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Book on sexuality causes frenzy

Conservatives assail author, publisher for content

NEW YORK (AP) — A month before its publication, a provocative book about children's sexuality is being denounced by conservatives as evil and prompting angry calls for action against the University of Minnesota Press.

The book, *Harmful to Minors: The Perils of Protecting Children From Sex*, argued that young Americans, though bombarded with sexual images from the mass media, are often deprived of realistic advice about sex.

"What's happening to me is a perfect example of the very hysteria that my book is about," New York-based author Judith Levine said in an interview.

Levine has been working on the book since the mid-1990s. With the recent sex scandals involving clergy and young people, she admits it's a particularly challenging time to make her case that American youth are entitled to safe, satisfying sex lives.

Publisher after publisher rejected the book — one called its contents "radioactive" — before the University of Minnesota Press accepted the manuscript a year ago.

Writes Levine in her introduction, "In America today, it is nearly impossible to publish a book that says children and teenagers can have sexual pleasure and be safe too."

From the outset, officials at the Minnesota press knew the book would be controversial; they had the manuscript reviewed by five academic experts, instead

of the usual two, to be sure its contentions were based on sound research.

The uproar exceeded expectations after the book was condemned on conservative Internet sites.

"We've never seen anything quite this angry," said the press director, Douglas

"It's as if [parents] cannot imagine that their kids seek sex for the same reasons they do."

— Judith Levine
author

Armato. "The book isn't actually out yet. What people are reacting to is not the book itself, but the idea of the book."

In "Harmful to Minors," Levine argues that abstinence-only sex education is misguided. She also suggests the threat of pedophilia and molestation by strangers is exaggerated by adults who want to deny young people the opportunity for positive sexual experiences.

"Squeamish or ignorant about the facts, parents appear willing to accept the pundits' worst conjectures about their children's sexual motives," Levine writes. "It's

as if they cannot imagine that their kids seek sex for the same reasons they do."

Levine said much of the furor over the book stems from an interview she gave last month to Newhouse News Service, the Roman Catholic Church's largest news outlet. Newhouse quoted her as saying a youth "conceivably" could be positive.

Levine said this week that she disapproves of any sexual relationship between a youth and an authority figure, whether parent, teacher or priest. However, she believes teenagers deserve more respect for the choices they make in consent matters, and suggests that America's off-consent laws can sometimes lead to excessive punishment.

She cites the Dutch age-of-consent as a "good model" — it permits sex between an adult and a young person between 12 and 16 if the young person consents. Prosecutions for coercive sex may be sought by the young person or the youth's parents.

"Teens often seek out sex with an older person, and they do so for understandable reasons: an older person makes them feel sexy and grown-up, protected and special," writes Levine, who had an affair with an adult when she was a minor.

Several conservative media commentators and activists have accused Levine of condoning child abuse.

NASA starts countdown for launch

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — NASA confirmed the start of its launch countdown for space shuttle Atlantis on Tuesday, following new security guidelines intended to thwart a terrorist attack.

The countdown clocks in the launch control center had actually started the previous evening for Atlantis' liftoff Thursday afternoon on a space station assembly mission.

Under the 3-week-old policy, NASA won't announce the start of the countdown until after the fact and won't disclose the shuttle launch time until 24 hours in advance. In addition, the astronauts' movements on launch day will not be televised live as usual.

Shuttle program manager

Ron Dittmore said the policy has not hampered shuttle work or countdown activities.

"It does not change the team's approach one bit," he said.

NASA says liftoff will occur sometime between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. Thursday. Forecasters put the odds of good launch weather at 70 percent, with low clouds and rain the main concerns.

The only shuttle concern involves the power-drive units needed to close the pair of trapezoidal doors on Atlantis' belly once the external tank is jettisoned in space. A door on Endeavour closed several seconds slower than usual in recent ground testing, and engineers want to make sure the same problem does not happen to Atlantis.

Dittmore said he expects the engineering analysis to be completed by late Wednesday afternoon and that the findings should clear Atlantis for an on-time launch.

Atlantis is loaded with a 44-foot girder for the international space station that weighs nearly 27,000 pounds. It's not just a basic metal beam: This \$600 million truss has 475,000 parts, including a myriad of electrical cabling and plumbing and four sets of computers. It also has a \$190 million railcar and track for eventual use by the space station's robot arm.

Additional girders will be attached to this component on future flights, and the entire framework ultimately will stretch more than 350 feet with

the railroad track running to full length. The track is needed to move the robot arm from one end of the space station to the other, to build up the orbiting outpost.

In a space shuttle first, Atlantis will be propelled by three new-style main engines during liftoff. The high-pressure fuel turbopump in each engine was built without welds, which was expected to make them more safe and reliable.

The seven astronauts assigned to Atlantis' 11-day flight will be the first to be for the three men who have been living on the space station since December. The shuttle crew is taking up fresh food, clean clothes for the space station residents.

U.S. military presence wanted to wipe out extremist Muslim rebels

ZAMBOANGA, Philippines (AP) — Officials in the southern Philippines said Tuesday they want U.S. troops to stay longer than planned to ensure Muslim extremist rebels are wiped out and planned infrastructure projects are completed.

More than 600 American military personnel are taking part in a six-month counterterrorism training exercise designed to help the Philippine military crush the Abu Sayyaf group on Basilan island. It is scheduled to end July 15.

U.S. officials are also planning to improve water systems, build roads and an airstrip in the poor, predominantly Muslim island province to revive commerce and attract investment following years of fighting and high-profile crimes by the Abu Sayyaf, local government spokesperson Chris Puno said.

"We've been neglected for a long, long time and we should give the Americans enough time to help us," Puno said.

Basilan mayors are considering a request to the national government to extend the American presence by six months, he said.

National Security Adviser Roilo Golez told reporters that two U.S. senators who arrived Monday for a three-day visit are assessing how much more military aid the Philippines needs in addition to the \$100 million committed by President Bush last November.

"We can expect more in terms of aircraft,

training, choppers, and I think that's very vital for the upgrade of our military capability," Golez said.

Tahira Ismael, mayor of Basilan's coastal town of Lantawan, said her area of more than 27,000 people has been devastated by years of violence.

"It's not just the peace and order. We badly need development," said Tahira. "Those opposing the U.S. troops do not know what we are going through here."

Left-wing groups claim the presence of the U.S. troops violates a constitutional restriction on foreign troops in this former American colony and could escalate conflict in the south, many areas of which have long been a hotbed of Muslim separatist rebellions.

Brig. Gen. Emmanuel Teodosio, director of Philippine troops in the training exercise, said U.S. military engineers may need to stay longer in Basilan if Washington proceeds with plans to finance infrastructure projects.

Lt. Gen. Roy Cimatu, who heads the southern Philippine military command, said the fewer than 100 Abu Sayyaf rebels on Basilan have split into three groups to evade pursuing troops.

It is unclear whether three people kidnapped by the group — Wichita, Kan., missionaries Gracia and Martin Burnham and Filipino nurse Ediborah Yap — were separated, but indications are that the captives remain on the island.

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Education
Continued from page 1

to connect the students with the University.

Alternative forms of education include asynchronous and synchronous learning, Hoyle said.

Asynchronous learning includes classes over the Web or recorded lecture students respond to by email.

Dr. Rod Ham, assistant director of the Center of Distance Learning & Research, said long-distance learning provides opportunities for students to work around scheduling conflicts.

"You've got more control over how you learn," Ham said.

Although these courses allow non-local or commuter students to fulfill credits, local students tend to enroll before non-local students, Harn said.

Fran Hunter, A&M program coordinator for distance learning, said long distance learning encourages students through its freedom.

"An alternative means of education, like long distance learning, knocks down the financial, geographic and time barriers so that qualified students have access to the kind of education institutions like A&M can offer," Hunter said.

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