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Web Firms Launch A Child Safety Site

*Effort Aims to Avert Regulation;
Critics Call 'Filtering' Ineffective*

By JOHN SCHWARTZ
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The biggest names in the online world yesterday introduced a large and elaborate World Wide Web site aimed at helping parents guard their kids from the wild side of the Internet. The site, called GetNetWise, is a key part of the industry's efforts to head off government regulation of the global computer network.

It offers Internet safety tips and an exhaustive guide to products and services that families can use to block and filter objectionable material. Visitors can also get information about reporting trouble to law enforcement agencies and can find links to sites deemed kid-friendly.

Built on the philosophy that the best protection is for their parents to get involved in their children's online explorations, the site offers tips for how to draw up an "Internet use agreement" that children would sign to set ground rules for how they would use the network.

Critics immediately faulted the site, saying, among other things, that many of the "filtering" products don't work as advertised. Congress has repeatedly rejected the industry's approach of self-regulation and passed bills to establish criminal penalties for making sexual material

available to children online.

The first such law, the Communications Decency Act of 1996, was declared an unconstitutional restriction of free speech by the Supreme Court. A subsequent law is tied up in court.

But the companies sponsoring the new site, which include America Online Inc., AT&T Corp., Microsoft Corp., Walt Disney Co., Excite Inc., Lycos Inc. and Yahoo Inc., say it and other programs will largely solve the

problem. The firms often beat one another up in the courtroom, the media and the marketplace, but they all agreed on GetNetWise and have pledged to place its logo prominently on their own sites.

"We don't think there is a requirement at this point for someone to legislate and tell the industry how to handle these issues," said Steven Wadsworth, president of Disney's Buena Vista Internet Group.

By "empowering" parents, Wadsworth said, the site will give them some of the same cues they use to

judge other media. Like movie ratings and brand names, he said, tools offered on GetNetWise are "going to provide people with a comfort level" about using the Internet.

Another big supporter of the site is Vice President Gore. "It really is the total digital toolbox," he said via a satellite link-up yesterday at a news conference introducing the site. "By establishing one simple place to block and monitor what children will see, we are giving the computer keyboard back to those who know best—America's parents."

The site includes a software finder that helps users pore through hundreds of products that attempt to make surfing safe. The user checks off desired features—say, those that block violent imagery or set time limits on Internet use—and the software on the site then produces a list of products and services sporting those features, with lengthy descriptions and links to the sites that in many cases allow the products to be downloaded for a free tryout.

Critics of filtering software argue that parents often don't have the

skills to install it and that the software can accidentally block inoffensive sites and fail to block offensive ones. Web-savvy teens can figure out ways to defeat the software, they say.

Bennett Haselton, a vocal opponent of filtering software, faulted the site for billing itself as a guide to consumer products. "One of the products on the market blocked Time magazine after Time gave them a bad review," he said, "and if I can't go to this Web site and find out which company did that, then they're not telling the full story."

The site does not refer to third-party reviews of filtering software from organizations such as Consumer Reports and Ziff-Davis's PC Labs—tools that could help consumers avoid clunky and flaky products.

Jerry Berman, executive director of the Center for Democracy and Technology in Washington and co-chairman of the GetNetWise effort, said such links would have led some of the potential players to drop out of the project and suggested that reviews are easy to find, as they are highlighted on each company's site.

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Clinton Sanctioned In Jones Lawsuit

Payment Ordered To Lawyers, Court

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A federal judge yesterday ordered President Clinton to pay nearly \$90,000 to Paula Jones's legal team for giving false testimony about his relationship with Monica S. Lewinsky, marking the first time that a sitting president has been punished for contempt of court.

In a 19-page order, U.S. District Judge Susan Webber Wright of Arkansas said "sanctions must be imposed to redress the President's misconduct and to deter others who might consider emulating the President's misconduct." The payment—to compensate Jones's lawyers for the extra time and expense they incurred because of Clinton's false statements—is far less than the sum sought by the Jones lawyers but almost triple what Clinton had suggested.

Wright also ordered the president to pay the federal court in Little Rock \$1,202 as reimbursement for the expenses she incurred in January 1998 when—at Clinton's request—she traveled to Washington to preside over his deposition in Jones's sexual harassment lawsuit.

Wright said she "takes no pleasure in imposing contempt sanctions against this nation's president, and no doubt like many others grows weary of this matter."

However, she said, "the Court has determined that the President deliberately violated this Court's discovery orders, thereby undermining the integrity of the judicial system."

In a statement, Clinton attorney Robert S. Bennett said, "We accept the order of the court and will comply with it."

Whether the president will pay the sanctions out of his personal money or from funds raised from contributors to cover his legal expenses remains to be determined, a White House official said yesterday.

During the deposition questioning, Clinton said that he did not recall being alone with Lewinsky and that he did not have a sexual relationship with the former White House intern. That testimony formed the basis of a civil contempt order issued by Wright last April, finding that Clinton gave "false, misleading and evasive answers that were designed to obstruct the judicial process" in Jones's sexual harassment lawsuit.

Wright concluded that Clinton's testimony violated her order that Jones was entitled to information regarding any sexual relations Clinton might have had with any gov-

ernment employees. She said she would require Clinton to pay "reasonable expenses" incurred by the Jones lawyers as a result of his misconduct, and in the intervening months attorneys on both sides of the case have sparred over what would constitute an appropriate amount.

Clinton has said that although he did not accept Wright's assessment of the truthfulness of his deposition testimony, he would not appeal her contempt order.

In court papers filed yesterday, Wright ordered Clinton to pay \$79,999.12 to the Dallas law firm of Rader, Campbell, Fisher and Pyke, which represented Jones in the final stages of her suit against the president. The firm, which initially sought \$437,825 from Clinton, said in a statement yesterday, "the order falls far short of awarding the proper amount of attorney's fees and expenses," and suggested that it might appeal Wright's finding.

The judge also ordered Clinton to pay \$9,484.93 to the Rutherford Institute, a conservative civil liberties advocacy organization based in Charlottesville that raised funds to bring the Jones lawsuit. The institute originally sought \$58,533.03, and John W. Whitehead, president, said he was considering whether to appeal the order. "Philosophically the opinion is good, but the fee issue

is important," Whitehead said.

Clinton's attorneys had argued that the Jones lawyers were "demonstrably overreaching" in their original requests and suggested payments of no more than \$33,700.

Wright rejected suggestions by the Jones attorneys that Clinton should be required to make payments that served as punishment for his misconduct. Instead, she said, the law only required compensation for otherwise unnecessary legal work caused by his false statements. Because the deposition came close to the end of the case, Wright found that only a fraction of the attorneys' work and expenses could be attributed to Clinton's misconduct.

Jones claimed in the original lawsuit that Clinton had made unwanted sexual advances toward her in 1991, when she was a state employee and he was governor of Arkansas. Clinton settled the lawsuit for \$850,000 last November just as Congress began impeachment proceedings against him.

The articles of impeachment voted by the House of Representatives last December accused Clinton of obstruction of justice in the Jones case and perjury in the criminal investigation by independent counsel Kenneth W. Starr that grew out of the Jones case. In February, the Senate acquitted Clinton on both articles.