

From the Chicago Tribune

Video game law strikes a chord

Blagojevich pitch finds a receptive room in Naperville

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Before Thursday, Naperville mom Kathi Molloy didn't think twice about allowing her 6- and 7-year-old boys to play violent video games like "Doom" and "Half-Life" because it was under their father's supervision and she didn't think the games' violence had any impact on her kids.

But after Gov. Rod Blagojevich came to her community to pitch his plan to ban the sale and rental of violent and sexually explicit video games to minors, Molloy said she's having second thoughts.

"I might go home and start cleaning out some of this stuff," she said after hearing the governor explain his idea to more than 25 mothers at a campaign-style "town hall" meeting in the family-friendly suburb.

The meeting is likely to be the first of many such events as Blagojevich plans to travel around the state in coming weeks to talk to parents about violent video games before introducing legislation in the General Assembly next year. The governor's office is also establishing an Internet site, safegamesillinois.org, to help educate parents about the content of many games.

If passed, the law would make it a misdemeanor for retailers to sell or rent violent or sexually explicit video games to anyone younger than 18, punishable by up to a year in prison or a \$5,000 fine.

Blagojevich told the group of mothers Thursday he was inspired to propose the crackdown after learning about a new game in which players try to assassinate President John Kennedy.

"I watched that and felt a great deal of outrage and contempt and thought to myself, 'Someone ought to do something about that.' And then it dawned on me, 'I'm the governor. I can do something about that,'" he said.

Unlike many games, however, "JFK Reloaded" is available only by downloading on the Internet.

Aides to Blagojevich said they believed they could subject Web retailers to the restrictions, although they acknowledged as a practical matter that could be difficult.

Similar crackdowns have been proposed elsewhere in the country but have all been blocked in the courts on grounds that they violated the 1st Amendment.

Blagojevich said he believed his proposal could be drafted to pass legal muster.

"I don't believe that my 8-year-old daughter has a constitutional right to cut somebody's head off in a game that she plays," he said.

Most mothers in the audience Thursday felt Blagojevich's proposal was a good one. Many said it has become increasingly difficult to parent children and keep them away from offensive material and that any help government can provide is welcome.

"It's not the state's job to raise my children, but I have trouble seeing what the harm is in making it more difficult for kids to get their hands on these video games," said Elaine Diveley, a former high school Spanish teacher and mother of three.

Not everyone agreed.

"I don't feel that the state legislature can do a good job of dictating to parents on how to raise our children," said Julie Lichter, a mother of three teens.

Blagojevich told Lichter the intent of the law is to give her information and a choice. If Lichter feels the games are appropriate for her children, she can buy them herself, he said.

Even Molloy, who supports the proposal, said she hoped the legislation didn't go too far. Educating parents on an Internet site is one thing, she said, but criminalizing the sale of such games is another.

Indeed, she said what she wished the governor had spent some time talking about a spring referendum proposal to increase local property taxes to build a new high school.

"I would have loved to have heard him address that," she said.