

MSNBC Countdown With Keith Olbermann

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Segment on Social Security & President Obama's Debt Commission & Members of the Commission

"...OLBERMANN: Former U.S. Senator Alan Simpson is apologizing tonight for what he said about—well, about you.

On our fourth story tonight, before we get to the outrage of what he said, though, the context matters on this one. Simpson was tapped by President Obama as the Republican co-chair of a panel charged with figuring out how to reduce America's national debt and spending.

Despite the fact that defense spending, including at least one war of choice and the Bush tax cuts account for a massive chunk of the deficit and Social Security accounts for none of it, Simpson is on record saying the panel will target spending that benefits the sick, the needy and the old, including Social Security, even though Social Security on track to remain fully solvent for decades.

Other points to keep in mind: The average senior citizen over 65 lives on less than \$30,000 a year. The average Social Security beneficiary gets \$13,900 a year. Because women have been paid less for equal work in this country, they get less in benefits. Female beneficiaries are getting only about \$11,000 a year.

One quarter of black older women live in poverty now. Forty-five percent of older women who live alone live in poverty now.

And while the panel talks about raising the retirement rate because American life expectancy is longer, in fact, poor minority women have recently seen decreases in life expectancy—meaning raising the retirement age to 70, as some have suggested, would not toss 1.5 million people into poverty, but would force some minority working poor to work until they drop.

So, that's the context—social safety net that's not in trouble and not worsening our debt, a literal lifeline for millions of Americans, especially poor Americans, especially poor female Americans, especially poor female minority Americans.

So, with that context, what did former Senator Simpson say when a blogger criticized him for calling those who oppose Social Security cuts, quote, "pink panthers"?

Here's his email to her: "If you have better suggestions about how to stabilize Social Security instead of just babbling into the vapors, let me know, and yes, I've made some plenty funny 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."

Still quoting, "We've reached a point now where it's like a milk cow with 310 million"—you can see the word for yourself. Concluding, quote, "Call us when you get honest work."

Who was the blogger Simpson wrote that to? The executive director of the National Older Women's League that he told to, quote, "get honest work" and to whom he referenced a slang word for women's breasts.

Simpson today apologized, but not before he got a stinging rebuke from the American Association of Retired Persons. Calls for President Obama to remove Simpson coming from Senator Bernie Sanders and Pete DeFazio, the National Organization for Women, the National Council of Women's Organizations, and surprisingly enough, the National Older Women's League.

All of them well aware of not only of Simpson's hostility towards Social Security and benefits for the sick, old and needy, but also Simpson's track record of nasty rhetoric—including when questioned by a Social Security advocate—calling beneficiaries, quote, "lesser people."

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ALAN SIMPSON, FORMER U.S.SENATOR: We're really working on solvency.

The key is solvency.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: And what about adequacy? Are you focusing on adequacy as well?

SIMPSON: Sure. We have to take care of the grassroots. (INAUDIBLE)
What are you doing? Where do you come up with the crap you come up with?

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Well, I just want—that's what I wanted to ask you.

(CROSSTALK)

SIMPSON: Give it to you before you ask it.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: Yes.

SIMPSON: We're trying to take care of the lesser people in society. We always have. And do that in a way without getting in all the flash words that you like to dig up, like cutting Social Security which is (EXPLETIVE DELETED). We're not cutting anything. We're not cutting anything.

UNIDENTIFIED MALE: OK.

SIMPSON: We're trying to make it solvent.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

OLBERMANN: Calling for Alan Simpson's departure tonight, Eric Kingson, co-chair of the Strength and Social Security Campaign, co-director of Social Security Works and professor of social work at Syracuse University. He joins us now.

Thanks for your time tonight, sir.

ERIC KINGSON, STRENGTHENSOCIALSECURITY.ORG: Thank you. Glad to be here.

OLBERMANN: Three hundred and ten million—OK. I'm pretty sure that's just about the population of the United States. So, in that lurid remark, what is Senator Simpson saying about us?

KINGSON: Well, frankly, I think it says a lot more about Senator Simpson than it says about the 310 million of our fellow citizens. It says the senator doesn't respect us. It doesn't—he doesn't respect that Americans have earned the right to Social Security benefits, have worked hard to perpetuate it for themselves and their families. He doesn't care particularly that there are that every one of our children is protected against loss of a parent by Social Security and that it's the fundamental retirement security program for the country.

It's no wonder that Senator Simpson is leading the charge to cut Social Security.

OLBERMANN: But he claims he's trying to reduce our debt by saving a program which he does not clearly want to save. By the way, doesn't need saving. And if you somehow, quote, "saved it," it would not reduce the debt. Can you help me out on the logic behind this?

KINGSON: Oh, beats me, Keith. I'm not sure I can help you out.

I can say this: It's perfectly consistent with some of the foolish comments that have been coming out, or some of the silliness that in the name of protecting our grandchildren, Mr. Simpson and Mr. Bowles, the other co-chair, and many others

in Washington who want to cut Social Security, in the name of protecting our grandchildren, they want to eviscerate benefits for our grandchildren.

I think they got this mixed up. They're really trying to protect their grandchildren and the grandchildren of Wall Street bankers.

OLBERMANN: If the fix is in on this panel, why not leave Simpson in as the co-chair because it's obvious to everyone as you implied there, essentially that this recommendations that they will—the recommendations they'll come out with are corrupted by their own viewpoint walking in?

KINGSON: Well, interesting point. Two things need to change on the commission: Mr. Simpson needs to be removed and Social Security needs to be removed from the discussion about the deficit. Social Security does not contribute a penny, not a penny, to the nation's long-term deficit debt.

And there is absolutely no reason for an unrepresentative body which - of people who have fundamentally stated their interest, many of whom have stated their interest, including their co-chairs, even before the commission began. They said they wanted to cut the American people's Social Security. It had to be done. Even though it's—we are not dealing with a significant financing problem and it has nothing to do with the federal deficit.

OLBERMANN: Eric Kingson, professor of social work at Syracuse University in the wake of the Simpson imbroglio—great thanks for your time tonight.

KINGSON: Thank you.

End of Segment on Social Security & President Obama Debt Commission.

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