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AP Photo

President at town meeting

President Clinton holds a televised town meeting concerning health care in Tampa, Fla., Thursday. His health care program was unveiled Wednesday before a joint session of Congress and this trip to Florida was his first public test for reactions.

Clinton goes face-to-face with public on health care

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — The self-employed painter swallowed deeply, stepped to the microphone and told President Clinton his plight: No insurance, $186,000 in medical bills and a sick daughter who needs more brain surgery.

"I don't know what to do," Joe Rossiter Jr. said, wiping tears from his eyes. "I can't get any help and there's no insurance in the world that will cover her now until she is 100 percent cured. There just ain't enough money to pay all of these medical bills."

Clinton responded softly: "I don't think there can be a better case for changing the current system."

The president came face-to-face with Americans' hopes and fears about health-care reform Thursday night and doled out soothing assurances that people with problems ranging from AIDS to Alzheimer's disease would be better off under his plan.

The intensely personal nature of the health-care debate was evident as Clinton fielded questions from an audience of 1,000 at a prime-time "town hall" meeting on ABC moderated by Ted Koppel.

HEALTH

Clinton, sitting on a stool alongside Koppel in the Tampa Performing Arts Center, took questions from the audience and from panelists assembled by the network in Chicago, Los Angeles and Boston. The local audience was selected by the network from area residents, many with direct links to the health care system.

Everyone wanted to know how it would affect them personally.

To Rossiter, Clinton explained that under his plan, self-employed people would be able to buy more affordable insurance and 100 percent of their premiums would be deductible, compared with a 25 percent deduction under current tax law.

As for Rossiter's plight, Clinton regretfully told the man: "I wish I had an answer for you right now. I don't." Later in the show, Clinton announced the hospital that treated Rossiter's daughter had promised, "We took care of her before and we'll take care of her again."

Clinton's visit to Tampa was his first trip outside Washington to promote his wide-ranging plan to overhaul the nation's health care system and guarantee coverage to all Americans by the end of 1997.

There is broad agreement that the nation's health-care system needs reform, but little consensus on how best to fix it.

The White House strategy in pushing Clinton's plan is to stress the broad-brush benefits of secure and affordable care. But Clinton plunged right into the intricacies of the plan as Tampa-area residents questioned him for two hours Thursday about how the plan would affect them personally, at times backing up to correct himself on specific details.

Over and over, he assured members of the audience they would come out ahead. Finally, a skeptical Koppel asked Clinton, "Everybody's going to be better off?"

"No, not everybody," Clinton allowed.

Single, healthy workers, people with cheap, limited coverage and people who now pay nothing all are likely to pay more, Clinton said.

Woman says she endured years of abuse before striking back

MANASSAS, Va. (AP) — A woman who cut off her husband's penis says she was driven to it by abuse, but the final decision was on impulse while she was in the kitchen getting a drink of water after having been forced to have sex.

"I was crying, and I just wanted to get a glass of water and I just turned, I was drinking the water and the first thing I saw was the knife," Lorena Bobbitt, 24, told ABC's "20/20" in her first interview since the incident, which took place in June at the couple's home in Manassas, Va.

The interview was to be shown tonight.

She said she had endured years of sexual and physical abuse before striking back, and sometimes feared he would kill her.

"He would be on top of me and he would use his two thumbs to actually choke me, and every time he did that he hit me," she said.

"It felt like there's no air any more. I kind of feel like I was going to pass out, and everything was white. He choked me again and that's how he forced me into sex."

Bobbitt, faces trial on a malicious wounding charge stemming from the incident, to which she has admitted her involvement.

Her husband of four years, John Wayne Bobbitt, 26, has been charged with marital sexual assault — a charge he denies.

The incident grabbed international headlines and provoked a media debate on relations between the sexes.

PEOPLE

In the "20/20" interview, Mrs. Bobbitt described a pattern of fights and beatings that she said drove her to the mutilation.

"He told me that that kind of sexual, sex, forced sex excited him, and I would just cry."

She settled in the United States in 1987, met John Bobbitt and married him in 1989. Troubles began almost immediately, she said. On at least one occasion, he was arrested and charged with assault and battery for hitting his wife in the face. They reunited in September 1992 after one year's separation.

The Ecuadoran-born Bobbitt said that after she told her husband she was pregnant he said she would not be a good mother and suggested she get an abortion, which she reluctantly did.

She said she felt her husband, a former Marine based at Quantico, Va., used hand-to-hand combat training on her.

John Bobbitt declined to be interviewed for the program, but his attorney, Greg Murphy, said his client absolutely denies abusing her.

"He is not known to be a person who is easy to anger," Murphy said. "There is nothing there other than her saying that this went on."

Lorena Bobbitt said that on the night of June 22, she had packed her bags to leave, but spent the night at the house. She was asleep in bed with her clothes on when her husband and a friend came home after a night out drinking, she said. The friend went to sleep on the living room couch, she said, and John Bobbitt went into the bedroom and forced her to have sex.

Afterwards, "He said, 'I don't care for you,'" she said.

Asked what she was thinking at the time, Lorena Bobbitt said: "Things about the abortion. That I am not going to be a good mother. So many things. He torturing me. When he was beating me up, when he had forced sex with me. Everything, it just came so fast."

Then she went back into the bedroom with the knife, lifted the sheets back and cut his penis completely off, she said.

WORLD WAR II
FIFTY YEARS AGO TODAY

SEPT. 24
1 • 9 • 4 • 3

German soldiers begin evacuating Smolensk, a key crossroads city on the central Soviet front; Red Army troops retake Borispol just east of Kiev on the southern front. Japanese warplanes attack ships supplying the offensive against Finschafen, New Guinea, but Australian forces cross the Burris River and capture the town's airfield.

Source: "2194 Days of War," W. H. Smith Publishers Inc.; "World Almanac Book of World War II," Shaon Books Corp., 1981

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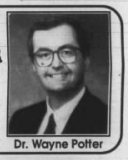

Dr. Wayne Potter

Mortgage rates slightly lower

WASHINGTON (AP) — Interest rates on 30-year, fixed-rate mortgages fell slightly this week, remaining below 7 percent for the fifth consecutive week, the Federal Home Loan Mortgage Corp. said Thursday.

This week's average was 6.95 percent, down from 6.96 percent the previous week but above the 25-year low of 6.82 percent two weeks ago.

The rate started 1993 at 8.07 percent and declined for most of the year, except briefly during the spring when investors became temporarily nervous about inflation.

On one-year adjustable rate mortgages, lenders were asking an average initial rate of 4.34 percent, down from 4.36 percent last week.

Fifteen-year mortgages, an increasingly popular option for those refinancing mortgages, averaged 6.47 percent this week, down from 6.49 percent last week.

The rates do not include add-on fees known as points.

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