

**CNN WOLF BLITZER REPORTS CNN**

February 15, 2002

Transcript # 021500CN.V67

BLITZER: Welcome back. The issue of safe sex front and center on MTV. Secretary of State Colin Powell appeared on an MTV international forum yesterday; it aired today. An Italian woman asked the secretary if he supported the pope's policies against condom use. Here's what he said.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

COLIN POWELL, U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE: I certainly respect the views of the holy father and the Catholic Church. In my own judgment, condoms are a way to prevent infection, and therefore, I not only support their use, I encourage their use among people who are sexually active and need to protect themselves.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BLITZER: Conservatives were quick to jump on Powell's remarks charging he's out of line with the administration's support of abstinence education. The White House was just as quick in backing the secretary of state.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ARI FLEISCHER, WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY: I think the secretary made it perfectly plain and so did the questioner. The question was in the context of for people who practice sex. It was not a question about everybody in our society. It was a question just those who are sexually active. And so, obviously, if someone's sexually active, they've already made a decision not to practice abstinence.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BLITZER: At least one conservative group says the Bush administration is sending out, quote, "mixed signals." And in related news, the mayor of New York, Michael Bloomberg, says New York's public hospitals will begin offering abortion training to all OB-GYN medical students. According to National Public Radio, the Republican mayor says this sort of training would make abortion more available nationally, and that fact has many abortion opponents up in arms.

Two high-profile Republicans on the record here -- Colin Powell endorses condom use for sexually active young people, and New York mayor, Michael Bloomberg, presses for abortion training.

Let's open up our debate here. With me now, Republican congressman Mike Pence of Indiana; Democratic congresswoman, Jan Schakowsky of Illinois.

Congressman, first to you. What's wrong with what Secretary Powell have to say about endorsing condom use for those who are sexually active?

REP. MIKE PENCE (R), INDIANA: Well, Wolf, I think it was -- given the enormous stature that Colin Powell rightly has, not only in America but in the world community, it was a sad day. I don't think any administration has had a worst day since boxers and briefs on MTV. And the truth is that Colin Powell had an opportunity here to reaffirm this president's commitment to abstinence as the best choice for our young people, and he chose not to do that in the first instance, but -- and so I think it's very sad.

The other part is that, frankly, condoms are a very, very poor protection against sexually transmitted diseases, and in that sense, Wolf, this was -- the secretary of state maybe inadvertently misleading millions of young people and endangering lives.

BLITZER: Well, congresswoman, let me bring you in. The secretary did say he does support abstinence education, but he simply said that as far as sexually active people are concerned, condom use would help. The congressman, though, congresswoman, says condoms don't help much.

REP. JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY (D), ILLINOIS: Well, first of all, the debate isn't between abstinence and the use of condoms. We're talking about using condoms to save lives. That's what Colin Powell pointed out, that we want to save lives. And, of course, it's not true. Condoms will prevent disease. They are a good way to prevent AIDS. Will they in every instance? No. And that's why we have to continue the kind of education that should go along with dispensing condoms or encouraging their use. But to say that they shouldn't use them at all, that's the option, are we saying you should have unprotected sex or sex with condoms? Obviously, the answer is condoms.

BLITZER: What about that, congressman?

PENCE: Well, I just simply believe the only truly safe sex, Wolf, as the president believes, is no sex. And we ought to, with leaders of the stature of the secretary of state, we ought to be sending a message to kids across the country and the opportunity had across the world that abstinence is the best choice for young people. But let's be clear, last year, the National Institute of Health, Wolf, and some 28 separate experts said at least a half dozen to ten sexually transmitted diseases for which condom use has zero preventative value. The secretary of state is simply wrong.

SCHAKOWSKY: That's like saying we shouldn't flu shots because it doesn't protect against anything else. There are 34 million people in Sub Sahara and Africa alone who are infected with AIDS and millions more in the United States. We're saying, let's not make it any worse; we could make it better. This is one way to do it. Is it the cure all, is it the perfect solution? No, but it's obviously something that will help. This is a -- he was making a 21st century, humane and

responsible answer to a 21st century problem.

PENCE: The problem is it was too modern of an answer, Wolf. It was -- it truly was a modern, liberal answer to a problem that parents like me are facing all over America, and frankly, all over the world.

BLITZER: Well, congressman, how disappointed you that the White House, Ari Fleischer, the White House press secretary, not speaking simply for himself but speaking for the president, went out and endorsed precisely what Secretary Powell said?

PENCE: Well, I'm very grieved about it, frankly, less as a congressman and simply more as a parent that the White House seems to be sending mixed signals on this message that is affecting so many families because, you know, far beyond we can argue about the science here, and I think that speaks for itself. You know, there was a tone to the secretary of state's comments that was troubling to me, because he talked about putting away taboos and conservative ideas and move on to condom use and condom distribution. As someone who believes in traditional marriage, it's hard for me to see traditional marriage as an antiquated, conservative view.

SCHAKOWSKY: I think what he was saying is that taboos and conservative ideas are causing people to die, young people, married people as well, who don't have access to condoms, who don't know about them. I think he was talking about saving lives.

BLITZER: Congresswoman, we only have a few seconds, but I want to get your opinion about what the Republican mayor of New York, Mayor Bloomberg, is advocating, that all OB-GYN students, medical students training in New York City public hospitals should learn how to perform abortions. What if someone Catholic or on a moral basis simply opposes abortions, why should that medical student either be forced into doing that or look for another medical school?

SCHAKOWSKY: No, absolutely the medical student can opt out. What it says, it must be part of the curriculum at all the public hospitals. And at Bellevue, where it is already, only one student has ever opted out. We're saying this is a medical procedure; doctors should know about it. They train one out of seven doctors in the city of New York. And so this way, most all will be trained in that medical procedure.

BLITZER: What about that, Congressman Pence?

PENCE: Well, as you know, Wolf, I'm very strongly pro-life. Jan and I have an honest difference of opinion on the issue. I'm glad we agree on this, that doctors ought to be able to have a choice, but we ought to be careful about using public resources to promote an education in a procedure that even doctors, the majority of many OB- GYNs around the country find morally objectionable.

BLITZER: Mike Pence and Jan Schakowsky, two members of the House of Representatives, thanks to both of you for joining us.

PENCE: Thank you.

SCHAKOWSKY: Thank you.

BLITZER: Have a good weekend.