

JULY 25, 2018 HELSINKI HEARING

Conducted by the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe
Statement by Katie Uhlaender

Thank you for the opportunity to be here it is inspiring to know the leaders of our nation are not giving up on protecting the rights of athletes. I am a 4 time Olympian and World Champion for the sport of Skeleton.

I have dedicated my life to sprinting and diving head first onto a sled, hurling 80mph down a bobsled track, with my chin inches from the ice. I've competed for the United States for 15 years, and held personal growth, integrity, and character at the forefront of my goals and duties as an Olympian. Despite facing many obstacles, surgeries, financial strain, and family loss I kept my focus on the goals I learned from my father. My father was a professional baseball player, who held his integrity and virtuous character above all. In the 1972 World Series, the Big Red Machine versus Catfish Hunter and the Oakland A's, he was faced with the choice to take performance enhancing drugs, and his response was "when you're at your best it's enough."

His lesson to me was whatever path I chose in life, what I give it, should be something of pure grit and all I have to offer. Excuses should never get in the way of success, and your heart in the effort is what will define it. The effort, integrity, and how I pursue excellence defines me more than the results, or the career I chose.

I chose to be an athlete like my father; which actively delayed my education, career, and settling on a home. My decision to be an Olympian was for the challenge, the growth, and the inspiration that is given and received. A noble path that allows iron to sharpen iron; one that I believe honors my father's legacy, what he has taught me, my country, and God by giving the Olympic movement all I have. Sport is a space in which all races, political parties, and nations come together. The Olympics prominently holds their participants to a standard of heart and inspiration. I am an ambassador for my country, and for a movement that touches the world.

I am not government funded, have very little sponsorship support, and there is very little money to be made by essentially competing on a really fast American Flyer Sled. None of the challenges I've faced deterred me from my dream or grit, I see this choice as a privilege. The dream was to one day stand on the podium, see the flag of the United States raised, and have the opportunity to say thank you all the people that supported me along the way. Winning a medal is the chance to give

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back to those who believed in me, to my community, and my country. That moment on the podium is a platform to inspire others to pursue excellence. The glory is in my effort. Any medal won belongs to those supporting our nation, and the quest to discover what is possible in fortitude and dreams.

I fell just short of that dream to give back at the Sochi, Winter Olympics. I missed a bronze medal by .04 of a second, over a distance of four miles. (Four Hundredths is quicker than you can blink!) I lost the bronze medal to a Russian athlete named in the McLaren Report, and who benefitted from the state sponsored conspiracy. Due to lack of enforcement, she and Russia have kept the medal. When I lost in Sochi, I lost with integrity and respect for my competitors. I did my best to honor all who helped me get there, despite coming up short.

The New York Times revealed the doping scandal, the lengths the Russians went to cheat, and it broke my heart. So many of us had dedicated our lives to compete in that one moment, and we could never get it back.

This was, and is a defining moment for all involved. A line was crossed, erasing the meaning of sport and the Olympics, for me and many. This intentional attack on the virtue of sport caused the meaning of the Olympics to change. Yet I resolved that I had done all I could, and I could only truly lose once. But I was wrong.

The IOC ruled to strip the medals from those who had cheated on November, 2017 (these athletes were listed in the McLaren Report). This made me a bronze medalist, and it felt like the good guy could win! The flame of the Olympic Movement had been relit.

That flame was quickly put out. The ruling was not upheld. The day I arrived in Korea for my 4th Olympic Games, they announced the Court of Arbitration for Sport had overturned that decision. I was no longer a bronze medalist, and had now lost the same Olympics twice. This time almost felt worse, it was a something that crushed more than my own spirit, we all felt it.

How could this happen? The evidence shows Russian athletes were forced to choose between taking illegal drugs to compete, or be cast out of their life's pursuit. This is more than just an attack on an ideal, it's an infringement on all athlete rights. Essentially these athletes are forced to take dangerous drugs, and

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there are no consequences or accountability for it, because the athletes didn't know. What will stop Russia (or another country) from abusing young children or other athletes now realizing there are no serious consequences. Even if the athletes are caught, the abusing powers have no accountability and their nation keeps the glory.

A young athlete can return to sport to perform even after a ban, at no consequence to their coaches or state. The athletes may not feel the health consequences until years after they retire. These drugs can result in serious health risks: shortened life span, an inability to have children, but their country's goals will have been met to win at all costs. There is more at risk here than just the broken rules of a game.

No one is disputing Russia's conspiracy to cheat, the fraud, or the doping, and yet nothing was done to protect the athletes or to prevent this from happening again. There are supposed to be institutions set in place to uphold these ideals, and they are very well defined. I don't know how in light of all the evidence presented, there were no consequences or accountability held. The lack of enforced policy in regard to cheating, fraud, and doping cost the Olympic spirit something indefinable. All of the virtues I was taught to hold above all else were left standing alone, without support, seeming no longer valuable to the Olympic Movement, and it scares me.

It seems clear that we need help with the application and prosecution of the rules. Russia has still not met the standards set before them, is refusing to turn over evidence from the Moscow lab. Evidence that could bring closure to many open cases. It is important that WADA acquires those samples. The Russians have already destroyed over 3,000 samples to hide evidence, and I worry these too will disappear. WADA needs the strength to investigate, collect evidence, and enforce policy to prevent spoliation.

We need help in giving the organizations in place the ability to uphold and execute protection of sport.

As an athlete, I have done all I can. I compete with integrity, represent my nation well and will continue to compete with honor and show gratitude for the opportunity to represent my nation. It seems clean athletes like myself, have no choice but to turn to you, the leaders of our nation for help. We need help protecting the ideals passed from father to daughter, and the things that children

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are raised believing to inspire them to a lifetime of dedication and self-belief. The type of belief and dedication that creates American heroes.

A quote that also embodies why it matters to never give up and continue to speak truth, spread virtue, and uphold one's character:

“If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;

If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise

If you can dream - and not make dreams your master;
If you can think - and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings - nor lose the common touch,

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If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And - which is more - you'll be a Man, my son!"

— **Rudyard Kipling, If: A Father's Advice to His Son**