

Were Biden's 'Gun Violence' Talks With Gaming Industry Just Window Dressing?

Vice President Joe Biden is heading a new task force on gun violence, formed by President Obama after the massacre in Newtown, Conn., which happened one month ago Monday.

Biden met last week with victims' groups and gun safety organizations, and also held conference calls with governors of both parties, and state and local elected leaders from across the country. In addition, he met with advocates for sportsmen and women and gun ownership groups as well as with leaders from the video game and gun industries to discuss the issue of gun violence.

Biden and members of Obama's cabinet will meet with members of U.S. House of Representatives on Monday as he prepares recommendations on how to decrease gun violence.

Christian media scholar Ted Baehr, CEO and founder of the Christian Film & Television Commission, questioned the value of Joe Biden's meetings on gun violence with entertainment and video game industry leaders.

"None of these meetings seem to include any scholars or researchers about the effects of media violence on real violence," Dr. Baehr noted.

"These meetings sound like just more political window dressing," he added.

According to Sen. Joe Lieberman, there are more than 500,000 studies showing the media violence can lead to real violence and aggression, Baehr said.

"Shouldn't the vice president also meet with the researchers

and scholars who have conducted and examined some of these studies?" he asked.

Baehr referred to media reports that President Obama has already decided to focus only on gun control, including a possible national confiscation of weapons and certain kinds of ammunition.

"Why have any meetings at all if the president has already made up his mind about this issue?" he wondered.

Baehr predicted entertainment and video game industry leaders will tell Biden that they don't know if media violence has any effect on people's behavior, especially children and teenagers.

However, he cited the 2000 "Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children" by the Surgeon General, the American Medical Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Psychological Association, and the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry that violence in the mass media does indeed contribute to violent behavior.

"A study published in 2002 in the journal *SCIENCE*," he added, "found that teenagers and young adults who watch more than one hour of television daily are more likely to commit violent crimes and other forms of aggressive behavior."

This study, led by Jeffrey G. Johnson of Columbia University and the New York State Psychiatric Institute, followed children in 707 families in two counties in northern New York state for 17 years. Adolescents and young adults who watched television for more than seven hours per week had an increased likelihood of between 16 and 200 percent of committing an aggressive act in later years. The study found a link between violence and viewing any television, not just violent programming.

"Dr. Johnson said at the time that the evidence 'has gotten to the point where it's overwhelming,' Dr. Baehr noted.

Baehr is "concerned" that the level of graphic violence on some cable shows, like Showtime's *Dexter*, will begin to influence the shows on the broadcast networks, which have been losing ratings to the cable channels.

He pointed out that two "relatively" family-friendly shows, such as *NCIS* and *Spongebob Squarepants*, are significantly more popular if you examine the top highest rated shows on Cable TV.

"So why isn't the entertainment industry doing more family-friendly TV shows?" Dr. Baehr asked.

He added: "If entertainment and video game industry leaders don't think media violence is contributing to the alleged problem of gun violence, then why don't they just stop taking any advertisements? If media content has no effect on society, then the entertainment industry has been lying to the advertising industry for decades!

"Joking aside, if President Obama and other politicians really want to make a difference, then they should focus on what the evidence actually shows, not on what their ideology tells them is true. Children keep dying, but no one, at least in the political realm, is looking at the real evidence."

Baehr concluded, "The evidence seems to show that other factors are more important than gun control when it comes to inciting violent crime."

He said those factors include the level of media violence (especially on TV) since the 1960s, the amount of prescription drugs given to young people with behavioral problems, first-person shooter video games, lack of supervision and control on people with mental problems, the breakdown of the traditional nuclear family since the 1960s, lack of discipline of

schoolchildren, and the removal of God, Jesus Christ, religion, and biblical values from the public square since the 1960s, especially our public schools and universities as well as our popular culture.