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12-23-2008

Bernanke email to Alvarez (Re Fw BAC)

Ben S. Bernanke

Scott G. Alvarez

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From:
 To: Scott Alvarez
 Subject: Re: Fw: BAC
 Date: 12/23/2008 11:08 AM
 Encrypted

Thanks, Scott. Just to be clear, though we did not order Lewis to go forward, we did indicate that we believed that going forward would be detrimental to the health (safety and soundness) of his company. I think this is remote and so this question may be just academic, but anyway: What would be wrong with a letter, not in advance of a litigation but if requested by the defense in the litigation, to the effect that our analysis supported the safety and soundness case for proceeding with the merger and that we communicated that to Lewis?

▼ Scott Alvarez address deleted

Scott Alvarez address deleted To address deleted
 cc
 12/23/2008 10:18 AM Subject Re: Fw: BAC

Mr. chairman,

Shareholder suits against management for decisions like this are more a nuisance than successful. Courts will apply a "business judgment" rule that allows management wide discretion to make reasonable business judgments and seldom holds management liable for decisions that go bad. Witness Bear Stearns. A different question that doesn't seem to be the one Lewis is focused on is related to disclosure. Management may be exposed if it doesn't properly disclose information that is material to investors. There are also Sarbanes-Oxley requirements that the management certify the accuracy of various financial reports. Lewis should be able to comply with all those reporting and certification requirements while also completing this deal. His potential liability here will be whether he knew (or reasonably should have known) the magnitude of the ML losses when BA made its disclosures to get the shareholder vote on the ML deal in early December. I'm sure his lawyers were much involved in that set of disclosures and Lewis was clear to us that he didn't hear about the increase in losses till recently.

All that said, I don't think it's necessary or appropriate for us to give Lewis a letter along the lines he asked. First, we didn't order him to go forward--we simply explained our views on what the market reaction would be and left the decision to him. Second, making hard decisions is what he gets paid for and only he has the full information needed to make the decision--so we shouldn't take him off the hook by appearing to take the decision out of his hands.

Let me know if you'd like any more info on this.

Scott
address deleted