Calls grow to revamp movie ratings

Critics on left, right blast system after bad words earn 'Bully' an R, violent 'Hunger Games' gets PG-13.

Steven Zeitchik
Reporting from Washington

The Republican presidential primary has painted bright ideological lines on a number of culture war issues. But liberals and conservatives are finding surprising common ground on one charged topic: the need to overhaul the nation's movie rating system.

Ratings of two upcoming films — "Bully," a documentary on bullying that received an R, and "The Hunger Games," about teenagers in a group death match that received a PG-13 — have revived debate over the system put into place in 1968 by the Motion Picture Assn. of America, a trade group comprising the six largest Hollywood studios.

Lawmakers, parents' advocates, filmmakers and teenagers are complaining that language and sex are scrutinized, while violence gets a pass ("Bully" received an R because it contains scenes of teens hurling profanities). Critics also say that the system of five alpha and alphanumeric characters are blunt tools rather than nuanced instruments and that the overall process is too secretive and rigid.

The hypocrisy is that the very movies that contribute to violence can be seen by teenagers because they get a PG-13," Rep. Hansen Clarke (D-Mich.) said, referring to "The Hunger Games." "And the one film ['Bully'] that actually teaches them to respect others is given an R."

Don Ichett, public policy director at the conservative Parents Television Council, agrees a rethinking is necessary. Like Clarke, he believes movies such as "The Hunger Games" — and a lot of other films that are approved for teen viewing — merit R ratings. (R means moviegoers younger than 17 must be accompanied by an adult.

PG-13 means some material may be inappropriate for children younger than 13, but it does not restrict entry.

"Certain movies will never get an R no matter what's in them. That's the problem."

[See Ratings, A19]
MPAA ratings draw criticism

[Ratings, from A1]
when the ones polling the system have an economic incentive to give films a certain rating," he said.

A full-fledged movement to overhaul the rating system hasn't coalesced. But the chorus is growing louder. More than 300,000 people, including Meryl Streep and Johnny Depp, have signed an online petition protesting the "Bully" rating.

The question is whether the new criticism will effect change; previous efforts have died on the vine.

Implemented by longtime MPAA chief Jack Valenti largely to avoid government censorship, the rating process is a well-worn, if murky, system. A group of modestly salaried employees watch dozens of movies each month and offer an initial rating. The MPAA does not reveal the identities of these individuals, or their qualifications, other than to say they are parents who are not affiliated with the film industry.

If producers are not happy with the rating that panel gives a film, they can take it to an appeals board of at least nine people. The MPAA does not say who is on the appeals board, though it is believed to be comprised mainly of a rotating group of studio and theater executives — and representatives of religious groups are sometimes present. (The MPAA itself gets one vote.) A maximum of two people are allowed to argue on behalf of the film at an appeals session, which is closed to the public. Records of such sessions are sealed.

To win an appeal, a filmmaker must receive the support of two-thirds of the appeals panel. The ratings are overseen by the MPAA's Los Angeles-based Classification and Ratings Administration, headed by Joan Graves.

The MPAA says film ratings "do not assess the value or social worth of a movie or censor any aspect of a film. They simply provide clear information to parents (and all interested moviegoers) about a film's content."

Yet some legislators, such as Rep. Linda T. Sanchez (D-Lakewood), say the rating panels are thinking too narrowly by counting swear words and body parts while ignoring the larger context.

"It seems like the MPAA missed an opportunity here," she said of "Bully," arguing that raters should have taken into account the movie's message.

The MPAA says that making its system more flexible would require raters who can offer value judgments. And that, the group's chief, former U.S. Sen. Christopher J. Dodd (D-Conn.), says, takes it into a messy thicket.

"Who am I going to hire to do that? Writers? Critics?" Dodd said in his office this week as the "Bully" controversy was building. "That's not a business we want to be in."

Dodd cited a study commissioned by the MPAA and conducted in 2011 by a company called the Opinion Research Corp. that found 81% of parents believed the ratings were "fairly useful" or "very useful."

A TEEN speaks at a town hall in "Bully," a documentary given an R rating for profanity. "The hypocrisy is that the very movies that contribute to violence can be seen by teenagers because they get a PG-13," Rep. Hansen Clarke says.

He also noted that few ratings are appealed. "We had something like six appeals out of more than 400 cases last year," he said. "That says that we're doing something right."

Groups including the PTC, however, counter that only producers, not the public, can appeal ratings, and there is no incentive for filmmakers to argue for a stricter rating for their own films. And even film companies say the system can be tilted against them.

"They'll never bite the hand that feeds," said Harvey Weinstein, the "Bully" distributor, about studio films that manage to avoid the R. (As an independent company, Weinstein is not a member of the MPAA. Neither, for that matter, is Lionsgate, the studio releasing "The Hunger Games." A Lionsgate representative had no comment.)

Lee Flirsch, who directed "Bully," was even more direct. "This case has brought to light the hypocrisy of the rating system," he said.

No consensus has emerged on changing the system, but a new rating between the PG-13 and R is among the most popular suggestions. Others want more raters from outside California and a system that's rooted more in descriptions than numbers and letters.

And some say that the group needs to take into account changing attitudes on sex and access to sexual content. "We'd be sticking our heads in the sand if we pretend the MPAA is reflective of our society today," said Rep. Yvette D. Clarke (D-N.Y.).

Yvette Clarke and more than two dozen other members of Congress — mostly Democrats, though the list includes Rep. Tom Cole (R-Okla.) — have signed a letter to the MPAA written by Rep. Michael M. Honda (D-San Jose) complaining about the "Bully" rating. But no formal hearings are planned. Critics say that only congressional pressure will prompt a change to the MPAA's system. What incentive the trade group has to respond to pressure from consumers, filmmakers and producers who are not members is unclear.

Some veteran observers say pressure to change the system simply subsides once a controversy on a particular movie dies down.

"The MPAA's problems are a little like herpes," said a former executive with the group who asked not to be identified and not to jeopardize relationships with the group. "They surface every once in a while and everyone notices them, but then it passes and everyone forgets about the problem."
This is a request for a scheduled meeting with the UCI LGBT proposal to discuss personally with you, the Foundation's PRIZE. Two years ago, 12/6/07, the Foundation made its original Proponer's PRIZE proposal to UCI LGBT Coordinator, Lorenzo B. Sandoval, requesting the UCI LGBT Foundation to discuss the homosexual contribution to the community. The Foundation, such as the運用, the Kaloa Kachanos Foundation's 10 April 2009 request to schedule a membership meeting with the UCI LGBT Foundation established by KF in 1968-9.

As of this date, the Foundation has received your personal letter dated 27 April 2009 (postmarked 5/6/09) replies to the Kaloa Kachanos Foundation's PRIZE to discuss the Foundation's proposal personally with them. The Foundation has received no indication of the Foundation's request to discuss personally with them, the Foundation's PRIZE.

In a letter dated 12/6/07, the Foundation made its original proposal to UCI LGBT Coordinator, Lorenzo B. Sandoval, requesting the UCI LGBT Foundation to discuss the homosexual contribution to the community. The Foundation, such as the運用, the Kaloa Kachanos Foundation's 10 April 2009 request to schedule a membership meeting with the UCI LGBT Foundation established by KF in 1968-9.

The UCI LGBT Foundation's PRIZE, as you have determined to make your personal decision in collaboration with appropriate individuals, excluding the LGBT Membership, implies the UCI LGBT Membership of college-age students (18-21 years of age) are not yet capable of considering the Foundation's proposal personally, with the Kaloa Kachanos Foundation Chairman.

Your determination to make your personal decision in collaboration with appropriate individuals, excluding the LGBT Membership, implies the Foundation's request to discuss personally with them, the Foundation's PRIZE.

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Office of the Chancellor

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July 1, 2009

Mr. Bruce S. Hopping
Chairman
Kalos Kagathos Foundation
P.O. Box 416
Laguna Beach, CA 92652

Dear Mr. Hopping:

This letter serves to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated May 8, 2009.

Your letter suggests that college-age students who are members of UC Irvine’s LGBT Resource Center be made aware of your proposal to offer the Kalos Kagathos Foundation Founder’s Prize. Please know that your letter and proposal has been shared with the student members of the LGBT Resource Center. Unfortunately, there is absolutely no interest among the students to meet with you at this time or to establish the Kalos Kagathos Foundation Founder’s Prize.

Thank you for considering UC Irvine.

Sincerely,

Ramona Agrela
Associate Chancellor/
Chief of Staff
Anti-bullying crusader to launch campaign

Lake Forest teen will help kick off national effort at San Francisco rally.

LAKE FOREST - Jonah Mowry, the teen whose anti-bullying YouTube video touched millions in December, will help kick off a national effort to stop an epidemic of bullying teens around the world.

Mowry, 14, and his mother, Peggy Sue Mowry, both of Lake Forest, will be featured speakers at the launch of The Monster March Against Bullying, being held at noon in front of the San Francisco Civic Center.

The rally, expected to be covered by national media, is the start of a yearlong effort to recruit and unite teens against bullying. The event is expected to draw nearly 1,000 people. A banner with 1,000 teen signatures will also be unfurled, inviting President Barack Obama and Lady Gaga to take part in a 10,000-person monster march planned for San Francisco in October.

Speakers at the event will include Allyse Rodemeyer, 16, sister of Jamey Rodemeyer, 14, a boy from Williamsville, N.Y., who committed suicide in September because of bullying related to his sexuality. There will also be other teens who are being bullied, their families as well as community leaders and anti-bullying activists.

Campaign co-founder Christi O'Connor said bullying is becoming a national epidemic. She cited statistics that show the incidence of suicide because of bullying is on the rise. In just the past few weeks, five bullied U.S. teens have killed themselves. She added that 65 teens have committed suicide for this reason since 2009. Each year, she said, 140,000 stay away from school because of bullying.

Peggy Sue Mowry said Jonah - who in December made headlines after a poignantly written video he posted about being bullied went viral on YouTube, Gawker and PerezHilton.com - is excited about making a difference in the anti-bullying effort.

In a week, the video, in which Mowry used cards to detail years of abuse and bullying and to reveal he was gay, went from a couple hundred views to nearly 8 million. Celebrities, including Lady Gaga, Jane Lynch, Rosie O'Donnell, Perez Hilton, Paula Abdul, Ricky Martin, Zooey Deschanel and Jordin Sparks praised him for his courage and gave him support.

"He's very excited to be part of this," Peggy Sue Mowry said. "Christi's message is important to me. I loved her point where she said that 96 percent of parents surveyed say they don't know how often or what their teens do when they go online. I don't want to see any more of our children commit suicide. Something has to be done."

"I think the Monster March is a great cause," Jonah Mowry said. "It's giving bullying the attention it needs. I want to encourage people to get involved."

Plans for the anti-bullying effort include youth-led projects, including a plan where teens across the country will submit ideas on stopping bullying. Ideas include anti-bullying school assemblies, an idea to keep abusive posts off social networks and national and regional teen-led anti-bullying courts where teens would hear cases and decide on consequences, O'Connor said.

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PERSISTENCE PAYS OFF FOR HOPPING

Resident who shows up at council meetings regularly is head of Kalos Kagathos Foundation receives commendation from City Council.

By Barbara Diamond

The City Council presented Bruce Hopping with a commendation for his foundation, for which he had been lobbying for months.

Hopping said the Kalos Kagathos Foundation, which he heads, was1 honored at the Jan. 10 meeting for more than 40 years of service to the city.

"Mr. Hopping has attended a copious number of City Council meetings," said Councilman Kelly Boyd, to whom Hopping had appealed for the accolade. "His foundation's good works and fervent behavior have prompted numerous passionate diatribes.

"However, Mr. Hopping's efforts for Laguna Beach have always been evident in his actions. Therefore, it is with great esteem that I recommend in the City Council that we honor Mr. Hopping's numerous quests and campaigns with this commendation recognizing his stupendous contributions to Laguna Beach."

"Hopping is nothing if not persistent. His visits at council meetings against traffic patrolled citations, claiming the primary and low-key stances that would ensure no matter the town. He periodically killed on the city council to present a local-only event for what he considers an inquisition on resident's quality of life. Hopping banished the lack of figural art in the city-owned collection and demanded the city to honor the Brooks Street Surfing Classic with a sculpture—a figurative, ornamental, statutory. He advocated for skateboarding as a way of life and as a sport native to Laguna that has been championing for years. He pursued the installation of 'Fantasy of Wings,' a sculpture by Belo Krause, but he finally gave up on that for Laguna's instance.

"I keep after things," Hopping said. "It is how I survive three weeks on a float in the Pacific Ocean during World War II."

It was the war that brought the young Hopping to Laguna. As a U.S. Navy pilot, Hopping was stationed at the Marine Corps Air Station in Tar. "We used to visit Laguna," Hopping said. "It was paradise. That was before the developers came in."

Following the war, Hopping was based at a Mayo's boot camp, where he conducted swimming. After learning that the base could also be accommodating for the "boobs" and serving them well instead. Hopping went to bat for his fellow. His interference did not sit well with his superiors, and he was transferred with a court martial.

Instead, he was put on ship bound for the Korean War, where he once again found himself leading an incarceration.

"I repaired the ship on the deck of the captain of the ship," Hopping said.

His superior called it a mutiny; Hopping was court-martialed and faced a sentence, according to an article published in the New York Times.

See HOPPING, page A14

COASTLINE PILOT

February 15, 2013

PROCLAMATION HONORING BRUCE HOPPING

WHEREAS, Mr. Bruce Hopping and the Kalos Kagathos Foundation have, for over 46 years, made worthy contributions to the City of Laguna Beach and its citizens; and

WHEREAS, Mr. Bruce Hopping convinced the City Council and School Board to ban smoking in their chambers during public meetings; and 1974

WHEREAS, Mr. Bruce Hopping established, with Laguna Beach Art Museum, the Laguna Beach City Arts Committee, not the City Arts Commission; and 1970 NUCLEAR CITY

Committee for Arts Commission

WHEREAS, Mr. Bruce Hopping commissioned, with LBHS Senior Artist Rachel Heusensmann, City Lifeguards Sand's "Keep Laguna Beautiful" beach environmental conservation; and 2000

WHEREAS, Mr. Bruce Hopping commissioned St. Ann's Beach and Tidally Beach conservation memorials; and 1988–2000

WHEREAS, Mr. Bruce Hopping and the Kalos Kagathos Foundation conceived and commissioned the City's Young Artists Community Services organization; and 1978

WHEREAS, Mr. Bruce Hopping and the Kalos Kagathos Foundation has continually promoted and supported life-long fitness of the Laguna Beach community; and 1970–2012

WHEREAS, Mr. Bruce Hopping and the Kalos Kagathos Foundation conceived and administered surfing, swimming, and water polo Junior Exchanges: 1960–2006 worldwide

NOW, THEREFORE, be it resolved, that the Laguna Beach City Council does hereby commend the Kalos Kagathos Foundation and Bruce Hopping for the dedicated support of the City of Laguna Beach and wish him the very best in the future.

DATED: January 10, 2012

Jane Egly
Mayor