Channel One Comes Under Fire

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In the interest of the public's right to know, Senator Jim Jeffords' Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions conducted an oversight hearing last week on the controversies surrounding "Channel One." That's the 12-minute-a-day news and advertising program beamed into the classrooms of 40% of all 11 to 18 year olds.

Channel One is able to offer its advertisers what every advertiser dreams of: a guaranteed captive audience. Children attend school because of compulsory attendance laws, and children are forced to watch Channel One because their school board signed a contract agreeing to compel them.

No wonder Channel One can charge primetime rates for its one- minute spots peddling junk foods, soft drinks, videogames, expensive sneakers, and vulgar movies, magazines, and TV sitcoms. Channel One gives advertisers a daily teen audience comparable to the Super Bowl.

Most people believe that teens watch too much television. So why are the schools compelling them to watch an extra hour a week (12 minutes x 5 days), which adds up to six days of instruction a year?

Many parents restrict and monitor the television their children are allowed to watch because they consider TV a danger to their morals and values and a waste of time. Channel One tells its advertisers how this program enables them to circumvent parents.

A Channel One marketing flier promises: "Channel One delivers the hardest to reach teen viewers. Channel One even penetrates the lightest viewers among teens." Of course, that's because schoolchildren are forced to watch the Channel One ads.

Prayer and Bible reading have been banned from the schools because they interfere with the right of atheist children not to have to sit in a classroom where prayers are recited. What about the rights of

children whose parents don't want them listening to satanic shock rocker Marilyn Manson (whose song was played as intro music to a Channel One program)?

Or what about parents who don't want their children to see clips from Stephen King's horror film "The Shining"? Or don't want them to be pressured to see the sex-saturated TV-14 show "Dawson's Creek," or the gruesome killings in the movie "The Mummy"?

The most objectionable commercials are the many hard-sell ads for movies and television shows that contain vulgarities, obscenities, blasphemies, sexual innuendoes, or violence. The ads induce students to see the movie over the weekend so they can answer a question the following week and win fabulous prizes.

Channel One even advertises PG-13 movies to pre-teens in middle school. Channel One has never released the list of the movies and television shows it has advertised, or the songs it has forced children to listen to.

Channel One plugs its own website, which once showcased a review of an R-rated movie. Channel One's website had an Advice Guru who gave the "safe-sex" message and advised a teenager, not that she should abstain from sex until marriage, but only until she is "emotionally ready and in a committed relationship."

One of the most sickening spots aired on Channel One showed a baby's face in the cross hairs of a gun, which flashes away to the sounds of a gunshot.

Channel One's so-called "news" is not selected on worthwhile educational criteria. One so-called "news" segment was a report of an opinion survey that purported to show that parents are now more tolerant of the "drug culture" and that 46% of parents expect their own children to try illegal drugs.

Should classroom time be allocated to that sort of "news"? Another so-called "news" segment was devoted to the shooting of a gangsta rapper noted for his drug-and-sex so-called music.

Since so many conservative, pro-family organizations have come out against the content as well as the commercialism of Channel One, the corporation has hired some conservative lobbyists to plead the case that it is really just free enterprise in action and that anybody who opposes it must be anti-business. Of

course, that's false.

Channel One is based on a government agency (a school district) making an exclusive contract to sell a portion of the school day to a private corporation that has total control over that portion, and then forcing children to sit and listen to the corporation's salestalk.

This would be like the school making an exclusive deal with the National Education Association to provide all the teachers, and giving the NEA the power to determine what the teachers teach. It would be like the school district making an exclusive deal with one textbook publisher to provide all the textbooks, giving the publisher total power to advertise anything they want in the textbooks, and forcing all the children and teachers to use only that company's textbooks.

We pay taxes so schools can educate children, and there is a widespread belief that it is urgent to improve academic performance. It does not advance us toward this goal to remove six days a year from teaching that we are paying for, and turn it over to Channel One, which is everything we don't like about Hollywood and network television in spades.

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