

We've Got Our Own Web of Censorship

By Neil Steinberg

Chicago Sun-Times

February 12, 2005

Opening shot

I typed "grotesque scenes of sex and death" into Google, and up popped a variety of Web sites promising just that.

What prompted me to this exercise was the overwhelming House Commerce Committee vote -- 46-2 -- approving a 45-fold increase in federal fines performers face for "indecent" broadcasts, whatever those might be, raising the maximum from \$11,000 to half a million dollars.

The future will no doubt laugh at the increasingly frantic efforts government is making to control mass media, at the very moment communications is fracturing and control is being placed in people's hands, whether TiVoing away their commercials or swooping around the Web for titillation and mortification.

Myself, I didn't click on the gory Web sites offered. I've seen enough death in my life -- I once spent 10 hours watching autopsies at the Cook County medical examiner's office -- so there is no need to top off the tank. We have always been our own best censors, and one of the most refreshing aspects of the Internet is that it will train us to screen out what we don't like

ourselves, and not count on government busybodies to clumsily shield us from what they imagine we shouldn't want.

Not part of the flock

Kudos to our own Rep. Jan **Schakowsky**, who knows a frenzy when she sees it, and was one of the two -- Rep. Henry Waxman of California was the other -- who voted against the ridiculously punitive piece of legislative hysteria.

"I am more concerned about infringing the First Amendment than I am about my children or my children's children seeing Janet Jackson's nipples," she said.

You and me both, Jan.