

MoveOn out, White House in

By Timothy Kerr

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The nearly 100 million viewers expected to tune in to next month's Super Bowl on CBS will be served up ads that include everything from beer and bikinis to credit cards and erectile dysfunction.

They will also see a spot from the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy. What's missing from America's premiere marketing spectacle will be an anti-Bush ad put forth by upstart advocacy group MoveOn.org. The group had hoped to buy airtime to run "Child's Pay", a 30-second ad that criticizes the Bush administration's run-up of the federal deficit.

CBS on Thursday rejected a request from MoveOn to air the 30-second spot, saying "Child's Pay" violated the network's policy against accepting advocacy advertising, a company spokesperson told reporters. At the same time, CBS is allowing an ad placed on the docket by the White House's anti-drug office. For the third year in a row, the White House has used taxpayer money to pay between \$1.5 and \$3 million each for 30-second spots during the broadcast. The 2004 ad, produced for the White House by Ogilvy & Mather is expected to convey a message similar to previous Super Bowl spots. While CBS would not reveal the content of the upcoming ad, a previous White House Super Bowl spot drew a controversial link between casual drug use and the financing of global terrorists.

Writing about the previous ads, LA Weekly media critic Judith Lewis reported that their message plays well into Bush's anti-terror campaign because it keeps ordinary citizens under siege and the war on terror central in their minds – an objective which in 2004 serves the president's re-election strategy well. CBS does not consider the White House ad to cross the line of advocacy. "We are fallible human beings who do not have Solomon-like wisdom but try to make rational decisions based on the ads we receive," Martin Franks, executive vice president of CBS told MediaChannel. "Taking into account the deep pockets in play in this election we don't want to appear to favor one side over the other."

MoveOn is now working the "back channels" at CBS, either via local affiliates or through others within the network to get "Child's Pay" on during the Super Bowl this year, said Wes

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Boyd, MoveOn co-founder. Boyd claimed that the networks do place advocacy ads during the Super Bowl. Moveon.org worked with Washington's local ABC affiliate WJLA in 2003 to air "daisy" – an ad based on the famous Lyndon Johnson 1964 campaign commercial – which urged President Bush to let the UN Iraqi inspections work.

"It's not clear to me that the White House ad is a PSA as opposed to advocacy ad," Boyd said. "This is about CBS and where they draw the line. It's very arbitrary and capricious when certain ads are accepted while others are not. The networks don't reveal their guidelines leaving the public unaware of the process."

Franks would not comment when asked about previous White House Super Bowl ads that equated the war on drugs to the war on terror. These ads appeared in 2002 on the Fox network, which aired the NFL championship that year, and in 2003, on ABC. Nor would he reveal the content of the White House ad planned for CBS' February 1 broadcast. "

MoveOn.org has run afoul of Viacom, CBS' parent company, in the past. In February 2003, the grass-roots advocacy group-solicited donations from its email members to raise \$75,000 to place an anti-war ad on billboards in four major American markets. The group claims that they raised the amount from members in two hours. When they approached Viacom Outdoor – a division of Viacom and the largest outdoor-advertising entity in North America – the company refused to post the ads, according to MoveOn.

In March 2003 MTV, another Viacom-owned entity, refused to accept a commercial opposing war in Iraq, citing a similar policy against advocacy spots that it says protects the channel from having to run ads from any cash-rich interest group whose cause may be loathsome. "The decision was made years ago that we don't accept advocacy advertising because it really opens us up to accepting every point of view on every subject," Graham James, a spokesman at MTV told the New York Times. The youth-oriented music station regularly airs recruitment ads for the U.S. Army.

According to Adage.com, Super Bowl 2004 will also include product spots for AOL, Bayer and GlaxoSmithKline, Daimler Chrysler, FedEx, FritoLay, GM, H&R Block, Monster WorldWide, the NFL, Pepsi Cola, Philip Morris, Procter & Gamble, Sony Pictures, Touchstone Pictures, Universal Studios, Visa USA, and Warner Brothers. A survey of 1,000 adults conducted last year by Eisner Communications found that 14 percent of those viewing the Super Bowl watch just for the ads.

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