



#WIGWednesday
July 22, 2020
“Getting Serious about Video Games”

Featuring:

Lucy Gettman, Executive Director Women In Government
Kansas State Representative and WIG State Director Stephanie Clayton
Tara Ryan, Vice President of State Government Affairs, Entertainment Software Association (ESA)
Anastasia Staten, Executive Director, ESA Foundation
Patricia Vance, President, Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB)

Lucy Gettman: Welcome to WIG Wednesday! I’m Lucy Gettman, Executive Director of [Women In Government](#), a non-profit, non-partisan organization by and for women state legislators across the nation. We’re delighted to resume our weekly virtual policy roundtables that we launched in March, and we just completed our first [Summer Summit Series](#) conference. It's been a digital summer for Women In Government and for all of us, and we love being part of your day and a part of your policy and leadership journey. WIG’s programming and initiatives are guided by our [Board of Directors](#), sitting women state legislators from across the country.

To make this an interactive experience today, we’d like to get the conversation started by asking an anonymous question: “Do you or a member of your household play video games?” Just select “yes” or “no.”

Even though we are socially distanced, we can still keep in touch! Women In Government is on multiple social media channels—[Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#)—and we would love to connect with you.

Alright, wow! Look at these results: 83% of those polled either play or have a member of their household that plays video games. This will make a great conversation today.

Now, I have the honor of welcoming a WIG State Director, Kansas State Representative Stephanie Clayton as moderator for our session. A native of Johnson County, Representative Clayton has served in the Kansas House of Representatives since 2013. She is the founder and leader of the Bipartisan Women’s Caucus. Her leadership extends beyond Kansas. She is the Vice President of the [National Council of State Legislators Women’s Legislative Network](#). She also serves on the [Budget Committee of NCSL](#). She is also a [State Director for Women’s Legislators Lobby or WiLL](#). So, Representative Clayton, you’re everywhere! And with that, the virtual podium is now yours.

Representative Stephanie Clayton: Thank you. Well, I try to be everywhere! I guess we've all started to adjust, and this is a great way that we can be everywhere while still keeping everyone safe. It’s been great to see everyone again. I definitely missed going to WIG in-person this summer, but it's a wonderful opportunity to get to see other people and sort of adjust to our new normal.

I am really excited to have the opportunity to moderate this discussion today because I have a house that's full of video gamers, and this is also very important as we have more and more people staying



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inside more to stay safe during this current pandemic. And so, I am really looking forward to having that opportunity to help.

We have a few housekeeping things: If you have questions or comments during the presentation, just be sure to identify yourself by name and then write them in the Chat Box that can be found in the Zoom meeting toolbar at the bottom of your screen. Please make sure that you have selected “To: Everyone” from the drop-down menu so we all see that. And I'd like you to note that all #WIGWednesday presentations will be available on the [Women In Government website](#) a few days after post-event.

Now, join me in welcoming our three panelists for today. Our first speaker is Tara Ryan, President of State Government Affairs for the [Entertainment Software Association](#). Our second speaker is Anastasia Staten, [Executive Director of Entertainment Software Association Foundation](#). As Executive Director, she cultivates partnerships to expand and promote the Foundation's positive social impact, and she also oversees the Foundation's grant and scholarship programs for our students. Our third speaker is Patricia Vance, President of the [Entertainment Software Rating Board](#). She leads the team responsible for assigning age and content ratings to video games and apps as well as enforcing marketing guidelines adopted by the video game industry. Tara, I'm going to go ahead and kick it over to you to start the conversation.

Tara Ryan: Thank you so much, Representative. As Representative Clayton said, I am Head of State Government Affairs for the [Entertainment Software Association](#) (ESA). I want to first say thank you to Lucy and to Laura and to the team at WIG and to Representative Clayton for giving us this opportunity. I agree with you guys. It's been a long couple of months not seeing people in-person. So, getting the chance to interact and have these kinds of conversations is nice. I hope that everyone is doing very well and staying healthy.

It leads into the discussion about video games because one of the things we know is that despite the fact that most of the news recently has been quite sobering—we're dealing with a health crisis, we're dealing with an economic crisis, and some may say we're in the midst of a moral crisis—it's kind of nice to talk about something positive. Headlines around the country and really around the world have talked about the positive value that video games have brought to families during this time. It's been a way for people to relax, to connect with friends and family, and to do something they're familiar with and they feel comfortable with, especially when so many other parts of our life feel so uncertain.

So, we wanted to take this hour to spend a little time talking to you about some of the data we have, who gamers really are in today's world, and maybe challenge some of the perceptions that people have about the industry generally. We'll also talk about how we can get more women involved in playing a role in shaping what this industry looks like as we move forward, and then provide information about how this forward-leaning industry has been able to make video gameplay fun and safe for families for the past several decades.



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As a PSA for those of you who haven't had much interaction with the industry, ESA is the trade association that represents both video game console manufacturers and game producers and publishers. We work to promote and protect the creativity and innovation of the game industry, we advance policies that support open and fair marketplace dynamics for all of our companies, and we work really hard to ensure a safe, vibrant, and entertaining experience for gamers of all ages across the world.

For those of you who think of video games as just something that young boys do, video games really are sort of the perfect combination of art technology and storytelling. They provide a very unique sort of business base and entertainment base. We're different. We're different than other types of entertainment like books and movies and music because of the interactive nature of video games. They allow players to unleash creativity, to develop a sense of purpose that maybe they can't do in other aspects of their life, to challenge some self-imposed limits, and in many ways, to develop strategic thinking. So, they are fun, but they also provide a tool that is applicable outside of gaming, and we'll talk a little bit more about how it's used in other fields.

Now heading over to my slides, this is a list of our member companies. You know some of these names. They are household names like Microsoft, Sony, and Nintendo. And then there are a lot of other game publishers that don't manufacture consoles but that manufacture a lot of the games that that you're familiar with and then a lot of games that maybe you're not familiar with. They're a great group of companies that we represent with some very talented people.

We are actually a nation of gamers. There are about 214 million people who classify themselves as gamers in the United States. That's about two thirds of the U.S. population. Globally, the number of gamers is about 2.5 billion people. There are 64% of adults over 18 who say that they play video games and 70% of kids under 18 who say that they are gamers. The majority of gamers fall between 18 and 34. I think a lot of people think of gamers as being young guys, and that's one of the myths that we wanted to bust because the average age is about 35 years old. And interestingly, only about 6% more gamers are under 18 vs. those that are over 55, so we have this huge generation of people who are getting into gaming. The 65-year-olds probably started about 10 years ago, but the 18-year-olds have probably been playing video games since they could first actually get into it.

We have a whole campaign called the “Game Generation” that really talks about how people game, where they game, when they game, and why they game. If you want to get onto the [Game Generation website](#), it provides some invaluable information, particularly for legislators because you have gamers in your state. They're men. They're women. They're boys and girls. They range in education. I mean, really, everybody. There's no one specific group of people that are gamers. Gamers are everyone. And interestingly, about half of gamers are female. We're not quite at the 50% mark. We've got some data that says somewhere between 41% and 44%, so women are gamers, and that's something I think that a lot of people don't think about.



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The reason I included this next slide is because some of the conversation at the state level talks about game consoles specifically. Most people still have game consoles in their house, although a lot of people are moving away from game consoles to mobile devices. But as we think about this, I thought it was kind of interesting that in the poll we just did, 83% of people said that they had gamers in the house. I would suspect that the majority of those probably also have some sort of game console, whether it's an Xbox and PlayStation, Nintendo Switch, or something like that in their house. That's probably still how people are playing games in the majority of houses.

Before I pass it over to Anastasia and Pat, I wanted to hit on a few other things I think that you as legislators, as moms, and as women in the workforce should know about the industry. As things start to percolate in the states and we start thinking about legislation and things that are going on, it's important to think about this industry kind of in that light. The industry relies on a resilient, modern, and dynamic workforce. They look at ideas, they look at ideals, they look at emotions, and they create formats that reach millions of people at the same time across the world so that people can play together.

Right now, women make up a little more than 50% of the U.S. workforce, but they represent about 24% of the global industry workforce. There's a lot of room to get women into gaming. It's a great experience. What we want to do is find ways to partner with Women In Government and other groups in the states to help support girls going into STEM. A lot of girls that are STEM candidates through high school and college go into fields that are relevant to video gaming. Anastasia will talk a little bit about more of the work that we're doing to encourage girls to propel them in that direction.

The second thing I want to highlight - and Pat will talk more about this – is that for more than two decades, this industry sort of leaned in. We listened to our consumers. We paid attention to what their concerns were, and we voluntarily worked to provide resources and tools to parents to make sure that gameplay is fun and safe for everybody, so that when you've got kids playing in your house, there are things that you can do to make that environment safe. Pat is going to spend some time talking about that.

There also is a broad and vibrant economic base of industry around the country that supports this creative industry. Not only do we have businesses in the states, we also employ people in art, in graphic design, in music, in sound, in dance, and all these different things in storytelling. There are all of these colleges that now have degree programs that support video game development and business. And then, there are also more than 200 schools across the country and colleges across the country that have varsity e-sport programs.

One of the things that was fairly dynamic about what happened during this pandemic is we lost all of our professional sports except for e-sports. So, all of a sudden there was an outlet for people to go, and it has been insane. It's amazing how much is being developed around e-sports. Philadelphia is building the first arena in the U.S. that's going to be dedicated to e-sports. There are e-sports competitions that go on. It's pretty serious stuff. And we are updating the tool on our [website](#) that talks about where the facilities are that our companies are running across the country, where the colleges are that have these



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sort of degree programs for students, and where the varsity sports programs are located. So, you'll have that type of information available for you to use when you're talking to people in your state and for constituents to access as well if they're looking for programs for their kids.

Another important thing that I wanted to highlight before we shift this over is that video games forge connections because they welcome all types of players at all levels, and they foster inclusion. When you're playing a video game, you're just a face on a screen. You can really be yourself and look like whatever you want to be. So, if you're into sports, you can play or if you're into fantasy, superheroes, the environment, or religion, there are games for everybody. And no matter what your demographic is, there is a game for you. But more importantly, there are about 46 million players with disabilities, and that's a part of this growing demographic and growing video game community. Two years ago, there was a platform that was developed specifically for the disabled to allow them to better interact. It was an [adaptive controller](#). Anybody who couldn't use their hands - they could use their feet, they could use their elbows, and there was a mouse stick that was adapted. To try to be able to bring everybody into this community, we are constantly working to find better ways to get everybody involved and to make them feel like they can be a part of this community.

As I mentioned earlier, the interactive design of video games allows it to be taken outside of just the gaming world. There are programs now that schools are using on the education side specifically. There's [iCivics](#) which teaches middle school and high school civics programs. As different types of diversity have gained prominence in the media, these educational programs can be modified on the fly so that we can adapt the information that we want to be teaching to our students and accommodate addressing a new understanding of history. So, it's great for educational purposes.

And I think probably a lot of you have read about what's happening on the medical side. We're increasingly using video games in rehabilitation. Virtual reality is changing that a lot. But in June, just last month, the [FDA approved the use of the first video game as treatment for ADHD](#). So, it's really making its way into other fields, which is super exciting for us.

The thing that's important to note is that we are by far the best entertainment value for families, period. For at least the last decade, players generally get more than 100 hours of play for the top title games for about \$60. That's better than any other form of entertainment. If you're not sure what games meet your family's needs, there's no industry that has more respected ratings and information than ours does. And then, if you look at what federal regulators have done, they've confirmed repeatedly that over the past decade, we've been a leader in addressing the needs of our consumers.

So that was just to open it up and give you a background of the industry before I turn it over to Anastasia, who will give you some great information about what we're doing with young people. But before I stop, I just want to say that [ESA](#) and my colleagues want to be a resource moving forward for legislators and for anyone else who might be listening to this. We want you to think of us when your constituents ask tough questions and come to us to see if we can help. We'd be happy to help you. And



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if anything else has piqued your interest and you have follow up questions, please feel free to reach out. We want this to be the beginning of the conversation. So, I'll pass it over to Anastasia now.

Anastasia Staten: Well, thank you very much, Tara. I appreciate that. For those of you that are not familiar with the [ESA Foundation](#), we are legally and financially independent from the Entertainment Software Association, but we are very much aligned in our goal to harness video games to create social impact. The Foundation was actually started 20 years ago, but it started actually a few years before that with industry members very early on in the birth of this industry getting together to raise money for nonprofits that supported kids. And then a few years later, they actually decided to formalize it into a foundation. So, for over 20 years, we've been providing educational opportunities for America's youth. We've actually continued that to be a cornerstone of our work, but we have expanded our mission to include more opportunities that leverage video games for social impact, particularly domestically in the U.S.

The Foundation approaches its work at the intersection of a few key areas: education, diversity and inclusion, wellness, and community. What's key to those approaches is really a strong emphasis on empowering and investing in individuals, organizations, schools, and nonprofits. Investment oftentimes occurs in the form of partnerships and grants, but given that we do have this beautiful access to a very large industry with a lot of professionals, we also tap into that and leverage their human capital to support our work.

Speaking of our grants and our activities, specifically those with schools and nonprofits, our partnerships focus on these areas and oftentimes I think some of these are the most exciting. They are a really great demonstration of the intersection of the approaches we just sort of talked about in terms of delivering our work. I'm a firm believer that numbers tell stories, and behind the numbers is so much more. So I hope you'll bear with me over the next couple of slides while I hopefully bring to life a little bit of these numbers for you.

Through investments from the Foundation, a small volunteer organization called [Extra Life](#) was actually able to found itself with an organizational infrastructure grant from us, which ultimately was absorbed into [Children's Miracle Network](#) and today has served by leveraging video games and the video game community to raise over \$70 million for Children's Miracle Network hospitals. Pretty much every community across the country has an Extra Life chapter or group raising money, so when you're thinking about engaging in your local communities, this is a great opportunity to get a little bit of a window into that vibrant community that is giving back.

Tara already mentioned [iCivics](#). iCivics is a wonderful organization founded by Sandra Day O'Connor, and the life of that video game company actually lives on through the board. Justice Sotomayor is now on the board, and we have supported them since their inception to not only develop these games about civic education and civic participation, but now we're also working with them to give some thought around social justice programming. And also, last year we underwrote the opportunity for them to take



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some of their video games and actually create Spanish versions for them to make sure that they were accessible to more students across the country.

One other program I'll mention on this list is actually [Bootstrap](#). Bootstrap was an organization that originated from a video game program born out of Brown University. And for many of you that probably sit on education committees or have a background in education - or, quite frankly, probably a child in high school - you realize that not only is algebra generally painful for most kids, but it is also one of the few universally required subjects for graduation. It's the number one reason for students not meeting their last few requirements for graduation. And not having that high school degree, let alone the opportunity to move on to college, is a real hurdle for their future productivity. So, Bootstrap is a very cool program that teaches algebra through game design, and they have some amazing statistics around leveraging that program to ensure the completion rate and passing of algebra classes.

Since the Foundation started a scholarship program in 2007, we've actually provided over 400 scholarships to women and minority students who are interested in video game arts and sciences. And we've also partnered over the years with [ThanksUSA](#) to provide scholarships to children and spouses of American service members. That program that we partner on with ThanksUSA is not dependent on a video game arts and science degree, but it's a partnership that we have long valued and continue to support through its events, mostly locally now, in Washington, DC.

The other two that are super fun on this list is the opportunity we had a couple of years ago to work with [Girl Scouts](#) to create a STEM badge for them using video game design. I love the picture. I actually received an honorary badge that I keep in my office. I would dig out my old sash, but I don't think it probably fits anymore.

The other program is digital literacy, and I'll leave this a little bit to Pat to discuss. From the Foundation's perspective, we actually take great responsibility in not only making sure that we're leveraging video games to provide educational opportunities for kids, but also with this generation specifically that is growing up as digital natives, that they actually understand how to navigate online and technology safely. And one of the partnerships we have is with [EVERFI](#), and they have worked with us to develop a module specific to digital health. They helped us deliver it to several states, with our last partnership being in Los Angeles, which was distributed to over 10,000 kids.

Numbers and stories bring things to life, but so do pictures. I love this photo. These are a few of my favorite photos from the last year. A few of them are actually our partnerships that we developed with Howard University and others to develop info markets around the country that encourage high school and college students to come and not only learn about game design, but for those students that are already in game design programs to actually be able to engage with professional mentorship. Amazon Game Studios has provided a lot of the mentors to our programs and allows students to learn more - not just about the jobs they might be interested in, but also to open up new horizons for them. One story I love is about the girl in the top right corner, Kayla. She actually is a Howard University student. She's earning a degree in computer science, and she came to one of our Game Jams earlier last year. She had



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a good experience - she wasn't sure how interested in video games she was, but she came, she learned, had a little hard time with her project and her team, but she came back to the next Game Jam that we just had about a month before COVID-19 kicked us out of regular life. And she walked away with an experience where she and her team not only won the competition for the Game Jam, but she was actually crying because for her, it had opened up a whole new world of computer science and engineering. She has now changed her computer science degree to have a minor in video games because it was really a way for her to bring her unique story to the table.

And back to the numbers a little bit, just really quickly. I wanted to highlight that several studies indicate that Black and Latinx teens are more active in the gaming community than their white counterparts. And just like Tara mentioned, women are not far behind men and their engagement as well. But those individuals are enthusiasts, and unfortunately, they're not making games and not being equally represented in the workforce.

I think Liz Kirby sort of said it best. She made this comment about how the industry needs more women and minorities to make more diverse games, and it's slowly happening. And that comment by Liz, who actually now works at 343 Industries, which is a Microsoft studio, is based from an experience that she had. The studio every year gets together all of the employees to take a picture, and she said over the eight years she has been at the studio, she has seen more and more women and minorities every year, and that really heartens her. But it also drives her to continue to do things like provide mentorship to our new scholars and also to continue to be a voice for the industry attracting more women and minorities.

And because we are largely a group of women on this call, I thought I'd spend just a quick moment talking about how girls are really making it when it comes to STEM or STEAM. Girls have a high aptitude and interest in STEAM, and I'm going to largely use STEAM because our industry is a mix of arts and sciences. Girls who play video games are three times more likely to pursue a STEM degree than girls who are non-gamers. Also, the percent of women graduating from games programs has doubled in the last 10 years. The diversity of students is moving in the right direction. The numbers are still not exactly where we want them as an industry, let alone as a society that is seeking to empower and encourage the next generation. And for the Foundation, we want them to not only hopefully join our industry, but we want to make sure that students have 21st century job skills.

And when we think about the degree programs Tara mentioned, there are over 700 colleges and universities in the U.S. that are offering video game studies, and over 450 of them actually have specific degree or certificate programs. For me, that really says this is a huge opportunity for not only our industry, but for individuals to capture kids where their interests already are. They're interested in exploring video games, not just as enthusiasts, but teaching them how to make them. And while they may or may not get a job in the industry, they're learning valuable skills that they can take into other places, and Tara mentioned a few of those. But also, when you think about your local districts, something that comes to my mind is small business. While a lot of the industry is associated with big names that you can think of, it also contains a lot of small businesses, and those small businesses are



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represented in the form of I think over 2,000 companies. But I know for a fact that they are represented in every state, including Puerto Rico, and also represented in over 80% of Congressional districts.

Something to also think about is providing these 21st century skills and also partnering with education, not only at the middle school and high school level, but also at the collegiate level. There is also spurring innovation in those local college towns. A really good example of this is that we have a scholar whose name is Warren. He went to SCAD, the Savannah College of Art and Design, and then he stayed on in Savannah. Rather than going back to Arkansas or moving to one of the larger game companies, he started an incubator through SCAD and is thinking now about staying in the Savannah area where his team is actually forming a small business game company. So, there are tons of examples of that. Rochester has had that community grow up around them. Champlain College University in Vermont has had some of the same experience. So, it's not just the big dogs that you hear about. It is much broader than that.

I also wanted to quickly show a few highlights of our scholarship program. We do have three. All three programs are focused on women and minorities. The first one is those that are seeking some sort of STEM degree like computer science, translating into a video game arts and sciences. The other one is the same degree program set, but the students also have to have additional community service that is dedicated to the queer community, regardless of their sexual orientation. And then we have a third scholarship fund that we just started this year, and that is for collegiate e-sports athletes, again focused on women and minorities. I'm just really proud to know that a lot of our scholars are going on to jobs in many well-known companies, not just in the video game industry, but also in animation and then engineering and computer science degrees and other tech companies.

Also, I know that possibly one of the questions out there is - how do we encourage young women to go into this field? With our companies with which we partner, we are trying to do that. We're trying to be role models in that, but we also partner to create experiences that are more digital and open to more individuals. And actually, right now we have a partnership with [Google Play](#), which is the mobile arm of Google and their program, [Change the Game](#). So, we have partnered with [Girls Make Games](#) to host a design competition.

Patricia Vance: I'm just going to dive into another aspect of the game industry, and hopefully you'll learn a little bit more about what the industry does to regulate itself. It takes a lot of pride in it. We've been around for over 20 years and actually just celebrated our 25th anniversary. We have a lot of experience in self-regulation, and I want to just make sure that everybody leaves today understanding all of the proactive and voluntary measures that the industry has taken.

As I said, we were founded over 25 years ago. As a self-regulatory arm of the ESA, we are technically legally part of the ESA, unlike the Foundation, but we operate quite independently. We're actually based in New York. ESA headquarters are in DC. Our mission is very different. We were initially established essentially to create a rating system like the film rating system, only better - and I'll talk about why it's better - so we make sure that consumers are informed prior to purchase. The other thing that we do



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that was introduced shortly after the introduction of the rating system is we have developed a very robust set of marketing guidelines that the industry must comply with, and we enforce those marketing guidelines. I'll talk a little bit more about that today. And last but not least, we were one of the first COPPA Safe Harbor programs to develop. The FTC approved our program, and it's a privacy certification program. It's an opt-in program. Companies come to us to certify their websites or mobile apps for sound business practices when it comes to the collection and sharing of personal information. I'm not going to talk much about that today, but it is an important part of what we do as it as an industry.

The rating system is a three-part rating system. When we started out, we were the first rating system to develop both age ratings as well as content descriptors. We use standardized 30+ content descriptors spanning all of the content areas that you could think of that would be relevant for age appropriateness of games such as violence, language, sexual content, and even things like references to drugs or use of drugs and alcohol and a whole host of various different types of content that you would want to know about as a parent.

We have five different age rating categories. “E for Everyone”—I'll show you in the next slide how large that category is, which some people may be surprised about, but “E for Everyone” has been our largest category from the very beginning. All of your sports games, your racing games, your Pokémon's, a lot of the Nintendo games, your Mario's - a lot of the most popular top selling games are rated “E for Everyone.” We hear much about the Mature-rated video games, but last year, only 13% of the games that we rated were rated “M for Mature.” It's actually our smallest category, surprisingly enough. “T for Teen” is also a large category. “E for everyone 10 and up” or “E10+” is our newest category. It's an important category, where instead of saying something is appropriate for everyone, it actually has a little bit of an edge to it. So for those particularly with tweens at home, that's an important category to identify.

We also, in addition to assigning ratings for physical games and for box games, provide rating summaries on our website and through our mobile app. So if you search by title or do another more advanced search for different types of criteria, you can access rating summaries that our raters write when they're viewing content. They actually provide examples of what's in the game and the context in which that content occurs. They're very, very helpful. So, in addition to all of the information that we're putting on the box, we also have rating summaries available.

The third part of the rating system is something that we call interactive elements. It's the newest part of our system, and it's really for online interactivity—different elements that may come up that are interactive in nature that we know that parents, based on our research, are concerned about - things like user interaction, where you can play a game online with other players. We want to make sure the parents know that a game online is enabled for online play, and that interactive element is called “users interact.”

We also have a descriptor and a notice for in-game purchases. So, if you purchase a game and then it provides additional transactional opportunities using real money, we want to make sure the parents are



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aware of that as well so they can take appropriate measures. Our newest interactive element is for randomized purchases. Sometimes you can purchase a player pack or a loot box. You may have heard about loot boxes, which are randomized purchases which you can make with real cash or earned currency. We have a notice for those types of transactions as well. There are two others that we use more for mobile apps, like sharing location with other users and unrestricted Internet, which is typically something that we would assign to browsers. We do rate mobile apps as well.

We have a lot of different resources available at our website, [esrb.org](https://www.esrb.org). Not only can you search for rating information, but you can also access [step by step instructions for parental controls](#). Those parental controls allow you to do a number of different things such as restrict games based on age rating, block purchases or any additional spending of money, or even set an allowance. You can set things like controls for setting time restrictions, sometimes even by day part, but you can definitely set timers if you only want your kid to be playing after school or for two hours a day. You can have all of those types of controls.

And then the fourth thing that you can do is restrict communication. Again, if your child is playing online with other players, you can either block it entirely or just approve by friends or by certain players' family, etc. So anyway, there are a lot of different tools that are available, and those guides are available on our website in a very easy-to-understand way. We do a lot of blogs about different things that we know that parents are potentially interested in knowing more about, things like multiplayer gaming, in game purchases or loot boxes, and we have a lot of guest bloggers as well who talk about their own experience with their kids. And then lastly, you can contact us. We get thousands of consumer inquiries on a variety of different issues, but it's a great resource at [esrb.org](https://www.esrb.org), so I wanted to make sure that you knew that those were available.

So, ESRB ratings are available, really, across all games that are sold at retail and across all games that are available on game consoles. Many of the VR headsets, all the VR hardware through Oculus and other VR hardware like the PlayStation VR are also rated. All of the PC games that are available in-store are rated by the ESRB. All of the apps in the Google Play Store are rated by the ESRB, and we do that through an international organization that we created called the [International Age Rating Coalition](#). And then [STEAM](#) also has a number of games. Although not all games are rated on STEAM, many of them are, and that's a very popular place to go for PC games. So, we have very broad coverage for ESRB ratings.

We are integrated, as I mentioned before, with parental controls. So, if it's on a mobile device or on a game console or even on your computer, Windows will allow you to block by age rating. So ESRB ratings are integrated with all of that.

Here's just an example of how our ratings are displayed on physical game packaging. On the front, you'll see the age rating. When you flip the box over, you'll have the age rating with content descriptors and interactive elements. So, a lot of information is there right on the outside of the box. When you're downloading games, the rating information is available prominently prior to purchase and prior to



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download of a game. This is an example of what you would see on the PlayStation if you were going to download this game.

This is what it looks like on Google Play. So, our ratings are at the top. Obviously, mobile screens are very small. We're restricted in terms of real estate. So, we do the best we can to make sure that parents and consumers at large can have access to this rating information prior to downloading a game. And actually, it's all apps in the mobile store. But in this particular case, you'll see the age rating above the fold, and then if you click on that rating, you'll get a pop up with the additional rating information, your content descriptors, and your interactive elements. Additionally, if you scroll down the page, you'll see complete rating information down further on the page.

And this is what it would look like if you have an Oculus VR headset on. You'll have the age rating information right there on the screen, and then you can use your controller to click on that information to get more detail.

The enforcement system that ESRB has is quite unique. So, not only do we make sure that we inform consumers, but we also make sure the publishers are displaying rating information prominently, legibly, and accurately as well as making sure they are compliant with our marketing guidelines. So, every time a company submits a physical game to us to get their game rated, they are legally bound to comply with our guidelines, spanning everything from complete disclosure of content to complying with our marketing guidelines to also making sure that they're displaying the rating information, not just on the packaging, but also wherever that game is marketed or sold.

So, it's a very robust set of guidelines. We actually have sanctions that I'd like to say we never have to utilize, but we do when companies don't display prominently, don't display according to our guidelines, or don't responsibly market their products. We have very strict guidelines about where, in particular, Mature-rated video games can be marketed, so we have a lot of monitoring that goes on within the ESRB to make sure that companies are complying with all of that. We have the ability not only to force corrective actions, which can be very costly, but also to fine companies. In the event that we have a really egregious bad actor, we can always revoke rating services. We've never had to do that. Companies, for the most part, really do want to comply. Noncompliance is typically due to lack of experience of a developer or just carelessness, but it is definitely not malicious because the incentives are just not there. Companies really do want to comply.

Another program we implemented about 20 years ago, which we're very proud of, is a voluntary program that we have with all the major retailers across the country, including Amazon. There's a [Commitment to Parents](#) that they sign up for, and included in that commitment is the commitment to self-audit. We do Mystery Shop Audits twice a year with these retailers to make sure that they're not selling Mature-rated video games to children, and we also want to make sure that they're informing their customers about the rating information and displaying accurate information online wherever they sell product.



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The Federal Trade Commission has recognized not just our marketing guidelines and the enforcement of those marketing guidelines as the gold standard of media rating systems, but it's also recognized the very strong compliance at retail that we have with our Commitment to Parents. Retailers really are not selling Mature-rated video games to children without their parents present.

This is the last of the FTC Mystery Shop Audits. The last one they conducted was 2013. We continue to conduct them twice a year, and we're maintaining at about 87% enforcement rate. That's significantly higher than the movie industry, whether it's a theaters or DVDs or retailers, or the music industry with their Parental Advisory Notice. So, you can see, we started out quite low at the 15% range, but we made our way up, thanks to this retail program that we implemented, and we're very proud of this statistic. It takes a lot of work, but it's important to us.

The Supreme Court made a decision in 2011 to strike down a California law that got passed to regulate the sale of violent video games. It did get shot down by the Supreme Court, and in the opinion that Justice Scalia wrote, he did recognize that the rating system is one of the reasons - it's not the only reason - but it's certainly the fact that we have an effective rating system and we have effective retailer compliance, so there was no need to regulate video games.

There is very high awareness and use among parents of our system: 87% of parents say they're aware of the system, and 77% say they regularly use it. That means all the time or most of the time. So, we think that's pretty darn good, and it's been very consistent for the last 15 years at these levels. We're very proud of that. And parents are using parental controls. In our latest research, 72% of parents said they have activated parental controls on at least one of the game devices in their home. Obviously, the rate of that is higher for parents of younger kids than older kids. That would be obvious, but nevertheless, an average is 72% of parents indicate that they've used parental controls for games.

I talked a little bit about parentaltools.org already. That's a part of the esrb.org website where you can find step by step instructions on how to set up parental controls. I've already sort of walked you through that. In sum, consumers are informed, our parents are engaged, and the industry is deploying very effective tools. We really take self-regulation seriously, so hopefully you'll get that message. That's the message that I want you to walk away with today.

Representative Stephanie Clayton: All right, I will be taking it from here. First of all, I want to thank all three of you - Tara, Anastasia, and Pat - for the presentation. I think it's been very informative. And for those of you that do want to ask questions, just go ahead and type your questions in the chat box at the bottom of your screen. Make sure you're addressing it “To Everyone.” I do have one question that I see, this is from Lisa. Who performs the assessment of games to decide their ratings? So, this is to you, Patricia.

Patricia Vance: We have a combination of full-time raters, and outside raters, part-time writers that we bring in. We have a minimum of three raters that look at every game. Sometimes we go more than that,



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particularly for borderline calls. There are games that may fall in-between categories. So, for those, typically we bring in more raters to evaluate.

But it is a democratic process, and the raters will look at the content and vote, and then they may discuss, and then they may vote again based on something that they hadn't considered. That rating sticks, and that's the rating that we issue to the publisher. If the publisher is not happy with that rating, we can tell them why it received the rating that it did, and if they want to modify their product and resubmit, the process would start all over again. But, that's how the process works

Representative Clayton: Thank you! Unfortunately, we have reached about the end of our time for questions, but I'm sure that there will be more opportunities later on. I really appreciate everyone joining today's #WIGWednesday, and I'd like to note that this presentation will be available on the [Women In Government website](#) a few days after the event.

Now, please don't forget to join WIG next week on Wednesday, July 29th. That's at 3:00 PM ET for our next [#WIGWednesday](#) session, which is “Stepping Up in Times of Crisis: COVID-19 and Kidney Failure.” The session will be moderated by State Director Kansas State Senator Barbara Bollier, a longtime colleague of mine who's very knowledgeable in the industry. So, I do hope that you're able to join us next week.

If you missed the [WIG Summer Summit Series](#), which I'm one of the people who did, resources from that presentation are now available on WIG's website. So, I will be utilizing that myself.

And [registration for Women In Government's conference in Orlando](#) is now open. So, to register for any of those conferences, whether they're online or in-person, I want you to go ahead and go to www.womeningovernment.org.

Thank you again so much, everyone, for joining us, and stay safe. It was great to see all of you. Thank you.

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