



**CANDIDATE QUESTIONNAIRE:
Kids and the Media
Barack Obama**

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1. You have children – what specific rules do you (or did you) have about media use in your home? And do your kids’ media rules change when you are on the campaign trail?”

As a general matter, we try to limit the amount of television our children watch. Children watch an average of three hours a day of TV—for African American children, it’s four. It’s too much, and all parents should turn off the TV and read to their children more often. But when our children do watch television, we try to watch it with them. This means finding programming that we can watch as a family, and being there to answer any questions it may raise with our kids.

Obviously, this gets harder when I am on the campaign trail. But Michelle and I make every effort to read with our kids as much as possible. Rather than just sitting them in front of the television, we try to get them to read the latest Harry Potter.

2. As a parent, what is your biggest concern when it comes to the media’s impact on your kids?

Michelle and I have tried to instill in our children a sense of what’s right and wrong; a sense of what’s important, of what’s worth striving for. As best we can, we also try to shield them from the harsher elements of life, and introduce them to the realities of adulthood at an appropriate age. But the concern shared by so many parents today – a concern that frankly hasn’t been taken seriously enough by some on the left – is that raising your children this way has become exceedingly difficult in a mass media culture that saturates our airwaves with a steady stream of sex, violence and materialism. I worry that even if Michelle and I do our best to impart what we think are important values to our children, the media out there will undermine our lessons and teach them something different.

But there is big opportunity here for all families as well. We live in an age of historic access to information and inter-connectedness. We need to make sure that all of our children have access to these technologies and we must teach our children how to harness the huge potential of this technology. I want to make sure my kids are protected from the dangers of the new media world, but I also want to make sure they reap the benefits of it.

3. Kids today spend nearly 45 hours per week consuming media. They only spend 30 hours a week in school, and 17 hours a week with their parents. Given the huge proportion of time that kids spend with media, how big a priority will the media's impact on kids be in your administration if you are elected?

It has to be a priority. As I noted above, it's not just about raising our children, which is important enough in itself, it's about maintaining America's place in the world. As we speak, children in China, India, and across the developing world are training to take advantage of our new media landscape and become innovators and entrepreneurs on the world economic stage in ways that just weren't possible ten years ago. America must prepare our children to do the same.

To do that, parents need to teach our children good media judgment. The openness of the new media world must be seen as a resource as much as some see it as a threat. And we must teach our children to harness it. There's a lot of media out there. Some of it is very valuable. We live in the most information-abundant age in history and the people who develop the skills to utilize its benefits are the people who will succeed in the 21st century. But also lurking out there are the darker corners of the media world: from internet predators to hateful messages to graphic sex.

We know that with the pervasiveness of mass media today – the existence of so many means of communication that are so easily accessible all over the world – it's very difficult to regulate our way out of this problem. And for those of us who value our First Amendment freedoms – who value artistic expression – we wouldn't want to. The key as I see it is that parents need to be training our children to separate the good media from the bad. We must train our children to have good media judgment and media skills so that those 45 hours per week are productive instead of distracting. We need to teach them to be smart media consumers, to take advantage of the tremendous empowerment that our information access affords us while avoiding its pitfalls.

My administration would make it a priority to make sure our children use today's media opportunities for good and not ill so that they remain competitive in the global economy. This means encouraging parents to turn off the TV and the video games when it's necessary for children to focus on homework, giving parents the tools necessary to block inappropriate content when it is time to watch, and teaching parents and children to access and use the vast amount of valuable information that's available to us through the media.

4. To date, nearly 10 states have considered legislation to keep violent video games out of the hands of kids. Would you support this type of legislation at the federal level? What other strategies would you support to keep the video game industry and other media companies from marketing and selling inappropriate content to children?

We need to give parents the tools and information they need to make choices about what programs their children are watching or what video games they are playing. As we move towards a digital environment, there is a golden opportunity for the industry to do this on their own—to use the latest in technology to give parents more information and more choice. For example, this technology could make it possible for parents to create their own family tier just by programming their television to block certain channels, block certain genres of programming like dramas, or block television at certain times of the day. The

same can be said of video games, especially as we're moving into an era when they can be downloaded as easily as today's movies and television shows.

I would call upon the video game industry to give parents better information about programs and video games by improving the voluntary rating system we currently have. Broadcasters and video game producers should take it upon themselves to improve this system to include easier to find and easier to understand descriptions of exactly what kind of content is included. But if the industry fails to act, then my administration would.

And even if the industry does do some responsible self-policing, there's still a role for the federal government to play. We need to understand the impact of these new media better. That's why I supported federal funding to study the impact of video games on children's cognitive development.

5. School curricula today require that kids learn the fundamentals of language, mathematics and science – but very few schools teach kids how to understand the vast digital media environment that now occupies most of their time. Would you support legislation to require that every American kid receives instruction of this kind?

I would support establishing programs and creating incentives to give our children the skills to navigate the virtual worlds and new media tools that have developed in recent years. I support programs in schools that incorporate Internet safety education, but we also need to develop ways for parents to teach their children to find educational and child-friendly content and information, and to use their connectivity and access to information to become the next generation's leading innovators.

6. Statistics show that one in five American kids will be sexually solicited online. How can we make the Internet a safer place for children, and how do we balance that safety with legitimate privacy and free speech concerns?

I support a combination of technology, education and enforcement tools to address this problem. I would require that Internet service providers clearly offer parents control technologies that empower them to decide whether to block or monitor their children's access to a broad range of sites, including social networking sites, and to block children from disclosing personal information online. I support the development of educational programs on child online safety such as have been developed in states such as Illinois, Virginia and Texas. Finally, I support imposing strong criminal penalties against sexual predators and increasing funding to allow law enforcement officials to investigate and prosecute online crimes.

7. Childhood obesity has reached epidemic proportions in this country. The latest research suggests that junk food ads are a major contributing factor. Would you support legislation to regulate the type of foods that could be advertised during children's programming (similar to laws considered in Australia and the United Kingdom)?

We're never going to be able to shield our children from all the potentially bad influences out there. And it would be counterproductive to just build walls that shield them entirely. Our best hope is to educate our children and give them the information and the tools they need to make wise choices. Our children are bombarded by all sorts of messages all the time. If it's not from television commercials, it's from somewhere else. We need to teach

them how to sort out these messages. I question whether legislating to control certain types of advertising is going to help our children in the long run.

I think there are other, helpful steps we can take to reduce childhood obesity. A generation ago, nearly half of all school-aged children walked or biked to school. Today, nearly 9 out of 10 children are driven to school. And once there, children are not very physically active—only 8 percent of elementary schools require daily physical education. Childhood obesity is nearly epidemic, particularly among minority populations, and school systems can play an important role in tackling this issue. For example, only about a quarter of schools adhere to nutritional standards for fat content in school lunches. I will work with schools to create more healthful environments for children, including assistance with contract policy development for local vendors, grant support for school-based health screening programs and clinical services, increased financial support for physical education, and educational programs for students.

8. Would you support any other type of regulation concerning the amount and type of advertising aired during children's programming?

The type of advertising aired during children's programming should be commensurate with the rating placed on the program itself. If parents can use increased information about programming to set their own standards for what they want their children to be able to watch, they shouldn't have that choice and control undermined by promos for horror movies and ads for the Las Vegas show aired in the middle of a cartoon.

9. Media ownership has been a major concern at public hearings held across the country over the past year, with many organizations raising concerns that consolidation ends up decreasing the quality and diversity of programming. Do you think media ownership consolidation is a problem, and if so, what would you do to increase the diversity of media ownership?

Excessive media consolidation is a problem. We should be doing much more to encourage diversity in the ownership of broadcast media, promote the development of new media outlets for expression of diverse viewpoints, and establish greater clarity in the public interest obligations of broadcasters occupying the nation's spectrum. I believe that the nation's media ownership rules remain necessary and are critical to the public interest.

Instead of allowing greater consolidation such as the current administration has done, I fully endorse the call for new rules promoting greater coverage of local issues and greater responsiveness of broadcasters to the communities they operate in. I also believe that broadcaster license renewal requests – the periodic review required to ensure that broadcasters are complying with their public interest obligations to local communities for using the public spectrum -- should require greater FCC scrutiny and public input and occur more frequently.

Recently, I sent a letter to Chairman Kevin Martin, calling on him to launch an independent review panel to develop proposals to further promote media ownership diversity. According to press accounts, following an insufficient 30- day review, the FCC intends to modify existing ownership rules by allowing even greater media market consolidation. This would allow large media outlets to become larger, potentially cutting out small business, women and minority-owned firms. I also asked for the FCC to reconsider the Chairman's proposed consolidation timeline and start a public review of any specific proposed rule

modifications. Finally, I requested that Chairman Martin complete a study of the responsibilities that broadcasters have to the communities in which they operate.

10. As president, you would have the power to appoint the FCC chairman and nominate commissioners. Would the FCC under your administration be more or less active on kids and media issues than the current FCC? What type of person would you nominate to lead the organization?

The FCC in an Obama administration would be more active on kids and media issues than the current FCC in the ways I have already described. I would appoint a chairman who appreciates the importance of diversity and competition in our media markets. I want a chairman and commissioners who are knowledgeable about the industry but are not beholden to any set of the special interests that so dominate the current media and communications debate. To that end, I would appoint a chairman who would conduct the significant business of the agency in public, so that any citizen can see in person or watch on the Internet as the FCC debates and deliberates the issues that affect American society. I will also require my nominees to commit to employ all the technological tools available to allow average citizens not just to observe, but to participate and be heard on the issues that affect their daily lives.