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Opening Statement of Chairman Raja Krishnamoorthi

Roundtable Entitled “Examining the Washington Football Team’s Toxic Workplace Culture”

February 3, 2022

Good morning. Thank you to Chairwoman Maloney for her leadership, and all of the members here for joining us at this roundtable.

Thank you also to our courageous victims who are speaking out, at great personal risk, to ensure that the truth comes out and that the NFL and the Washington Football Team (known now as the Washington Commanders) are finally held accountable.

Sexual harassment is a serious problem. According to a Pew Research study, nearly 60% of women have been sexually harassed, and 40% of women have been harassed at work.

Many victims fear reporting harassment – in fact, around 90% of victims never file a formal complaint. Why? Because they fear retaliation. That comes as no surprise, since nearly 75% of those who file complaints do face retaliation.

Sexual harassment is a dangerous cycle: perpetrators harass; victims who report are ignored, silenced, or retaliated against; and then perpetrators get away with their misconduct and repeat it again and again.

We are here today to help break this cycle.

That’s why the Chairwoman and I launched our investigation into sexual harassment at the Washington Football Team, and the NFL’s mishandling of it. The WFT and the NFL, among the most prominent workplaces in America, should be setting a higher standard for others, not avoiding accountability and covering up sexual harassment.

In fact, the NFL previously embraced that role: in 2014, in the wake of the Ray Rice domestic violence scandal, Commissioner Roger Goodell said the NFL is “held to a higher standard, and properly so.”

But behind the scenes, neither the WFT nor the NFL was holding itself to this higher standard.

We’ll hear painful stories from our victims about the severe, pervasive sexual harassment they experienced, spanning almost two decades. We’ll hear how the harassment wasn’t limited to one or two harassers, or one or two victims – it spanned the entire organization. And that rot started at the top – with team owner Daniel Snyder – and trickled down.

Mr. Snyder claimed, in response to media reports of the harassment, that he was “unaware of these allegations” and was simply too “hands-off as an owner.”

As we’ll hear today, unfortunately nothing could be further from the truth.

And Mr. Goodell has engaged in troubling behavior as well. As I said, Goodell claimed in 2014 to embrace a “higher standard” for the NFL. But in 2018, he failed to implement recommendations from a sexual harassment investigation of the Carolina Panthers. Those recommendations, if implemented, could have protected today’s victims. The NFL had a playbook to fight sexual harassment; it just didn’t use it.

But Goodell didn’t just fail to implement those recommendations. The NFL deep-sixed the findings from its own investigation into the Washington Football Team. Mr. Goodell and Mr. Snyder worked together to make sure the public never heard the full story – until now.

Fortunately, the victims before us have been brave enough to speak out. Speaking out shouldn’t be their burden – they shouldn’t have to retell, day after day, the stories of their trauma. But unfortunately, that’s where we’ve wound up, thanks to the NFL’s apparent cover-up.

After we hear from these victims, we’ll all be clear on one thing: to ensure real accountability – and to stop workplace harassment in the future -- the NFL and WFT must release the findings of its own investigation. This is the beginning, not the end, of holding the rich and powerful accountable and protecting women across America from workplace sexual harassment. Recognizing the NFL’s power and popularity, Roger Goodell said that we should hold the NFL to a higher standard. And starting with today’s roundtable, we will.

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