

**National Credit Union Administration  
Chairman Debbie Matz**

**Remarks to the  
Illinois Credit Union League 80<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention**

**Chicago, Illinois  
April 30, 2010**

Thank you very much. It is great being in Illinois – and it is an honor to take part in this morning’s program, along with Governor Quinn. I have been to many league meetings during my time on the NCUA board, but I have never been at one where the state’s highest elected official is featured on the program. The Governor’s presence here is surely a testament to the visibility and leadership of the Illinois credit unions.

For 80 years, Illinois has been in the forefront of the nation’s credit union movement. Credit unions were thriving in “the Land of Lincoln” even before the Federal Credit Union Act authorized federal charters in 1934. Reflecting that fact, Illinois today has the nation’s largest number of state-chartered, federally insured credit unions.

You can also be proud of the fact that Illinois credit unions are growing faster than credit unions in most other states, while maintaining a strong overall position of safety and soundness. At the start of this year, your membership growth rate in Illinois was more than double the national average. Better still, your rate of loan growth was six times the national pace. And your rate of share growth beat the national average by half-again – not just 10 percent, but 15 percent. Those are clear signs of strong public confidence in Illinois credit unions.

With more than \$32 billion in total assets, the 376 federally insured credit unions in Illinois remain – in the best “people helping people” tradition – very close to the communities you serve. Good management and sound lending standards have long been the norm in Illinois where 253 – about two-thirds of your federally insured credit unions, holding more than 93 percent of your state’s total assets – have a CAMEL rating of 1 or 2.

Like every state, however, Illinois has a worrisome number of credit unions that have weakened – sometimes severely – during these tough economic times. The net worth ratio of Illinois credit

unions, overall, has fallen from a strong 12 percent at the end of 2006 to about 10 percent going into this year – about the same as the national average. Delinquency rates have almost doubled over the past three years, and the net charge-off ratio has climbed significantly.

Beyond these issues, NCUA is concerned about the growing number of Illinois credit unions rated CAMEL 3. More than one-quarter of Illinois credit unions – over 27 percent – are now in this vulnerable category. With 104 CAMEL 3s, you have far more credit unions under stress than in most other states. And the CAMEL 3s in Illinois are holding nearly 6 percent of your state's credit union assets. We want to make sure that today's CAMEL 3s do not become tomorrow's CAMEL 4s and 5s.

No one knows better than you, here in the Midwest, that the economic trends remain challenging in the nation's heartland. The severe downturn has had a greater impact on Illinois than on most states. The new federal job-creation package, enacted into law last month, will help promote new jobs – but it will certainly take some time to bring down the 11.5-percent unemployment rate in Illinois.

If there is a silver lining amid our country's economic crisis, it is this: At a time when every other part of America's financial-service sector has seen its reputation tarnished, credit unions are still shining – with overall strong net worth, growing membership, and even continued growth in lending.

Yet no part of America's financial sector has been immune from economic pressure. The credit union industry now confronts an array of challenges that will test your resilience. As the federal agency that ensures the safety and soundness of the credit union system, NCUA is committed to helping you through these volatile times.

Nationwide, a great many credit unions remain under pressure. The number downgraded to CAMEL 4 and 5 almost doubled during the downturn – and those credit unions hold more than 5 percent of all insured shares. Even larger is the growing group of credit unions rated CAMEL 3, which now account for nearly 14 percent of all federally insured shares. Many credit unions – while still well-capitalized – will be draining capital this year, due to negative earnings. At the

same time, delinquencies and loan losses continue to increase. Undoubtedly, these will lead to an increase in failures.

So NCUA is stepping up to the plate. Our examiners are carefully monitoring the call reports of all federally insured credit unions, looking for red flags. These include increases in delinquencies in member business lending, indirect lending, and loan participations.

We are particularly concerned about credit unions that are not doing their own due diligence. Let me be clear: If you make member business loans, you must do your own underwriting, even if you use a vendor or a CUSO. If you make indirect loans, you must not delegate loan approval authority. And if you participate in loans, you still must do your own due diligence, even if the originator is another credit union.

As our examiners review the call reports, if they see that a federally insured credit union has suffered a significant increase in delinquencies in any of these areas, they will visit the credit union – even if an exam is not on the regular schedule, and even if it is a state-chartered credit union.

We are also looking very closely at any credit unions that are holding too many fixed-rate, long-term mortgages on your books. We have been warning, for months now, that higher interest rates are a question not of “if” – but of “when.” You have probably seen, just in the past few weeks, that the Federal Reserve is indeed beginning to let interest rates rise. We urge you to take action now to make sure your portfolio is strong enough to withstand the interest-rate risks that will soon hit your balance sheets.

NCUA is determined to take a realistic approach to the difficult economic trends, by taking precautions to prevent dangerous situations from arising before it is too late. We are taking the disciplined steps required to protect the credit union system as a whole. We must uphold rigorous standards, because we aim to protect the 90 million members who depend on the safety and soundness of the credit union system.

Now I would like switch gears, and to talk with you candidly about a subject that is on everyone's mind – the corporate credit union crisis.

As I know you are all aware, NCUA has taken decisive action to deal with the corporate crisis. And, yes, that term is fully justified: It was indeed a crisis. If we had not confronted the situation head-on, the nation's credit union structure would have faced a grave systemic risk.

I know that there has been a great deal of confusion about what has happened and what will come next. So let me take a few minutes to discuss these issues.

And let me start by assuring you that I fully recognize the legitimate anger that many of you feel. That anger has come through loud and clear during the comment period for the proposed new corporate rule.

In your comments, and in conversations with many of you, I have heard directly about the pain you have felt. I know that many of you blame NCUA: After all, two examiners were on-site at US Central and WesCorp. NCUA definitely shares some of the blame – but there is plenty of blame to go around, especially among the managers and boards who exercised such poor judgment.

Much of the blame falls outside the credit union industry. Mortgage brokers made dubious loans that led to waves of foreclosures. Rating agencies handed out Triple-A ratings for mortgage-backed securities that are now merely “toxic assets.”

When the mortgage bubble burst in 2007 and 2008, the fallout caused an extraordinary decline in the global economy – and exposed the four giant corporates to extreme shock, because of their vast investments in residential-mortgage-backed securities. When the market for those bonds came to a halt, the corporates' losses pushed them toward insolvency.

If the corporates had abruptly stopped operating, that would have threatened to end the services that they have long provided to natural-person credit unions. That is because three-quarters of natural-person credit unions have used the corporates as their primary agents for clearance and

settlements – taking care of the complicated processing of everyday services like checking accounts, debit accounts and ATM transactions.

Worse: About 90 percent of natural-person credit unions had investments in corporates. If the corporate system had collapsed, the natural-person-credit-union system would have suffered huge and insurmountable losses – shattering confidence in all of America’s credit unions. Natural-person credit unions would have lost about \$30 billion in net worth – about one-third of their net worth at the time. At least 800 natural-person credit unions would have collapsed.

In addition, your federal Share Insurance Fund would have had to levy huge assessments on the surviving credit unions, to cover the remainder of the losses. Many of those remaining credit unions might not have withstood the strain.

To preserve capital and confidence, NCUA had to put two of the largest corporates – US Central and WesCorp – into conservatorship. And we have also had to carefully monitor the operations of the other large corporates.

To stabilize the system, NCUA placed guarantees on shares at all corporates. As a result, credit union investments in the corporates are backed by the full faith and credit of the United States government.

During the first half of 2009, NCUA was successful in getting Congress to create a separate fund – the Corporate Stabilization Fund – that allows NCUA to assess credit unions for corporate losses over a seven-year period, rather than having to do it all in one lump sum.

Shortly after NCUA established this new fund, the accounting profession issued new rules governing the presentation of commercial financial statements. To this day, accountants still have differences of opinion about how to interpret the new rules, and about whether or not they apply to federal regulators.

At NCUA, we have been working diligently with two independent audit firms to ensure that the agency’s financial statements will be presented with complete accuracy and transparency. This is

a vital concern for credit unions, consumers, and all other stakeholders. The additional work has caused a delay in the release of NCUA's audited financials for both 2008 and 2009.

Over the past few months, you may have heard some speculation as to why our audits have been delayed. I would like to put an end to all that unfounded speculation right now: The delay in NCUA's audit is in no way related to the health of the National Credit Union Share Insurance Fund.

I assure you, the federal Share Insurance Fund remains strong and robust.

In fact, every month at NCUA's open Board meeting, we release a report on the financial conditions of both funds. At our April Board meeting yesterday, we reported that the Share Insurance Fund's equity ratio remains within our normal operating range, while the Corporate Stabilization Fund remains well-positioned to assess the costs of corporate losses over time.

Our aim is not to "bail out" the corporates. We aimed to stop them from bleeding, as their assets were hemorrhaging value. NCUA did what we had to do, to save the system by preserving public confidence.

We must now ensure that never again will the entire credit union system be threatened by one group of credit unions – or even one single credit union.

NCUA is focused on providing a framework for safety and soundness that protects the system.

The NCUA Board's proposed new rule on corporates has drawn more than 800 comment letters – and we're reading every one.

The proposed rule has four main themes, aiming to change four critical areas in the current rule.

First: On capital standards: The new rule will strengthen capital requirements, aligning corporates with Basel One standards; subjecting corporates to a leverage capital requirement to

help reduce risk; and imposing Prompt Corrective Action standards on corporates that match those that apply to all other federally insured financial institutions.

Second: On asset-liability management: It proposes specific ALM requirements to ensure that the gap between the average life of assets and liabilities does not present excessive risk. It also prohibits a corporate from accepting funds from a single source that exceeds 10 percent of the corporate's assets. This will avoid excessive reliance on a single lender or depositor.

Third: On risk concentration: It will limit risk by forbidding corporates from excessive concentration in a single type of asset. Promoting a diverse portfolio of investments will help avoid the kind of risk concentration that was permitted under the flawed corporate rule that was approved in 2002. Back then, I voted against that rule, for this very reason.

Fourth and finally: On governance standards: It will raise eligibility standards for corporates' board members, aiming to elevate their level of experience, expertise and motivation. Strengthening these four areas will go a long way toward preventing another corporate crisis from ever occurring.

In light of all the comments we have received, we will be making further improvements to the rule, which we hope to finalize at our September Board meeting – if not sooner.

But first, we plan to respond to what your comments have told us is the highest priority: the need for NCUA to dispose of the toxic assets that caused the crisis.

Isolating the so-called “legacy assets” is a necessary first step in avoiding further damage.

I understand why some of you do not want to recapitalize corporates as long as toxic assets remain on their books. And I understand why you are frustrated that NCUA has not yet announced a plan to remove these legacy assets. So, now I am going to share with you our plans to date.

Let me be clear: This is very much a work in progress. It is an enormous undertaking. There is no easy way to un-bundle more than \$50 billion worth of assets, repackaging them into marketable bonds, and move them from corporates' balance sheets without realizing losses.

This effort is so huge – and so important – that we are dedicating 30 of our top staff to work on it. In recent months, our team has been brainstorming every idea for safely resolving the corporate crisis at the lowest possible cost to credit unions. With nearly every possible solution, more questions – and more legal and accounting issues – are raised.

Yet today we feel we are on the verge of a breakthrough. Our team is close to proposing a plan that would remove the riskiest legacy assets from ongoing corporates, while carrying forward the most valuable pieces of the corporate system. The plan would empower natural-person credit unions to choose which corporates they will support. And it would ensure that those corporates begin with clean balance sheets.

If the plan proceeds as we envision, it could even allow credit unions to recover future earnings from legacy assets that out-perform current loss projections.

Our team is still working to answer a host of questions – questions about underwriting, funding, and much much more. But our team is cautiously optimistic that this careful process will generate the best possible answers. In fact, they hope to bring a comprehensive corporate resolution plan to the NCUA Board by this summer.

Like you, I want to unveil NCUA's plan to resolve the corporate crisis as quickly as possible. But I do not want to rush this vital process. We may only have one chance to get this right. So please bear with us until we are sure that we have refined the best possible answers.

In the meantime, let me assure you: Based upon your comment letters, we will not move forward with a final corporate rule until after the plan for legacy assets is announced. And while the legacy assets plan will ensure that corporates begin with clean balance sheets, the final rule will ensure that corporates maintain those clean balance sheets.

Looking ahead: There will be difficult choices about the future of corporates.

But NCUA's overriding objective remains constant: to create a solid framework for safety and soundness. That is the surest way to protect the nation's 90 million credit union members.

Ultimately, the future of the corporate system will be determined by all of you – the leaders of natural person credit unions.

Our vision of the resolution is this: After we dispose of the legacy assets and approve the final rule, corporates will be much better positioned to protect your capital.

We recognize that the search for alternative providers would pose hard choices, especially for smaller credit unions. As you confront such choices, NCUA is ready to work with you as a constructive partner.

For the credit union community, and for the economy overall, the recovery from our recent problems will take time. But we have survived the worst of the ordeal. And we have taken strong measures to make sure that credit unions, and the system that frames them, will remain sound.

Now that the system is ready to bounce back, your industry can begin to chart a confident course.

Building on your record of service and success, you are positioned to broaden your appeal to millions of potential new members. The energy and spirit of innovation in the credit union community give me confidence that the industry has a bright future.

After the global crisis tarnished the reputation of every other part of the financial-services sector, Americans' confidence in credit unions continues to grow.

Let us not forget: During the financial crisis, the credit union system was just about the only part of America's financial sector that did not buckle under stress.

With American families struggling, and with big banks turning their backs on Main Street, it was credit unions that stepped up to the challenge.

It was credit unions that reached out – that made loans – that provided advice and reassurance.

It was credit unions that set out to modify mortgages, so that their members could stay in their homes.

It was credit unions that helped millions of Americans regain a measure of financial stability, and thus regain their confidence.

That is the kind of positive impact you can continue to achieve, as the economy moves from recession toward recovery.

In a spirit of partnership – drawing on the faith that millions of Americans place in their credit unions – I am looking forward to working closely with you in the years ahead . . . to help you make the most of the opportunities that your industry enjoys, and to help you provide the benefits that American consumers deserve.

Thank you very much.