PS1 for 2/23/89 # The Answer to Dial-A-Porn

A stranger came up to me at a recent convention in Washington, D.C. and said, “Mrs. Schlafly, would you like to know how one of your television appearances changed my life?” Naturally, with such a provocative introduction, I was all ears.

He said he saw me on a television program discussing the issue of dial-a-porn. Also on the show were the distraught parents of a pre-teen boy who, after attending Sunday school, dialed a pornography number from the church telephone, listened to the explicit message, then went home and raped a younger girl.

The first time most parents find out that their children are into dial-a-porn or sexually suggestive “gab line” calls is when the parents receive their monthly phone bill with charges for toll calls they didn’t make. The sex lines are expensive, and some parents received a monthly phone bill of over $1,000 before they realized what was happening.

The gab liners are party lines on which any number of persons can join the conversation by dialing a certain number. Sometimes these numbers are even advertised on television by a sexy teenage girl talking on the phone while she reclines in bed. According to the **Wall Street Journal**, most gab lines range from off-color to hardcore pornography.

The TV program I was on also featured a couple of ACLU-type lawyers who asserted that dial-a-porn cannot be constitutionally banned because it is protected speech under the First Amendment. My new informant it is protected speech under the First Amendment. My new informant said that I looked straight into the TV camera and said, “With all the magnificent communications and telephone technology developed by American geniuses, there just has to be a way to stop dial-a-porn!”

The man recounting this, Roger Remillard, said, “I felt you were talking right to me because I know there, indeed, is a way. My company invented that precise technology – and then put it on the back shelf because our best customers, the telephone companies, are reluctant to buy it because it would be such a big revenue cutter.”

The way the 900 “dial up” numbers work is that the phone company bills the individual customer for the call and then remits a portion of the charge to the owner of the 900 number. The telephone company does the billing and collecting.

The legitimate “dial up” services charge about 50 cents a minute, but dial-a-porn can run several dollars for the first minute, and then pile up additional charges the longer the customer stays on the line. In the case of the gab lines, this could be hours.

The telephone companies function as the indispensable collection agency for this porn business, and it is extremely profitable. They reap an annual revenue from dial-a-porn and gab lines of about $300 million a year.

Under deregulation, the various baby bell companies have different policies. One phone company asks subscribers to pay a fee to have dial-a-porn and gab lines blocked from their homes, but dial-a-porn lawyers rush into court and, in one case, a federal court blocked the phone company from blocking dial-a-porn.

Some local telephone companies are attempting to appease public indignation by offering customers a cutoff of all 976 access for a fee. However, the dial-a-porn hucksters have figured out how to circumvent that by advising customers to dial a long distance carrier and then the 976 number.

Remillard went to his boss and argued him to take the item off the back shelf, put it into production, and offer it for sale at the reasonable price of $99. The boss agreed, and Remillard is now selling the item called a Digitech Call Blocker.

It can easily be plugged into any phone jack and will prevent the dialing of specified numbers on all phones on a single line. This prevents unauthorized toll and long distance calls, which add millions of dollars to residential and business telephone bills annually.

The Call Blocker is pre-programmed to block 976 and international dialing. In addition, it can be user programmed to block any local number (except for emergency numbers) as well as 900, 976, 1+, and 0+ long distance calls. It can block 900 calls even if they are routed through a long distance carrier.

Anti-pornography leaders favor a Congressional ban on all dial-a-porn, as was recently done in England. A second option would be getting the telephone companies to stop doing the billing for dial-a-porn, without which it cannot operate.

Discussions of this problem on television talk programs have featured lawyer after lawyer arguing that nothing can legally be done to block porn calls because of the First Amendment. Whether or not that is true may be debatable, but it certainly would be helpful if the media would let the public know that blocking technology is available.