

Jack Bauer Goes Subprime! *The Washington Post*, April 15, 2010

(Kiefer Sutherland voiceover: "The following takes place between 2 p.m. and 3 p.m. Events occur in real time.")

The hearing room of the Senate permanent subcommittee on investigations. Two men caucus in urgent tones behind the dais.

Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), chairman: What you're proposing is most unusual, Mr. Bauer. I'll need to talk to counsel.

Agent Jack Bauer: With all due respect, senator, we don't have time for that. Either we gin up the kind of public outrage that gives real financial reform a chance—or we let the lobbyists win and guarantee an even bigger financial meltdown a few years out. These bankers will blather their way through your hearings to the point where you'll be lucky to get even one decent sound bite on the news. Mitch McConnell says he'll do anything to kill reform. The president's pow-wow with congressional leaders Wednesday can't change this dynamic. You have to decide *now*.

Levin: All right. But we won't really have to hurt the family, will we?

Bauer (to a medic): Administer the serum. (Medic approaches the witness.)

Kerry Killinger, ex-CEO of Washington Mutual: No! Not that! I promise, I'll do any—(He is injected.)

Levin (slamming gavel): This hearing is convened. Welcome, Mr. Killinger. Washington Mutual, where you were CEO, was the biggest bank failure in U.S. history. Agent Bauer will handle the interrogation—I mean, the questioning.

Bauer: Mr. Killinger, a number of former WaMu employees have told the press that they felt sick about peddling adjustable-rate mortgages to people who couldn't afford them. Poor old ladies lost their homes. Why did you push these products on them?

KK: That had to be a few bad apples in the sales force. We had a strong published policy to always put the customer's needs first.

Bauer: THINK, Mr. Killinger.

KK (automaton-like): It was part of our plan to goose profits and bonuses while the getting was good.

Levin (aside): Hey, this talking-points antidote really works. . . . (fretting) Make sure you don't spill any of that stuff up here . . .

Bauer: WaMu's internal records show that the bank packaged and resold billions in subprime mortgages that you knew were experiencing high delinquencies and outright fraud.

KK: No, we had very tight internal controls and risk committees that met . . .

Bauer: THINK, Mr. Killinger.

KK (monotone): Everyone was doing it. Wall Street wanted to buy the stuff. The rating agencies said they were riskless. Fools!

Bauer: Mr. Killinger, I direct your attention to the live video feed on the screen to my right. Can you identify who is on there?

KK: Why, yes, that's my wife, and our children and grandchildren. Who are those men with guns? What's that paperwork? How dare you—

Bauer rushes witness, grabs him by the neck and pounds him to the table in one swift move.

Bauer: Listen to me, Killinger. Unless you start talking, our agents will have your entire family's home loans refinanced into WaMu-style option ARMs that jump 6 points after the first year. And believe me, we've pushed the fees and commissions to levels few humans can withstand.

KK: You wouldn't. That would ruin them. You're bluffing.

Bauer: Look in my eyes, Killinger. Do I look like a man who won't do this?

Levin: Agent Bauer! Please!

Bauer (regaining composure): Mr. Killinger, would you lend your own money to borrowers who couldn't prove they had any income to pay it back?

KK: Of course not.

Bauer: But you let Washington Mutual shareholders do it?

KK: Oh, yes.

Bauer: Why?

KK: Turns out it's a way to get quite rich. Did you know I made \$100 million between 2003 and 2008?

Bauer: Yes, before WaMu was seized by regulators. How could you make so much money while presiding over the collapse of your bank and the devastation of so many vulnerable customers?

KK: That's not fair. We should have been given a federal bailout like the other big banks. No one

could have anticipated the historic decline in housing prices.

Bauer: THINK, Mr. Killinger.

KK: It was a perfect storm . . . perfect storm . . . perfect storm . . .

Levin (to Bauer): I thought the serum was supposed to cut through this.

Bauer: Some excuses are so deep it can't penetrate. Mr. Killinger, final question: Do we need an independent consumer protection agency?

KK: Is the pope foot-dragging on child abuse? Look, I'll answer, but I want full immunity.

Bauer: From what?

KK: From the scorn I'll get at the club. Once I admit that more transparency with consumers means less profits for banks, I'll never work in this business again.