[redacted]
Rochester, MN. 55902
[redacted]
July 10, 1996

To: Brian Lamb
C-SPAN
400 North Capitol St. NW
Suite 650
Washington DC 20001

Dear Mr. Lamb,

As a frequent watcher of C-SPAN, I want to bring out that in our little city of Rochester, Minnesota (voted number three in Money Magazine this year) we have a TCI cable company that does public interest programming. Recently, they taped an hour and a half program on a different look at Federal Budgeting. The program was of me, explaining what I had learned about the basics of that process by watching C-SPAN and doing some additional research.

Those who actually take the time to watch this program will be the best educated in the country on the "Smoke and Mirrors" so often alluded to but never explained on television.

Have you ever re-broadcast any of the programming developed at the small stations around the country that make up the cable network? Sort of a TV equivalent of what John Naisbitt did in looking at what goes on in the little towns.

I know you do a lot of programming of seminars done by organizations. I am not an organization, just a person wanting to share what he has learned. If you are interested, or just curious, I will send you an unedited tape of the program.

[redacted]

Postscript: Yesterday, you experimented with putting two callers on at the same time. It was fascinating how much these people knew about the issues they were interested in when they were given the extra time to expand. You have the best programming, no question about that. However, there are only so many people in the professional Washington press and political scene. As a result, the content of your programs does get to be repetition of much the same content. Letting the callers interact was refreshing.

S-play

POST-BULLETIN, ROCHESTER, MN.

Tuesday, July 2, 1996

Bill Plummer is a retired engineer and manager for IBM. He has made an extensive study of issues related to the federal budget deficit.

Speaking Out

National budget can be daunting

Once again we are bombarded with news out out of Washington on budget issues like the Balanced Budget Amendment, the size of the deficit, Medicare going broke in 2001, Social Security going broke in 2028, and so on.

Are you confused by the conflicting stories? It is difficult to sift through all the words and charts to get at the truth.

Take this little test to check out your skill, don't be cynical and use your best judgment.

True or false:

1. The national debt is about $5.2 trillion.
2. If there is a $150 billion deficit this year, the national debt will go up $150 billion.
3. When the budget is balanced, the national debt will stop going up.
4. If we would reduce the growth of Social Security payments, such as by reducing the cost of living adjustment (COLA), this would slow down the growth of the national debt.
5. If we adopt the Balanced Budget Amendment, it will prevent any increase in the national debt unless Congress votes by a majority of 60 percent to allow it to go up.
6. The national debt is the sum of all the deficits from all previous years.
7. Entitlements are a major cause of the growth of the national debt, especially Social Security and Medicare A (which is going broke in year 2001).
8. The interest we pay on the national debt is about $230 billion this year.

Let's see how you did. Question No. 1 is almost true. Actually, this is the size of the gross federal debt; there is really no "official" thing named the "national debt." So we will count it as true.

Question No. 7 is a half-truth, which is about as close to a "truth" as you ever get out of Washington. There are many entitlements. Some affect the size of the national debt, some do not. The one you hear most about, Social Security, has not added a single dollar to the national debt.

The rest of the questions are all false.

Do not be discouraged if you did not do too well. Normally, the media do not bother to explain the basics when they discuss the issues; I guess they think we learned them in grade school. But if we do not learn the basics, we do not understand the issues very well.

It is like expecting you to balance your checkbook before teaching you how to add and subtract. Just imagine having to rely on your bank, or the reporters, or some bureaucrat to balance your checkbook! Some, maybe most, would be completely honest and accurate. Some would make honest errors, some might make errors to their own advantage. Learning to add and subtract is a much better idea than relying on others.

If you are interested in learning the whole truth about these and some other parts of the federal budget, a locally produced TV program will try to help you do that by going over some of the basics. The program runs about an hour and a half, but will be run several times so if you get tired, you can catch it again later. Might be a good idea to have a pencil and paper handy.

Here is the schedule, all on cable Channel 10: Sunday, July 7, 1 p.m.; Tuesday, July 9, 7:30 p.m.; Thursday, July 11, 7:30 p.m.; Saturday, July 13, 11 a.m.; and Thursday, July 18, 8 p.m.

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