

**Testimony to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, Pensions
Channel One
By Jim Metrock, President, Obligation, Inc.
May 20, 1999**

I have watched Channel One programs since March 1996. Here are some observations backed up with a library of evidence on tape.

Channel One has significantly more advertising than the two minutes they claim. True, they usually run four 30-second ads during their daily show, but they also will run an ad after the apparent end of the program. For example, they urged children to enter a "Dawson's Creek" contest at the end of their program. That ad lasted 20 seconds in addition to their regular two minutes. This is a violation of their contract.

Channel One also exceeds their advertising limits by having music groups guest host on the program. The artist(s) music is played going in and out of commercial breaks. The anchor will ask the musical act about their latest CD (usually coming out the following week) and then will allow the tour to be promoted to the audience.

This is a violation of Channel One's own "news standards" and is also an example of extra advertising above the amount school boards had agreed to.

Channel One commercials are often unique to its program. Special ads made especially for the captive Channel One audience are frequent. Snapple ran a contest aimed at Channel One students. Skittles ran an ad that told students that Channel One students are the first to see this ad. "See-It-And-Win" movie contest urge Channel One students to see often age-inappropriate movies during the weekend so they can answer a question about the movie that Channel One will pose to them next week.

Channel One has a long history of playing music from groups known for ultra-violent and women-hating lyrics. Gangsta rap music and music from groups like the shock rock Marilyn Manson has been used by Channel One to keep the children's attention to the TV screen.

Viewing Channel One over the years, I got a feeling that Channel One producers and executives did not have middle school children of their own. If they did, how could they create a web site that endangered children like they did in 1997.

Channel One constantly funneled children to its web site that featured very dangerous chat rooms. A child could enter a private room and meet

anonymous Internet users. Channel One even asked "optional information" about children like their phone number, street address, and email address.

Channel One executives allowed the promotion of a "Personal Ads" feature on the Internet where Channel One facilitated the passing of very personal information between children and other Internet users. Obligation complained and after a few months Channel One stopped this reckless feature.

Channel One tried to get children to send in their picture so Channel One could post it on the Internet along with enough personal information that would allow anyone to contact them. I did. I call a Brentwood, TN high school principal and said, "With one more phone call I could find where this female student lived." Shortly thereafter, Channel One suspended their "Fresh Faces" feature.

Channel One routinely reviewed extremely violent and sexually-explicit movies like "Pulp Fiction" and "How to be a Player". "Pulp Fiction" was considered by the Channel One writer to be one of the top hundred movies in the last 18 years.

Channel One has run commercials for violent programming that would outrage parents if they knew. In 1996, a Channel One Reebok ad told children to watch yet another Reebok ad that night on the most violent primetime series on network TV at the time - "New York Undercover". That is insanity. Taxpayer school time should not be used to promote any product, especially not extremely violent TV programs.

Thursdays and Fridays are "Coming Attraction" days at Channel One schools. Taxpayers would be revolted at the lost of school time spent telling children to watch movies that their parents would not want them to see.

Channel One has gotten much more aggressive in pushing age-inappropriate entertainment since the beginning of the 1998-99 school year. The "DLS" rated "Dawson's Creek" TV show was heavily promoted to children at the first of the school year. Channel One even ran a contest urging children to win a role on the sexually-charged show. The previous season this show made national news by having a 15-year-old character have sex with his teacher. This did not stop Channel One from giving "Dawson's Creek" their "OK". Channel One delivered a massive teen audience to the second season premiere show and then agreed to stop running commercials after Obligation complained.

Channel One executives approved ads for the profanity-filled PG-13 movie "The Waterboy", the very inappropriate PG-13 movie "Never Been Kissed",

the off-color humor of the Eddie Murphy movie "Holy Man", and the ultra-violent PG-13 movie "The Mummy" just a week after the funerals at Littleton, Colorado.

Channel One has not earned a right to speak to children. They buy their audience by loaning a school system a TV network. Schools are fleeced by Channel One because no matter how many years schools force their students to watch Channel One's program and commercials, title to all the equipment remains with Channel One. This is outrageous.

Schools endorse every product that is shown on Channel One. I don't want my school to tell my child what brand jeans to purchase, what brand candy bar to eat, or what sleazy movie to see this weekend. It is simply none of my school's business to push products on my child or any other child.

Channel One is forced viewing of content. This should anger U.S. Senators. School time is precious. It is already paid for by taxpayers. No school board has the right to resell that time to a company like Channel One.

Channel One is a taxpayer's nightmare. In Alabama, the average cost to maintain a child in a classroom is about six cents per minute. If a 23-student classroom was forced to watch Channel One for the minimum number of school days that classroom would sacrifice \$2,600 worth of taxpayer-purchased school time in exchange for the rental use of a \$275 19" color TV and whatever value the discredited Channel One news show has.

This is a rotten deal for taxpayers. A novice accountant would laugh his or her head off at this contract. A school that contracts with Channel One gives up control of at least 31 hours of school time. That is more than one week of instructional time a year. A child that is contractually obligated to Channel One's marketing plan from sixth grade to graduation will lose 7 weeks of school watching television instead of reading. There is a tremendous cost here that citizens must openly discuss.

One hour a week of school is determined by a Channel One Hollywood executive named Andy Hill. He is not an educator; he is not a journalist. His claim to fame is that he worked on "Touched By An Angel" when he was with CBS Entertainment. He is the president of programming for Channel One. He is ultimately responsible for what children see on Channel One. Communities have no say-so over the content of one week's worth of school time. That's all up to Mr. Hill and his Channel One studio in Hollywood.

The public must be made aware of Channel One's intention to bring the Neilsen Media Research company into Channel One's schools to effectively

“spy” on students. They will attempt to install monitors in five randomly chosen TV sets in 300 schools nationwide. These monitors will determine if children are watching the required amount of programming. If they do not measure up, Channel One may remove the children’s TV network. School officials cannot be told which TVs are being monitored or the results will be meaningless.

Our nation cannot allow Channel One to use Nielsen to snoop on our schoolchildren during their school day. There are other less invasive ways for Channel One to monitor contract compliance.

States are increasing their curriculum standards and strengthening their graduation exams. These actions added to the clear trend to minimize non-instructional time during the school day will force school systems to seriously reconsider Channel One’s place in classrooms.

Once parents and other taxpayers find out about Channel One, Channel One is removed from schools. This happened in Jasper City, Walker County, Hoover City, Shelby County, and Clarke County (all Alabama) to name a few.

I want to thank the Health, Education, and Labor committee for helping to shine light on this commercial exploitation of schoolchildren.

Much Obliged,

Jim Metrock

President, Obligation, Inc.

May 20, 1999