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Coleman Supports Bush Push On AIDS

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(AP) (Washington) Sen. Norm Coleman said he'd like to go to Africa this year to get a

firsthand look at the devastation of the AIDS crisis.

"I have a sister who died of AIDS," said Coleman, a freshman Republican from Minnesota. "I don't talk about it much. It was more of a drug-abuse issue, but in the end she died of that. ... I was with her, and I've seen the impact."

Led by President Bush, Republicans are promoting a plan to spend \$15 billion to fight AIDS in Africa and in two island nations in the Caribbean.

Many supporters, including Coleman, are selling it as a national security issue, arguing that some of the largest countries in the world will be destabilized by AIDS if the United States does not act quickly.

Coleman also supports Bush's plan to distribute condoms as part of the effort, a plan that has some church officials concerned.

Coleman, who was appointed last week to the Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee on African affairs, said he recently met with the prime ministers of Uganda and Kenya to discuss the impact of AIDS.

But the state's other senator, Democrat Mark Dayton, questioned the motives of Bush's plan for Africa.

Dayton said Bush used it in his State of the Union speech two weeks ago "to present him as a great humanitarian" and to try to soften his image as he prepares to take the nation to war against Iraq.



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"I appreciate his humanitarian impulse," said Dayton. "I wish he'd direct it toward Americans."

Dayton suggested that the \$15 billion proposed by Bush could be better spent at home.

"It's odd that he dramatized a spending increase away from home while leaving farmers in northwestern Minnesota in disaster, and special education ... and Head Start" underfunded.

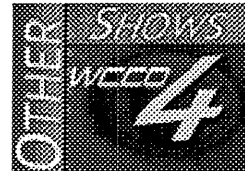
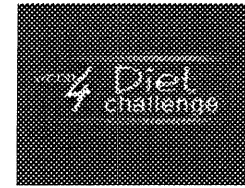
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