I am not going to debate whether or not video game violence has negative effects on people. In fact, I'm willing to say that violence in video games, along with violence in tv, movies, books, and every other form of media have some kind of negative effect on people. What I do want to discuss is how we as a society are choosing to deal with these media. Currently there is legislature, the "Violence in Video Games Labeling Act" (H.R. 4204) sponsored by Representative Joe Baca, to require that video games have a warning label placed on them if they are rated 'E' (Everyone), 'Everyone 10+' (Everyone 10 and older), 'T' (Teen), 'M' (Mature), or 'A' (Adult). The label would read: "WARNING: Exposure to violent video games has been linked to aggressive behavior." I am going to discuss first this bill's redundancy, and second what it hopes to achieve.

So first, this bill is horribly redundant. It lists a set of ratings for video games that would have this label. Think about that for a minute. This bill wants to put a warning label on games which already have a rating determined by the Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB). This rating system was developed specifically to help people judge the content of a game. It's not perfect, much like the ratings for movies, but it is much more descriptive than a broad warning slapped on the front of the box. These ratings are very visible on the front of the box with an appropriate age and provide simple to understand descriptions of the content that warrants the rating on the back of the box. The bill proposed would require that, in addition to these ratings, a label be placed on the front of the box similar to that of cigarettes and the surgeon general's warning on alcohol. Really? We need a warning label for video games like we do alcohol and cigarettes, but we don't for movies and books? Personally I think the warning label is ridiculous, but that's beside the point.
Video Game Violence

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Video games already have a warning label of sorts with the rating system, which I fully endorse.

The more interesting thing about this bill is what it is trying to achieve. Frank Wolf, the co-sponsor of the bill, states "Just as we warn smokers of the health consequences of tobacco, we should warn parents--and children--about the growing scientific evidence demonstrating a relationship between violent video games and violent behavior," in an article on Gamespot's website (listed at the end). This bill is trying to treat video games like any other controlled substance by putting one big one size fits all warning label on them. However, video games are not like other controlled substances. "My Little Pony: Pinkie Pie's Party", rated E, is very different than "Grand Theft Auto 3," rated M. under this bill both of these games would contain this warning label, in addition to games like "Brain Age" where the goal of producing the game was to better the person playing it. This bill fails to recognized the different between games where to ESRB rating system does not. Another problem with this approach to educating parents about the risks of video games is that it completely ignores all of the science that says some aspects of video games can be beneficial to people. Instead it solely focuses on the research showing that video game violence can be harmful.

If we really want to protect our youth from the negative impacts of violence in video games (or any other media for that matter) we need to educate parents better. In the end, the only way to prevent this exposure is to have the people raising the children pay more attention to what they are letting them play. A broad one size fits all label will do the opposite of this. Instead of explaining the content in the game so that a parent can make an informed decision, it puts a negative connotation on all games. On top of that, this is legislature. It is bogging down our governmental system with redundant and pointless laws. Video games already have the ESRB, if there is a problem with it we should spend effort to improve it, not create redundant and pointless laws.

Bill: http://thomas.loc.gov/home/thomas.php  search Bill #: H.R. 4204

ESRB website: http://www.esrb.org/index-js.jsp

Gamespot Article: http://www.gamespot.com/news/lawmakers-seeking-warning-labels-for-most
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