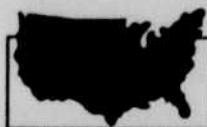


Clinton plugs health care, agenda on TV town hall



NATIONAL

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) Warming up for his evening forum with health care events in rural Troy, 50 miles east of Charlotte, Clinton said promoting health care and the rest of his agenda outside of Washington would be a critical tool in the weeks and months ahead. That approach, he said, will keep his ideas from getting "lost in a cloud of hot air."

The Charlotte event was the first of three TV town halls scheduled this week, and Clinton opened with a recap of his health care efforts and a plug for anticrime legislation on the agenda when Congress returns next week.

Clinton said the measure would put 100,000 police officers on the street, ban 28 types of assault weapons and create a "three strikes and you're out" no-parole provision for the most violent federal crimes, as well as increasing drug treatment funds.

And, looking to prove his agenda is not being derailed by the Whitewater controversy, Clinton also said his efforts to streamline government were churning ahead.

"It is going to be a very busy year," Clinton said. Still, he said the public might be surprised by the busy agenda. "Because of what comes across the airwaves you may not know the work of the people is going on," he said.

Clinton's first question was about crime, and the second was from a man skeptical the government could run a national health care overhaul.

"That's why I don't propose that the government take it over," Clinton said, casting his program as using government tools to control costs but leaving much of the nation's private, market-based health care system intact.

A few minutes later, Clinton assured a Roanoke, Va., insurance salesman that health care reform would not destroy — but likely improve — his livelihood

because small business would get better rates and then go looking for coverage.

"They will still be able to buy their insurance from you," Clinton said.

He also defended his proposed tobacco tax increase as "a fair and reasonable way" to help pay for health care reform but promised to be sensitive to the economic impact on tobacco states like North Carolina.

The town halls anchor in yet another White House effort to focus public attention on Clinton's domestic agenda — particularly crime and health care as Congress prepares to return from an Easter recess and take up both issues.

In addition to the questioners in Charlotte, Clinton took questions from studio audiences at affiliated stations in Virginia, Tennessee and Texas.

Earlier, speaking to reporters, Clinton acknowledged support for his health plan has ebbed and flowed in the polls. He attributed most of the slips to attacks by critics or a diversion of White House atten-

tion to other issues.

"What I'm trying to do is get out here and highlight these real world experiences of the doctors and nurses and all the health care providers here so that we can focus the attention of the American people and the Congress on solutions to the real problems and not the rhetorical problems," the president told reporters.

With Congress due back next week and health care before several committees, Clinton offered this optimistic status report: "I think we are winning it again, and we are getting real movement in Congress."

Responding to voter confusion shown in polls, Clinton has simplified his presentation, relying frequently on charts to promote the major goals of his program — and rebut the major criticisms.

He said it would eliminate such practices as imposing lifetime limits on policies but keep the industry financially viable because insurers would get more premiums if everyone were insured.

Parents charged with endangering kids

ROCHESTER, N.Y. (AP) — The parents of nine children found crouched in a house reeking of sewage and heaped with garbage were charged Tuesday with endangering the children's welfare.

The children, ages 10 months to 14 years, were placed in protective custody Monday night after police and social workers forced their way into the two-story, wooden-frame house on the city's southwest side.

It was unclear how long the children were left alone, but police Investigator Dale Feor said they were alone for "long periods of time quite frequently."

Feor said the toilet emptied directly into the basement and that the house's seven rooms were

so full of junk that the children were hard to find.

In some corners, dirty clothing was piled 5 feet high, and the basement floor was awash "with 5 inches of fecal matter," he said. All the children needed a bath and some had bug bites. The only food in the house was a can of tuna.

John Person, 53, and Christine Conner, 44, were arraigned on nine counts of endangering the welfare of a child. They were released on their own recognizance. A pretrial hearing was set for April 21. Feor said authorities went to the house after getting an anonymous tip.

According to court documents, the couple left their children in the care of the eldest, a 14-year-old girl.

Actor Snipes led police on high speed chase

JUPITER, Fla. (AP) — Wesley Snipes sped by a state trooper and led him on a 120-mph chase before he lost control of his motorcycle and was thrown from it, authorities said Tuesday. The actor wasn't seriously hurt.

Snipes refused medical treatment and was cited at the scene for reckless driving, said Florida Highway Patrol Lt. Sherian Staley.

The chase began Monday night, authorities said, after Snipes sped between Trooper Steve Walker's marked patrol car and another motorist on the two-lane southbound side of the Florida Turnpike.

The pursuit continued for 30 miles, ending as Snipes tried to exit the highway at the Jupiter offramp. He crashed when his motorcycle and the front of the patrol car bumped, Staley said.

Authorities didn't know how fast Snipes was traveling when he was thrown. He suffered only

minor injuries, Staley said.

The 31-year-old action-adventure star has appeared in such films as "Demolition Man" and "Rising Sun." He is in Florida filming "Drop Zone," in which he plays a federal marshal who infiltrates a band of skydivers while tracking a killer.

Snipes had another brush with the law during a motorcycle mishap last August. A bystander spotted a 9mm semiautomatic pistol under Snipes' jacket when his motorcycle overturned in Los Angeles.

Snipes pleaded no contest to carrying a loaded weapon. He was placed on two years' unsupervised probation and fined \$2,700.

Snipes is licensed to own and carry a gun in his home state of Florida and had registered the gun in California, but lacked the required special permit to carry a concealed weapon in Los Angeles.

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