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Title: Video game proposal would be a helpful tool

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Opinion - Video game proposal would be a helpful tool

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Gov. Rod Blagojevich's proposal to make it a crime to rent or sell violent or sexually explicit video games has been criticized as another grandstanding move that draws national attention. Which it is. It has been criticized as another instance where the government is doing something parents ought to be doing. Which it is. It has been criticized because it puts the onus of enforcement on retail establishments that rent and sell the games. Which it does. But there won't be much criticism from parents who are at the forefront in what they often feel is a losing battle for the hearts and minds of their children. While government can't raise our children for us, it can at least give us a few tools that help, a few barriers to accessing the worst society has to offer. There's no question Gov. Blagojevich has a flair for grandstanding. We saw it first-hand when he flew into west-central Illinois to announce the region's Opportunity Returns program, which was filled with promises he couldn't deliver without legislative approval. We saw it when he announced the plan to encourage Illinois residents to buy their prescription drugs from Canada. We saw it when he promised to deliver flu vaccine even though there was none to be had. So it was no surprise to see the governor's video games initiative make national headlines. Coming at the height of the holiday shopping season, it put the spotlight on a concern shared by millions of parents - perfect for the cable news talking heads.

The governor proposes making it a Class A misdemeanor to sell video games with a "mature" rating - games with excessive violence or that are sexual in nature - to anyone under age 17. There's no prohibition now. Stores would be required to label the games with such content. Violating the ban could be punishable by up to one year in prison or a \$5,000 fine.

"We're talking about violent games that use realistic depiction of human-on-human violence. Video games that include dismemberment and disfigurement. Video games where the kids control the process," Blagojevich said. The governor's critics are correct in pointing out that parents, not shopkeepers, hold the primary responsibility for the content of the video games children play. They are also correct in suggesting that a child intent on getting such games will figure out a way. But that doesn't mean adults should make it easy or that society shouldn't at least erect some barriers to access. The concept isn't new. There are prohibitions against selling tobacco and alcohol to minors.

Communities prohibit minors from entering adult bookstores or buying sexually oriented adult videos. "The most important job we have is to protect our kids and to raise them right," said the governor, who has two young children. He's right. While that's a job only parents can do, they can use a little help along the way. - Don Cooper, publisher