

**Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden**  
**Subcommittee on Digital Commerce and Consumer Protection**  
**“Perspectives on Mixed Martial Arts”**  
**November 9, 2017**

Good Morning, and thank you to all of our witnesses for appearing before this Committee today. Thank you especially to Mr. Couture—although I understand you were born in Washington State, you have spent enough time in Oregon that for purposes of this hearing we will consider you an honorary Oregonian.<sup>1</sup>

This hearing will also examine H.R. 44, the Muhammad Ali Expansion Act, sponsored by our colleague Congressman Markwayne Mullin of Oklahoma. I look forward to a thoughtful discussion.

Mixed martial arts have enjoyed tremendous popularity since UFC 1 was held almost exactly 24 years ago in Denver, Colorado, on November 12, 1993. Since that event the sport has grown to be an international sensation, viewed in 1.1 billion homes in 156 countries around the globe. And it is an economic powerhouse: last year the UFC sold for \$4 billion, and both UFC and Bellator compete for contracts with the most well-known and accomplished fighters that battle at widely-attended events.

In the U.S., mixed martial arts bouts are subject to regulation in all 50 states. These regulations are primarily concerned with protecting the integrity of the sport and the safety of the fighters.

In many ways MMA’s regulation is similar to that of boxing, but the two sports have differences beyond merely the tactics employed by the fighters. Unlike in boxing, MMA has no centralized ranking system, and title bouts are largely determined by the promoters of the sport. Fighters are treated as independent contractors, and enter into agreements with the promoters of a particular MMA organization, which may contain exclusivity clauses barring the fighter from engaging in unapproved fights.

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<sup>1</sup> For reference only: Mr. Couture lived in Corvallis, where he served as a wrestling and strength coach for OSU, and he started “Team Quest,” a training camp for MMA fighters, out of Gresham. For a time he was listed as “fighting out of Roseburg, OR” on his MMA profile.

The growth of MMA in the United States has been a tremendous success story. At today's hearing we look forward to hearing the witnesses describe their experiences as regulators, competitors and promoters, and to learn about any ideas or recommendations that can help MMA continue to thrive. This Committee is committed to ensuring the safety and well-being of the athletes, healthy competition among promoters, and support for our State regulators.

Thank you and I yield back the balance of my time.