

# STRENGTHEN SOCIAL SECURITY

**...don't cut it.**

August 26, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama  
The White House  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the 125 organizations in the [Strengthen Social Security Campaign](#), which have more than 50 million members, we are writing to urge you to remove former Senator Alan Simpson from his position as co-chair of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform.

You have charged the Fiscal Commission with proposing “recommendations that meaningfully improve the long-run fiscal outlook, including changes to address the growth of entitlement spending,” such as Social Security. The Strengthen Social Security Campaign believes Social Security should not be under consideration by the Fiscal Commission. Social Security has a \$2.5 trillion surplus and by law it cannot contribute to the deficit. A commission debating this program's future – and whose recommendations would be put on a fast-track, up-or-down-vote in Congress – should not be comprised of and staffed by generalized budget experts but rather individuals whose primary career focus has been Social Security. As has always been the case, Social Security legislation should go through the regular order, allowing for full review by congressional committees that have jurisdiction and related expertise and for the public and other experts to offer their views.

While we may disagree with the scope of the Fiscal Commission's work, we believe there should be no disagreement about the need for a co-chairman of the Fiscal Commission to show objectivity and sensitivity in order to fairly debate the future of America's arguably most successful and most important government program.

Clearly, Senator Simpson has not exhibited those characteristics with respect to Social Security over the years. The latest example was an email communication he had with the Executive Director of the Older Women's League, a leading organization working to protect the economic security of older women:

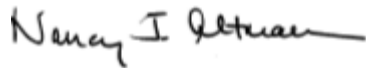
“And yes, I've made some plenty smart cracks about people on Social Security who milk it to the last degree. You know 'em too. It's the same with any system in America. We've reached a point now where it's like a milk cow with 310 million tits! Call when you get honest work! ”

Clearly, Sen. Simpson thinks that most or all of the nearly 54 million Social Security beneficiaries – 57 percent of whom are women, 8.5 million of whom are severely disabled, 4.1 million of whom are children – are “milking the system.” Nothing could be further from the truth.

Social Security provides a modest benefit of less than \$14,000 a year for retirees, which workers earn with their hard work and contributions to the system. That is less than the minimum wage. Annual benefits are even less for the spouses of deceased workers, severely disabled workers and dependent children, many of whose parents have passed away. On average, Social Security replaces less than 40 percent of the typical worker’s wage. Yet it lifts 19 million Americans out of poverty and is the foundation of many Americans ability to survive, and for millions of others to live out their sunset years in modest comfort with some dignity and respect.

Given the critical importance of this program and the harsh criticism of the program and its beneficiaries that Sen. Simpson has expressed over the years, on behalf of the entire Strengthen Social Security Campaign we respectfully request that he be removed from the Fiscal Commission.

Sincerely,



Nancy Altman  
Co-chair



Eric Kingson  
Co-chair