

Family hour needs revisiting

Penny Nance

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"Our rules run to the licensee. At some point, enough is enough." With those words, during his speech to the annual National Association of Broadcasters convention in Las Vegas earlier this month, Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael Powell sent a shiver through the broadcasting industry. The FCC is now talking seriously about revoking broadcast licenses for egregious violations of its decency rules.

This is welcome but long overdue, and it is not by accident. FCC commissioner Kevin Martin met with representatives of a dozen pro-family organizations on March 26. The representatives emerged from that meeting optimistic that support for their position — that the FCC had to be far more aggressive in enforcing its decency standards on television and radio — is growing significantly within the commission.

Both Commissioner Martin (a Republican) and Commissioner Michael Copps (a Democrat) have been quite outspoken in recent months about the need to return to a family hour, when parents and children can gather in front of the screen and enjoy entertainment together without having their values and senses assaulted.

Both the ABC and PAX networks have begun to deliver more family-friendly programming in the first hour of their prime time lineups. This sign is encouraging as networks continue to discover that family-friendly programming can be profitable.

Still, the prevailing attitude in Hollywood encourages producers and performers to push the envelope even further. This is where the FCC's deeds must follow its words.

The same family groups met with Chairman Powell almost a year ago. While we tried to be optimistic coming out of that meeting, the consensus was that he really just met with us to say he met with us, and was uninterested in taking our concerns seriously. His most recent statements must now be followed with actions.

There are plenty of cases where television content violates the FCC's standards, there have been countless cases over the past decade or more. But the FCC hasn't acted on a single complaint.

In fact, according to Concerned Women for America, 6,900 complaints were filed with the FCC after last year's "Victoria's Secret Fashion Show" aired on network television. But the FCC combined them all into one complaint, and still did nothing.

Sexual themes and even soft-core pornography are rampant on shows such as CBS' "Survivor" and MTV's "Real World." Nielsen research reveals 1.4 million 2- to 11-year-olds watch "Survivor," and 1.4 million 12- to 17-year-olds watch it as well. Thirty percent of "Real World's" audience is under age 18.

Commissioners Martin and Copps are right: It is time the networks revisited the family hour. This would be the traditional first hour of prime-time on the networks (the big three of ABC, NBC, CBS, along with newer networks FOX, UPN, WB, and PAX) from 8 p.m. until 9 p.m. each night (7 p.m. until 8 p.m. in the Central and Mountain Time Zones).

More than 10 million children watch the first hour of prime time in the evening. Regardless of Mr. Powell's past indifference, his latest words are a red flag to broadcasters that the public is growing increasingly agitated and wants to see some positive responses.

We hope matters wouldn't have to get to the point where the FCC actually revokes a broadcaster's license for violating these standards. Our hope is the industry will be proactive in responding to the concerns *of its audience*.

Penny Nance, a mother of two children, is president of the Kids First Coalition, based in Alexandria, Va.