

Ventura’s image and legal battles not over

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Former Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura got the legal vindication he craved when a jury agreed he had been defamed in slain military sniper Chris Kyle’s autobiography.

Ventura won another victory on Wednesday — a day after the jury voted 8-2 to award him more than \$1.8 million — when “American Sniper” publisher HarperCollins told The Associated Press it would remove the passage that sparked the lawsuit from the best-seller.

But given the rhetoric surrounding the verdict, the former Navy SEAL and ex-pro wrestler still faces battles over his reputation and the money he’s owed.

Ventura came under heavy scrutiny within the tight-knit brotherhood of Navy SEALs and former SEALs for continuing his lawsuit after Kyle was killed at a Texas gun range last year.

A former SEAL regarded as the deadliest sniper in U.S. military history, Kyle wrote that he decked Ventura at a California bar in 2006 after Ventura made offensive comments about SEALs, including that the SEALs “deserve to lose a few” in Iraq. The subchapter was called “Punching Out Scruff Face.” Ventura testified he never made the statements and that the confrontation never happened.

Kyle insisted in sworn testimony videotaped before he was killed at a

Texas gun range last year that his story was accurate. The jury disagreed Tuesday, giving Ventura a potentially hefty windfall if it stands.

Ventura doesn’t expect to see a lot of the money, he said in interviews published or aired Wednesday. He also echoed what his camp had said Tuesday — that Kyle’s widow, Taya Kyle, won’t be the one paying the damages.

Ventura lawyer David Bradley Olsen told reporters his reading of HarperCollins’ insurance policy is that its carrier will cover all damages and costs of defending against the lawsuit.

“This money does not come out of a widow’s pocket; it comes from an insurance company,” Olsen said.

Ventura reiterated that on “CBS This Morning.”

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everything for her,” he said.

But attorney John Borgner, who represented Kyle in her capacity as executor of Chris Kyle’s estate, said Tuesday that insurance won’t cover everything. He said it will cover the \$500,000 awarded for defamation, but not the \$1.3 million for unjust enrichment.

“All of that comes directly from money that Taya and Chris received from royalties or whatever assets the estate may have,” he said.

Borgner also asserted that under the law, the \$1.3 million part of the jury’s award is only advisory and the final determination will be up to U.S. District Judge Richard Kyle, no relation to the author. He also said they will be considering all their legal options “in the days and week to come,” including a possible appeal.

A woman who answered Ventura’s phone Wednesday said he was not available for comment. But Ventura told the Star Tribune

he was paying his lawyers by the hour, not with a contingency fee. Neither he nor Olsen would say how high his legal bills will be.

“If I had lost, it would have been devastating financially for me,” Ventura said.

How devastating isn’t entirely clear. Ventura splits his time between his home in suburban St. Paul and a remote “off the grid” winter home in Baja California, Mexico. He testified he made about \$11 million between 2002 and 2012, but his tax forms showed his income declining from a high of \$3.8 million in 2003 to \$190,378 in 2012.

Ventura has long said his lawsuit wasn’t about money anyway, it was about trying to restore his reputation. He told the Star Tribune that he’s pleased with the decision, but wonders who will be next to throw him “under the bus.”

Ventura testified that since “American Sniper” was published in 2012, he no longer feels welcome at Navy SEALs reunions.

Olsen, who did not immediately respond to requests for comment Wednesday, said Tuesday that the testimony of 11 SEAL community members called by the defense was hard for Ventura to hear.

“Because he did have to listen to these young SEALs say all of these terrible things about him, and there’s probably a lot more people like them out there in the SEAL community,” Olsen said.

FLOOD RELIEF

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Lake Band of Chippewa and Prairie Island Indian Community.

Gov. Mark Dayton initially secured a major disaster declaration for eight counties: Chippewa, Freeborn, Jackson, Murry, Nobles, Pipestone, Renville, and Rock counties.

FEMA and HSEM officials were in Koochiching County July 24 to meet with county and city officials to begin assessing damage and to qualify the county for the disaster declaration. Now that the county has been requested to be added to the federal disaster declaration, HSEM officials will return to brief county officials on the aid application process, at which point FEMA officials will return and conduct a more in-depth damage assessment.

Koochiching County Board Chairman Rob Ecklund said officials will return in about three weeks for a more detailed assessment, at which point they might be able to assess some highway sites that were still

underwater when they first arrived.

Ecklund said he was impressed with HSEM and FEMA officials, both by their detailed knowledge and professional, efficient demeanor. Right now, the county budget is “tremendously strained,” he said, so it’s important for the county to get some aid to help with the recovery.

“I don’t think you ever fully recover,” Ecklund said. “This will take some dollars we hadn’t planned on spending.”

Some of the biggest costs the county incurred were overtime pay for county employees, Ecklund said, including those in the sheriff’s office and highway department, who worked around the clock during the flood.

According to a release, these counties are currently eligible for two categories of federal and state aid: Public assistance and the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. Public assistance applies to counties within the disaster area, while the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program applies to all counties in the state of Minnesota.

VETERANS

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center, or cannot get help from a VA clinic in a timely manner.

Rep. Rick Nolan, who represents Minnesota’s Eighth District, said the House passage of the bill sends a clear message that veterans deserve timely and proper care.

“In providing resources necessary to reform the Department of Veterans Affairs, expand its health care services, and eliminate the unconscionable benefits backlog, Congress has sent a clear message that there can be no more excuses or delays in assuring that every veteran receives the highest standard of care a grateful nation can provide,” Nolan said in a statement.

The bill also would appropriate \$1.5 billion for the VA to lease 27 medical facilities in 18 states and Puerto Rico. It also would provide \$5 billion for the VA to hire more doctors and nurses and improve facilities.

Only veterans enrolled in the VA healthcare system by Aug. 1 would be eligible for federally funded care from private providers. The VA currently cares for nearly 9 million enrolled veterans.

As more veterans return home from service abroad, Nolan said this bill shows them and their families that they will have access to care when they come home.

“Make no mistake – significant challenges lie ahead as more and more of our troops return home from abroad, but veterans and their families can feel very good about the passage of this bill – a major step forward on their behalf,” Nolan said. “I am pleased the Speaker listened to the calls of more than one hundred House Democrats to pass this measure before the August recess, and I now urge swift passage in the Senate.”

Under the bill, the VA secretary is also granted the authority to immediately fire senior executives for poor performance. Those executives would be allowed to appeal, but appeals would be streamlined in a 21-day process.

The \$17 billion figure represents a compromise between Sanders and Miller, as it is about \$5 billion more than Miller was seeking, and about \$10 billion less than Sanders wanted. The final figure includes \$5 billion in budget offsets, bringing the total package cost down to \$12 million in new funding.

WOLF

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we’re not just going to dispose of the animals.”

Larry Petersen, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources area wildlife supervisor in International Falls, said it’s not that unusual for a wolf to be in and around the community. After all, places like International Falls and Ely are in the midst of wolf territory.

Petersen, too, recommended people who see or encounter a wolf to handle it just like they would a bear: Don’t surprise it, respect it, and shout and wave your arms to scare it away from you.

“The likelihood of it harming people is pretty small,” Petersen said.

He urged people to be make noise as they come around corners of homes and fences so as not to surprise any animal that may not yet be aware of an ap-

proaching humans.

However, he cautioned, wolves have been known to attack dogs even when a human is nearby. He urged people walking dogs who may see a wolf to control their pet, make noise, and turn and walk away from the wolf.

Kittelson said a small wolf pack has existed very near the city for years. He said the pack’s range is around the cemetery, across the truck route, and near Moonlight Rock area and the rock ridges around there. They occasionally venture closer to homes, he said.

The wolf or wolves recently observed may have been disbursed from a pack and forced to hunt on their own.

A draw to the city and homes may be people feeding deer in their yards. “The wolf is a predator,” he said. “And they will follow their food source.”

He suggested people stop



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Lynde Mettler snapped this photo of a wolf along Keenan Drive earlier this month. She reports it was about the size of a German shepherd and the wolf didn’t seem alarmed by Mettler taking his photo about 5 feet from where he stood.

feeding deer in an effort to make the city less appealing to predators.

“They don’t want to be here,” he said of the wolves. “But for some reason there is a food source that’s at-

tracting them. We are working with the police department and are aware of the situation. If this gets to a point of a huge safety concern, it will be taken care of.”

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