opinion

Americans cannot give up their responsibility

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to lead us.

Specifically, the private life of a public official should not be the only issue on the political agenda. Otherwise, the voters become imbalanced and impaired. As voters, we have to work to balance the issue of personal character with a candidate's past performance and experience in policy-making, and a candidate's stand on the national issues.

It's possible that we have lost interest in national issues because we as Americans feel we do not have the power to change national policy. Whether it is in the Persian Gulf, in Central America, or here at home, we, the people of this nation, feel powerless to affect and influence events. We see ourselves as passive bystanders to the course of American history.

By voting for Ronald Reagan in 1980 and 1984, we hoped to find a political leader we could trust, a man who would stand up for America, that he would not negotiate with terrorists. With another administration was selling arms to Iran in order to influence its government. The Reagan administration had then funded, without the American people's knowledge, the contra's war in Central America. The president betrayed the people's trust. With one face, he told them he would stand up for America, that he would not negotiate with terrorists. With another face, he sold arms to one of the country's worst enemies. And he did this behind the backs of the American people and our Congress.

Maybe this is political secrecy makes us believe we have no input into policy. Finding ourselves excluded from the decision-making process, we've decided to abdicate our responsibility for America's troubles.

We cannot afford to do so. The world is getting smaller day by day. The Persian Gulf may be half a world away, but the blood shed there could profoundly affect Americans' lives — it could one day be the blood of our sons and daughters. In the gulf, the United States today finds itself in a dangerous serve-and-volley with Iran. America responds to Iranian attacks, provoking Iranian retaliation, forcing America to respond in kind. The bloody exchange never seems to end and it could lead to full-fledged war. Then where will the Persian Gulf be?

The fiscal policies our government pursues will also affect the world of our children. The nearly $3 trillion national debt must be paid by someone. If we refuse to do what is needed to bring down the national debt, the next generation will have to pay. Not only does the federal deficit build up the national debt, it also plays a role in skyrocketing interest rates, making it harder for firms and individuals to invest in equipment, education, and research. It will be easy to bring down the deficit; it will require sacrifice and pain. But if we are not willing to shoulder the responsibility, who will?

Similarly, the poor and homeless are the problem of every American. The nation should not remain oblivious to an underclass that goes hungry and lacks decent housing and education. If we do nothing today, the ranks of the suffering will increase. The nation's ability to grow will be hindered by expensive welfare programs and the absence of a large skilled labor force. Its future will be plagued by the social problems — drug addiction and crime — that poverty and lack of education foster.

In 1836, Nathaniel Hawthorne wrote a short story in which a church minister veiled his face because he couldn't bear to see others see his weaknesses, his flaws. In doing so, he isolated himself from his loved ones and lived a lonely life. Hawthorne was trying to warn us that the ultimate tragedy of the human condition is the refusal to accept the fact that we are human, that we all have some good and bad in ourselves. We've got to understand that the men and women who will lead this country are human beings, with personal faults and weaknesses.

But with humanity also comes compassion and the resolve to question the unjust. If we see it as our responsibility to do what we can to redress the wrongs, we will have found the moral resolve to correct the abuses.

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