

Pressure on the Media Pays Off

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The premise behind Accuracy in Media is that citizens can bring pressure on the media to be accurate and fair. It doesn't always work out that way. But there is some good news on the media front: the raunchy daytime talk shows are losing advertisers and U.S. News & World Report has managed to get an admission from Kmart that a boycott engineered by the American Family Association hurt business. These victories should convince us to redouble our efforts.

The advertiser pullout involves the giant company Proctor & Gamble, which spends \$284 million a year on advertising. Reports said that the company pulled its ads from four of the talk shows in late September after producers wouldn't clean up their act. The four cancellations represented millions of dollars.

This revelation came at about the same time that the Wall Street Journal reported that another big advertiser, Sears, Roebuck & Co., had also dropped advertising from several of the talk shows. A Sears spokesman called the programs "increasingly controversial" and was concerned that advertising on the shows would alienate customers. Still another corporation, Unilever, was also reported to have pulled ads from talk shows.

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The fascinating aspect of this development is that the companies pulled their ads before William Bennett launched his national campaign to clean up day time talk shows. It looks like Bennett has tapped into a phenomenon that could produce tremendous dividends in terms of combatting cultural pollution. The encouraging thing is that it appears that the companies themselves came to the conclusion that the programs were going too far. This represents corporate citizenship at its best.

But it's far from clear that *all* the talk shows have gotten the message. On the day that news broke about the advertiser pullouts, the Sally Jesse Raphael show featured a raunchy program about a husband who may have gotten his wife's little sister pregnant. The show featured tests conducted on the husband to determine if he was, indeed, the father. Meanwhile, U.S. News & World Report says that one reason for the financial problems afflicting the Kmart discount chain was the Kmart boycott engineered by Donald Wildmon and the American Family Association. The boycott was in response to the sale by a Kmart subsidiary, Waldenbooks, of Playboy and Penthouse. Waldenbooks was sold by the company and the boycott was called off in September. A Kmart spokesman was honest enough to admit to U.S. News that the boycott had hurt business.

Now, if the liberal media were honest enough to admit and correct their own liberal biases, we would really start making some progress. The advertisers should demand nothing less than fairness, accuracy and objectivity in the news programs they sponsor.