So I think ultimately there's less and less programming available for kids.

And when you think again about the technological innovation that's -- we're going to see in a digital environment so many more channels, which I think also means so much more programming that might be questionable for kids – you know, violence, sex, those kinds of messages. And again, as we talked about earlier, in a digital environment there's so much more exposure to advertising because of the interactive nature of content, so I think there's a lot of concern in the current programming environment and in a future programming environment about having enough programming that's going to meet kids' cognitive, emotional and physical needs. So I think we want to think about, how do we create a quality media environment for our nation's kids? I don't think there's enough programming for them right now.

MS. JORDAN: I would like to direct a question to Commissioner Abernathy and Congressman Markey. We've done some research on families' responses to the V-Chip. We've done some research on whether or not commercial broadcasters' educational programs are in fact educational. Do you as policymakers have the information that you need in order to make informed decisions about appropriate public policy for families with children? I'll start with Congressman Markey.

REP. MARKEY: Well, the policymaker's job is to make sure that the industries that are the beneficiaries of government policy have a responsibility to respond to the children's audience. And that's what the Children's Television Act of 1990 is all about, that's what the E-Rate is all about, that's what the V-Chip is all about. I don't think that it's any mystery that our responsibility is to continue to keep pressure upon the industries that are under our jurisdiction to ensure that they discharge the high responsibility which they have.

And it's studies like this that make clear that a whole lot more can be done to educate the public and that we have an ongoing responsibility to ensure that we make easier and easier for parents to ensure that their children receive the information which they want them to receive. So your own personal experience in going into a store and having no one understand the technology is a pretty good reflection of the fact that the people who may have been permanently in that section were moved over to the snow shovel section about two months ago and you're just walking in with someone who's temporarily holding on. But that's just a reflection of the way in which those stores work. So that's a problem.

But does that it mean that the broadcasters and the cable industry can't do a better job? I think that the parents of the United States know more right now in two weeks about how to duct tape a saferoom in their house and how much water they should have in that saferoom to protect their children for a minimum of three days than they know about whether or not there's a V-Chip in their TV set that their kids are watching five hours a day. Now, if the media wanted to very graphically and clearly explain, "hey, Mom, can I just take a minute here and explain to you how you

could set up on your TV set a violence or a sexual programming check on this set, and I'll show you how easy it is right now, just for one minute. Just pay attention, please -- I know you're sitting there with your kids." They might not like this – do it very creatively. I bet you could increase by 100 percent the number of young mothers who know how to program their set in about two weeks.

But they have to do it, and they have to decide to do it, so part of our responsibility is to just take studies like this that are common sense, and then as policymakers, use our bully pulpit in order to pound it into the broadcasters and cable industry the ongoing responsibility which they have. And I think most parents would think that on an ongoing basis that's probably a more important thing than whether or not they're ever going to use duct tape in their house. Because for more communities, the chance of Al Qaeda going to their neighborhood is about a one on a scale of 10 whereas programming which they find offensive to their children and undermining the values of their children is a 10 on a scale of 10, unless the cable and broadcasting industry provide this information, which they don't do on a consistent basis and a usable basis. So, yeah, we as policymakers, we pretty much understand what parents want, pretty much because we represent them. But the question is, do the industries have a stake in ensuring that the parents get the tools they need? And there we do have a responsibility as policymakers to fight harder to make sure that those industries give that information to parents.

"I think that the parents of the United States know more right now in two weeks about how to duct tape a saferoom in their house and how much water they should have in that saferoom to protect their children for a minimum of three days than they know about whether or not there's a V-Chip in their TV set that their kids are watching five hours a day."

– Congressman Ed Markey

MS. JORDAN: Yes, Commissioner?

MS. ABERNATHY: Well, as always, Congressman Markey's right on point, and I agree with everything he said. I'm actually the perfect guinea pig for sort of before-and-after because before I was the commissioner, which was only two years ago, I knew nothing about the V-Chip. I knew nothing about the ratings system for educational programming for young children. I did, however, have a young child, and at that time I had only over-the-air broadcasting.

So what I did in that environment was I pretty much relied on PBS and gave them a lot of money because they do phenomenal work for children, as all of us know. So I didn't know a lot, and I'm pretty well educated and I live in a large city and I work in the telecom industry. And I was generally aware of V-Chip, generally aware of children's programming, but frankly had not specifically focused on the details of it because, like most parents, I was working and I was juggling a thousand things at once and it just hadn't risen to a level where I was paying a lot of attention, and the information doesn't come easy. As I said, the television directories don't really let you know what programming is – I know when I turn on PBS I'm safe. I wasn't sure when I turned on Saturday morning television necessarily – the over-the-air

broadcasting – if I was or was not safe with some of that programming, so I just kind of didn't use it.

Now that I'm in this position, I have been very fortunate to have a lot of different folks come in and educate me about children and television and the needs of kids. Vicky has been phenomenal, and I know now a whole lot more about this issue, and I also care very much that we take the tools that are in place today and make sure the parents have access to them.

And I agree completely with Congressman Markey that as a policymaker, as a regulator, we have a very strong bully pulpit in the sense that we can talk to the industry folks and we can work with them around issues we've identified. So, for example, I'm working on this question of how do parents know what programs are out there for their young kids, the educational programs? It's not in *TV Guide*; it's not in the directories. There may be other ways to get it to them, and I have found that particularly with a number of the broadcasters -- and I haven't met with all of them yet; the folks who are working on the educational programming are very, very proud of their programming and they put a lot of time and effort into it. And it seems to me that it's a shame that that programming is out there and we don't tap into it. So we're working on the fruits of that labor being made available, and that information being made available to parents.

With regard to the V-Chip technology, I completely agree that that's the next step, the educational piece, and then parents can either use it or not. I don't use it today simply because my child is so young that I still have some limited amount of control over her. I would expect that I will reach a point where I will need to tap into that technology, and then I will. And I think it's just like as Jill discussed. I guess once I finish with this effort on the sort of identifying educational programming that's available to over-the-air broadcasters, the next step will be well, let's talk informally about how we can try and increase information about the V-Chip and get it out there, and is there anything that I can do; is there interviews that I can give or ways that I can help gain better exposure to it?

And I want to talk about one other piece of this whole puzzle that goes to the quality of the programming that we see for children on over-the-air broadcasting. Everything – when you have companies that are publicly traded that are for-profit, inevitably it comes down to money, and so when I'm talking to them about the kinds of programming that they're doing, it always comes down to, well, we're free over the air, and we're now competing in a digital – in a cable world where it's pay-per-view and the amount of money and the quality that I can put out there has changed as a result of these changing market economics. That's no excuse; I think the programming still has to be there. But I think that's why some of them have migrated to using some of the cable programs, which frankly, because I saw before they migrated over cable programs to the educational programming and after – cable programs, frankly, are head and shoulders, in many respects, above what the broadcasters as broadcasters were putting together.

So that migration doesn't bother me so much -- I think we're seeing better programming – but what does concern me a lot as I look at the future of free over-

the-air broadcasting, is I do not want the continual quality driven down, driven down, driven down, and I fear that that's what we're seeing. So I think it's also important for all of the policymakers to emphasize over and over the importance of children's television and not just of having something on there, but of quality children's programming, of educational children's programming, and I'm going to continue to work on that project too.

MS. JORDAN: Okay, thank you.

We're nearing the time when I'd like to open up the discussion for a question and answer period, but I do want to ask all of the panelists, if they would like to, to weigh in on one final question, and that is: what are the critical issues that we need to think about when we think about the future of media, in particular the future of television for children? Are there questions that we're not asking now that we do need to be asking? And as we look to the future of how children are going to be relating to the medium, what are the gaps in our knowledge; what are the kinds of concerns, issues that we need to be raising now?

MR. WOODARD: Thank you very much, but before I pose my question, I want to agree with most of what Commissioner Abernathy said about the migration of quality programs to cable, with one very important exception: PBS. PBS remains a stalwart in the provision of quality programs, mostly for younger children, but with shows like *Sesame Street* and the product of the late Fred Rogers, we really cannot diminish the value of that resource and should do all that we can to encourage the long life of it as a resource.

But in terms of questions that we need to ask about the future of media policy, I think the most important question that's come out of this discussion is: who's responsible for making parents aware of media policies and what funding sources can be made available to raise such an effort above the din of other marketed information and parental concerns? I think once we determine who's responsible, and once we loosen up some purse strings and provide the adequate financial resources for the promotional efforts, we will advance the effectiveness of children's media policy multiplicatively.

"PBS remains a stalwart in the provision of quality programs, mostly for younger children, but with shows like Sesame Street and the product of the late Fred Rogers, we really cannot diminish the value of that resource and should do all that we can to encourage the long life of it as a resource."
– Emory Woodard, Villanova University

I'd also like to raise the question about how we can encourage policymakers to take advantage of formative and summative research. How can we incorporate research more in the policy development and then the policy evaluation arena?

MS. JORDAN: Okay, thank you. And also, if there are people with questions, you can feel free to come to the microphone. As soon as we're through getting our critical questions from our panelists we'll get critical questions from the audience.

Vicky?

MS. RIDEOUT: One thing is we need to continue to monitor what's happening – what's out there now, so we need to continue to do research about children's media use, especially, I think. The youngest kids, there isn't very good data on, and especially the sort of new digital technologies that are out there. So we need to keep our finger on the pulse of what's actually happening in people's homes. We also need to pay attention to all the other types of media that are spending a lot of time with, which includes the Internet, and videogames in particular, I would think. And we need to be continuing to do studies like the ones that you folks and Children Now have done in the past, monitoring educational programming and just keeping an eye on that, and monitoring the public interest obligations of networks because, you know, I think it's not just educational TV programming or the entertainment shows that are important for kids, but also the public service campaigns, or the lack of public service advertising I think is important for young people and for their health too. So that's another item that I would hope would stay on the agenda.

And I guess, lastly, Congressman Markey mentioned the E-Rate, and I think – so continuing to monitor what's happening with issues around the digital divide and with Internet filters, particularly given the Supreme Court is going to be hearing oral arguments on that case this week, are also going to be important. I think there's been a tremendous amount of progress made on the digital divide because of the E-Rate, but I think that there remains a divide at a deeper level. In terms of, "have you ever used a computer or used the Internet?" I think we've made great progress, but in terms of the quality of young people's experiences with the Internet, I think there's still a pretty profound divide. So that would be another area I would direct attention.

MS. JORDAN: All right.

Congressman Markey, would you like to weigh in?

REP. MARKEY: I guess what I would say is that as we go forward and we try to deal with these issues, looking to the future we're going to have unlicensed spectrum which can be used in very creative ways in order to help the children's audience in every community. So I think it's going to be important for Congress and for the Federal Communications Commission to be very open-minded and creative in using unlicensed spectrum in a way that can provide new opportunities for children in every single community across the country. And that's the new frontier, but it's something that offers potentially great opportunities.

And then you have the issue of what happens at the point at which the second six-megahertz, which the broadcasters have received, is auctioned off. So for those of you who haven't followed it, when the broadcasters were given the original six-

megahertz to put on Channel 4, 5, 7, 9, 13, that was fine for the analog era. Now an additional six-megahertz has been given to them in order to convert over to digital, so they control 12 megahertz now, but with the promise that they'll give us back the original six megahertz for every television station in America. So when that's auctioned off there's going to be a lot of money which will be raised.

I think one of the things which we should do is to find a way in which we create a digital dividends trust fund so that we can ensure that, for example, the public television system, which is really the Children's Television Network from 7:00 in the morning until 6:00 every single day, is kept viable forever. And there are other things that we could do with a digital trust fund, and I think most of it is aimed towards the children's audience, and we should make sure, as a result, that the pressure remains high in the country as a whole by those that care about these children's issues, so that the pressure is placed upon the Congress and upon the FCC to extract from the industries the benefits that will derive from this digital era, including the creation of some kind of trust fund that guarantees that there is high-quality programming for kids.

MS. JORDAN: Patti Miller, other critical questions, critical issues that we need to consider as we think about the future of children's media?

MS. MILLER: Well, one of the things I was so struck by in your research is the high level of satisfaction among parents who did end up using the V-Chip. And so I guess my question is – and also to Vicky's point about the V-Chip being the orphan technology – how can we work together to educate parents about this system -- policymakers, broadcasters, advocates, academics -- to make it so the parents are aware of the current policies on the books? To think of new ways that we can educate parents I think is one big question.

My second question is, how do we harness technology to best serve kids as we move to a digital environment? You know, as I was talking before about being able to click on something online and purchase it, there's that option and then there's the option of being able to click on something you see on the TV screen and have it provide you with information about ratings, for example. I mean, that's the great thing about digital TV; it's the ability to transmit data. So what if you're a parent watching and you could click on your TV and you would have, oh, this is the V-Chip, this is what FV stands for – "oh, my gosh, I get it now…" You know, the idea of harnessing technology to actually do something really positive for parents.

"How can we work together to educate parents about this system -- policymakers, broadcasters, advocates, academics -- to make it so the parents are aware of the current policies on the books? To think of new ways that we can educate parents I think is one big question."

– Patti Miller, Children Now

I think the same thing could be said for EI programming. There is so much benefit to new technology, and I think we want to make sure it's really serving our nation's kids and serving our nation's parents.

REP. MARKEY: Could I just say, just quite briefly, it's that we have limits on how many minutes per hour that can be commercial advertising on children's television, but if you have these little links now that are set up, then the kids can just push on the link and get around all of the limits – the legal limits in terms of advertisers. And so, we have to make sure that the law doesn't allow the broadcasters or the commercial interests to have children be able just to click away from and around all the limits in terms of their ability to target them as an audience for any one of these products.

MS. MILLER: Absolutely, and that's actually my next question. What about advertising? What about advertising in a new environment, this idea that you can click and go somewhere else? How are we going to separate kids? What are the limits in a digital environment -- I think that's so important – and in a consolidated media environment? We're not just talking about limits on ads that run during a kid's program, we're talking about cross-marketing, we're talking about product placement. There are a lot of issues to be discussed about the future of advertising and how that's going to impact children.

Finally, in broad media policy, how do we prioritize kids' issues? Now, when we're talking about a policy that we don't think has implications for kids' issues, let's make sure – let's figure out, say, what are the implications for, like, consolidation for example? Immediately you don't think, is that going to affect kids' programming, but ultimately it will. And I think the bottom line is if you have fewer and fewer producers, you have less innovation, and I think that's ultimately going to harm quality because fewer owners, more commercial opportunities. It's like, how do we constantly think about providing quality innovative content for kids in a consolidated environment?

MS. JORDAN: Jill Luckett, would you like to weigh in?

MS. LUCKETT: A lot of people have talked about digital technology and interactivity. I think there's a lot we don't know about just how it works. How will children respond to a link on the TV? I mean, there's a lot – we've talked about interactivity for so many years and it's still not really here. And we have some experience, probably looking at the Internet model, but doing this over the TV there is still a lot to learn about how not only children but viewers in general will react to interactivity and how it affects – I think Congressman Markey has identified an important issue and something the Commission, I believe, has asked about in terms of being able to link on a site through your TV and what that means for the commercial limits. And clearly that's something they've reengaged on in their most recent DTV notice.

I also think, how do we get parents engaged? Because I do think – we all know, certainly in the industry, that parents will complain about content. What's less clear to me is how much they understand about the impact of that content on their children. Because I am just constantly surprised at the rules that parents don't have for their children, and how little they seem to understand, in spite of all the research that's been done, what the real impact of some of this stuff might be, and the things that they need to look for and need to be concerned about. And so I think

it's not just, how do we push more information at them, but how do we make them responsive to it and understand it so they can use it in a responsible way?

MS. JORDAN: Commissioner?

MS. ABERNATHY: Thank you. And fundamentally, everything that's been said so far I agree with. I think we need more research money. I think we need to think out of the box. I think we need to be aware, for example, with the unlicensed spectrum – I'm a tremendous supporter of unlicensed spectrum. I love this panel. I'm in complete agreement with Congressman Markey, which doesn't always happen. So this is great.

I think the other piece that we're going to have to start thinking about is that we need to broaden how we even think about media because it's always been, what do we get over our TV set? And technology doesn't really care how you get it. The technology now can either be a computer, it can be a handheld device, it can be your TV set, and some of the most violent things that children can get their hands on today are some of the games, which frankly we don't have any jurisdiction over them – I'm not sure I want them to throw that problem in my face. But I'm just saying there is the media and how children use it and how information will be delivered is completely changing. It's not at all the way it used to be.

And so that means, as we're thinking of children, we can't just think of radio and TV anymore. Media is much broader. It's any way that a child can get fast, easy information over some kind of device, and that means, then, that as parents we're going to have to become better educated, because I worry that my daughter will understand a lot of this technology better than I will, and I really won't be able to channel effectively what she sees or how she uses it. And frankly I worry because, as Jill said, when she goes over to other people's houses, they have completely different rules than I do about what can be seen and what can't be seen. And so I want everyone out there better educated because I want to know that when she leaves my home she can go other places and I'm not terribly worried about what she's going to see. So I think parent education and then just broadening our understanding of technology and how children will be receiving information.

MS. JORDAN: Thank you. We do have a few minutes for questions if there are questions from the audience that you'd like to direct to the panel. Would you come to the mike, identify yourself and your institution?

QUESTION: Yes, Angela Campbell of the Institute for Public Representation at Georgetown University Law Center. I actually have two questions. The first question is a follow-up on a comment that Vicky made about the need to simplify the ratings. At the time the ratings were being developed, many of the advocacy groups, and myself included, were fighting for more information for parents rather than just the age categories. And so my question is, were we wrong or is there a way to both simplify and give more information to parents?

The second question is more directed, I think, to Commissioner Abernathy and Jill Luckett. Last month Commissioner Martin called for the broadcasters to reinstitute

the family viewing hour and called for the cable industry to adopt family-friendly tiers, where families could just get a tier with only family-friendly channels, and I just would like your reaction, and anyone else too that would like to respond, whether you think that's a possible tool or piece of the puzzle as well.

MS. JORDAN: Okay, why don't we start with the first part of the question.

MS. RIDEOUT: I think that there needs to be some analysis of the policy options as far as how to design a new rating system, if there is any policymakers who are interested in doing that, and that it would really need to be studied and looked at carefully, almost sort of from a marketing perspective, because there's two answers to the question. One is that parents consistently say that what they want is content-based information. If they have to pick between age-based and content they'd rather have content information. On the other hand, the part that they understand a little better is the age-based ratings because it mirrors the movie ratings. So I don't think there's a clear answer.

MS. JORDAN: Okay, and the second part of the question.

MS. ABERNATHY: And I can tell Vicky I'm happy to work with her on ratings information. I think that that's one of the issues that we were talking about was the lack of information and just see what can be done there. I'd like to finish this part about making sure that parents know where to find E/I information first, but you should come in and we'll start talking about what steps could be made to try and work through that problem.

With regard to family-friendly programming, I can't imagine anyone who'd say, no, I'm against family-friendly, because, frankly, I want to be able to sit down and watch some shows with my kids. The problem is it really does vary, depending on the age of your children – you know, what my sister and her husband think is family-friendly for their 10-year-old boy, no way am I putting my daughter, necessarily, in front of that.

So, again, in connection with this effort to make sure that we identify the educational programming better, we've been talking to all the broadcasters about better identifying, quote, "family-friendly" programming because that's the place where you're most likely to find the parents with the child to advertise the educational programming, and they're responding – the good news is they're responding positively to this because they tend to target – they're targeting the same groups in those instances, and they feel like they have a better chance of getting the kind of viewing they want on their educational programming if it's during some family-friendly. So I'm happy to work with the industry on that and have been talking to them about it, and just how they can do that and how they can improve information to the public about what they're showing.

They have said to me in return that they have a difficult time getting the audience share that they want – well, on their educational programming, which I tell them, well, first we need to know it exists. But assume for a minute that we knew it existed. I do recognize that it is much easier for me as a parent to turn on Discovery Kids fast and easy because I know everything there is fine, and just keep it on than it is for me to go in and look and find the other programs. So I understand what they are saying. You know, you tend to put your kids towards those channels where you know it's all good stuff and you don't worry about it as opposed to searching it out. But as Patti pointed out, we still have 15 percent of the –

MS. MILLER: Twenty to 25 percent.

MS. ABERNATHY: -- some amount of the population that relies on free over-the-air – you don't want to use just PBS, you want to be able to look at other things, so we still need to work though all those sort of informational issues.

QUESTION: Hi, thank you. I'm Marjorie Hines. I direct a small think tank called the Free Expression Policy Project in New York and the idea of the project is to try to bring free expression values into the policy arena instead of the First Amendment being thought of as some impediment to regulation, or something that's only dealt with by courts. And one of our concerns with things like ratings and V-Chip is that they tend to take a very broad approach to large subjects like sex and violence, and there are sort of underlying assumptions that, well, these are bad things that shouldn't be discussed, and certainly children should not be exposed to any information on these topics. So a rating system is troublesome to us from that perspective.

Now, on this panel there seems to be almost universal agreement that the V-Chip and the ratings are a good thing but there are some problems in the execution; they need to be simplified. And of course the problems with simplifying content ratings still further is there is going to be even less context. It's really impossible to have a rating system that has context in which there is any kind of distinction made between the Civil War and fantasy violence on cartoons and so forth.

But there has also been some talk about affirmative, non-blocking solutions to concerns about media content such as media literacy education and more educational programming, so my question is, what are the chances – I mean, you are folks who are deeply involved in setting policy. What are the chances for a shift in emphasis in the area of media policy away from blocking out information – art, entertainment – and toward more of these affirmative solutions like media literacy?

MS. JORDAN: I'll throw it open to the panel.

MS. ABERNATHY: Well, fundamentally I think we need both. As a commissioner I have found that I am in constant tension between First Amendment and protecting children, both core values that define us and values that sometimes are at odds, which is why I think – the reason I'm okay with the V-Chip is it's purely voluntary. And as you have seen, some parents use it and some don't. And I would bet they

block based on what they know about some programs more than just the rating system, just because most parents kind of know what's out there.

But I'll tell you, ratings are inherently flawed, and the question is, do you ditch them because they're inherently flawed or do they provide some value? I think that for some people, they definitely provide value. I think that the V-Chip is, you know, one of the least intrusive means of dealing with the fact that not every parent has the ability to really monitor what their kids do, and they need some help, but I don't want to deny access of all the other consumers to that kind of programming. It may not be a perfect balance, but I think I'm pretty comfortable with it so long as I'm not denying choice to everyone else and it's not a mandatory kind of blocking or prohibiting certain viewers from seeing programming.

MS. MILLER: I think I would just echo Commissioner Abernathy's perspective and just say that I think media education is a really powerful tool for kids of different ages. I mean, a lot of it depends on the age of the child and the nature of the child. And I that's what I think is so useful about the V-Chip is that it really does come down to individual parents' choice. They can decide to block based on their own personal values for their kids. If they have a problem with violence, if violence is what they're concerned about, then that's what they can block. I mean, I think it's true that there never is going to be a perfect rating system; I think it's just trying to find a way to have the best system that we can have. I think media education is a great additional tool, but I think we need both.

REP. MARKEY: Can I say that – if you take, for example, the medicine in the medicine cabinet. Now, the most important thing is to say, "whatever you do, don't take any of that medicine because it can make you very sick; it might even kill you. So please don't take it, okay? I'm just telling you, don't do it; it's not going to be good for you." Now, we'll call that the media education face of it. And that works to a certain extent -- it's going to really hurt you; it'll make you sick. Now, on top of that, however, there are also childproof caps, in case you are very concerned, in addition to putting it on the top shelf that, you know, there might be someone inclined to do it. And you might really be glad that you've got that. You don't just want to leave it lying around up there. No matter how many times you've told them it might be dangerous, you might not want to put it on the lowest shelf in a dish – very accessible. And you might not even want to let them see you taking it and thinking, well, this is an indispensable part of my life.

And that's how the V-Chip really is structured. It's not a panacea, it doesn't substitute for good parenting all day long every single day, it doesn't eliminate the need to explain the issues of sex and violence and language in terms of what your family values are. But it allows you to use it as an additional tool to the media information, to your family value information, that some families, at some phase of their child's life, might feel gives them a little extra help in advancing the values

that they want to see instilled in their children. But we agree with you that the more important thing, by far, is ensuring that those values are out there every single day.

MS. JORDAN: I do need to bring the discussion to a close. And I want to thank you all for being here today. I also think it's important, as Vicky Rideout had mentioned earlier, that we recognize that we lost a great hero to children's television this week, Mr. Fred Rogers. And he was in this very room five years ago, accepting an award for all that he had done on behalf of making the lives of children better and healthier. I'd like to close this meeting with a quote from his acceptance speech of the award.

He said, "no matter what our job description may be, all of us have the real privilege of offering glimpses of what's eternal, what might be missing in our lives; glimpses of that which somehow connects us all one to another. What a worthy gift to our civilization for the broadcasters of our country to use their creative talents, not necessarily to be clever, but to be wise; to point in the direction of the simple, the quiet, the truthful, the generous, the kind."

May we all strive to work in the spirit of Fred Rogers. Thank you.