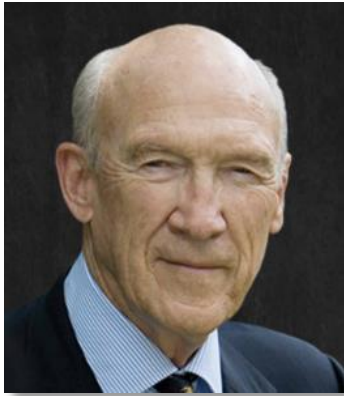


Remembering Alan K. Simpson: Lawyer and former member of the United States Senate



By David Isenberg

On 14 March 2025, Al Simpson died at age 93 in Cody, Wyoming. He will long be remembered as a member of the Republican Party who served as a US Senator from 1979 to 1997, as Republican Whip in the US Senate from 1985 to 1995, as Republican Majority Whip from 1985 to 1987, and Republican Minority Whip from 1987 to 1995. Most of all, he will be remembered for advocating bipartisan solutions and for a moderate view of Conservatism.

Robert Reich wrote a nice remembrance for his old friend:

<https://robertreich.substack.com/p/in-loving-memory-of-my-very-dear>

I really liked this paragraph:

He made some errors, but I admired his sincerity and passion for democracy. Alan wasn't in anyone's pocket, and he bemoaned the role of big money in politics. "If this crap continues," he told me one day when we were doing "The Long and the Short of It," "in a few years, some wealthy bozo is gonna buy the whole damn presidency. It's ludicrous."

This reminded me of my own meeting with Al Simpson which I want to share with you.

I feel sad, because in 2016 I was commissioned by a group (whose name shall remain undisclosed) in DC to write a paper on the impact of money in politics on national security. I had the chance to interview various people, including a former Secretary of Defense, a former CIA director, a former House Foreign Affairs Committee chairman, and a former governor, among others. They all had interesting and informative things to say. But Simpson was, hands down, the most fun.

I flew out to Cody Wyoming to interview him at his home. And if you have never flown to Cody, making the final approach is a bit like flying over the surface of the moon. He was a very personable, gregarious, innately decent (no BS), a charming guy, and not at all pretentious. Since we were both veterans, and he had formerly chaired the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, we had some fun talking about the VA and veterans' issues.

When the interview was over, he insisted on driving me to the local museum called Center of the West, <https://centerofthewest.org/>, which has an amazing firearms collection. He served as a board member there and made sure I had free admission.

The next day I returned to his home because I thought I had left something there and while there his wife asked if I could chase a family of deer away from her garden where they were feeding, which I happily did. And then their daughter drove me back to my motel. Her kid was on a soccer team, so I got to reminisce about the time I was on a team back in high school, when soccer was still regarded as a suspect Commie pinko sport.

The group that commissioned the paper I wrote never published it. I was never told why.

But given the ongoing political chaos currently unfolding in America, it strikes me that what Senator Simpson said in that interview long ago is particularly relevant today – and more than a little prophetic. I have deleted just one word – to delete the identity of the group that hired me. I encourage you to read it in its entirety. The occasional grammatical error in the text below was made by the transcriber.

Remembering Alan K. Simpson: Lawyer and former member of the United States Senate

THE INTERVIEW:

David Isenberg: Okay, and this is my back up here. Okay, and finally, I'll start this. Okay.

Alan Simpson: If you need any more electric support, we can move around.

David Isenberg: This is fine, this is perfect.

Alan Simpson: I don't care [inaudible 00:00:35].

David Isenberg: No, this is just so the microphone will hear you better.

Alan Simpson: Yeah, but I don't want to watch myself.

David Isenberg: All right.

Alan Simpson: Never do. Never had a speech writer, never had a tele-prompter.

David Isenberg: All right, this is an interview centered on Simpson for the National Security Project being done by []. Let me just start off with a big picture question that you don't normally hear national security experts "talk about" which is: Why is a functioning democracy vital to our national security?

Alan Simpson: Why is a functioning democracy vital to our national security? A dysfunctional democracy will kill us, and that's exactly where we're heading with a dysfunctional congress, dysfunctional democracy. It's never more evident than right now, today.

David Isenberg: Do you feel the people that are currently charged, cabinet officials, senior policy advisers, people who were supposed to be formulating national security policy every day actually caring about the state of our democracy?

Alan Simpson: Well, sure, if you've been in America, and many of them have, like you and me, we care about democracy, but you're also frustrated beyond belief because you have a president, any president who can squish you, and just whatever plans you have, the civilian President of the United States can say we're not going to do that. That's very frustrating, but that doesn't mean it dims their patriotism or their willingness to help make things work.

David Isenberg: Do you think that sort of frustration with the process is sort of filtering down to the public at large, and they see that, and they're getting at least as frustrated and even perhaps more disillusioned and unbelieving in the ability of the political process to work.

Alan Simpson: It isn't about defense or anything else. It's just about the whole system. It doesn't matter what it is, and what was it Gates said about the Department of Defense, he said, "Hell, if you can't get along, on five or ten billion bucks."

David Isenberg: Half a trillion.

Alan Simpson: You have a budget now which is headed for 600 and whatever they're playing with now. The game was easy to play. The republicans didn't want to look like they were [inaudible 00:03:08], so they just raised it and shifted over to Pelosi. She got tired of being called a Commie, so she just added 5 billion and sent it back. It doesn't even have anything to do with the reality of what we need.

David Isenberg: Everybody is trying to establish their national security credentials by approving the budget or even pumping more money into it, even if the Pentagon doesn't ask for it.

Remembering Alan K. Simpson: Lawyer and former member of the United States Senate

Alan Simpson: Sure, I mean, all the things that you know, and I know about Eisenhower's statement because they sent me questions, this stuff, I've been looking at it for years. This is madness. When you have a budget that's more than what 10 or 11 countries on earth, including Russia and China combined. When [Burstein 00:03:59] and I did our work in 2010, the defense budget was about 560 or 570, and the defense budget of the top 10 countries on earth, including Russia and China combined was 540 billion. Who's kidding who?

David Isenberg: Yeah. Of course, that's only the Department of Defense budget, and if we factor in everything else going into the overall national security budget from intelligence agencies to the Department of Homeland Security, [inaudible 00:04:31] administration, interest on the debt from past wars, and now we're up over a trillion.

Alan Simpson: Well, don't forget OCO, Overseas Contingency Operations ...

David Isenberg: [crosstalk 00:04:39]

Alan Simpson: With that part of the budget, I mean, let's get serious. It's called, hide the P.

David Isenberg: I'm very glad you brought up Eisenhower's farewell address. I was re-reading it the other day, and everybody focuses of course on the famous paragraph about the acquisition of power in the military industrial complex, but 8 short paragraphs later he has a sentence talking about, I'm quoting here, about "the power of money to influence the scientific technological elite." Although he was focused just on the scientists and technicians doing weapons development, I think his point about the power and money is extremely germane, especially in the environment we find ourselves in today post-Citizens United, which gets us to the central question of this visit which is, how do you assess the impact, negative or neutral or positive the seemingly unlimited amounts of money just washing around in the political process today?

Alan Simpson: That's why I'm involved in this. I wouldn't even be involved. This is corrosive and to the little guy it looks like just graft or corruption. If he's thinking of throwing in 5 bucks for Hillary or 5 bucks for Trump, he's just going to stop in mid-reach of his wallet and say, "Geez, some asshole gave him \$5 million, and they don't even know who it is." If that isn't destroying the feeling for people toward patriotism and democracy, I don't know what is, and everybody's on the take. You got to cough up bucks to get in the room, and that's exactly what it's for, access in the long run.

David Isenberg: I was doing an interview last week with the former director of the Central Intelligence Agency, Porter Goss, he said that he's not so much opposed to the money swirling around in the system for Citizens United if there was complete and utter transparency, which he freely admitted is not the case currently. I think what you just said confirms that there's no transparency, no visibility into this money that we have being contributed by the pact and the lobbyists. Is that a fair summary?

Alan Simpson: Yeah, I was in the state legislature, and I tried to pass disclosure laws, and they said, "Well, this is Wyoming, come on Al. Everybody knows everybody." I said, "Well, they don't have one family that has a trucking branch and a railroad branch and an oil branch. Come on. Give me a break." Who's that. Well, everybody knew who it was. Yeah, you tell me. Show me. Whose money is it? Transparency is the key. I mean if the guy can give \$5 million, who is he, and what does he control? What boards is he on, or she? You have to have disclosure, and you have to have transparency. Without that, you can go in a limit, and then the Supreme Court has got you all messed up with that. Whose money is this?

David Isenberg: Since we don't have that transparency and therefore have no basis for any kind of accountability or oversight on campaign contributions and donations, you would, I assume, consider

Remembering Alan K. Simpson: Lawyer and former member of the United States Senate

that the environment we're in now post Citizens United is [atypical 00:08:16] to any kind of positively functioning democratic process.

Alan Simpson: Well, it'll bring us to our knees. I think it's the worst Supreme Court opinion, and I'm a lawyer. I can think of a lot of them that were bad, but that's the worst. Now you got another one out here, hanging there, about the Governor of Virginia, how far you can go in playing footsies with the people who give you the money. I mean, give me a break. Those are going to make things even tougher.

David Isenberg: Given the situation we find ourselves in today internationally, we're still fighting Al Qaeda and now we have to fight ISIS as well regarding, not to mention lone wolf terrorists, etc., the outlook for any reductions in military and security spending seem dim. In fact, the opposite seems to be the case, that it is going to be more push for more higher levels of spending military and national security wise. Do you think that will do anything to increase our national security or not? Or will it just be enabling various contractors to make a profit?

Alan Simpson: It'll be the usual ping pong between the House and the Senate, especially with the dual majorities, democrat in one and then the republican. They'll just keep bouncing it back and forth. What, are you phrasing it again? Phrase it again.

David Isenberg: Assuming increases in military and national security spending in the future, do you think if we get those that it will actually do anything to further better the national security of the country, keep people safe, or will it just enable companies to get more contracts to make more money?

Alan Simpson: It'll make everybody feel good to do that, but don't forget, you haven't mentioned the one word that's better than money, and it's called jobs. If you meet that and you're a politician, you've missed everything. He or she doesn't give a rat's ass of what happens in their state, but when they talk about Grumman, taking away the contract with Grumman, or [Lawkey 00:10:46], or taking away from a big defense contractor, let me tell you, the violin music is tremendous. This is critical. The Chamber of Commerce shows up, all the businesspeople say, "You can't do this. You can't shut this base. This is a key to our ..." That's where politicians, it's not about money, it's about jobs in their district.

This F-35, which is a \$100 million dollars an aircraft, and the son of a bitch may fly upside down half the time, I have no idea, but when you're messing with that, and then when you're messing with one big, huge thing, you'll find that the parts are made in about 50 states. The wheels may be made in Cheyenne, and the steering mechanism maybe being in Missouri. There's a reason for that, it's called jobs. That you can get away with as a politician. I know it seems like a waste, folks, but it's not because I'll tell you what it means, it means jobs and money to take home and educate your kids, and the violin music comes home. Don't miss that aspect of the industrial military complex.

David Isenberg: It's a classic tactic. I can remember when they were doing it with the B-1 Bomber, and of course it goes back even far beyond that. Are we in a state now where contractors are sort of like the big banks at the start of recession? Are they simply too big to fail? You may recall back in 90s, Secretary of Defense William Perry convened a sort of last supper and got the majors together and said, "You're now going to enter into a period of consolidations, and some of you are going to buy out other firms. Other firms are just going to go by the by, and we need this to consolidate the defense industrial base." That process occurred, but now we have basically 5 huge behemoths from General Dynamics, Northrup Grumman, Joaquin Martin, [Raytheon 00:12:52], and no one can, as far as I know, can see any kind of situation where anybody would allow them to fail. Do they have inordinate influence now, or at least far more influence than they used to have?

Remembering Alan K. Simpson: Lawyer and former member of the United States Senate

Alan Simpson: I have no idea about that. I don't think they're too big to fail. They have stockholders who they kiss up. I mean, that's the whole job is to [inaudible 00:13:20]. Too big to fail? Hell, I haven't any idea, but I know one thing, that when Burstein and I, and our commission were doing our work, and we got 5 democrats and 5 republicans and 1 independent to vote on what we did, 67-page report written in English using terms like going broke and shared sacrifice, and then people say, "Who voted for that?" "Well, Dick Durbin." "Dick Durbin, that Commie from Illinois, Jesus Christ, what the hell is he ..." "Well, Tom Colburn voted." "Tom Colburn"? That republican neanderthal." I mean, that's your country right now. Don't forget what's happening, and the viciousness and the hatred. It's not discussed. It's hatred. Hatred, it corrodes the container it's carried in. There are people who hate McConnell, hate Reid, hate Obama, hate Pelosi. I mean, get serious. When you have a cauldron of hate out here, you can't get anything done.

Now, go back to the defense budget. Ted Conrad, you got to have a Medal of Honor democrat, the Defense Department has testified before us, and Ted said, "I think we ought to be audited." The witnesses said, "It's impossible to audit the State Department." We said, "By God, we'll be sure that it isn't." Now of course they said they'll start. As far as I know, there's some semblance out here of the thought of auditing the Defense Department. There's nothing like that going on. Until you can audit this huge department and find out where the bucks are going, I mean, this is not repetitive, you've probably heard it, there are 64 Department of Defense schools in America, all a bus ride from a public school. They're important to overseas, they're independents. When I was at Fort Benning, I was a sub-teacher at Fort Benning. They all have superintendents and principals and teachers, and the cost is 53 billion a year for less than 20,000 students. There's a word for that, it's called bullshit.

Then you have this marvelous thing, and you're a veteran, so am I. If I had stayed in the reserve another few years, I would have been a military retiree. Well, I met, there are only 2-and-a-half million of them. I have met some of them who have never been on active duty. They've been in the guard or the reserve. One was a brigadier general from somewhere, I can't remember, and I said, "Where were you on active duty as a military retiree?" "Well, I was in the guard and the reserve." "Are you on tri-care?" He said, "Yes, I am" Tri-care, try that one, the premium, it's a special military healthcare system. It takes care of Uncle Sam and the kid with the zits. 85% of the money goes to dependents, and the premium is 540 bucks a year. They raised the co-pay from 3 to 46 bucks last year in a very self-flagalistic activity.

The cost of that is 50 billion a year. Then they have a grill sergeant which is a television program. Some first sergeant, they were the guys that saved my ass, they're showing people how to grill. They mess with the veterans. They shouldn't be into the Veteran's Administration, they're into everything. It's a giant octopus, and you then get nasty about the Defense Department, somebody clutches their heart, falls forward, and I say, "Button your shirt, your heart fell out." The bullshit in the Defense Department is beyond your reason. You'll never understand it, and it's a cozy operation, [inaudible], and it's a giant slush.

David Isenberg: I've heard the expression, self-perpetuating ice cream cone, used quite frequently. Let me ask you this. When you were in office, were you ever begged by a contractor who wanted to come in and talk to you about something? Can you speak to defense contractors and the way they try to lobby?

Alan Simpson: I never had anybody that didn't come to me to beg. There wasn't one son of a bitch in America ever came in and wanted less. Don't blame it on something, blame it on the cowboys, the Indians, the right, the left, the medical community, the farmers. Nobody ever walked into my office and asked for less. They came to ask for something, something in the tax code if they didn't ask for something directly. Don't just think the hand out system came from defense.

Remembering Alan K. Simpson: Lawyer and former member of the United States Senate

David Isenberg: Absolutely not.

Alan Simpson: It came from every single ... It's a milk cow with 320 million tits. That's what your country is right now, and there's not a soul in there. They looked at what we did, and we found those tax expenditures, 180 of them, all of them sucking a trillion one out of the budget per year, which is exactly how much income came in 2010. "Oh boy, you did a great job [inaudible 00:18:56]. Oil, gas, a [fleece 00:18:59] allowance, Blue Cross/Blue Shield, home mortgage interest deduction, municipal bond, every shit." You think you're going to pry that out of the dead hand or the live hand of anybody in America, you've got to bring a good lunch.

David Isenberg: Let me ask you this, I take your point, but post Citizens United, the ability of people who want something, the means by which they can do it, either through direct campaign donations or hiring lobbyists just seems to have exploded. I mean, every day you can read the newsletters in Washington and read about the latest pact being formed or the latest lobbyist who is registered on behalf of a specific client. I mean, I think it was Stalin who said that quantity has a quality all its own, and the sheer quantity in terms of the resources being pumped into the influence industry [inaudible 00:19:58] amount to greater than before Citizens United. Is that a problem or not?

Alan Simpson: Well sure, I mean just the definition of it shows the problem of it. It's a non-accountable flux, and to the average guy, it's corrosive and arrogant and crooked.

David Isenberg: Okay. Let me ask you a few questions related to your work on the commission. How do you see the connections between national security and ...

Alan Simpson: Come in here and answer these questions, Diane, don't try to escape. He's been through all the crap I have too. You have to have a support spouse in this business or shit, you'd lose your mind.

David Isenberg: I'm sure. How do you see the connections between national security and fiscal responsibility?

Alan Simpson: There is none. I mean [cross talk 00:20:51] ...

David Isenberg: [crosstalk 00:20:54]

Alan Simpson: ... say look, this is for the poor, this is for the veteran. I mean both of these people running for the presidency are talking about increasing social security. They must not have read the report which was 10 days ago by the social security trustees, not a bunch of hicks from the right and the left or a bunch of boneheaded bastards. A very fine group of trustees were telling us that unless we actually do something, in 2034 you're going to get a check for 20% less. What is being done? Nothing, and the AARP, 38 million crows sitting on the telephone line, they don't give a shit. They don't give a shit about their grandparents, I mean their grandchildren, and they're sending messages to the candidates, "Tell us where you stand on social security." I wrote them, I said, "Tell us where you stand on social security at the AARP." I bomb them with letters. I never hear a word from them, but boy, if ever I go down in the clutch, it'll be hopefully with AARP with my bony fingers on their neck. They're a phony bunch of bastards.

David Isenberg: You mentioned President Eisenhower's farewell address previously, if we could bring him back today and he was looking around at the state of affairs between military and industry and congress, what do you think he'd say?

Alan Simpson: Well, they'd be calling him Pinwheel Ike. He'd be spinning in his grave like a rotor on a helicopter. I mean, he wouldn't be able to believe what happened because of his warning because nothing happened because of his warning. He would be absolutely numbed. You know, someone

Remembering Alan K. Simpson: Lawyer and former member of the United States Senate

said the other day, "Where's Ike when we need him?" I don't know, but he ain't there. He would be stunned.

David Isenberg: I know that in little circles it's popular to deride the military industrial complex as the boogie man, but as an item of just sheer definition, I think most people would agree that it exists. I mean, there is such a thing as the military industrial complex or a military industrial congressional complex or the iron triangle as some people like to call it. Let me just ask you, what impact does the influence of that complex today have on US leaders' ability to make the best national security policy decisions they can?

Alan Simpson: What are you saying?

David Isenberg: Well, I mean, do you think that the motivations of the corporations and the companies within the complex, and their need to stay in business and make a profit and their efforts to secure new contracts for various weapon systems or services to the government, you can think of intelligence contractors or military service providers also in that regard, are pushing members of congress to make decisions which will benefit them but not necessarily be in the best interest of the country.

Alan Simpson: There's a lot to that. When you have the revolving door of the guy, especially a flight officer, who retires at a splendid pension, and then he goes to work for the contractor. There's nothing wrong with a guy who served for 20 years, and getting out at the age of 38, going to work for Lawkey, that's how you make a living. To have some guy who's retired with full benefits go out as a consultant at 500 an hour, 300 an hour, all paid by the defense budget or somebody, that's an apple that's starting to rot.

Then we asked the Defense Department, "How many contractors do you have?" They said, "Well, it's quite a figure." We said, "Could you give us an idea?" "Yes, it's between 1 and 10 million contractors." We said, "Well, that's pretty handy." "Yes it is." You'll get to playing around in that game, and you have, if you've written on that subject, but this whole thing, when you have [inaudible] agency awash in bucks where if you came to a congressional hearing and said, "You can't cut this precious budget or the enemy will be at our throats and our country will disappear."

Yet, it was Admiral Mullen who testified very clearly, he said, "The greatest threat to America is not the terrorists, it's the debt" because if everybody's just going to add, and they will, billions, billions here, it's for the protection of America, it's for the kids, it's for whatever, whatever, at some point in time the people who have loaned us what will be 20 trillion bucks at the end of this decade are going to say, "We love you, you're addicted to debt and you have a dysfunctional government, but we would like to loan you some more money, but it's going to cost you some more money." At that point inflation will kick in and index and up and interest rates will go up, and the guy that gets screwed is the little guy, the one that everybody talks about all day and all night because the money guys always take care of themselves.

David Isenberg: Do you see any way to avert that eventuality from happening, and if so, what is it?

Alan Simpson: Yeah, America will take a hit. There will be a tipping point, and all the shit your talking about or I'm talking about won't even make a whip until you get to the tipping point, and the tipping point is when the people who have loaned us 20 trillion bucks, half of that's private, that's your uncle and your aunt in the market playing around with municipals and treasuries, and the other half is public, and half of that is China. At that point, the tipping point. At that time, you re-trench, and we become a more aware America.

Remembering Alan K. Simpson: Lawyer and former member of the United States Senate

David Isenberg: It sounds developed from the vocabulary of the Vietnam War that we're talking about an experience where we're basically going to have to burn the village in order to save it.

Alan Simpson: I don't know anything about that, but that was the toughest war that I've ever watched. No need to go back and dig around in it.

David Isenberg: I meant it as a metaphor in a sense we're talking about an eventuality where things are going to have to run off a precipice, we're going to have a crash before people take things serious enough to change the way we are going.

Alan Simpson: The person who kept asking on our commission was Dick Durbin. I don't have to agree with Dick Durbin, but I admire him greatly. He's tough. I like tough guys, partisan, I like partisan guys too, I'm one. You can talk with him, and you can cut through the shit and engage. He kept saying, "Where is the tipping point?" We asked that of so many witnesses. There is a tipping point, and especially with the people running for President right now, nobody's talking about cutting anything because if you say that, you automatically drop 20 points. You have to go out and say, "We need more for defense. We need more for social security. We need more of this. We need more of that," and everybody is just quite tickled by that. Of course the deficit was going down, and that threw everybody off because if people don't know the difference between the deficit and the debt, then you really are screwed.

The deficit goes down, everybody says, "Geez, I think that was 1.6 billion there, and now it's down to 400. This is great." The debt is on automatic pilot and nothing is stopping it, and at some point there's a tipping point, and it will be by people who really don't like us at all.

David Isenberg: It sounds like you're talking about a very dysfunctional appropriations process within government, within congress, not just for defense, but really for all sectors. Can you speak to why ... I mean you've been down there in the works, as they say, watching sausage being made, how bad is it given the way the appropriations process works?

Alan Simpson: There's no budget, and now they can't get one done, and you've got republicans in both houses, and you still can't do a budget. I guess that's pretty bad because they ran on the basis of, "Give us the wheels. Give us the wheelhouse, get their hands on the tiller and we'll give you a budget" because the Dems haven't done that for 5, 6, 8, I don't know. They haven't got all the appropriation bills passed, and they can't because they've got hard guys in the House and hard guys in the Senate. If you can't get a basic budget in the United States, and then you've got billions of stuff backed up that's been authorized, which was, people will be like, "What's that again?" They've been authorized but not been appropriated. At some point you're going to go back into that stack of all this crap that's been authorized and start passing that, especially at election time. If you can't even pass the appropriations bills to run the country and can't do a budget when you have a House and Senate in the same party, well you can kiss it off when it gets worse than that.

David Isenberg: Every time we see government operating on the basis of a continuing resolution, it's just affirmation of a dysfunction in the process?

Alan Simpson: Sure it is. I mean, shit, let's go to a CR which I a continued resolution. You can't run the country on continued resolutions, but we've chosen to do that. We've chosen just to ignore anything fiscally painful, anything that has to do with one of these great systems. If you want to know where we are right now, today, in the appropriations and budget process, then you need to know that all the stuff that you're reading about in the budget isn't dealing with 2-thirds of American budget which is health care, and forget the name Obamacare, forget the nastiness of it. Health care and social security solvency are over 50%. I mean congressional [inaudible 00:32:51] are sparrow fart. Waste,

Remembering Alan K. Simpson: Lawyer and former member of the United States Senate

fraud, and abuse are nothing. Foreign aid is nothing, on and on, that's 3% or 2% or 4%. The 52% of everything eating our lunch is in 2 things. There's no cost containment in the health care system except down the road. When you get there, like a doc fix or a medical tax, it ain't going to do anything because the docs will rise up. You got to do something with everybody. You got to do something with the docs, you go to do something with the providers, the hospitals, the lawyers, the whole works, and get them in a big ole circle and say, "America first."

David Isenberg: Given the dysfunction in that process, what specific changes would you recommend to the process to make it more fiscally responsible and sound?

Alan Simpson: I would recommend to anyone that they simply get a copy of a book called *The Moment of Truth*. Is that the cops calling you?

David Isenberg: No, no, no. I'm just checking on ...

Alan Simpson: Please, they're after you, and you knew they'd come. You were walking up here and you looked [inaudible 00:34:05].

David Isenberg: No, please.

Alan Simpson: No, I won't even go into the romance of it, I'll just say, read the 67-page report. It hit everybody. That's why it was received with the most extraordinary courtesy, "Thank you very much for your work, and then get the hell out of town for god's sake because you talked about shit that we don't want to talk about." It's real. It's all real. It talks about the F-35, it talks about the defense budget, it talks about healthcare, it talks about social security, it talks about the fakery of Nancy Pelosi's aircraft for god's sake. It's all there, and I recommend that highly to your good citizens and those engaged in ... It's in English, and it doesn't have a lot of charts, and it's very clear, and it pisses everybody off. They say, "I love what you're doing except for that one part," and that's their part, and they'll cut your nuts out with a salad fork to keep that in there.

David Isenberg: It's probably a good sign that you've said something relevant if they're pissed off. Let me ask you because by the time you left the Senate, we had not nearly begun to outsource functions of the government, at least in the military, state department, foreign policy, national security side, that we do today. Do you have any thoughts as you watch that unfold using contractors and overseas operations or contractors being ... spending 70% of the Central Intelligence budget on contractors? Does it make sense? It is too much?

Alan Simpson: It doesn't make any sense, but they're into it, and when you go around the country and say, "What do you do?", and the guy says, "I'm a procurement person with the Defense Department," or "I'm a contractor," "I'm an advisor." They're in it, and they like that. It's going to be hard to break up. What was the other part of it because I was ...

David Isenberg: Just wondering as you watch the whole outsourcing ...

Alan Simpson: I'm sorry, yeah, of course, that's the tax code. When we suggested in tax code that you take the corporation from 36 to 26 to go to a territorial system which means you don't get hosed twice on the tax over there and then here if you bring it back, you will solve all that outsourcing. Nobody will do that because it doesn't seem right. As Burstein said, who's a democrat, people on my side say, "God you don't want to let them come back like that, that money coming back." Burstein said, "Why not? You could use it to pay dividends and do other things." When you're the worst one in America on a 36 corporate tax rate, then what would you do with your business? I mean if you've got a brain and you got shareholder, you're going to go overseas, and you're going to outsource.

Remembering Alan K. Simpson: Lawyer and former member of the United States Senate

All you have to do to cure that is go from 36 to 26 and go to a territorial system where you don't get taxed over there, and then when you bring it back, you get taxed here. I mean, you don't have to be a wizard to know that these people are not Commies, they're not Soviets, they're businesspeople, and they have an obligation to their shareholders, and that would solve a lot of that.

As far as the security outsourcing, start hiring ... go ... I don't know, go somewhere and get a bunch of plain clothed men that are in the Defense Department instead of going out to hire a bunch of marauders sometimes, and that's already hurt. That's already hurting our country.

David Isenberg: Let me ask you one final question. We kind of started talking about the greatly increased levels of money washing around in the political process today, and we seem to be in the green end of that. That's not a good thing. That's corrosive to democracy. It's having a negative impact on our national security. If you agree with that, then short of heading off the cliff 20 years from now, what's the solution to that problem of too much money in the political process aside from having greater transparency on who's contributing money, is there another step that should be taken?

Alan Simpson: Well, you're never going to get any kind of anything done with Mitch McConnell as involved with the leadership in the Republican Party and the Senate. He will prevent any kind of change that prevents money from falling. This is his mantra. He's a good egg. I think he knows how to lead. He's got them all in line but get serious. Nothing will happen. Reid wasn't exactly ... I mean, the 2 of them didn't like each other. That was obvious, and now Reid will be gone. There won't be any kind of reform in that as long as Mitch is in a position of leadership. He'll fight to the death. At some point in time, you have to have disclosure and transparency if you can't get anything else. The reality is clear.

David Isenberg: It seems like a limited step unless there's some future Supreme Court decision in which they modify or reverse Citizens United.

Alan Simpson: That they what?

David Isenberg: Unless a future Supreme Court revisits the Citizens United decision and either revises it or reverses it, it seems like this only a palliative measure in terms of changing the leadership.

Alan Simpson: If Hillary gets elected, it'll all be taken care of very nicely. I can tell you that. Yes, it will indeed.

David Isenberg: Okay. I think that's it. Thank you very much, unless you ... Let me just say, any thoughts on anything that we've covered thus far, please feel free if you want to add anything or just something you can ...

Alan Simpson: I had this whole discussion before about the veterans and the veterans' budget, and you just have to be realistic. It's embarrassing to me when at a public function they'll say, anybody that's been in the Army stands up. It might be 400 people in the room, and 4 of us stand up. "Now, Navy", and then they plan Anchor's Away, and 6 guys will stand up. "How about the Army Air Corp." Then then old Bomb's Away, and about 5 guys. Probably 1 of 100 of us has ever been in combat.

A guy literally can have served. When I went on the Senate Veterans Affairs Committee, a guy could serve for 6 months and have no combat experience, nothing but just the headquarters company in North Carolina, and get the same benefit as a combat veteran. That is bullshit. I said that, and I'll say it again. You can't have this system where people who never ... Now you should take care of a combat veteran or anyone in a combat theater. They don't have to have a shell flying, but they were there 6 miles down the road of 20 or 200. You take care of those veterans, and you give them a little more, and you get them fixed up with healthcare in the public sector if they can't get into this goofy VA

Remembering Alan K. Simpson: Lawyer and former member of the United States Senate

system which is so fucked up. It was fucked up then, and it's more fucked up now. When I was there and the budget, it was 49 million bucks for 26 million veterans. Now there are only 22 million of us, and the budget is 160 billion, and they're not getting care. Somebody needs to go in and blow up that process.

This presumptive disease, nobody will know what that is, but give me a break that you were in Vietnam for 2 weeks or 3 weeks and you were 100 or 200 miles from where they were throwing Agent Orange, and your 60 years old, and you've been drinking whiskey all your life, and you got a heart condition and diabetes, and that that came from presumed comes from your 2 weeks or 2 months in Vietnam. Bullshit. That'll break the bank. I mean, you're talking about money, and you're talking about it down the road, and you can put in your adjectives. What are we going to do with Afghanistan, Iraqi guys 30 years down the road, trillions. Trillions will happen to be what then went to the tipping point.

Whatever you're worried about veterans, there will be people picking grit with the chickens because of the fiscal irresponsibility of this country and the frightening way that's displayed by the big time, the AARP and the healthcare groups, and the hospitals that keep 2 sets of books, and the providers who make something for 83 cents and sell it for 8 bucks, and you know all the crap that goes with it.

David Isenberg: Well said.

Alan Simpson: On a cheerful note, I'm just glad that I can leave you on a note of cheer in your work, David. You come here ...



David Isenberg *is an independent analyst in national and international security affairs.*