



STATEMENT OF

MARC RATNER
SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF
GOVERNMENT AND REGULATORY AFFAIRS
UFC

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON DIGITAL COMMERCE AND
CONSUMER PROTECTION
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FOR A HEARING ON

“PERSPECTIVES ON MIXED MARTIAL ARTS”

PRESENTED

NOVEMBER 9, 2017

Chairman Latta, Ranking Member Schakowsky, my name is Marc Ratner, Senior Vice President of Government and Regulatory Affairs at the UFC. I am pleased to share with you my perspectives about regulation of mixed martial arts (MMA) and why applying the Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act to MMA does not make sense.

I have been involved in boxing, a sport I love, for most of my adult life. For over 20 years, I served at the Nevada State Athletic Commission as a boxing regulator. I started in 1985 as an Inspector and in 1998 was promoted to Chief Inspector. After a brief stint as Acting Executive Director, I was officially elevated to the position in 1993 and served until 2006. I also served as the President of the Association of Boxing Commissioners. I was honored to have been inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame in 2016 and the Southern Nevada Sports Hall of Fame. It has been a great point of pride that I have been associated with the sport of boxing for these many years.

Because of my love and admiration for the sport of boxing, I was concerned about the conflicts, cronyism, and corruption that was undermining this great sport. In fact, because of my significant concerns, I testified before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation nearly 20 years ago about the problems in the sport and discussed with the Committee measures that could be taken to fix what was so clearly broken. I can tell you from a lifetime of experience that the problems facing boxing when Congress considered the Muhammad Ali Boxing Act are absolutely not present in MMA.

After nearly 20 years on the Nevada Boxing Commission, I joined the UFC because I had come to admire and appreciate what the UFC, under new leadership, had done for MMA. Make no mistake, it was the UFC and only the UFC that undertook the hard work and expended the personal and monetary capital to make MMA what it is today – the fastest growing sport in the world. It was not always so.

A short five years before I joined the UFC, it was nearly bankrupt. Run into the ground by its previous owners, Frank and Lorenzo Fertitta and their good friend Dana White, the current President of the UFC, purchased the UFC for \$2 Million in 2001. For that \$2 million, they received the UFC's limited intellectual property – basically three letters, "U, F, and C" and a box of old tapes. There were no distribution deals, no plans for future events, and the UFC was nearly bankrupt. MMA was in disregard because it was not a real sport. It had no rules and events were held in unregulated markets. It was marketed as a blood sport. Sen. John McCain, a huge boxing fan, famously derided the sport as "human cockfighting." A sport, which combines disciplines from many honorable combat sport specialties like boxing, wrestling, judo, kickboxing and ju-jitsu, was shunned.

MMA was transformed from a shunned spectacle to a respected sport because of the UFC's leadership, ingenuity, entrepreneurship, foresight, hard work and some significant risk taking. A key to the UFC's success is regulation which ensures fairness, consistency, and adherence to a common set of rules. I traveled, along with my colleagues, from capital to capital urging states to legalize MMA, adopt the uniform rules of mixed martial arts, and regulate the sport. Sixteen years after purchasing the UFC in 2001, we are proud to say that MMA is and regulated in all states that have athletic commissions and around the world. I want to emphasize

that no one else embarked on this hard work. We didn't ask Congress for a grant or tax break. Our many competitors did not spend a dime or lift a finger in a single state capital advocating for the legitimization of MMA. It was the UFC, and only the UFC, that crisscrossed the country and the world to convince lawmakers to legalize and regulate the sport. We have many competitors today, but they did not assist with the effort to transform MMA from a shunned and disregarded spectacle into a sport that has earned the admiration and respect of millions. In 2001, only one state regulated MMA. Today, all 50 states regulate the sport and it is regulated around the world. In 2017, UFC will host 39 events around the world, and will be broadcast in over 163 countries and territories to more than 1.1 billion TV households worldwide in 35 different languages.

This Subcommittee should understand that state regulation is real and effective. The UFC has consistently embraced thorough regulation of MMA because these rules help ensure athlete safety and fair competition by providing a consistent set of rules for the sport – something that was missing in the early days of MMA. All UFC bouts are now governed with full adherence to the provisions set forth in the Unified Rules of MMA, as regulated by state athletic commissions. Each fight is overseen by the appropriate state athletic commission, which provides independent evaluation and rule enforcement. State athletic commissions and similar regulatory bodies are true champions for athlete safety and their involvement in the sport has done a great deal to improve safety. We're proud to partner with these organizations to protect MMA athletes, and we are continuously evaluating procedures to determine how to further improve safety measures.

Furthermore, this quintessential American success story has created wealth and opportunity for many for whom no such opportunity previously existed. I regard this as one of the great virtues of the UFC and is rightly a point of pride for us. Today, collegiate and Olympic wrestlers, judo specialists, and other mixed martial artists have a professional outlet for their athletic endeavors that barely existed a 15 years ago. Dozens upon dozens of mixed martial artists are millionaires because of these opportunities. They have capitalized on their successes by opening gyms; managing and training fighters; obtaining sponsorships; and some have even made it in Hollywood.

We are also proud of our female fighters. Women excel in the UFC. The UFC has created one of the biggest platforms for female athletes in professional sports. The organization has done so by putting athletes first, regardless of gender. Women competing in the UFC do so on the same terms as their male counterparts, on the same fight cards, under the same rules, and with the same earning opportunities. UFC's biggest event in history, which attracted more than 56,000 fans, was headlined by four women competing in championship events. Their success has been a significant contribution to the global popularity of UFC today. Rhonda Rousey was the UFC's biggest draw for over two years and she accomplished that in a combat sport historically dominated by men.

A very small minority of fighters have urged this Committee to enact legislation because of some perceived unfairness. The contrary is true. The UFC is the undisputed leader in how it supports athletes, and promotes athlete health and performance. Because there are many competitive promoter options for MMA athletes around the world, UFC does everything it can to be the prime destination for top tier talent. UFC offers its athletes a generous compensation and benefits package. We consistently pay the highest purses in the industry, plus an opportunity to

earn fight night bonuses. The UFC is the first and only promoter providing accident insurance that covers both competition and training injuries. Last year, this Subcommittee heard from Jeff Novitzky, the UFC's Vice President of Athlete Health and Performance who explained the UFC anti-doping program, which is the most comprehensive anti-doping program in all of sports. It is administered by the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA), not by the UFC. It requires athletes to be available for random drug testing 24/7, 365 days a year. We are the largest supporter of a landmark study on fighter brain health being conducted by the Cleveland Clinic. This study seeks to determine whether particular individuals are predisposed to brain injury. It further seeks to determine whether tiny changes in the brain can foretell problems before symptoms become apparent. Earlier this year, the UFC opened a new performance institute that provides its athletes with the most advanced training and wellness network, and unveiled new guidelines to improve weight management practices.

Some have argued that because boxing and MMA are both combat sports, both should be governed by the Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act. However, the two sports are entirely different.

The Ali Act was passed in 2000 to address specific problems created by boxing promoters and sanctioning organizations over decades. I supported that effort. Boxing's conflicts of interest and corruption are not found in MMA. States and government entities around the world are doing an outstanding job regulating MMA, which has helped foster MMA's explosive growth and popularity. While the expansion of the Ali Act to include MMA is intended to aid athletes, it would actually harm the sport and the athletes it's supposed to help.

MMA is not run in any way like boxing was during the 1980s and 1990s. The Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act was enacted to address chronic corruption in boxing, including conflicts of interest and self-dealing. These problems not associated with MMA. In boxing, some managers also served as promoter and agent – a clear conflict of interest and bad for boxers and the sport. In MMA, athletes are represented by their own agents and attorneys, not by the promoter.

Furthermore, the Ali Act attempted to address corruption in so-called sanctioning organizations. These are the numerous privately run businesses that rank fighters for a fee. Many were concerned that these sanctioning organizations were corruptly holding certain fighters down or propping others up. MMA does not rely on sanctioning organizations. The UFC's fighters are ranked by sports reporters and those rankings guide our merit-based competitive matchmaking decisions. We put on the fights that fans want to see and they want to see competitive fights. Fighters, fans, and sports reporters keep MMA promoters honest and the success of these promotions, including UFC, is a testament to the fair way these enterprises are managed.

H.R. 44 would impose boxing's sanctioning organization model onto MMA. This would undermine the sport the way it has hindered boxing's growth. There is a reason why MMA is more popular today than boxing, and a large reason for that is the predictability and transparency of the MMA system. A multiplicity of ranking systems is not conducive to running a sports organization and has hampered boxing's growth. When I testified in favor of congressional

action to help the states regulate boxing, I warned about the metastasizing sanctioning bodies. My testimony stated: “Any discussion of these [sanctioning] organizations, which rank boxers and State championship bouts, should begin by recognizing that the number of these organizations have multiplied like rabbits . . . [and] there does not seem to be any end in sight. There is a lack of uniformity in the rating of boxers. This situation has become unwieldy to the boxing industry. Having only one ranking organization should be the goal.” The UFC learned this lesson in boxing and relies on only one ranking system. Furthermore, Congress passed the Ali Act to address the alleged corruption involving sanctioning bodies. Why would Congress force MMA promoters to use a system that has failed so miserably and was the rationale for the Ali Act in the first place? Why Congress would insist on applying that system which was of such concern on MMA is baffling? H.R. 44 would remove from the promoter the decisions regarding when and against whom fighters are matched, and might force inter-promotional fights. Because different promotions have less comprehensive health and safety standards than the UFC, our fighters would be endangered.

Mr. Chairman, From all accounts, if the market response is a reliable guide, the UFC is not disappointing MMA athletes or fans, which is why MMA is the fastest growing sport in the world. We led the creation of this exciting sport, we are leaders in athlete health and safety, we treat our fighters fairly by any objective measure, and we appropriately and with integrity put on the fights that fans want to see.

I look forward to your questions.