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Gov targets violent video games

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BY [DAVE MCKINNEY](#) Sun-Times Springfield Bureau Chief

SPRINGFIELD -- With "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" atop many gift-giving lists, Gov. Blagojevich wants state lawmakers to do more to keep such violent and sexually explicit video games out of the hands of kids.

In an assault on the video gaming industry, the governor today will call on lawmakers to approve new restrictions subjecting retailers to potential jail time and fines of up to \$5,000 if they sell or rent violent or sexually charged video games to those younger than 18.

"What they're doing is targeting video games with graphic sex and excessive violence to children, just like the tobacco industry targeted children with the Joe Camel advertising campaign," Blagojevich said. "It's all about making money."

WHAT WOULD BE RESTRICTED

Here's how the governor would define violent and sexually explicit video games:

- Violent games would include those that have human-on-human violence in which the player kills, injures or otherwise causes physical harm to another human, including but not limited to depictions of death, dismemberment, amputation, decapitation, maiming, disfigurement, mutilation of body parts or rape.
- Sexually explicit games are those that depict male or female genitalia and other nudity exposed in a way that, in accordance with contemporary community standards, predominantly appeals to the prurient interest of the player.

Blagojevich singled out the popular "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas" video game as one he wants kept away from kids. It encourages players to exact revenge for the murder of the hero's mother and boost their standing in his gang by gunning down cops, breaking into houses, stealing cars at gunpoint and having sex with prostitutes.

But what really motivated the governor was a controversial British video game, "JFK Reloaded," that lets players take on the role of presidential assassin.

"I was outraged," he said.

Constitutionality at issue

While a state crackdown on raunchy video games may be popular with some parents, judges have not been as enthusiastic, striking down similar laws in Washington state, St. Louis and Indianapolis.

Blagojevich insists his proposal will stay within the Constitution, but retailers don't believe it.

"There's no way that this can stand the constitutional test," said David Vite, president of the Illinois Retail Merchants Association.

Vite said most major retailers in Illinois already won't sell minors video games that carry an M-rating, the industry's designation for the most violent or sexually explicit games. Without a law, the governor says, kids can still get those games.

Under Blagojevich's plan, retailers would be left to judge whether video games were too violent or sexual for kids, based on definitions written into the law, rather than the industry rating system.

But no definitions can be specific enough, Vite said. "Is a video game involving the old Popeye series, which shows Popeye and Brutus in a fistfight over Olive Oyl, violent? I don't know."

Last year, Washington state enacted a law that would impose \$500 fines against retailers who sold or rented video games built around killing cops to kids. In June, a federal judge overturned it on the basis it violated free-speech protections.

Sex sells? 'Larry' fails to score

BY [MISHA DAVENPORT](#) Staff Reporter

So much for the adage that sex sells.

To hear the politicians tell it, video game publishers can pretty much publish anything they want and get away with it. Video game publisher Vivendi Universal found out the hard way that that's not the case with "Leisure Suit Larry Magna Cum Laude," a video game about a nerdish guy trying to score with the ladies.

The company was even less successful with retailers than Larry is with women, which surprised the company.

"There seemed to be a high degree of interest in sophomoric humor," said Phil O'Neil, president of Vivendi Universal Games of North America.

Eric Nofsinger is vice president of creative content for Hoffman Estates-based High Voltage Software, which developed the game for Vivendi Universal. He said he expected some difficulty with the Entertainment Software Rating Board from the get-go.

"We were going into uncharted territory," Nofsinger said. "The ESRB knows how many bodies you can shove into a wood chipper and still get an M-rating, but they're far more vague on how many boobs you can show."

High Voltage should have a much easier time with its next project, a video game based on Tim Burton's "Charlie and the Chocolate Factory," due in stores next year around the time the film of the same name comes out.

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