

# Violent media, violent kids?

Health groups say yes; Congress takes the cue, renews call for code of conduct

By Paige Albinak

**V**iolent entertainment encourages kids to be violent, according to four major public health groups.

"[The effects of violent media] are measurable and long lasting," said the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry last week in a joint statement. "Moreover, prolonged viewing of media violence can lead to emotional desensitization toward violence in real life."

The groups say there is a "causal connection" between children's behavior and violent TV shows, videogames, movies and music.

But they also pointed out that many other factors—including family breakdown, peer influences, and easy availability of guns and other deadly weapons—contribute to the problem.

The groups did not advocate any remedies, but Sen. Sam Brownback (R-Kans.)—joined by Sens. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) and Kent Conrad (D-N.D.), and Reps. Tim Roemer (D-Ind.) and Tom Coburn (R-Okla.)—renewed the call for the entertainment industry to voluntarily adopt a "code of conduct" that would guide programming decisions.

"The cigarette industry was cool to discussing the public-health impact of smoking, but it has become clear that this is a public-health concern," Brownback said. "We intend to put the same pressure on the entertainment industry."

But Brownback is hesitant to go so far as to advocate passing a law that

would require entertainment companies to create such a code, and it is questionable whether such legislation would survive constitutional scrutiny.

The entertainment industry has stayed largely quiet on this issue since June 1997, when broadcasters, cable companies and film studios hammered out a compromise with advocacy groups to add content-based ratings to TV programs. But the media-violence issue received renewed scrutiny following the Columbine shootings.

Last week, a spokesman for the National Cable Television Association said most programmers already use

content-based TV ratings to inform parents about programs. NCTA also promotes initiatives that help families watch TV more critically, he said. The Motion Picture Association of America chose not to comment and the National Association of Broadcasters did not return phone calls by deadline.

Meanwhile, FCC Commissioner Gloria Tristani called on the "entertainment industry and, particularly, the broadcasting industry to stop violating the minds of our children," adding, "I will be asking the FCC chairman to hold a hearing on television violence and the public interest obligations of broadcasters." ■

## The Wright move

NBC's president named vice chairman of parent GE; some Wall Streeters dismiss Welch-succession possibility

By Steve McClellan

**T**hough NBC President Robert C. Wright was named vice chairman of NBC parent General Electric's board of directors last week, some Wall Street analysts say the elevation does not put him among the contenders to replace chairman and CEO John F. Welch, who is retiring in April 2001.

Wright, 57, was also named a GE executive officer and member of GE's corporate executive office. He'll continue to serve as president and CEO of NBC.

The appointment raises eyebrows because it comes at a time of transition for GE, due to Welch's imminent departure. Three executives have been identified as the top contenders to replace him: Jeffrey Immelt (medical systems); James McNerney (aircraft engines) and Bob Nardelli (power systems).

GE declined comment on the succession issue. But a spokeswoman did say Wright's appointment signals that he will be "one of the forces helping to shape the future of the new GE."

A buoyant Wright told BROADCASTING & CABLE last week that his appointment "is a good recognition of

NBC and its success, and it's certainly great for me and hopefully great for GE. But I am keeping my day job."

As to exactly what his new duties will entail, aside from guiding NBC, Wright replied: "We have to let a little bit of time go by. They didn't give me a list."

"We're obviously going through a transition with the chairman so there's going to be a lot of things going on in the next six months, and I'll try to pitch in wherever I can be of value."

Wright becomes the second of two vice chairmen at GE, the other being Dennis Dammerman, CEO of GE Capital.

Commenting on the appointment, GE chairman Welch said, "Bob's a visionary with a great strategic mind, and he's a strong business leader. ... His insights over a long GE career have been invaluable and [he] will be a key force in guiding the company's future growth."

Wright has worked at GE most of his career, the past 14 as head of NBC, where at the start he was considered to be a fish out of water, particularly given that he was replacing television veteran Grant Tinker.

Since then, he has turned NBC into a multifaceted powerhouse. ■

### Consequences of exposure to violence\*

#### Children may:

- Grow to see violence as an effective way to resolve conflicts
- Become desensitized to real-life violence
- Mistrust others because they fear violence
- Become more violent adults

\*According to the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association and the American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry