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January 12, 2002

Attorney General John Ashcroft
United States Department of Justice
Washington, DC 20530-0001

Dear Attorney General Ashcroft:

I am in favor of the current settlement between Microsoft and the government.

There are some rare instances in which the government needs to step in and level the playing field when one of the players of our free market economy both becomes exaggeratedly strong and uses its strength abusively to destroy its competition. Even in cases in which the government needs to level the playing field, the government must be careful not to make companies afraid to come out with the best products and services at the best prices.

My concern is that Microsoft, like IBM and other companies that experienced government intervention will not be as innovative as they can due to fear of being declared monopolistic. When I did some software contract work inside IBM, I saw for myself how law-suit phobic IBM became. Today, IBM never has the best laptop or best desktop computer. Their computers always lag the market late and are a little slower and have slightly less memory, etc., than competing brands. I am sure that IBM does this deliberately. This is a result of their corporate experience with IBM competitors using the government to suppress IBM.

I've read that in the current settlement, Microsoft agrees not to enter into any agreements obligating any third party to distribute or promote any Windows technology exclusively or in a fixed percentage; not to retaliate against computer makers who ship software that competes with anything in its Windows operating system; or against software of hardware developers who develop or promote software that competes with Windows or that runs on software that competes with Windows.

Mr. Ashcroft, when I buy Windows and other Microsoft products, no one is holding a gun to my head to force me to buy Microsoft. I keep looking for alternative products. These days, Microsoft simply has the best products.

The government should do only enough to make sure companies compete based on products, services, and price, and that companies do not eliminate competitors by abuse of strength. I think the current settlement is enough. Requiring more would go overboard.

I think your approving this settlement will level the playing field without Microsoft becoming afraid to be the best. I urge you to accept it after the public comment period is concluded.

Sincerely,



Ron Lewis