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Governor's game-ban crusade comes to town; Blagojevich puts violent games in his legislative sights

By MIKE FRAZIER - H&R Staff Writer

DECATUR - Youngsters playing video games today can assume the role of a gangster who carjacks the innocent, shoots police officers and solicits prostitutes, Gov. Rod Blagojevich said.

To those who sell or distribute such graphic games to minors, Blagojevich intends to send a clear message: Game Over.

Blagojevich received applause Monday from local community leaders and parents at the Greater Decatur Y as he pitched his plan to outlaw the sale of violent and sexually explicit video games to minors.

The governor unveiled plans last week to ban the distribution, sale, rental and availability of such games to children younger than 18 years of age. Violators could face up to one year in prison or a \$5,000 fine.

Blagojevich said those under 18 already can't buy alcohol, cigarettes, or pornography.

"We think if you're under 18, you can't buy graphically violent video games," he said. "Or if you're under 18, you shouldn't be able to buy sexually explicit video games that are very similar to pornography. If a grownup wants to do it, that's his or her business."

Video games already have ratings such as "M" for mature. But Blagojevich cited a study by the Federal Trade Commission that found 69 percent of underage boys could purchase video games with a mature rating.

If the proposed legislation passes, Illinois would be the first state to enact such a ban. Similar prohibitions have been unsuccessful in other states and communities. But Blagojevich intends to narrowly define violent and sexually explicit video games; a move he hopes will help deal with concerns raised by federal courts.

Rick Pepin of Decatur backed the governor's plan. Pepin doesn't savor the thought of his 16-year-old daughter dating a guy with a mind "polluted" by the graphic video games.

"I'm all for the kids having fun," Pepin said. "But this is crossing the line."

Keith Anderson, founder of Homework Hangout, also praised the governor's proposed ban. He said leaders of the after-school tutoring program already monitor games students play at the center's arcade.

"That stuff is very influential," Anderson said. "Kids are so heavily influenced by what they see, and those video games are so addictive."