

Source: Herald and Review

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Date: 3/17/05

From the Herald & Review

Governor's ban on violent video game sales to minors passes House with strong support

By MATT ADRIAN - H&R Springfield Bureau Writer

SPRINGFIELD - The state House passed Gov. Rod Blagojevich's violent video game legislation Wednesday, a proposal with overwhelming support.

The governor's proposal would make it illegal for stores to sell violent or sexually explicit video games to anyone younger than 18. While lawmakers voted in favor of the ban, nearly all the debate was negative, with concerns raised about constitutionality or state government usurping parental control.

The House voted 91-19. The measure now heads to the Senate.

"I support this bill. A strong message has to be sent," said state Rep. Lou Lang, D-Skokie. "The truth of the matter is that bill is unconstitutional as drafted. The truth of the matter is it's vague."

State Rep. Linda Chapa LaVia, D-Aurora, the House sponsor, argued children learn violent behavior from games such as Grand Theft Auto in which players can steal cars, beat prostitutes and shoot cops.

"An industry that is making so much money selling these things to your children is dealing with things like decapitation, defecation on people," Chapa LaVia said. "There's vivid pictures of nudity. It's an industry that needs help being policed."

State Rep. Roger Eddy, R-Hutsonville, said, as a teacher, he believes video games are having a negative effect on children.

"I believe to my core after 25 years in education and being around children that we are in a period of time of unprecedented types of video depictions that are violent and they have a detrimental effect on our children," Eddy said.

Eddy thinks the proposal is constitutional.

"I've read the Federalist Papers. I don't think this is what the constitutional founders were talking about when they were protecting speech," he said.

State Rep. Bob Flider, D-Mount Zion, who has children younger than 18, said "This legislation has helped me understand more about what's in some of those games that are out there that previously I was not aware."

He also said the initiative is not unprecedented. "I'm sure long before this debate we had discussion on whether adult magazines should be available to kids under 18."

State Rep. Bill Mitchell, R-Forsyth, said he voted in favor of the measure but does not have a strong opinion either way on this issue. He said it is important to protect younger people from video games his generation is not familiar with.

However, state Rep. Chapin Rose, R-Mahomet, voted against the proposal, arguing it was too broad and unconstitutional.

"The problem with her bill as drafted was that it made no distinction between violent acts of extreme brutality and say a football game, hence the latest version of John Madden football, would not be allowed under her bill," Rose said.

State Rep. David Reis, R-Ste. Marie, agrees the games are a problem and voted for the legislation, but he, too, is skeptical.

"I hope that the author of the bill will work with making any changes before it gets over to the Senate, because I have serious doubts that it's going to pass from a constitutionality standpoint," he said.