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Senators fight hidden sex in 'Grand Theft Auto'

By Brooks Boliek
Reuters
Friday, July 15, 2005; 3:35 AM

WASHINGTON (Hollywood Reporter) - Two high-profile U.S. senators, Joseph Lieberman and Hillary Rodham Clinton, are incensed over pornographic content "hidden" in the popular video game "Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas," and are demanding action from either the government or the game's maker.

The content can be unlocked by using the "Hot Coffee" code modification widely available on the Internet. By installing the modification, gamers can have their drivers find different girlfriends in the game who will have a "cup of hot coffee" -- a euphemism for sex -- with them.

A spokesman for the game's maker, Rockstar Games Inc., said the "Hot Coffee" modification was the unauthorized work of people in the "modder community" -- the group of intense gamers who often add content to games.

Lieberman (D-Conn.) asked Rockstar president Sam Houser to submit the game to independent analysts to determine how the content was put in.

"I am asking you to bring this matter to light and resolve this serious controversy by voluntarily submitting your game to independent concerned and responsible parties for such technical analysis," Lieberman wrote in a letter to Houser.

Rockstar spokesman Rodney Walker said the company was confident that it had done nothing wrong and would be exonerated by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board, which is investigating the incident.

Clinton (D-N.Y.), meanwhile, said she will introduce legislation to help keep inappropriate video games out of the hands of children, and has asked the Federal Trade Commission to investigate the "Grand Theft Auto" game.

Her legislative proposal would institute a financial penalty for retailers who fail to enforce the video manufacturers voluntary ratings system rules. It would prohibit the sale of violent and sexually explicit video games to minors and put in place a \$5,000 penalty for those who violate the law.

"The disturbing material in 'Grand Theft Auto' and other games like it is stealing the innocence of our children, and it's making the difficult job of being a parent even harder," Clinton said.

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In calling for the FTC to launch an investigation, Clinton urged the commission to determine whether an AO rating (adults only) is more appropriate than the current M rating (mature) for the video game given this new sexually explicit content. She also requested that the FTC examine the adequacy of retailers' rating-enforcement policies.

Bo Andersen, president of the Video Software Dealers Assn., said Clinton's action went way too far.

"Sen. Clinton is a fine lawyer and undoubtedly knows that her proposal is unconstitutional," he said in a statement. "The senator's proposal is politically savvy but will do nothing to help parents make informed choices about the video games their children play. In fact, by turning the voluntary video game ratings system into a cudgel of government censorship, Sen. Clinton's proposal ironically would likely lead to the abandonment of the ratings system."

Reuters/Hollywood Reporter

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