The sad truth is that there is no surplus in our national budget. For the two presidential candidates to play that card is wholeheartedly deceitful. We have a national deficit that continues to grow. In 1998 it amounted to $5. 53 trillion dollars (up $113 billion from 1997)! The surplus exists only, for the time being, in the Social Security Trust Fund. Social Security is exactly what it is labeled—a trust fund—and should not be used, under any circumstances, for anything other than its designate purpose—the paying of benefits to our elderly and disabled. The Social Security Trust Fund is already in jeopardy relative to future benefits because so many Baby Boomers will be retiring in the next twenty years and entitled to their share of what they have paid into Social Security throughout their careers. The prediction is that there will not be enough to cover the payout because the Boomers will outnumber the dollars being collected. The public can learn the truth about the country's indebtedness by visiting www.publicdebt.treas.gov, where the Bureau of Public Debt (a subsidiary of the Bureau of National Debt, which is a department of the US Treasury Department) files a monthly statement on the country's true deficit.

To treat the present Social Security surplus as an overall budget surplus is pure smoke-and-mirrors posturing, a campaign tactic to get elected—so don't be fooled. The Unified Budget Act allowed the trust funds to be commingled with the general fund, and this is where the truth can be scrambled. Whether you prefer Bush's or Gore's proposed tax plan, both will eventually bankrupt Social Security much faster than it would on its own. While the candidates are clearly obtuse, it is their children who will suffer the consequences, as will those of us who are in our 40s or younger. The Boomers and Gen-Xers have been paying into Social Security for an average of at least twenty years and, at this rate of depletion, will not see a nickel of their contributions in the form of retirement benefits. Meanwhile, we are paying the highest rates in the history of the fund to support those who are currently entitled to receive benefits. And it (FICA) will only continue to rise.

The even greater travesty is that the US Government has run amok in terms of uncontrolled spending—so much so, it is incapable of adequately accounting for much of the budget expenditures. The General Accounting Office (GAO), which oversees all the government budget/accounting operations, is reporting discrepancies so large and vast that they don't believe they will ever straighten it out. The waste is beyond comprehension even for the government's own accounting body. Between corruption, ignorance, inept standards, and apathy, the American taxpayer is being repeatedly robbed with no end in sight. Nothing short of swift and radical reform will stop this thievery. Because of sovereign immunity laws, the perpetrators go unpunished. The GAO has conclusive, irrefutable evidence of the inaccuracies, the discrepancies, and the deliberate misreporting and larcenies that have been occurring for decades, but there are no consequences, let alone remedies.

For each one of us who pays their 30-40-50 percent in taxes every year, this is no longer tolerable. The current politicians and bureaucrats are the ones ultimately responsible because they allow it to continue. The government's wasteful spending is beyond repair and will only get worse. This is evidenced by the pathetic lack of dialogue from the candidates on these monumental spending/reporting issues. Not only are the candidates complacent, but also the mainstream press is equally disinterested. This is due in large part to the mainstream press' collective efforts to dumb down America, made more obvious by its inability to address

substantive issues like unrestrained, wasteful spending because it would require reporters who could think beyond discussions of polls, election tactics and ad campaigns.

The only politician with hard issues even remotely on his radar screen is Ralph Nader. While Nader doesn’t expect to be elected, he is giving Americans an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the current political system, including corporate welfare—government being run by special interests and the exorbitant expenditures that benefit a select few, bought and paid for with our tax dollars. If Nader exceeds 5% in the popular vote, his third party (the Green Party) will be allowed at the table during the next national elections in four years. And studies show that a vote for Nader is not a vote for Gore or Bush because Nader has rallied those who would not necessarily vote for either candidate. He appeals to those citizens who are discouraged, disheartened, and disenfranchised, but who see hope in his rhetoric and ideas—new, meaningful strategies for the millennium that address real problems, not just campaign tactics.

Nothing is going to change unless the public demands it. We must scrutinize our national budget (a novel idea, but consider that a significant portion of our own, personal budgets go to support it), and get involved on a much more vigilant level if we are ever going to require a higher standard and hold the elected body accountable.

Final Note: I can't let this election go by without reminding Scott County residents of the negative impact, both asthetically and economically, that Pat Gibb's mayoral legacy has provided us via a renewed long term lease for a cement plant squarely on the riverbanks in the middle of our lovely rivertown of Davenport. Gibbs is running for state senate and this is only one example of the kind of vision and leadership Iowans can expect from Mr. Gibbs if he is elected.