

Oklahoma State Senate



STATE CAPITOL BUILDING
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DISTRICT 46
OKLAHOMA

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
BUSINESS AND COMMERCE
GENERAL GOVERNMENT
RULES

AL McAFFREY
SENATOR

November 30, 2012

The Honorable Ben Bernanke
Chairman
The Federal Reserve System
20th Street and Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20551

Dear Ben:

I am writing to express my concerns as a state Senator over the proposed implementation of the Basel III capital requirements. I support to improve and enhance standards of banking organization in light of our financial crisis. As a state Senator, I want to comment over the impact that Basel III will have or is having in Oklahoma.

Oklahoma is home to 169 state-chartered community banks with assets ranging from \$8 million to \$9 billion. These banks serve as a source of credit in communities where, in their absence, the community would not only fail to thrive, but would fail to exist. Over the past few months, I have personally had discussion with community bankers who have decided to sell institutions as a result of regulatory burden—of which Basel III has been described as the “last straw.” I am concerned that the implementation of the Basel III proposal will have a dramatically negative impact on the willingness of Oklahoma bankers to serve their communities—especially in many communities where no other banking and credit alternative exist.

While I support strong capital (in both quantity and quality), Basel III will do *nothing* to strengthen the safety and soundness of Oklahoma’s community banks. In fact, it will likely serve to create uncertainty in our community banks and will ultimately weaken the communities they serve.

I will not repeat all the ways in which the Basel III proposal is an “International One-Size-Fits-All Reaction” to a problem that never existed in Oklahoma. However, I would like to address in real terms the way it will have a negative impact on Oklahoma and its communities. Specifically, I would like to address the changes that Basel III proposes to make in the risk weighting of mortgage credit.

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I understand that poorly underwritten mortgage credit was one of the reasons for the “real estate bubble” and the resulting financial crisis. However, that problem never existed in Oklahoma. For example, in one year (2005) during the height of the real estate bubble, home prices in California, Arizona, and Florida increased 21%, 35%, and 28% respectively. During that same period, home prices in Oklahoma increased only 5.6%. one reason for that significant difference is the nature of the operation of a community bank.

In many Oklahoma communities, the local bank is the only source of mortgage credit. These rural mortgage loans are retained by a bank in its portfolio because they cannot qualify for the secondary market, nor do such loans attract the interest of larger institutions. For safe and sound reasons, the bank will not make a 15-or 30- year fully amortizing 1 to 4 family mortgage loan that is held in the bank’s portfolio. Therefore, my understanding is that under the Basel III proposal, these loans will not fit within “Category 1” risk weighting. Instead, these soundly underwritten loans (HELOCs, balloon payment ARMs, *etc.*) will be Basel III “Category 2” mortgages with a risk weight of up to 200%.

Additionally, although community banks may hold only 10% of the nation’s banking assets, they provide 40% of the small business loans—often secured by second liens and HELOCs. The Basel III risk weighting will eliminate a reliable business line for community institutions and an important source of credit for consumers and small business owners. It will not protect against increased risk to community banks nor will it result in stronger capital for community banks. The reality is that the Basel III risk weighting formula is a reaction by the international community to a real estate bubble that has long since burst and that never existed in Oklahoma.

In summary, the United States federal banking regulators should recognize that this nation’s dual banking system is made up of predominately community banks for which the Basel III international standards are neither appropriate nor effective for the purposes of strengthening capital. But making piecemeal changes to the Basel III proposal so that it will take into consideration the unique nature of community banks seems unproductive. Therefore, if implemented, the Basel III provisions should exempt completely the vast majority of banks (*i.e.*, community banks) that, even collectively, pose no systematic risk to this nation’s economy or to the global economy. The federal banking regulators may then begin the process of crafting capital standards that consider the unique nature of community banking in the United States.

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Thank you for your consideration of my views. I strongly encourage you to consider exempting community banks from Basel III and working to continue a safe and sound community banking system.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Al McAffrey", is written over the word "Sincerely,".

Al McAffrey
Oklahoma State Senator
District 46

cc:

Tom Coburn, U.S. Senator
Jim Inhofe, U.S. Senator