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Protecting the Young

Istook's Win on Net Access is Sensible

IT shouldn't have been so difficult to limit a minor child's access to Internet pornography on a public computer. Rep. Ernest Istook has learned that lesson first hand in his campaign to install filters to block a child's access to obscene material on such computers.

The victory by the Warr Acres Republican in seeing this legislation signed into law by President Clinton just before Christmas is a worthy one. Because of it, children using federally funded computers or Internet access will not be able to view pornographic sites on those computers. Instead, the public school or library must install filtering software to prevent minors from surfing obscene Web sites.

The law already faces court challenges. Certain groups like the American Civil Liberties Union believe this is censorship or an example of the heavy hand of the federal government mingling in local affairs.

But these arguments fall apart under scrutiny. This law strikes a balance between the interests of an adult's civil liberties and protecting a child.

This bill should not limit Internet access to adult users, so complaints that this amounts to censorship are unfounded. It also does not mean the federal government is imposing its ideals on issues best left to local and state entities. Instead, it means that if federal funds are used to buy computers or access the Internet, then the federal government has the right to send the message that minors shouldn't be using that equipment to access adult material.

This isn't the only time the government has restricted the use of its funds to certain criteria.

The legislation leaves it up to local school and library boards to decide how best to filter out that material.

Today it's hard enough for parents to protect their children from accessing tempting information that's not appropriate for their age. Moms and dads shouldn't have to worry they will have to work overtime to shield them from pornography in a place that's supposed to be safe, such as school or a library. That's not the kind of education children need.

Istook should be praised for pursuing this bill until he found a common-sense solution that appealed to both sides of the political aisle.