

October 23, 2008

Senator John McCain Senator Barack Obama
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WHITE RIBBON AGAINST PORNOGRAPHY WEEK
Sunday, Oct. 26, through Sunday, Nov. 2

Dear Senators McCain and Obama:

The annual White Ribbon Against Pornography Week begins this Sunday, Oct. 26. Launched nationally in 1987 by Morality in Media, WRAP Week is intended to raise public awareness about the harms of pornography and about what can be done to fight back against pornography.

This would be a wonderful opportunity for each of you to state publicly that you are concerned about the explosion of pornography and that you support vigorous enforcement of federal obscenity laws.

Common sense ought to inform us that there is both a “demand” side to the pornography problem and a “supply” side; and parents, schools and religious institutions should be at the forefront of efforts to reduce the demand for pornography through efforts to educate youth about the harms it can cause.

Those harms include the degradation of women in the production of pornography and sexual addiction. Sexual addiction can lead to acting out sexually against other children and to ruined marriages when children become adults. Children can also get wrong messages about sexuality from pornography which “teaches,” for example, that women (and girls) are sex objects to be used, degraded and violated.

Religious institutions should also be at the forefront of efforts to make persons of all ages understand that from a “faith perspective,” viewing pornography is morally wrong (sinful, if you will) and that use of pornography is destroying countless marriages and contributing to other harmful sexual behavior, such as sexual exploitation of children, prostitution, rape, and on-the-job sexual harassment.

The secular media should be at the forefront of exposing the social evils (harms) of pornography; and to their credit some in the secular media have helped make the public more aware of the addictive nature of pornography and of harms that pornography addiction causes. Unfortunately, others in the secular media are so committed to defending pornography on supposed “First Amendment grounds” that they ignore the harms or distort the facts and thus fail to accurately inform the public.

There is also a “supply” side to the pornography problem; and as you also know there are federal laws that prohibit distribution of obscene materials in interstate and foreign commerce. In recent decades Congress has strengthened these laws several times, including an amendment in 1996 to clarify that use of an interactive computer service to transport obscene materials is prohibited. In 2003, the U.S. Senate also adopted a Concurrent Resolution in support of “vigorous” enforcement of federal obscenity laws.

As you also know, the Supreme Court has repeatedly held that enforcement of obscenity laws does not violate the First Amendment. In a 1973 obscenity case, the Court also recognized that there are

“legitimate governmental interests” at stake in stemming the tide of obscene materials, “even assuming it is feasible to enforce effective safeguards against exposure to juveniles.” These include maintaining a decent society and protecting morality, family life, public safety, and the community environment.

This brings up an important issue: if elected President, will you nominate individuals to serve as Attorney General, Director of the FBI, and U.S. Attorneys who will enforce federal obscenity laws?

It is of course no secret that the United States has failed miserably at “enforcing effective safeguards against exposure to juveniles.” The Internet in particular is awash with hardcore pornographic materials that are available to minors without cost or proof of age; and surveys indicate that large numbers of children have been inadvertently exposed to these materials or have sought them out.

It is also no secret as to why it is so easy for children to access hardcore pornography on the Internet. For the past 10 years, a law that Congress enacted to protect children from Internet pornography has been tied up in the federal courts because some judges think that parental use of filtering technology alone can protect children from Internet pornography. Parents are indeed the “first line of defense” when it comes to protecting children, but no matter how hard government tries, many parents will not use filters. Even assuming that many more parents could be persuaded to use filters, that filters blocked all pornography, and that filters could not be circumvented as children get older, there would still be another big problem – as children get older, most have access to the Internet outside the home.

This brings up another vital issue: if elected President, will you nominate individuals to the Supreme Court and other courts who will follow the “ACLU-party” line or who will refrain from interpreting the Constitution and other laws in a manner that reflects the foolish preferences of unelected judges?

Thankfully, “adult” obscenity laws can still be enforced against websites that commercially distribute hardcore pornography. The Congressionally created COPA Commission concluded in its October 2000 *Final Report*: “Law enforcement resources at the state and federal level have focused nearly exclusively on child pornography and child stalking. We believe that an aggressive effort to address illegal, obscene material on the Internet will also address the presence of harmful to minors material.”

During President Clinton’s terms in office, enforcement of federal obscenity laws against commercial distributors of obscene materials came to a virtual halt. During President George W. Bush’s terms in office, there has been more enforcement but not enough to reverse what is now a floodtide of obscenity.

What America needs now is a President who will build on the limited progress made during the past several years. I also think the American people will support such a President. In April 2008, MIM commissioned Harris Interactive to ask this question in a national survey: “Were the next president to do all in his or her constitutional power to ensure that federal obscenity laws are enforced vigorously against commercial distributors of hardcore pornography, would you support or oppose the President in this matter?” Among those 18 years of age and over, 75% said they would support the President.

Next week would be a good opportunity for you to let the public know where you stand.

Sincerely,

Robert Peters
President