

For Immediate Release

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Advocacy groups call on Defense Secretary to cease funding of Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC)

More than 7,400 people signed a petition demanding the U.S. Marine Corps cut ties with the UFC over homophobic slurs and misogynistic comments made by UFC fighters

Monterey, Calif. – Outraged by homophobic and sexist remarks, a delegation of more than 50 military veterans, union activists and advocates for gay and lesbian service members today will deliver a letter to the Panetta Institute for Public Policy in Monterey, California, urging Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to cease military funding of the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC).

“The hateful remarks by UFC fighters and others associated with this cage fighting company are deeply offensive to many people in uniform who have served this country with honor and integrity,” said Lorenzo Sanchez, a U.S. Coast Guard veteran from Watsonville, Calif., who will join the delegation outside the Panetta Institute. “The Pentagon must immediately put an end to this inappropriate relationship and refrain from using taxpayer money to sponsor the UFC.”

To watch a video of veterans objecting to the military’s sponsorship of the UFC, click here: http://youtu.be/t_cjTZCrMeQ

The letter to Mr. Panetta catalogues a long list of anti-gay and anti-women slurs by people associated with the UFC, the nation’s largest promoter of professional cage fighting events. The Marines have continued to air commercials during televised UFC events, even after groups have publicly criticized the UFC for tolerating jokes about rape, homophobic slurs and sexually explicit remarks that are demeaning towards women. For a copy of the letter, click here: <http://bit.ly/ltrPanetta>

Since May, more than 7,400 people nationwide have signed a petition calling on the Marine Corps to “renounce its support of the UFC immediately.” On July 12th, veterans and their supporters hand-delivered these petitions to Marine Corps recruiting stations in seven cities. For more information visit www.UnfitFortheCorps.org

According to a poll on the official blog of the Marine Corps, 65 percent of respondents as of July 31st voted “No” to the question, “With a veterans group coming out against the practice, do you think the Marine Corps should continue to support the Ultimate Fighting Championship (UFC)?”

The offensive remarks by people associated with the UFC conflict with the Defense Department's stated commitment to tolerance for sexual diversity. In a June 15th videotaped message recognizing Gay Pride Month, Mr. Panetta said, "I remain committed to removing as many barriers as possible to make America's military a model of equal opportunity."

The letter to Defense Secretary Panetta is signed by leaders of a diverse coalition of local, state and national organizations. The signatories include Jennifer Wells, Executive Director of **Protect Our Defenders**; Debby Tucker, Executive Director of the **National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence**; Evelyn Thomas, Executive Director of **The Sanctuary Project Veterans**; Erin Neff, Executive Director of **ProgressNow Nevada**; Mike Reid, Executive Director of **Veterans For Peace**; Jim DuPont, Chairman of the **Veterans Committee of UNITE HERE**; Cleve Jones, Community and Political Director of **UNITE HERE**; and Michael Ginsburg, Southern Nevada Director, **Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada**.

WHAT: Delegation demands Defense Secretary Leon Panetta to cease military funding of the UFC

WHO: Military veterans, union activists, advocates for gay and lesbian service members

WHERE: Panetta Institute for Public Policy at California State University, Monterey Bay

WHEN: Wednesday, August 1, 2012 at 1 p.m. PST

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