

## STATEMENT

before the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform

Susan Scanlan  
Chair, National Council of Women's Organizations

June 30, 2010

Thank you, Senator Simpson and Mr. Bowles, for inviting me to testify today.

As chair of the National Council of Women's Organizations, I speak for the 12 million



American women who are part of this nonpartisan coalition. For 25 years, our 240 member organizations have collaborated through substantive policy work and grass roots activism to address issues of concern to women like work/family balance, economic equity, education, fair pay,

corporate accountability, and women's health.

Just like their fathers, husbands, sons, and brothers, U.S. women believe that bringing the federal budget back in line is serious and necessary business. Our children and grandchildren should not be expected to bear the burden of fiscal irresponsibility that put us in this position. I commend the the two of you for taking on this tremendously difficult assignment and ardently hope for your success.

It is important that you listen to those of us who did not cause but are struggling through this Great Recession. Unlike the bankers and financiers of Wall Street who brought us to the brink of economic calamity, your average woman on the street has not received a bailout. We're still working at low wage jobs, more than half of which offer no paid vacation, retirement, or sick leave let alone childcare or transportation assistance. Right now, the nurses, teachers, secretaries, grocery store clerks, data processors, hair stylists, and waitresses whom I represent are grateful to have a job, even if they receive

only 77-cents for every dollar their male counterparts earn. But that's a battle being waged on another front.

What I ask you to understand is that such economic "ghettoization" has life-long consequences as wives and women workers age. It is moms who drop out of the workforce to nurse aging parents or to raise children. How sad that building America's future is not just unrewarded but penalized in our nation's economy!

When retirement comes around, it's easy to explain why women in this country have little to no savings, pensions are few and far between, and they experience increasing poverty due to death of or divorce from a husband. Right now nearly half of women 65 and older living alone are poor. And this situation is even more grim for women of color and women with disabilities.

We all recognize the bottom line that holds these lives together. It's Social Security. A contract American workers have made with their government to insure at least a minimal standard of living when they grow too old or too sick to stay on the job.

It would be an understatement to say that my membership is distressed by talk of balancing the budget via cuts to Social Security. Let's review the bidding on such proposals. Social Security has not contributed one red cent to the deficit. By borrowing from the Trust, the government was able to issue bonds to build bridges, finance worthy social programs, and yes, wage wars.

In 1983, the Dole Commission dealt with the approach of the *pig-in-the-python* Baby Boomers so that the system will be solvent for nearly 30 years. The so-called Social Security crisis has been manufactured by those who want to get their hands on this vast pot of money or to create some sort of intergenerational warfare.

Suggestions about cutting benefits or raising the retirement age represent nothing less than the country's breaking its word with its most vulnerable citizens. Truly, America is better than that.

Let's do the math: while the average Social Security benefit is \$13,800, older women receive \$2,000 less or \$11,800—only about 56% of what they need to meet basic needs—rent, food, medicine. You can't cut into a benefit that already verges on the official poverty line.

Granted, well-educated, higher income white men – a U.S. Senator, for example -- are living longer and healthier and might be able to continue working into their 70s. This does not hold true for low income women – and men – with physically demanding jobs in a factory, a hospital, or a fast food restaurant. Try telling grandma that she can stand on her feet for a few more years—if her employers are even willing to keep her on.

I know that you are looking out for our grandchildren. So I'm here today speaking for today's and tomorrow's grandmas. The 12 million members of the National Council of Women's Organizations are ready, willing, and able to work with you to defeat the deficit. Give us a fair plan that eliminates the Bush tax cuts, ends two unfunded wars, and spreads the sacrifice to those who can afford it. Then we'll roll up our sleeves to work with you.

But we will stand as one against any efforts to renege on this enduring and essential social contract by balancing the budget on our backs.

Again, I am grateful to you both for allowing me to speak my piece.