

# Trump discusses violence with video game execs and critics

March 8 2018, by Catherine Lucey

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President Donald Trump speaks during a cabinet meeting at the White House, Thursday, March 8, 2018, in Washington. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)

President Donald Trump raised concerns about the graphic depiction of violence in video games at a White House meeting Thursday with members of the industry and some of their most vocal critics.

Searching for ways to respond to last month's Florida school shooting,

Trump has questioned the impact of video games, although decades of research have failed to find a link between gun violence and graphic depictions of violence in games. Meeting attendees said he sought to hear from all sides.

"He asked a lot of questions and he raised concerns with the violent nature of these games and asked the question: Is this causing the kids to have (this) violent behavior?" said Rep. Vicky Hartzler, R-Mo.

The White House put out a statement after the meeting, saying Trump "acknowledged some studies have indicated there is a correlation between video game violence and real violence." The statement included a link to a YouTube video with clips of video game violence.

While some studies have shown a connection between gaming and emotional arousal, there's no evidence that this heightened emotional state leads to physical violence.

Attendees offered opposing views after the meeting.

The Entertainment Software Association released a statement saying it had brought up "the numerous scientific studies establishing that there is no connection between video games and violence, First Amendment protection of video games, and how our industry's rating system effectively helps parents make informed entertainment choices."

Melissa Henson, program director for the Parents Television Council, a conservative watchdog group, said there is evidence that video games can "contribute to violent attitudes" or feelings of isolation. She said she sought to convey the challenges of keeping violent games away from kids "even for the most diligent parent."

She described the meeting as a listening session, saying there were no

decisions about next steps.

"I don't think there are easy answers and I don't think that we're going to be able to figure out the solution in the course of a one-hour conversation," Henson said.

Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., also attended. He noted in a statement that there was "no evidence" tying video games to the Florida shooting, but said he was interested "in making sure parents are aware of the resources available to them to monitor and control the entertainment their children are exposed to."

Trump has focused on video games as he seeks solutions to deal with the scourge of guns in the wake of the Florida school shooting that killed 17 people. After weeks of public deliberation—including expressing support for some gun control measures—Trump has not yet outlined what he would like to see in legislation.

During a Cabinet meeting Thursday, Trump congratulated Florida on school safety legislation approved by state lawmakers, saying the state "passed a lot of very good legislation last night."

The measure would raise the minimum age to buy rifles from 18 to 21 and create a waiting period on weapons sales. It also would create a so-called guardian program, enabling school employees and many teachers to carry handguns if they go through law enforcement training and their school districts agree to participate. Republican Gov. Rick Scott has not said if he will sign the bill.

Trump also said the White House is working to ban "bump stocks" and said efforts to enhance background checks are "moving along well" in Congress. No votes have been scheduled yet in the Senate on a pending background checks bill, but the House has said it will consider school

safety legislation next week.

This is not the first time Washington has focused on video game violence.

In 2013, after the shooting at Sandy Hook elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, Vice President Joe Biden held three days of wide-ranging talks on gun violence prevention, including a meeting with video game industry executives. After the 2013 meetings wrapped up, the White House called for research on the effect of media and video games on gun violence, but nothing substantial came out of that.

While Trump has suggested rating both games and movies for violence, ratings already exist.

Following an outcry over violent games such as 1992's "Mortal Kombat," the Entertainment Software Ratings Board was established in 1994 by the Entertainment Software Association to give each game a rating based on five categories ranging from "E" for "Everyone" to "Adults Only" for those 18 and older.

In 2011, the Supreme Court rejected a California law banning the sale of violent video games to children. The decision claimed that video games, like other media, are protected by the First Amendment.

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Citation: Trump discusses violence with video game execs and critics (2018, March 8) retrieved 13 March 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2018-03-trump-video-game-execs-critics.html>

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