Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

August 25, 2010

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

There is no question that the United States faces serious long-term fiscal challenges that require thoughtful and difficult solutions. Running a $13 trillion national debt and a record-breaking federal deficit is clearly not sustainable in the years and decades ahead and we look forward to working with you to address this issue.

While there are honest differences of opinion as to how best to tackle this growing problem, we should all be in agreement that everyone working in this area – especially someone in as important a position as the co-chair of your National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform – has a responsibility to be as serious, deliberate, and sober as the challenges we face.

Sadly, a recent e-mail sent by former Senator Alan Simpson, the current co-chair of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform, does not demonstrate a commitment to addressing the serious challenges that our country faces. According to this e-mail sent to the executive director of the Older Women's League (OWL), former Senator Simpson wrote: "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!"

Co-Chairman Simpson's comments are highly insulting to the tens of millions of senior citizens, persons with disabilities, widows and orphans who have contributed into this highly-successful program and who now utilize it. Further, this demeaning attitude toward Social Security is consistent with factually incorrect statements made by Senator Simpson in the past which show a complete misunderstanding of the true financial condition of Social Security.

Let's be clear: Social Security is not going bankrupt, nor has it contributed one dime to the federal deficit. For 75 years, through good times and bad, Social Security has paid out every benefit owed to every eligible American and will continue to pay 100 percent of those benefits through 2037, according to the Social Security Board of Trustees, and until 2039, according to

the Congressional Budget Office. In fact, the Social Security Trust Fund today has a $2.5 trillion surplus which is projected to grow to more than $4 trillion by the year 2023.

The statement by Senator Simpson that Social Security is "like a milk cow with 310 million tits" is really quite beyond comprehension. Today, Social Security provides the majority of income for two-thirds of the nation's elderly and for one-third it provides nearly all their income. Without it, millions of Americans would be living in abject poverty as was the case before the creation of Social Security. It is false and demeaning to say that these people, the vast majority of whom have worked their entire lives and contributed into the Social Security system, are somehow "milking" the system.

Despite the many years of distinguished public service former Senator Simpson has dedicated to this country, his recent e-mail indicates that it is no longer appropriate for him to serve on the bi-partisan deficit reduction commission. Therefore, in order for your commission's recommendations to have credibility with Congress, we respectfully urge you to remove Senator Simpson from the commission.

Sincerely,

Bernard Sanders
United States Senator

Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress