



Via Agency Web Site

April 14, 2011

Elizabeth Murphy
Secretary
Securities and Exchange Commission
100 F Street NE
Washington, DC 20549-1090

*Re: File No. S7-08-11: Clearing Agency Standards for Operation and Governance*¹

Dear Ms. Murphy:

I am writing on behalf of the Council of Institutional Investors (Council), a nonprofit association of public, union and corporate employee pension funds with combined assets exceeding \$3 trillion.² Our members have a responsibility to protect the retirement savings of millions of American workers. The Council appreciates being able to share its views with the Commission on the proposed rule referenced above.

In 2009 the Council and the CFA Institute co-sponsored an independent, blue-ribbon task known as the Investors' Working Group (IWG). The IWG's final report, subsequently endorsed by the members of the Council, recommends that all standardized and standardizable derivative contracts trade on regulated exchanges and clear through regulated clearinghouses.³

The Council generally supports the provisions of the proposal requiring clearing agents to make transparent their governance arrangements and adopt procedures for addressing conflicts of interest. We, however, would urge the Commission to consider complementing those provisions with a minimum board independence requirement.

The Council recommends that at least two-thirds of all board directors be independent.⁴ We believe that prohibiting boards from consisting primarily of directors affiliated with the entity they oversee is a sensible practice that would strengthen the long-term soundness of the market for standardized derivatives and, in turn, the overall financial system. For similar reasons, we also support a narrowly-drawn definition of independence, as detailed in the attachment provided for your consideration.

¹ Available at <http://sec.gov/rules/proposed/2011/34-64017.pdf>.

² More information about the Council is available at <http://www.cii.org>.

³ Investors' Working Group, U.S. Financial Regulatory Reform: The Investors' Perspective (July 2009) at 11. The full text of the report is available at <http://www.cii.org/iwglInfo>.

⁴ The Council's policies on directors are available at <http://cii.org/UserFiles/file/CII%20Corp%20Gov%20Policies%20Full%20and%20Current%2009-29-10%20FINAL.pdf>.

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Thank you for the opportunity to share the Council's perspective. Please feel free to contact me at (202) 261-7097 or glenn@cii.org with any additional questions or comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Glenn Davis". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Glenn Davis
Senior Research Associate

Attachment

Attachment

7. Independent Director Definition

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Basic Definition of an Independent Director

7.3 Guidelines for Assessing Director Independence

7.1 Introduction: A narrowly drawn definition of an independent director (coupled with a policy specifying that at least two-thirds of board members and all members of the audit, compensation and nominating committees should meet this standard) is in the corporation's and shareowners' financial interest because:

- Independence is critical to a properly functioning board;
- Certain clearly definable relationships pose a threat to a director's unqualified independence;
- The effect of a conflict of interest on an individual director is likely to be almost impossible to detect, either by shareowners or other board members; and
- While an across-the-board application of *any* definition to a large number of people will inevitably miscategorize a few of them, this risk is sufficiently small and is far outweighed by the significant benefits.

Independent directors do not invariably share a single set of qualities that are not shared by non-independent directors. Consequently no clear rule can unerringly describe and distinguish independent directors. However, the independence of the director depends on all relationships the director has, including relationships between directors, that may compromise the director's objectivity and loyalty to shareowners. Directors have an obligation to consider all relevant facts and circumstances to determine whether a director should be considered independent.

7.2 Basic Definition of an Independent Director: An independent director is someone whose only nontrivial professional, familial or financial connection to the corporation, its chairman, CEO or any other executive officer is his or her directorship. Stated most simply, an independent director is a person whose directorship constitutes his or her only connection to the corporation.

7.3 Guidelines for Assessing Director Independence: The notes that follow are supplied to give added clarity and guidance in interpreting the specified relationships. A director will not be considered independent if he or she:

7.3a Is, or in the past five years has been, or whose relative is, or in the past five years has been, employed by the corporation or employed by or a director of an affiliate;

NOTES: An "affiliate" relationship is established if one entity either alone or pursuant to an arrangement with one or more other persons, owns or has the power to vote more than 20 percent of the equity interest in another, unless some other person, either alone or pursuant to an arrangement with one or more other persons, owns or has the power

to vote a greater percentage of the equity interest. For these purposes, joint venture partners and general partners meet the definition of an affiliate, and officers and employees of joint venture enterprises and general partners are considered affiliated. A subsidiary is an affiliate if it is at least 20 percent owned by the corporation.

Affiliates include predecessor companies. A “predecessor” is an entity that within the last five years was party to a “merger of equals” with the corporation or represented more than 50 percent of the corporation’s sales or assets when such predecessor became part of the corporation.

“Relatives” include spouses, parents, children, step-children, siblings, mothers and fathers-in-law, sons and daughters-in-law, brothers and sisters-in-law, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews and first cousins, and anyone sharing the director’s home.

7.3b Is, or in the past five years has been, or whose relative is, or in the past five years has been, an employee, director or greater-than-20-percent owner of a firm that is one of the corporation’s or its affiliate’s paid advisers or consultants or that receives revenue of at least \$50,000 for being a paid adviser or consultant to an executive officer of the corporation;

NOTES: Advisers or consultants include, but are not limited to, law firms, auditors, accountants, insurance companies and commercial/investment banks. For purposes of this definition, an individual serving “of counsel” to a firm will be considered an employee of that firm.

The term “executive officer” includes the chief executive, operating, financial, legal and accounting officers of a company. This includes the president, treasurer, secretary, controller and any vice-president who is in charge of a principal business unit, division or function (such as sales, administration or finance) or performs a major policymaking function for the corporation.

7.3c Is, or in the past five years has been, or whose relative is, or in the past five years has been, employed by or has had a five percent or greater ownership interest in a third-party that provides payments to or receives payments from the corporation and either: (i) such payments account for one percent of the third-party’s or one percent of the corporation’s consolidated gross revenues in any single fiscal year; or (ii) if the third-party is a debtor or creditor of the corporation and the amount owed exceeds one percent of the corporation’s or third party’s assets. Ownership means beneficial or record ownership, not custodial ownership;

7.3d Has, or in the past five years has had, or whose relative has paid or received more than \$50,000 in the past five years under, a personal contract with the corporation, an executive officer or any affiliate of the corporation;

NOTES: Council members believe that even small personal contracts, no matter how formulated, can threaten a director's complete independence. This includes any arrangement under which the director borrows or lends money to the corporation at rates better (for the director) than those available to normal customers—even if no other services from the director are specified in connection with this relationship;

7.3e Is, or in the past five years has been, or whose relative is, or in the past five years

has been, an employee or director of a foundation, university or other non-profit organization that receives significant grants or endowments from the corporation, one of its affiliates or its executive officers or has been a *direct* beneficiary of *any* donations to such an organization;

NOTES: A “significant grant or endowment” is the lesser of \$100,000 or one percent of total annual donations received by the organization.

7.3f Is, or in the past five years has been, or whose relative is, or in the past five years has been, part of an interlocking directorate in which the CEO or other employee of the corporation serves on the board of a third-party entity (for-profit or not-for-profit) employing the director or such relative;

7.3g Has a relative who is, or in the past five years has been, an employee, a director or a five percent or greater owner of a third-party entity that is a significant competitor of the corporation; or

7.3h Is a party to a voting trust, agreement or proxy giving his/her decision making power as a director to management except to the extent there is a fully disclosed and narrow voting arrangement such as those which are customary between venture capitalists and management regarding the venture capitalists’ board seats.

The foregoing describes relationships between directors and the corporation. The Council also believes that it is important to discuss relationships between directors on the same board which may threaten either director’s independence. A director’s objectivity as to the best interests of the shareowners is of utmost importance and connections between directors outside the corporation may threaten such objectivity and promote inappropriate voting blocks. As a result, directors must evaluate all of their relationships with each other to determine whether the director is deemed independent. The board of directors shall investigate and evaluate such relationships using the care, skill, prudence and diligence that a prudent person acting in a like capacity would use.