Madame Chair and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to speak. My name is Jim DuPont. I am a Marine Corps veteran and chairman of the Veterans Committee of Unite HERE, a labor union that advocates on behalf of 250,000 food service and hospitality workers across North America. I am also Executive Vice President and Director of the Food Service Division at Unite HERE.

I enlisted as a Marine in 1971 because I wanted to serve our country. I was drawn to the Marine Corps, in particular, because of their commitment to the ideals and values that make this country exceptional. These values include: Honor, courage, commitment, and service before self. Like many young men and women, I was attracted to the Marines because I believed they were genuinely committed to striving for excellence in everything they did.

It came as a shock to me, and to my colleagues who are veterans, to learn that the Marine Corps is sponsoring the Ultimate Fighting Championship, or UFC, an organization that goes against everything I believe as a veteran and as an American.

I am not going to recount the litany of repulsive and inappropriate remarks by people associated with the UFC. It would easily take up the entire public comment period of this meeting. I encourage members of this Committee to read the materials in the packets I have provided and to visit the website, www.UnfitFortheCorps.org

This much is fact. Popular UFC fighters have joked about rape on their public Twitter accounts. One appeared in a video making light of sexual assault. On multiple occasions, UFC fighters have made remarks that are demeaning towards women, gays and Latinos. The UFC does not have a policy of publicly reprimanding its fighters when they say such things.

Clearly a line has been crossed when professional athletes can joke about rape and engage in hate speech in public and get away with it.

This summer, more than 10,000 people nationwide signed a written petition calling on the Marine Corps to renounce its support of the UFC. My union has delivered these petitions to the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James Amos, as well as to the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, Representative Howard McKeon.
In addition, a broad coalition of veterans groups, academics and organizations that advocate for survivors of sexual assault, have endorsed our efforts to end the relationship between the Marines and the UFC.

Our list of supporters includes: Professor Elizabeth Hillman, President of the National Institute for Military Justice; Lory Manning, Director of the Women in the Military Project; Jennifer Wells, Executive Director of Protect Our Defenders; Debby Tucker, Executive Director of the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence; and Bob Handy, Chairman of Veterans United For Truth, among others.

We recognize that no organization is perfect. But exactly what kind of young men and women will the Marine Corps attract by publicly aligning with the UFC? Are they trying to recruit men who will treat their fellow soldiers with respect and will strive to end sexual assault in the military, or men who will think it is funny if other soldiers are assaulted?

Our military leaders talk frequently of a “zero tolerance” policy against sexual assault. But such pronouncements are less credible if those same leaders stand by and allow our tax dollars to be spent on an organization that tolerates misogyny and sexism from people associated with it.

By continuing to sponsor the UFC, the Marine Corps is betraying the very ideals that persuaded me, and so many other young men and women, to serve our country with honor and dignity.

On behalf of the Veterans Committee of Unite HERE, and the 10,000 people who signed our petition, I ask that DACOWITS formally recommend that the Defense Department and Marine Corps sever all ties with the Ultimate Fighting Championship and any organization that tolerates hate speech, in any form.

Thank you.

Jim DuPont
Chairman, Veterans Committee of Unite HERE
U.S. Marine Corps Veteran