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NEWS

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ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY & "MONEY TRAIN" ATTACK

TIME FOR HOLLYWOOD SOUL-SEARCHING FOLLOWING SHOCKING
NY SUBWAY CRIME; AMERICAN PEOPLE HAVE RIGHT TO DERAIL
"MONEY TRAIN" AT BOX OFFICE

Thousands of concerned citizens all across America are now joining the chorus of voices speaking out against an entertainment industry that too often glorifies mindless violence, and peddles its harmful wares relentlessly to our children. These citizens understand, as I do, that images of senseless violence--repeated over and over again and showing murder in ever more graphic detail--debase our culture and affect people's attitudes and conduct, especially the attitudes and conduct of our impressionable young.

Regrettably, a shocking incident reported in today's New York Daily News, New York Post, and New York Times seems to confirm the accuracy of this observation.

This past Sunday, two men squirted a bottle of flammable liquid into a token booth at a subway station in Brooklyn's Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood. They then lit a match, igniting an inferno that blew the token booth apart and sprayed broken glass and splintered wood throughout the subway station. Trapped inside the token booth at the time of explosion was its operator, 50 year-old Harry Kaufman, who miraculously survived with his life but who nonetheless suffered second- and third-degree burns over nearly 80 percent of his body. Mr. Kaufmann normally works only weeknights, but made the fateful decision to work the overtime shift on Sunday because he was trying to save money to send his son to college.

Crime Similar to "Money Train" Scenes

This incident--committed by two men whose depravity is beyond description--is remarkably similar to incidents depicted in a new movie called "The Money Train," released by Columbia Pictures. Although I have not personally seen "The Money Train"--and after Sunday's subway attack I have no intention of patronizing it--the movie apparently contains two scenes nearly identical to the one that occurred in Brooklyn on Sunday. In the movie, a pyromaniac named "Torch" squirts flammable liquid through the slot in the token booth and then ignites the booth. Unlike Mr. Kaufman, the fictional token-booth operator escapes unscathed from the ensuing explosion.

Are "The Money-Train" scenes and the real-life tragedy in Brooklyn just a coincidence? Perhaps. But, apparently, this is not the view of New York City Police Commissioner William Bratton, who says "There seems to be some connection between the movie and the explosions." Or as Alan Kiepper, the head of New York's Transit Authority, points out: "We know from experience that when you get movie and television depictions of criminal activity, it is often copycatted."

No Excuses for Criminal Behavior

Copycat or no copycat, the individuals who committed this unspeakable act must be held accountable for their crimes. We are all responsible for own actions. To say that a movie "caused" this senseless act in Brooklyn gives it a logic and dignity it does not deserve and cannot have. There can be no excuses for criminal behavior, whatever the motivation may or may not be.

Time for Soul-Searching in Entertainment Industry

But, at the same time, those who work in Hollywood's corporate suites must also be willing to accept their share of the blame. For those in the entertainment industry, who too often engage in a pornography of violence as a way to sell movie

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tickets, it is time for some serious soul-searching. Is this how they want to make their livelihoods? Is this their contribution to society?

Those who continue to deny that cultural messages can and do bore deep into the hearts and minds of our young people are deceiving themselves and ignoring reality. They are ignoring what happened this past June when a group of teenagers killed a Massachusetts man claiming they were "Natural Born Killers." And, yes, they are ignoring the senseless act that occurred this past Sunday morning in Brooklyn.

NY Authorities Objected to Scenes

In fact, news reports indicate that Transit Authority officials had reviewed "The Money Train" script before the movie was filmed and had objected to the token-booth arson scenes. The film's producers decided to create the scenes anyway--on Los Angeles soundstages. We may never know the true impact of this decision.

I want to take this opportunity to convey my thoughts and prayers to Mr. Kaufman and his family. We wish him a speedy recovery. And we wish the New York City Police Department every success in their efforts to track down the vicious thugs who have committed this cowardly act.

The American people have a right to voice their outrage, and they can do so not through calls for government censorship, but by derailing "The Money Train" at the box office.

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* Remarks delivered on Senate floor, approximately 4:10 p.m.