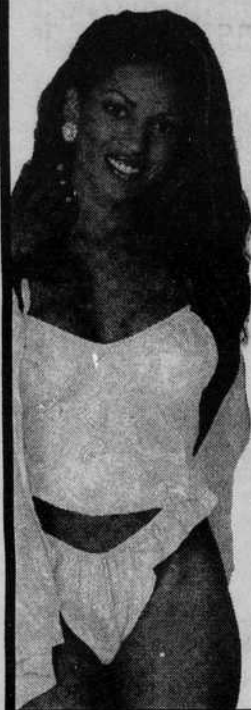


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Ventura insults many in interview

By Rochelle Olson
The Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Anyone who was NOT offended by Gov. Jesse Ventura's Playboy interview, please raise your hand.

The former pro wrestler, whose frank talk got him elected in an upset last fall, gave an interview in which he aimed barbs at religion and fat people and declared the Navy's Tailhook scandal overblown. And that was just the beginning of what the Reform Party's biggest star had to say.

On Thursday, the morning after the interview became public, Ventura got the tag-team treatment from both his political opponents and his own party.

"Minnesotans do not embrace your views on religion, on women, on prostitution, on drugs or conspiracy," Senate Majority Leader Roger Moe, a Democrat, said at a news conference.

State Republican chairman Ron Eibensteiner said Ventura should consider stepping down because his "attacks show he has a fundamental lack of understanding of the world he lives in."

Ventura, "The Body," defended his comments by saying, "This is Playboy. They want you to be provocative."

One major question is whether

the interview will hurt the Reform Party and Ventura's standing in it. As the party's highest-ranking elected official, Ventura exerts great influence. He has encouraged developer Donald Trump to get into the presidential race and made it plain that Pat Buchanan isn't welcome.

"At a national level he gets attention, but it's attention that eerily parallels the 'What's going on upstairs' attention that Ross Perot got," said Chris Gilbert, a political science professor at Gustavus Adolphus College in St. Peter. Ventura is "no longer provocative; he's a potential laughingstock. It's exactly what the Reform Party doesn't need."

The interview, which hits the newsstands Monday, was conducted over three days this summer with contributing editor Lawrence Grobel.

In it, Ventura called for the regulation of illegal drugs, with the creation of "places where the addict can go get it."

He pronounced organized religion "a sham and a crutch for weak-minded people," and blamed it for the unpopularity of legalized prostitution, which he has said should be considered. He also said that President Kennedy was killed by assassins hired by

the "military-industrial complex" because he was planning to withdraw from Vietnam. And he declared that Tailhook was "much ado about nothing" and claimed that fat people "can't push away from the table."

On being governor, he said: "It's good to be king. The best thing is that there's no one in this state who can tell me what to do."

The Catholic League, a Roman Catholic organization based in New York, called him Jesse "The Bigot" Ventura.

"The Catholic League is interested in knowing whether Ventura's hostility to religion represents the position of the Reform Party," said league president William Donohoe.

Reform Party Chairman Russ Verney said he had been deluged with calls and was extremely distressed, especially about the comments on faith and Tailhook.

"We have been building the Reform Party based on principles, integrity and values and this story is just so humiliating," Verney said. "It is contrary to everything we have been building in the Reform Party."

But Lynn Wong, a mortgage company manager from Coon Rapids, said she likes that the governor says what he wants "instead of telling us what he thinks he wants us to hear."

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