

## Nashville's Tate becoming family advocate on FCC Tate suggests FCC regulate video on Internet, or was she just kidding



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It's a rainy Monday afternoon, and FCC Commissioner Deborah Tate is learning how talking vegetables can be good for you.

Tate, who wants to use her post on the Federal Communications Commission to get TV programmers and networks to promote healthy eating among children, is visiting the Franklin headquarters of the Veggie Tales videos and TV show, where animated vegetables are drawn to teach Biblical messages.

"We are vegetables, not candy," said senior editor Chris Wall of Big Idea Productions.

**FCC Commissioner Deborah Tate tours Big Idea Productions in Franklin on Monday where VeggieTales is produced. From left, director Mike Nawrocki, Tate, Big Idea Chief Operating Officer Terry Pefanis and producer Paula Marcus watch editor John Wahba show an animation for the future VeggieTales movie.**  
PHOTOS BY SHELLEY MAYS / THE TENNESSEAN

Chief Operating Officer Terry Pefanis explains that Big

Idea tries to pick marketing partners with healthy-eating options. For instance, Del Monte Corp. recently started attaching coupons to its canned vegetables offering discounts on the purchase of VeggieTales videos.

Almost a year into her tenure on the FCC, the Republican commissioner and Nashville resident is shaping up to be an advocate for children and family-friendly programming on a national scale.

Tate worked with Sen. Sam Brownback, R-Kan., to help get an FCC task force on media and obesity started. She has met with food makers Kellogg Co. and General Mills to talk about what they're doing to improve the nutritional value of their products.

She also supported a law that increased fines for TV indecency tenfold, to \$325,000 per incident.

The 50-year-old Tate is quick to point out that she cares about other issues as well, including emerging technology and copyright piracy.

Children's and decency issues have remained a consistent theme for Tate, who has three grown children. Before being appointed to the FCC by President Bush, she founded Nashville-based Renewal House, a recovery residence for mothers with crack addictions and for their children.

"She's a dedicated children's advocate," said Patti Miller, vice president of Children Now, a group that lobbies the FCC on behalf of children's TV programming.

National Association of Broadcasters President and Chief Executive David Rehr said the group plans public service announcements on healthy lifestyles early next year, in part because of Tate's prodding.

"Her interest in children and children's issues have kind of spurred us to do more healthy initiatives," he said.

Recently, his group also worked with Tate and the FCC on new rules requiring digital broadcast TV to carry the same amount of children's programming, a minimum of three hours per day, as their traditional analog signals.

"She was involved with moving (the settlement) forward," Rehr said.

Not everyone has been pleased with Tate's advocacy, however.

She visited a conference last month about video on the Internet and suggested the possibility of FCC regulations on video content, according to one of the conference's organizers.

"I'd rather see families determine what content they see as appropriate rather than having a one-rule, one-size-fits-all model determined by government," said Jonathan Askin, general counsel at Pulver.com, an industry investor and consultant.

Jeff Pulver had called Tate's words "a warning shot" to the industry.

Tate said her comments may have been misinterpreted and that she favors the industry coming up with technology that will allow parents to screen out objectionable content, not government censorship.

But, she added, "It got the message across."

The issue of religious messages in TV programming came up recently, when NBC edited some religious content out of VeggieTales for the show's debut on broadcast television. VeggieTales got such a response from fans, that it set up a page on its Web site to handle all the e-mails, some of which said VeggieTales should not have watered down its Biblical references, and others which praised the company for at least getting a program on network TV.

Although Tate regulates broadcasters such as NBC, Pefanis said that he didn't discuss the issue with Tate and he didn't ask for Tate's help in dealing with NBC.

Children's programming is far from the only issue coming before the FCC this year.

The commission is expected to vote soon on the AT&T-BellSouth acquisition, which will create the largest telecommunications company in the country. The FCC delayed a vote last week amid calls from consumer groups and Democratic commissioners to put conditions on the merger.

One possible condition, referred to as net neutrality, would forbid AT&T from charging Web sites for delivering their content to Internet users. Tate said this week she wasn't ready to say whether conditions were needed on the merger. She takes a wait-and-see approach to the issue of net neutrality.

"It seems like so far, the marketplace seems to be working," she said. "It's difficult to shape a solution when you haven't had a problem." •