



## ***Veterans Request McKeon End Military Sponsorship of Sexist and Homophobic UFC***

Written by Mark Archuleta

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On Saturday, 25<sup>th</sup> District Congressman Howard “Buck” McKeon will be holding his 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Women’s Conference at College of the Canyons. The event described as “...a morning filled with motivational speakers and educational sessions focused around issues most important to women today...” will also include an unscheduled delivery of petitions to McKeon by a woman (Beatriz Topete, a U.S. Army veteran) with her own important issue - stopping the military’s sponsorship of UFC (Ultimate Fighting Championship) whose behavior she considers sexist and homophobic.

“Under no circumstances should our taxpayer money go to organizations like the UFC that tolerate homophobia, misogyny and hate speech by people associated with it,” said Topete, director of the Veterans Committee of UNITE HERE, and co-chair of the Veterans Committee of the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor, AFL-CIO. “The comments by some UFC fighters and UFC president Dana White are deeply offensive to many of our veteran brothers and sisters who have defended this country with honor.”

The veterans group plans to deliver 10,000 signatures to McKeon (chairman of the House Armed Services Committee) not with the idea of being confrontational but educational. UNITE HERE officials say they’d mailed their information and concerns to McKeon’s Washington, D.C. office a month ago and never received a response.

“It is time for elected officials who have oversight over military spending to do the right thing

and refrain from rewarding organizations that tolerate sexism and homophobia with tax dollars,” said Micah Ehler, a U.S. Army veteran and member of the Veterans Committee of UNITE HERE, a union that represents 250,000 hospitality workers in North America.

According to UNITE HERE, in an Aug. 1 letter to Defense Secretary Panetta, leaders of a coalition of local, state and national organizations - including the National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence, Protect Our Defenders and Veterans For Peace -- demanded that Panetta cease taxpayer funding of the UFC. The letter catalogued a long list of anti-women and anti-gay slurs by people associated with the mixed martial art organization UFC.

For a copy of the letter to Mr. Panetta, [click here](#): (Warning: the letter contains graphic language and offensive quotes.)

Many of the examples cited by UNITE HERE have been collected on a video entitled UFC = Unfit For Children, which can be viewed by clicking [here](#). (Warning: the video contains graphic language and offensive behavior.)

UNITE HERE takes issue with the U.S. Marine Corps decision 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.”

To watch a Marine Corps-UFC commercial, [click here](#).

In addition to inappropriate behavior by UFC fighters and their President Dana White, many veterans have expressed concern about the way in which images of soldiers sacrificing for country have been juxtaposed with the spectacle of cage fighting for money.

According to UNITE HERE “This particular line has offended some of our union members who are veterans: *‘SOME VICTORIES ARE MEASURED IN BELTS AND TITLES. SOME VICTORIES ARE MEASURED IN STARS AND STRIPES.’*”

Topete says the comparison of soldiers who put their lives on the line to cage fighters makes no sense.

“A cage fighter is there for entertainment. Cage fighters are there to make the organization money and to entertain. A Marine, a soldier is defending our country,” said Topete.

To watch a video of veterans objecting to the military's sponsorship of the UFC on the UNITE HERE website Unfit For Children, [click here](#):

(The UNITE HERE website Unfit for Children.org is run by Las Vegas-based Culinary Workers Union Local 226. The union has had had battles with the non-union Station Casinos, which is partly owned by Frank and Lorenzo Fertitta, who also own UFC parent company Zuffa LLC.)

In April Advertising Age reported a reprimand by Anheuser-Busch to UFC to clean up their act. In the article, UFC responded:

"With over 425 athletes on our roster, there have unfortunately been instances where a couple athletes have made insensitive or inappropriate comments. We don't condone this behavior, and in no way is it reflective of the company or its values."

Topete, who has seen inappropriate behavior by the UFC president Dana White, says making light of rape and making homophobic slurs is encouraged from above.

"It starts at the top, right? It is the behavior of the athletes. I don't believe this behavior is tolerated in other sports. But because Dana White, the president, is behaving this way of course the other athletes are going to do the same," said Topete.

Topete says this behavior would not be tolerated in the NFL, the MLB, or NBA.

"They would get fined reprimanded for this behavior. But with the UFC it's actually endorsed," said Topete.

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