Statement to the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services; Request for Military to Sever Ties with the Ultimate Fighting Championship

September 27, 2012

Madame Chair and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

My name is Edna Everett. I am a veteran of the U.S. Army. I served in the Army for seven years before being honorably discharged with an injury. Currently, I am a food service worker at Stevenson University in Baltimore; the proud mother of a 15-year-old daughter; and an active volunteer in the Girl Scouts.

I am here today to communicate my deep displeasure and disgust at the U.S. military’s ongoing sponsorship of the cage fighting promotion known as the Ultimate Fighting Championship, or the UFC.

This summer, I came across a YouTube video in which a popular UFC fighter named “Rampage” Jackson pretends to rape a woman in a parking garage. This video has received more than 190,000 views on YouTube. In another video, this same fighter can be seen practically molesting a female reporter from behind.

But the most shocking, to me, was when UFC fighters started to joke about rape in public. One star UFC fighter actually wrote on Twitter, “Rape is the new missionary.” Another fighter wrote, “If a rape van was called a surprise van, more women wouldn’t mind going for rides in them.”

Members of this Committee, rape is never funny.

Rape is not funny to the estimated 19,000 men and women of our military who were raped or sexually assaulted in 2010.

And rape is not funny to me, a proud mother of a teenage daughter – a daughter who must make her way in a world where young men can watch YouTube videos of UFC fighters making light of rape and sexual assault.

I ask you this: Can you imagine our military allowing a soldier to behave like these UFC fighters towards other soldiers?

My guess is such a person would be reprimanded or removed from duty immediately. But to my knowledge, the UFC fighters who appeared in these disgusting videos have never been reprimanded in public.

At the age of 18, I enlisted in the Army out of a sense of honor and duty. My shoes had to be shined. My badges couldn’t have any fingerprints. From my hair down to my feet, I had to look and act in a dignified manner.
Why? Because I didn’t just represent myself. When you put on that uniform, you represent the entire country. A lot of children look up to soldiers as heroes because they see them as honorable.

But where is the honor in the UFC? Where is the honor in cage fighting – a sport in which each fighter appears to be on a mission to outdo the other fighter in terms of who can be the most disrespectful and misogynistic?

In cage fighting, it’s all about ticket sales and television ratings. In their world, misogyny sells because it generates controversy. And controversy sells tickets.

I saw a commercial recently in which the UFC tried to equate cage fighting with military service. As a veteran, I found this both offensive and misleading.

In the military, you work in teams. In cage fighting, it’s every man for himself.

In the military, you’re only as strong as you’re weakest link. In cage fighting, anyone who doesn’t win is weak.

Military service is a proud and honorable tradition. Cage fighting is a violent spectacle that people participate in for money. The two should never be equated.

Madame Chairwoman and members of this Committee, I applaud you for your sacrifice to our country, and your ongoing work advocating on behalf of women and equal opportunity in our military.

I strongly encourage you to call on the leadership of the Defense Department to sever all ties between the military and the UFC.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Edna Everett

Member, Veterans Committee of Unite HERE
Food Service Worker, Stevenson University in Baltimore