

BEYOND THE BALLPARK: THE ROLE OF MINOR LEAGUES IN ECONOMIC GROWTH

HEARING

BEFORE THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON INNOVATION,
ENTREPRENEURSHIP, AND WORKFORCE
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BEYOND THE BALLPARK: THE ROLE OF MINOR LEAGUE BASEBALL IN ECONOMIC GROWTH

TUESDAY, JUNE 10, 2025

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON SMALL BUSINESS,
SUBCOMMITTEE ON INNOVATION, ENTREPRENEURSHIP,
AND WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT,
Washington, DC.

The Subcommittee met, pursuant to call, at 2:29 p.m., in Room 2360, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Brian Jack [chairman of the Subcommittee] presiding.

Present: Representatives Jack, Wied, Bresnahan, Downing, Patronis, Scholten, Simon, Olszewski, McGarvey, and McIver.

Also Present: Representatives William, and McDowell.

Chairman JACK. So, before we begin, as is customary for this Committee, I will lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance and an opening prayer. If you will stand with me. I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of American, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

ALL. I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

Chairman JACK. For those who wish to do so, will you please take a moment to pray with me? Dear Heavenly Father, thank you for bringing us here today, different people from different places with different perspectives, united under something as simple and fun as baseball. In a world so often divided, we are grateful for moments like this where shared love for a game reminds us of what we have in common. We humbly ask for your blessing over our conversations today. May they be filled with respect, openness, and a spirit of unity. Amen.

Good afternoon, everyone. I now call the Small Business Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development to order. Without objection, the Chair is authorized to declare a recess of the Committee at any time.

Pursuant to Committee rules, I request unanimous consent for Representative McDowell to wave onto this hearing for the purpose of asking questions under the 5-minute rule. Without objection, so ordered.

I now recognize myself for my opening statement.

Welcome, everyone, to today's hearing entitled "Beyond the Ballpark: The Role of Minor League Baseball and Economic Growth." With the annual Congressional Baseball Game tomorrow, Capitol Hill is abuzz about America's pastime. This is our first hearing of the Small Business Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development, and I thank Ranking Member Scholten for her partnership as we planned today's discussion.

This hearing is focused on the economic benefit Minor League Baseball brings to communities across America. Almost every Member of Congress on this panel represents a city that hosts a professional baseball team operating within Minor League Baseball or its partner leagues like the Pioneer Baseball League or the American Association of Professional Baseball. While only 27 of America's largest cities host Major League Baseball teams, fans of America's pastime are able to enjoy professional baseball in over 200 small- to medium-sized cities across our country.

Minor league ball clubs create significant economic impact opportunities for local businesses and the teams bring enormous pride to the communities they call home. Some minor league teams are owned and operated by their major league affiliate. But the majority of minor league clubs qualify as small businesses and experience many of the same challenges our full Committee has addressed, like access to capital, stable employment, and fluctuating sales. Minor League Baseball organizations are unique in that they have little to no control over their roster of players and the product they put on the field. Instead, they must innovate to create affordable experiences that draw fans and families to the ballpark.

If you follow MILB promos on Instagram or X, you will see a steady stream of the innovative promotions Minor League Baseball teams offer, from bobblehead giveaways to \$1 hot dog nights. One of the more memorable promotions came from the Stockton Ports, which hosted Asparagus Night replete with an asparagus eating contest and very healthy asparagus theme uniforms. To be successful in Minor League Baseball, you must have an entrepreneurial spirit and clearly a great sense of marketing.

As my colleagues know, I am a passionate supporter of professional baseball and I was very excited last year when my hometown Atlanta Braves announced Minor League Baseball was returning to Columbus, Georgia, Georgia's second largest city, for the first time in 17 years. I represent the northwestern part of Columbus and many of my constituents are proud season ticket owners and attendees of Columbus' new ball club.

Last September, I joined hundreds of my now constituents at an event at the Columbus Georgia Convention and Trade Center at which the team and mascot were revealed. A video played on the screen and the Columbus Clingstones were formed with the name and mascot that immediately went viral. In April, I was honored to attend the Clingstones' sold out opening night to see nine-time Major League Baseball All-Star Craig Kimbrel pitch a scoreless ending. Later that week I attended another game and was honored to join the radio and television broadcasts and provide color commentary. At each game the atmosphere was electric, the community was vibrant, and the attendance number suggests this trend will continue.

Already in just 24 games, over 100,000 fans have attended a Columbus Clingstones game this season. Prior to the Clingstones founding, the historic ballpark at which they play was vacant and its infrastructure was crumbling. But thanks to the public-private partnership with the Columbus Consolidated Government, the team's ownership group, and companies like Synovus, the ballpark has been completely renovated and the area around it is set to thrive. Local restaurants and hotels are already experiencing the positive impact from the Columbus Clingstones and I look forward to learning more today about how the Clingstones are generating economic opportunities and memorable experiences for my constituents.

As was said in the "Field of Dreams," baseball has been the one constant through all the years and has a very special way of connecting each of us. In the 1970s, my father played baseball in Georgia's Stan Musial Division of the American Amateur Baseball Congress. After a game, one of his teammates, James Ivey, was signed by the Atlanta Braves and played one season in its minor league organization. Mr. Ivey pitched three games for the Wytheville Braves, a rookie level ball club.

I mentioned this because Mr. Ivey's teammate on the Wytheville Braves was a young and up and coming player out of Texas Christian University named Mr. Roger Williams. Indeed, our Chairman, Roger Williams, was drafted by the Atlanta Braves in the 1971 Major League Baseball draft, is the only former professional baseball player in the 119th Congress. He is also the manager of the Republican Congressional Baseball Team and the distinguished Chairman of our Small Business Committee. I thank him for presiding over this hearing with me today.

Also joining us in the audience is my friend Kevin Malone, who was previously the general manager of the Montreal Expos and Los Angeles Dodgers. Kevin was recognized by USA Today as the best general manager in the game. And since his baseball career ended, he has devoted his life to fighting the scourge of human trafficking. Thank you for joining us, Kevin.

I now recognize the distinguished Ranking Member, Ms. Hillary Scholten for her opening remarks.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for convening this hearing. What a great idea.

When the Chairman and I first sat down about where we wanted to take this Committee and I threw out some ideas, you know, I said, you know, I am really interested in digital currency, Bitcoin. And he is like, how about we start with baseball? And I thought that was a brilliant idea. Nothing brings us together like sports. As the daughter of our local sports reporter and an athlete myself, I know how sports can not only bring communities together, but bring us together across the aisle. I am really looking forward to today's hearing and I know, along with so many of my colleagues, looking forward to tomorrow's Congressional Baseball Game.

Minor leagues provide so many benefits to our community. Their players participate in local volunteer activities. Their teams are a source of pride for their hometowns. Their stadiums serve as community gathering places, and their games are an affordable entertainment option for families. Over the course of this hearing, I hope

that we can shed light on another benefit, the team's ability to boost local small businesses. In my hometown, for example, our minor league team, the West Michigan Whitecaps, partnered with the Lake Michigan Credit Union and now play at LMCU Ballpark. LMCU is a proud SBA lending partner and was recognized as the SBA's International Trade Lender of the Year.

Beyond bringing greater visibility to this and other outstanding local businesses, the Whitecaps and LMCU Ballpark have been an economic driver for the Comstock Park community in the greater Grand Rapids area. The park hosts concerts and movie nights, annual events like the Taste of Grand Rapids, a car show, a holiday lighting display, charitable events, and fundraisers and private events like family celebrations. All of this has helped to lead development in the nearby business park and supported retail shops and restaurants that would otherwise not be there. These benefits have been the result of the Whitecap's long-term investment in our community and our strong relationship with local small businesses. We are also so honored to have a representative here today serving as a witness, who I look forward to introducing in just a moment.

Their example shows how minor league teams can play a role in small- and mid-sized cities, local economic systems, and drive development and economic activity in the surrounding area. I look forward to learning more from all of our witnesses today about how minor leagues can be good partners and enormous assets to local small businesses while bringing their enthusiastic fans and cultivating a sense of community in their neighborhoods.

Thank you. And with that, I yield back.

Chairman JACK. Thank you, Ranking Member Scholten.

I now recognize the distinguished Chairman of the House Committee on Small Business and a great baseball player, Mr. Roger Williams, for his opening remarks.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Thank you. Thank you, Chairman. I appreciate that. And I just noticed that we all have this right here. I want to thank Representative Scholten for these bats because this is the bat the Democrat will be using tomorrow night. So I appreciate that.

I want to thank you again for holding this. I want to thank both of you for holding this Committee hearing. I would like to thank all of our four witnesses for being here today to talk about a sport that is the greatest sport there is. I would like to thank Chairman Jack. As he mentioned, we are just one day away from the Congressional Baseball Game and this hearing is the perfect way to review the importance of it.

Now, Minor League Baseball plays a significant role in the lives of families throughout the country. And whether the team plays in a large metropolitan area or a smaller town, fans can see some of the best baseball players in the world in action. As a former player myself, I understood the importance of this. In 1971, I was drafted by the Atlanta Braves. I played in their minor league system for 3 years, returned home to run the family car dealership and coach baseball at Texas Christian University, and then later bought the San Antonio Missions in San Antonio, which Reid's very familiar with. And during my time as a professional player, I saw firsthand the value of making professional sports accessible to people from

all around the country as well as the community that has built these minor league systems.

In addition to making our national pastime more accessible for fans, Minor League Baseball teams serve as important fixtures in their local communities. Now, from providing opportunities to local suppliers to fostering a small business boom in the surrounding area. Minor league teams support the economic development of small towns and cities nationwide. This unique type of small business fosters a self-sustaining ecosystem in areas fortunate enough to have a minor league sports teams.

I look forward to today's discussion. It will be a lot of fun on the role of minor league teams in building communities. And we are excited for the big game tomorrow. We are also excited about all the former players and my friends that are out here today. So this hearing is an opportunity to highlight the benefits that Minor League Baseball can bring to local small businesses.

With that, I yield back.

Chairman JACK. I will now introduce our witnesses. Our first witness is Mr. Pat Battle. Mr. Battle is the Executive Chairman of Diamond Baseball Holdings, a sports management group that owns and operates 44 Minor League Baseball teams, including the Columbus Clingstones; the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers, Mr. Wied's district; the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders, Mr. Bresnahan's district; and the Louisville Bats in Mr. McGarvey's district. Mr. Battle was previously the chief executive officer of Collegiate Licensing Company, the oldest and largest collegiate licensing company in the United States. He is a graduate of Georgia State University, a university I strongly support, and for generations his family has been involved in sports management.

Mr. Battle, we are grateful you are testifying before our subcommittee today.

And I now recognize my colleague, Representative Bresnahan, to briefly introduce his constituent who is appearing before us today.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Thank you, Chairman. It is an honor to introduce our next witness, Mr. Lou Ciampi, Jr. Mr. Ciampi is the president of Independent Graphics in Wyoming, Pennsylvania, located in my congressional district and, ironically, the same borough where I was born and grew up. Independent Graphics was started by Lou's father, Lou Ciampi, Sr., in 1980. Mr. Ciampi has been a full-time employee at his family business since 1986, starting as a sales manager and progressing to president.

Independent Graphics is a proud partner of the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Yankees Minor League Baseball team, the RailRiders. Through his extensive experience and knowledge of the print process and products, Lou has propelled sales volumes and has grown Independent Graphics dramatically during his tenure.

Mr. Ciampi is also an integral part of our community. He is involved with charitable efforts such as the Luzerne County Jump-a-Thon, indoor triathlons, and the Wyoming Area Football Alumni Association, which has locally raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for scholarships and equipment for high schools as well as little league teams.

Mr. Ciampi graduated with a bachelor's degree in economics from Dickinson College.

Thank you for joining us today and I am looking forward to today's important conversation. I yield.

Chairman JACK. I now recognize the Chairman of the full Committee, Chairman Williams, to briefly introduce our next witness.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Thank you, Representative Jack. And I am excited to welcome Mr. Reid Ryan, my friend who is the owner and chief executive officer of Ryan Sanders Baseball in Round Rock, Texas.

Now, just a real quick story I want to tell you about baseball history. This may never happen again, but it is a quick story. You may know who his dad is, Nolan Ryan. Well, 1992, is this right, Ried, 1992, Ried was pitching for the Texas Longhorns playing an exhibition game against the Houston—or against the Texas Rangers. Well, he was pitching for the Longhorns and his opposing pitcher was his 44-year-old father. Pretty good. I don't know who won the game, though. Who won it? They did. Okay.

But anyway, that is a unique part of history that you may never see again, father against father. Two great men.

Ried, along with his dad Nolan, his brother Reese, and former Astros minority owner Don Sanders formed Ryan Sanders Baseball in 1998. Ryan Sanders Baseball founded two minor league teams, the Round Rock Express in 2000 and Corpus Christi Hooks in 2005. Mr. Ryan was drafted by the Texas Rangers during the 1994 Major League Baseball draft and served as president of the Houston Astros from May 2013 through May 2019. Mr. Ryan also serves on the Board of Trustees for Major League Baseball and is a graduate of Texas Christian University. Go Frogs.

So we are excited to have you, my friend, and we look forward to having a conversation today. Mr. Chairman, I yield back.

Chairman JACK. I now recognize the Ranking Member from Michigan, Ms. Scholten, to briefly introduce the last witness appearing before us today.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It is my honor to introduce my constituent, Mr. Joe Chamberlin. He joined the West Michigan Whitecaps in 2013, serving in several roles prior to becoming CEO and managing partner in 2018. Mr. Chamberlin has a longer history with the team, however, since his father, Lew Chamberlin, has been a proud co-owner of the Whitecaps for over 30 years, a family business.

Beyond Whitecaps baseball, Mr. Chamberlin and his team operate one of the largest distributors of Dippin' Dots Ice Cream in the United States. And in 2018, he founded the Traverse City Pit Spitters baseball team and led the acquisition of Turtle Creek Stadium up north in Michigan.

Mr. Chamberlin is a Member of the Grand Rapids Chamber of Commerce CEO Council and currently serves as a board member with the Whitecaps Community Foundation and St. Mary's Foundation. He earned his master's degree in labor relations and human resources at Michigan State University and received his bachelor's degree from the College of Worcester.

Mr. Chamberlin, welcome. Thank you for making the trip and thank you for appearing before the subcommittee today.

I yield back.

Chairman JACK. Before recognizing the witnesses, I would like to remind each of you that your spoken testimony is restricted to 5 minutes in length. If you see the light turn red in front of you, it means your 5 minutes have concluded and you should finish your testimony.

I now recognize Mr. Battle for his 5-minute opening remarks.

STATEMENTS OF MR. PAT BATTLE, EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN, DIAMOND BASEBALL HOLDINGS; MR. LOU CIAMPI JR., PRESIDENT, INDEPENDENT GRAPHICS, INC.; MR. REID RYAN, OWNER/CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER RYAN SANDERS BASEBALL, ROUND ROCK EXPRESS BASEBALL CLUB, SAN ANTONIO MISSIONS BASEBALL CLUB; AND MR. JOE CHAMBERLIN, CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER AND MANAGING PARTNER, WEST MICHIGAN WHITECAPS, TRAVERSE CITY PIT SPITTERS

STATEMENT OF PAT BATTLE, CEO, DIAMOND BASEBALL HOLDINGS

Mr. BATTLE. Thank you, Chairman Jack, Ranking Member Scholten, Chairman Williams, and distinguished Members of the Committee for inviting me to testify today about the importance of Minor League Baseball and helping drive economic growth across the country. My name is Pat Battle. I am Executive Chairman of Diamond Baseball Holdings. And DBH is an organization that owns 44 affiliated Minor League Baseball clubs, all of which are run as independent organizations by a passionate group of employees in each of the 44 communities that we serve. I recently visited one club which has 31 full-time employees, 26 of them having started their careers as interns with the team.

Minor League Baseball exemplifies the best in America. It is community-focused, rooted in deep tradition, and representative of the broad cultures and customs across our country. Most people wouldn't know that Minor League Baseball is the second most attended sport in the U.S., welcoming more than 30 million fans through its turnstiles each season, which is why I am grateful to this Committee for shining the spotlight on Minor League Baseball today and why I am proud to share with you our mission, along with my colleagues at the table, our mission to protect and to preserve and to enhance Minor League Baseball and through that, to fuel small business economic development and growth for generations to come.

Minor League baseball reaches many different constituencies and represent something uniquely special to each group. For Major League Baseball and the 30 big league clubs, the minor leagues serve as a training ground for developing its future stars. The second group are the professional baseball players themselves, where Minor League Baseball represents their opportunity to achieve life-long dreams as the path to make it to the Show. DBH relishes its role in supporting those dreams through close collaboration with Major League Baseball and our local municipal partners.

The Major League Baseball Hall of Fame is full of great players who got their start in the minor league system: Willie Mays played in historic Rickwood in Birmingham, Alabama; David Ortiz in Appleton, Wisconsin; Aaron Judge in Scranton, Pennsylvania. I could

go on and on about the number and the thousands of Major League Baseball players that began their professional journey in the Minor leagues.

A third group impacted by Minor League Baseball are the 120 communities who host affiliated Minor League Baseball teams. The stadiums in which the teams play serve as centers of energy in these communities and represent an important and vibrant gathering spot for its local citizens. At DBH, it is our desire for these stadiums, in addition to hosting roughly 70 professional baseball games a year, to also host many events such as concerts, high school state championships, graduations, weddings, corporate outings, and the list goes on and on.

In April, I was proud to attend the opening of the new minor league stadium in Columbus, Georgia. Columbus has welcomed, as Chairman Jack said, more than 100,000 fans to the ballpark in just 2 months. And importantly, we anticipate that Synovus park will create more than \$10 billion in annual economic impact.

And the community impact extends beyond just what happens inside the stadium. We are proud of our planned \$250 million mixed-use development in Congressman McGarvey's district in Louisville, Kentucky. In close partnership with Mayor Craig Greenberg and the Louisville metro government, the project will revitalize downtown and create more than 1,000 jobs for the local economy.

The fourth constituency impacted by Minor League Baseball are the fans. At DBH, we believe we are in the memory making business and we strive to do that in a fun, affordable way for families, friends, and colleagues. Affordability and accessibility are a top priority in Minor League Baseball, with the average ticket price to a game still under \$15, that is 1-5. Our approach is to execute in a hyper local manner, celebrating the nuances which make each of our communities special and unique.

And last, but certainly not least is what Minor League Baseball represents to the more than 1,000 small businesses who partner with our teams in a variety of ways. Whether through advertising, sponsorship, vending, and more, these partnerships broaden their relationship with fans, with other businesses, and with the community as a whole.

I hope I have given you a sense today of why we are so passionate about Minor League Baseball and its wide-reaching impact in bringing communities together. Mr. Chairman, thank you for engaging in this important conversation and for recognizing what Minor League Baseball means to your constituents.

Chairman JACK. Thank you. I now recognize Mr. Ciampi for his 5-minute opening remarks.

STATEMENT OF LOU CIAMPI, JR., PRESIDENT, INDEPENDENT GRAPHICS INC.

Mr. CIAMPI. Try that again. Thank you to all the Members of the Committee and especially to Mr. Rob Bresnahan for inviting me here today. It is greatly appreciated.

My name is Lou Ciampi, Jr. I am the president of Independent Graphics. We are a family-owned and operated printing and direct mail company located in Northeastern Pennsylvania. This year we

proudly celebrate our 45th year in business. The company was founded by my late father Lou Ciampi, Sr., and Ried, if it is any consolation, he always won, too. It is now owned by my brother Jim and me. I joined the company full time in January of 1986 as sales manager and I have since assumed the role of president. Over those years we have grown from 5 employees to 35 full-time employees and we run 2 shifts.

We have been honored to work with the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders since 2008. During this partnership we have completed numerous interesting and time-sensitive projects that have helped shape our company's reputation and capabilities. One of the earliest and most memorable projects involved Roger Clemens. In 2008, Roger came down to Triple-A for a rehab assignment. When he threw out the first pitch, a photo was taken. The photo was emailed to Independent. We produced 15 top-quality posters, which we then ran up to the ballpark so Roger could sign before he left that day, creating instant memorabilia. And no, my friend John Stevenson at the ballpark did not give me one of these collector's items. So thank you, John.

In 2012, the ballpark underwent major renovations and opening night of the 2013 season was a milestone event. Once again, in the first inning, a photo was emailed to Independent Graphics. This time we produced 5,000 8-by-10 photo-quality prints, which we printed, threw in the car, and ran up to the stadium in time to hand out to the fans as they left the field that night. Same night, a true rush job.

When we were introduced to the RailRiders, they were owned by Mandalay Entertainment. I had the great pleasure of meeting Mr. Jon Spoelstra, who was the architect of the Play Ball program books. The Play Ball program books were unique for each game. So Game 1 of the season was played. After the game, the updated statistics would be emailed to Independent Graphics. We would print unique program books overnight and deliver the next day for the game. Today, speed to market is more than a motto, it is our standard and a RailRiders partnership help us define it.

Beyond business, the relationship has held deep personal meaning for our family. We are both a vendor and a sponsor. Our signage has proudly been displayed at the ballpark and we have rented a suite for half the home games each season. Sundays at the park became a cherished tradition for the entire Ciampi family. My father, a passionate Yankees fan, especially Yogi Berra being his favorite, relished every visit. We have had the pleasure of meeting legends, like Roger Clemens, Dwight Gooden, Daryl Strawberry, and Reggie Jackson, memories that will last a lifetime.

This Saturday, June 14th, we will celebrate Independent Graphics' 45th anniversary in the left field party box at PNC Field. What a party it is going to be.

Thank you so much for your time and allowing me to share our story.

Chairman JACK. Thank you. I now recognize Mr. Ryan for his 5-minute opening remarks.

STATEMENT OF REID RYAN, CEO, RYAN-SANDERS BASEBALL INC.

Mr. RYAN. All right. Thank you, Chairman Jack, Chairman Williams, Ranking Member Scholten, and the Committee. Hello, my name is Reid Ryan and I am the CEO of Ryan-Sanders Baseball. And I am honored to be here today to discuss the positive impact that Minor League Baseball has had on communities across the country.

Baseball has been a lifelong passion for me. As Roger said, my father, Nolan Ryan, is Major League Baseball's all-time strikeout leader, an all-time no-hit leader and a member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame. When I was born, he was pitching for the New York Mets and shortly after that he got traded to the Angels and we spent time in California, and with the Houston Astros and with the Texas Rangers.

After playing college baseball at the University of Texas and then at TCU, I was fortunate enough to get drafted by the Texas Rangers and assigned to the Hudson Valley Renegades in Poughkeepsie, New York, a team that Mr. Battle owns today. That experience marked my very first minor league game. Having grown up in the big leagues, I was amazed at the fun, family-friendly environment that Minor League Baseball offered. I couldn't believe that this type of entertainment existed all over the country, and yet I had never experienced it until I played in my very first game.

Over the next 2 years, I played in the New York Penn League, the South Atlantic League, and the California League. Traveling across the country, I got to witness the same thing in every single market from the East Coast to the West Coast, families and communities coming together around the game of baseball. And it wasn't just about the sport, as many people mentioned here today. It was about affordable family fun, community pride, and a sense of belonging.

And so when my playing career ended, I set my sights on becoming an owner of a minor league team. And in 1998, at 26 years old, I discovered a Houston Astros club in Jackson, Mississippi, that was for sale. They were playing in an aging ballpark and they needed to be closer to Houston, Texas. And so I assembled a group, I secured a loan, and I purchased the ball club. Little did I know my efforts would help spark a renaissance in Minor League Baseball and the game of baseball in our industry.

So, in 2000, we opened the Dell Diamond in Round Rock, Texas. We built a major league quality stadium on a minor league scale. It was one of the first times this had ever happened to the game. And then since then, I have owned and operated several clubs across the country, including the Corpus Christi Hooks, the San Antonio Missions, and the Fayetteville Woodpeckers. Along the way, I have spent time in the major leagues, working with the league on various committees and serving as president of the Houston Astros, as Roger Williams discussed.

I share all this to illustrate that I have seen this game literally from every angle. And I always return to my love of Minor League Baseball. There is just something truly special about the fans and the communities we serve that makes our game such a cherished part of Americana.

Minor League Baseball at its core is a hyper local small business. Our games are played in front of fans at the ballpark and not for people on TV. The fans, the sponsors, the staff, they are all deeply involved in the local community. And the ballpark often becomes the front porch of these towns. It is the place where folks go to watch baseball, but, more importantly, visit with their neighbors, connect with friends and loved ones.

So throughout my career, I have been fortunate to build new stadiums in four different markets around the country. And I am currently working on my fifth right now in San Antonio, Texas. And in every one of these cases, the local community has benefited. In Round Rock, the ballpark spurred development of restaurants, hotels, and businesses. And in fact, we have one of the world's largest indoor water parks, Kalahari, across the street now. In Corpus Christi, another water park was built, a concert venue and a restaurant opened. And in Fayetteville, North Carolina, we had downtown living and a hotel emerge adjacent to the stadium. And in San Antonio, we are in the process right now of working with the city and county on a tours that will include downtown living and hotels as part of the project. In every instance, the ballpark has revitalized or spurred growth in the surrounding areas.

And so one of my favorite sayings has always been from the former First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson. And it is derived from the Bible, to whom much is given, much is expected. That is how I feel about my role in Minor League Baseball.

And I will close by saying that it has been my goal and my family's goal to always leave the game in our communities better than we found it. And by investing in Minor League Baseball in the areas around our stadiums, we have improved the quality of life in our local communities and we have helped many small businesses grow. Thank you very much.

Chairman JACK. Thank you. I now recognize Mr. Chamberlin for his 5 minute opening remarks.

STATEMENT OF JOE CHAMBERLIN, CEO & MANAGING PARTNER, WEST MICHIGAN WHITECAPS AND TRAVERSE CITY PIT SPITTERS

Mr. CHAMBERLIN. All right. Chairman Jack, Ranking Member Scholten, and Members of the subcommittee, I am honored to be before you today to share my story and, most importantly, to talk a little bit of baseball. This was certainly an exciting, albeit unexpected, invite for me to receive. And when I received it, my wife Dana insisted that I make sure you all had the right guy. Here is to our spouses keeping us humble.

My name is Joe Chamberlin and I am the CEO and managing partner of two baseball franchises that call the great state of Michigan home: the West Michigan Whitecaps and the Traverse City Pit Spitters. Both Traverse City and West Michigan are incredible communities and incredible sports markets. For me, baseball has become the family business. The Whitecaps were founded by my dad, Lou Chamberlin, and his business partner, Denny Baxter, in 1994. Lou was the quintessential entrepreneur and with the help of many along the way, he spent the better part of 10 years on a journey to make his dream a reality for his West Michigan commu-

nity. That day came in 1994 and out of the gate, the Whitecaps broke every single A attendance record in Minor League Baseball, consistently drawing over 500,000 fans a year.

Because of our entrepreneurial origin story, we have always operated a little differently than most teams. Lou was the idea guy, not the capital guy. And based on a strong business plan and proven success in another market, he formed a partnership and raised the capital needed to purchase a team and build our ballpark. And because of that history, we own our privately funded stadium and can proudly say that no taxpayer dollars were used for its construction in 1994 or for upkeep since. It is unique for a club to be actively run by its entrepreneurial founding family and we have always taken pride in being sports owners who are actively involved at every level of our team's success.

The success of the Whitecaps in the early '90s proved that our community could support professional sports teams and vibrant stadiums and in the years following our inaugural season, Grand Rapids has been lucky to see other teams and amenities added to our city's roster. The collective impact of all these teams saw Grand Rapids recognized as the best minor league sports market in the country in 2019. And we are extremely proud that the Whitecaps proved the thesis that sports-centric infrastructure investment and economic development works in West Michigan.

Today, both the Whitecaps and the Pit Spitters are hyper local small- to medium-sized companies that have incredibly symbiotic relationships with their communities. If you want a barometer on the health of a community's small businesses, look no further than its stadiums. Our outfield walls are filled with sponsorship inventory and those are filled with small businesses advertising what they do. Our hospitality areas are filled with businesses entertaining employees and their families. And on game days, our stadiums are full of local employees of all ages earning competitive wages.

Our organizations employ over 1,000 seasonal staff members between the Whitecaps and the Pit Spitters each summer, in addition to the 65 full-time front office staff members we have year round. In total, we estimate the local economic impact of the Pit Spitter exceeds \$10 million a year, while the Whitecaps contribute over \$40 million annual to the West Michigan community.

While there has been a lot of success, as you all know, running a small business is hard and our industry has felt that pressure over the last few years. Although specific policy issues are not on my agenda today, I do think it is worth stating a few observations.

First, uncertainty is the enemy of nearly every small business out there. To the extent that legislators at both the state and federal levels can steer a steady ship, allowing businesses like mine to have predictable inputs and consistent regulatory environments, I can assure you that people like me will thank you and work hard every day to create more jobs, invest in communities, and spur economic development.

On the topic of economic development, which I am working very hard on at the state level, I think it is also important to recognize how truly transformational a sports team can be for its community when done right. As opportunities arise, please continue to consider

practical and pragmatic policies and programs that help keep Minor League Baseball teams thriving across the country. The returns on those kinds of initiatives are significant in so many ways.

And in closing, I want to thank the Committee for this opportunity and for highlighting our incredible industry. As a family business owner, I tend to take the long-term view and seek sustainability where I can find it. That philosophy has served us very well in an industry with such a rich history that has proven for generations to be one of the best forms of affordable, family-friendly entertainment out there. Who knows if either of my sons, Crawford or Becker, will ever have an interest in this wonderful world of Minor League Baseball, but for the foreseeable future, my job is to ensure these franchises remain vibrant for the next generation of Whitecaps and Pit Spitters fans, and to ensure that we keep all the fun Minor League Baseball can offer thriving in our communities for decades to come. Thank you.

Chairman JACK. We will now move to the Member questions under the 5-minute rule.

I recognize myself for 5 minutes.

Mr. Battle, thank you for testifying today. The team you have assembled, especially my friend Henry Shepard, represents Diamond Baseball Holdings incredibly well. With your acquisition of the Fredericksburg Nationals this week, your portfolio now includes 44 Minor League Baseball teams. How is Diamond Baseball Holdings providing affordable experiences to fans across each market?

Mr. BATTLE. Thank you, Chairman Jack, for that question. And thank you for the comment on Henry and the team that we have assembled at DBH. We are very proud of and they represent our teams and the sport very well.

You know, I think that everybody has talked about, you know, providing affordable entertainment. You know, I mentioned in my opening remarks that the average ticket price to a Minor League Baseball game is under \$15. Minor league is probably the only professional sport that you can attend, a family of four can attend for under \$100. And I think that that is very important.

And when we think about our teams and the 44 clubs that we own that, as I said, operate as independent clubs in each of their communities, they each have the same mission, and it is to provide fun, affordable family entertainment to its local fans. And every community is different. Every community is special. Every community has its own nuances. But providing that fun, affordable family entertainment experience to the fans is what we are all about, and that is how we win. And so I think that as we think about that mission, fun and affordable are the first two words that we use and think of.

Chairman JACK. Thank you, Mr. Battle.

Mr. Ryan, thank you for testifying today. I am working closely with your former colleague Derek Schiller on an issue. Since you both won a World Series ring, I will not ask who is the better team president. But as with Mr. Battle, I will ask, how is Ryan-Sanders Baseball approaching affordability and creating memorable experiences for folks across the ballparks you operate?

Mr. RYAN. Yeah. So, you know, we are very blessed to be in two very large cities in San Antonio and Austin, Texas, market. Be-

tween the two, you are talking two of the top 20 population cities in the country. So I think in that situation, for us, there is a lane that we need to stay in, which a lot of people are priced out by some of the other, you know, things that have come into the market at the major league level. And so we try to make sure that we continue to be affordable for folks when they come in. But also we know that being a Triple-A and Double-A, that the travel schedule is a little bit different than A ball because we are flying people around the country and we play a few more games. And so it is a balancing act, but we continue to work hard at it because it is the lifeblood of this industry.

Chairman JACK. Thank you. And thank you, Mr. Chamberlin, for testifying today. The Detroit Tigers are the best team in baseball. Many of their players today started their careers in Comstock Park, Michigan. Tarik Skubal won Major League Baseball's Cy Young Award last year, but in 2018, I understand he was pitching for your West Michigan Whitecaps. How are you approaching affordability with respect to fans in the area?

Mr. CHAMBERLIN. Thank you, Chairman. As a Minor League Baseball club, I think affordability flexibility is paramount to what we do. As some of the other folks have mentioned, it is very easy to lose focus on it and start chasing high-dollar ticket prices or increasing food and beverage costs. For us, it is keeping the North Star, which is can a family of four get in and out of the ballpark for a very reasonable price? So as a business, it is certainly a push and pull. You have to create inventory and you have to do things that keep you moving forward. I think in our business, we are a little bit unique in that we know we cannot lose sight of that family of four and price them out. So it is definitely something that we are aware of and that we work very hard to maintain on a year-over-year basis.

Chairman JACK. Thank you. My last question, Mr. Battle, although today's hearing concentrates, of course, on the economic impact of Minor League Baseball, could you illuminate for this panel how the facilities at which Minor League Baseball teams play serve their communities outside of baseball?

Mr. BATTLE. Yeah, it is a great question and it is a, you know, it is a goal that we have at DBH. We operate, you know, basically run 70, roughly 70, professional baseball games a year. But these stadiums are the centers of energy in most of these communities. And so we are actively involved. And Ranking Member Scholten talked about several of the things that happen in Minor League Baseball stadiums, but with concerts, with movie nights, with just all of the things, with weddings and graduations and corporate outings and, you know, having the opportunity to amplify and to highlight our stadiums 365 days a year.

In Charlotte, North Carolina, it is the Charlotte Knights, Triple-A White Sox. There is a 30-day winter wonderland that takes place from December 1st through January 1st. And last year, you know, tens of thousands of citizens in Charlotte came into the stadium. It was lit up, there was an ice rink in center field. That is one example of the many ways that we are working beyond baseball to create these special memories for the citizens and the community.

Chairman JACK. I now recognize the Ranking Member for 5 minutes of questions.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chamberlin, my first question is for you. The Whitecaps are a privately owned team with a three decade history in our community. And I know that the team is planning to continue being a part of that community for decades to come. We certainly hope so. What lessons could other communities take from the Whitecaps' experience that might be good practices for maintaining strong long-term partnerships with local small businesses around them?

Mr. CHAMBERLIN. Thanks for the question. I think it starts from the top and as an owner, it is our responsibility first to ensure that that is part of the organization and it needs to trickle down to the staff. And everyone needs to believe in the importance of a club being committed to being locally integrated. For the Whitecaps and the Pit Spitters, I think that process starts for us. We have a diverse group of minority owners in both markets who are community members and, you know, are so proud to be affiliated with our organization that they help us achieve that local integration.

I think you also have to know the community that you operate in and operate in a way that encourages collaboration. So many of these items have been listed here today. But even doing the kinds of events outside of baseball that allow fans to come into our ballparks, experience them in a different way.

In 2014, we had a fire at our ballpark and half of it burned down. The first few people to arrive at the ballpark were season ticketholders who just wanted to be there to help in rebuilding the ballpark. And, you know, that is one of those moments where you know you are impacting the community.

And finally, I think the pricing structure that we have talked about a little bit is also an important factor. In both West Michigan and Traverse City, you look at our outfield boards and you see everybody in the community. So we intentionally have a way for everyone in our small business community to play in our ballparks and that helps us achieve that local integration.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you. Sticking with you briefly, minor league team affiliations with their major league partners help pay for players and coaches, but the teams still need to cover costs, including costs for the fields, equipment, uniforms, travel. You started getting to know the business side of the Whitecaps as a college student and have seen that business grow and diversify. I am wondering if you can share any strategies or tips for ensuring minor league teams are profitable and sustainable as a business.

Mr. CHAMBERLIN. Oh, thank you for the question. We have some great owners and operators up here, so I won't preach to the choir. I think every market is a little bit different, but at the end of the day, one of the things that I love most about Minor League Baseball is that our business model is relatively straightforward. We create value by creating a brand that our fans love interacting with. And the more engaging we can be, the better. We also create value by inviting fans into our ballparks to enjoy baseball games. And the more fans we can invite in, the better.

On both of those fronts I think the number one thing that has been a positive factor for us as a business over the years has been

having great people doing great work. So just like a lot of businesses out there, our success is based on the success of our staff. And the Whitecaps have been incredibly lucky over the course of 30 years to have one of the best staffs in Minor League Baseball helping us be a fantastic franchise.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you. And that was a great lead-in because my follow-up is to open the question up to the rest of the panel and share some of your insights and particularly how we, as a Small Business Committee and legislators more generally can both help in that extent even. And most often it is oftentimes staying out of the way. So what can we do as legislators to help support?

Mr. BATTLE. I would simply say what you are doing today is extremely important. Shining the spotlight on Minor League Baseball and everything that you, Chairman Jack, Chairman Williams, have talked about, Reid, Joe, Lou have talked about. It is what makes the sport great, the impact that it has on communities.

And I think that the opportunity—I mean, we are—we like to partner with the local municipality, with local businesses to create that great experience for the fans that we have talked about. And when communities win, we all win. And that is really what we are about. And so I am very thankful to you and Chairman Jack and Chairman Williams for shining the spotlight, because I think that educating businesses and municipalities about the important impact that Minor League Baseball is having and will continue to have is extremely important. So thank you.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you. I yield back.

Chairman JACK. Thank you, Ms. Scholten.

I now recognize Chairman Williams from the great state of Texas for 5 minutes.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And again, I am very excited that Representative Jack and Scholten are holding this Subcommittee hearing. And as a former player and owner, I have a passion at hand and a lot of people know that about baseball. The opportunities that professional sports provide for small local business growth are vital for the communities throughout the country.

So, Mr. Battle, your organization owns 40 minor league teams across the country. So could you please explain how your work with these 40 teams to develop and revitalize each one of those communities?

Mr. BATTLE. It is a great question, Chairman Williams. Thank you for that. And, you know, ultimately we see our role as one of support. We do own 44 teams. As I said earlier, they operate as independent. You know, we own teams from Portland, Maine, to Pasco, Washington, down to Rancho Cucamonga, California, all the way across to Spartanburg, South Carolina, and those four cities that I mentioned, you can imagine how different and unique that they are. And our role, we see it as providing to our teams on the ground, to the 25 to 35 employees that we have on the ground, the that live there every day, how can we provide them with the resources that they need to accomplish the mission, which is to provide that fun, affordable, family entertainment experience to their fans?

And so we work very closely with our teams to amplify best practices across the portfolio to provide advanced technologies, including common point of sale systems and food and beverage, and our merchandising that allow customers to go through lines quicker and to make it easier. So those are examples of the things that we can provide to our teams to help make them more successful in achieving their mission.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Thank you. I think one of the most important aspects of Minor League Baseball is it makes our nation's pastime available to more people and communities outside of the few cities that host major league teams. So, Mr. Ryan, you were the CEO and founder of both the Corpus Christi Hooks and the Round Rock Express minor league franchise, which you talked about. Both teams brought baseball to communities that lacked easy access to sports. So how have these communities changed now that a minor league team has been established in them and is part of the community?

Mr. RYAN. Yeah, you know, I think people don't realize what they are missing until they get a team in their community. And it is really about quality of life. And I think, you know, as Pat was saying, every market is very different. And so in Corpus Christi, they had never been able to sort of get something that could bring the community together. And unfortunately, in a divided, you know, society today, in a lot of ways, there are few things that do bring everyone together. Sports teams do that. Teams win a championship and everybody is high fiving and hugging each other on the street. And that is really what we saw in Corpus Christi is, first and foremost, it brought the community together in a way that had never been done before.

And then it was fun to see the development around the stadium. The city really jumped on the ballpark and created a SEA District, which was sports, entertainment, and arts. And they have now clustered all of their amenities into one area of town and really created a unique destination. The city was known for being sort of a regional summertime vacation place, but they lacked anything really to do at night. People would go to the beach or go to the aquarium, the USS Lexington, but then at night, they didn't really have anything to do. And now you are seeing that with a concert venue and the stadium and some other stuff.

In Round Rock, which is 15 miles from downtown Austin, it was a bedroom community, you know, very much like here in D.C., that a lot of people have to live outside of the city. And so people were wanting amenities for kids and families in their community because folks would go downtown, go to work, they would fight traffic back home. And then if they wanted to go back to, you know, a game at UT or something, they were fighting traffic again, and they were spending hours in the car. And so for the city of Round Rock, this was a way to anchor people to their community, to have a quality of life aspect that they had missed. And what came out of that was, you know, a big growth with the water park and with concert venues and with their own Old Settlers Park. So it has been fun to watch.

Chairman WILLIAMS. You have done a great job. And in my last time I have got here, in addition to the community renovation

that often occurs around minor league stadiums, minor league teams also strive to build meaningful relationships with local small businesses like yours, Mr. Ciampi. So, real quick, if you have been successfully with the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders for now over a decade, how is working with RailRiders growing your business? And also you talked about printing 5,000—you never told us who that was. Was that Jim Sundberg that you—

Mr. CIAMPI. The photo was just a photo of the ballpark, so, no, it wasn't Mr. Sundberg. Being a part of the RailRiders, and it is a family, it has become such a large part of our brand. We are celebrating our 45th anniversary, and I had one of our layout people do a little brochure. And almost kind of to my surprise, one full page is dedicated to stuff that happened up at PNC Field. So it just brings nothing but good vibes for the champions.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Thank you. My time is up. I yield back.

Chairman JACK. Thank you, Chairman Williams.

I now recognize Mr. Olszewski from Maryland for 5 minutes.

Mr. OLSZEWSKI. Thank you very much, Chairman Jack and to Ranking Member Scholten, for convening this. I want to thank all of our witnesses as well for being here today.

Been in training myself for my first Congressional Baseball Game. I have my friend and colleague Representative McGarvey to thank for that. He is a recruiter in addition to being one heck of a catcher and team player on the Democrat side. So looking forward to being part of the tradition here on Capitol Hill and excited to be part of this conversation on Minor League Baseball.

Mr. Chairman, Chairman Williams, I wish you luck tomorrow. I am really hoping that you are going to need it though, so. Oh, I think my bat is going to be a little bigger than that, my friend.

So we are proud in Maryland, which I am lucky enough to represent, represent to have three Minor League Baseball teams. We have the Chesapeake Baysox, we have the Aberdeen IronBirds, and we have the Delmarva Shorebirds, all of which are affiliates of my hometown team, the Baltimore Orioles. We are excited about the ways in which our teams generate tourism revenue and boost our local economy outside of Camden Yards and at a better, more convenient price point for a lot of our families as well. This partnership supports Maryland and the Mid-Atlantic region as one of the most economically vibrant and budget-friendly regions in the U.S.

We know that you all are not strangers to America's pastime, nor the opportunity that is created when we make baseball more accessible for all to enjoy. The teams that you help manage and help develop provide a large cultural and economic benefit to the communities they call home. So I want to thank you again for your work in this space and for supporting small businesses. I will see many of you in the field tomorrow. Go Dems. Go O's.

I do have two quick questions and I don't want to be redundant, so just building on some of the points earlier. Mr. Ryan, you mentioned SEA Districts in regards to community revitalization and infrastructure, building around the stadium. There was also some conversation about how these are meeting grounds of bringing the community together, particularly in these divided times. Just wanted to give any of you the opportunity to speak a little bit more about what actions you take to specifically help cultivate maybe

specific programs or outreach efforts to build that sense of community in your spaces. And then also if there are any other like-minded development or infrastructure projects like the SEA District that you mentioned, I would love to hear about that.

Mr. RYAN. Yeah, well, I will take that one to start. You know, as I said in my opening statement, you know, we look at our role in the community as the community betting on us and our expertise to come in and, you know, be the people that are entrusted in this great game of baseball. We all own teams, but really we don't own anything. You can't own the game of baseball. You are just entrusted with it for a time period. And one of the things we try to do is make sure that everyone in the community gets to use the stadium.

So in Corpus Christi we played a lot of high school baseball games there. In fact, we drew 21,000 fans to see two teams from each side of the town. Who is going to go to the state championship? We had a local business, Myra Sports, who played a high school tournament every year. You know, in Round Rock, Texas, we have the state high school championships there. But we have also worked with the Austin Rodeo to do bulls in the ballpark where we do bull riding.

And so I think it is making the facility available to everyone in the community helps because everyone supported the community, especially in our state where we are a property tax heavy state. And so having a municipal partner makes the affordability aspect like a must. If you don't have a partner, if you did what Joe did, it would be really hard to keep prices affordable. And so we owe it to the constituents that we have to make sure that the venue is available for them for all kinds of things.

Mr. CIAMPI. One of the things that the RailRiders do on Sunday mornings before the game, they will host challengers baseball in right field, like special needs children. And I used to bring up my little league team to volunteer and to be umpires and run the bases with the kids. And for me, the whole time we have been there, I think that was about the most special community thing I have seen and it is a testament to the kind of outfit they are running up there in Scranton.

Mr. CHAMBERLIN. Yeah. I will reiterate something that Reid said and that is just it truly is a mantra of our organization to make sure that our stadium and our ballpark is a place where everyone in the West Michigan community feels comfortable coming. That is not always the case in society today. And I think it is a common theme of all the 120 clubs that that is something at the front of how they operate things and really important in our communities.

Mr. OLSZEWSKI. I appreciate that all very much and thanks again to our Chair and Ranking Member for this great conversation. Thanks again for your great work and I yield back.

Chairman JACK. Thank you. I now recognize Mr. Bresnahan from the great Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for 5 minutes.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman, and to the Ranking Member and to our witnesses. It means a lot that you were able to sacrifice a day in the middle of June

with warming temperatures and all of the scuttlebutt relating to baseball. So thank you all for being here.

And I am especially grateful for Lou Ciampi to come out here. Not only is Lou a constituent, we have similar backgrounds. We both come from multigenerational family businesses.

And going back to the RailRiders, some of the most meaningful moments that I ever spent with my grandfather was going to a baseball game or catching a doubleheader. And it really was very instrumental into my upbringing and determining who I am today. So I appreciate the investment that you make into small communities like ours. Not every different media market has the opportunity to attract a Major League Baseball team, specifically in Northeastern Pennsylvania. We really are proud of our Triple-A baseball teams and it is something that really binds us together, even if we went from a Phillies organization to a New York Yankees organization over the duration of time.

But I guess my first question, Lou, you recently mentioned that you are celebrating your 45th anniversary at PNC Park. Can you speak more about the partnership with the team and what it means to Independent Graphics?

Mr. CIAMPI. So, you know, I don't want to be redundant, but as I said before, the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders are very much a part of the Independent Graphics brand. To be able to go out on a sales call and say, we are a proud partner of the New York Yankees, like them or not like them, Triple-A team, it is certainly a conversation starter.

Some of the unbelievable memories, one in particular, the day that we met Reggie Jackson. Now, I have heard that some days are not so great to meet Mr. Jackson, but on this particular day, we caught him on a good day. And the vision of Reggie and my old man shaking hands like they were two old Army buddies, that is never going to leave me. That is never going to leave me. Where does a company started 45 years ago by one man get the chance to go up to the ballpark and meet all of our baseball heroes?

So, I mean, that is coming straight from the heart. That is one of the biggest things for me about the ballpark. They are part of our family.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Thank you. Mr. Battle, I would like to kind of invert the question and ask why, I mean, I think I know the answer, but I don't want to speculate, but why is it so important, important for organizations like Independent Graphics to partner with organizations like yours?

Mr. BATTLE. Well, you know, as we have talked about, we are, you know, we are operating, you know, not in the 30 major markets. And this is small and middle town America and there are thousands of small businesses that we work with. And Minor League Baseball wouldn't work without the partnership with small businesses like Lou's and what they are doing for the community. And it really is a partnership to create that win-win situation. And we take a lot of pride in every community in working with companies like Lou.

And as Lou said, he is not just an advertiser, but he is a vendor in the ballpark. And we find that over and over and over again. And it is just part of the lifeblood of Minor League Baseball and

it is the only way that it can work. And it, you know, it allows these businesses to connect with the community in a way that would probably otherwise be impossible. And so I think that it, you know, it is very important, and we are very excited to be part of it.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Well, perhaps you don't hear this enough, but thank you for investing into Northeastern Pennsylvania and taking a chance on our community. And we are very excited to have you interwoven into the fabric of who we are.

My last question, Lou. We have seen devastating flooding in 2011, which ultimately, like you just said before, put six feet of water on the first floor of your building. What does it mean to have the continuity and the promise of the relationship with the RailRiders, so you were able to bounce back from that devastating experience?

Mr. CIAMPI. So it was a great coincidence, we got flooded at the end of the season in '11. And during 2012, the ballpark was renovated, so no home games. So we were in no great shape to be producing program books in 2013. And it was kind of a tough time for us, and, you know, it was a little tenuous with the ballpark and our business model and everything. And then that Fourth of July, Derek Jeter came down for a rehab visit. And we print those program books, and Derek Jeter's on the cover, I wanted to run out onto the field and slide into home plate.

So I don't know, Rob, if that answers your question.

Mr. BRESNAHAN. Absolutely. With that, I yield my time.

Mr. CIAMPI. Thank you so much.

Chairman JACK. Thank you, Mr. Bresnahan.

I now recognize Mr. McGarvey from the Commonwealth of Kentucky for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCGARVEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Ciampi, you have got me fired up. I am ready to go out there myself right now. I love it.

What is baseball? And look, I am from Louisville, Kentucky, and Louisville is a baseball town. Whether it is the stars of today, like Will Smith, the catcher for the Dodgers, won the World Series last year. Whether it is the stars of our game, Peter Reese, his hometown is Louisville, Kentucky. And we all know what he did on the field, in particular with his play, but it is what he did with his leadership, the moment when he went up to Jackie Robinson and didn't just tell Jackie Robinson it was okay, but told the whole country it was okay.

I got to know Pee Wee a little bit when I was a pool guard for a summer in high school. And he was doing exercises in the pool and he would come out and talk to me about all things. He wanted to know what I was doing in school, I wanted to know what spring training was like in Dodger Town. And he gave me that picture of him with his arm around Jackie Robinson in the locker room and he signed it to me. I keep it in my office to this day because it says it is always the right time to do the right thing. And baseball can teach us those types of lessons.

Of course, we have more than stars. Baseball is key to Louisville and our identity. One of the most iconic things about baseball is the Louisville Slugger. And Mr. Chairman, I brought these Louis-

ville Slugger bats here today for everybody, not to show what the Democrats will use in this game, but what I hope the Republicans will use in this game. You guys could score a few dozen fewer runs and the game would still be competitive. So we are hoping there is the torpedo bat. Maybe you will use this one for bat speed.

But baseball is important to who we are. But we haven't had a major league team in Louisville since 1891. We have filled that gap with Minor League Baseball. And what a wonderful thing Minor League Baseball is. When I was a kid going to Redbirds games at the old Cardinals' stadium, when we could load up the family station wagon with our three kids and whatever neighbors jumped in and not break the bank and go out there, see who could throw the fastest pitch in the little thing outside the alleyway. Go watch the games. Maybe you got something lucky in a Cracker Jack box. Of course, not only did you get to experience baseball, but you get to see the guys who would go up and play in the Show and see them in those close confines. It is where so many of us not just got to experience baseball, it is where we saw our first concerts. It is where we went with our families. It has those great memories.

And now the Minor League Baseball in Louisville is continuing. And I will tell you that when we moved from Cardinal Stadium to the Bats new stadium in a blighted part of Louisville, it reignited that area of downtown Louisville in a way that people didn't think was possible. It was an act of faith to go to this area and build a top-notch baseball facility. But it sort of proved the baseball adage true: if you build it, they will come. So, and fans did come. And better yet, they are still coming.

Mr. Battle, I know you are here with us from the Louisville Bats. The Bats are already an anchor for our downtown and our local economy, and I know you are working with the city and state to grow that footprint even more. How will DBH's planned investment in Louisville help grow our local economy and benefit small businesses in the city?

Mr. BATTLE. Thank you for that question. And you are a baseball town. Congratulations also on the College World Series, apparently.

Mr. MCGARVEY. That is right.

Mr. BATTLE. Louisville Cardinals.

Mr. MCGARVEY. Louisville Cardinals going to the College World Series. And Murray State down in Western Kentucky going.

Mr. BATTLE. Very impressive. Yes, thank you for the question. And you know, when we announced the acquisition of the Louisville Bats, probably 18 months ago, Mayor Greenberg pulled us aside at the press conference. In fact, he pulled Henry Shepard, who Chairman Jack mentioned earlier, aside and said, we have been waiting on DBH to acquire the team. The city owns eight acres of land adjacent to the stadium, and we would like to sit down as quickly as possible and figure out how we can partner to help to continue to revitalize that part of Louisville. And so we have done that.

We have partnered very closely with the Louisville metro government. As you know, Congressman McGarvey, you know, we have talked about a \$250 million investment in building condominium, hotel, entertainment district, all of the things that we think will

continue to energize that part of Louisville. And we couldn't be more excited to do that. And, you know, Reid has done it, he said four times, and now is working in San Antonio. And those kinds of projects are really important. The stadium and the team is one thing, but how you can continue to invest in the community in order to have that kind of impact on the citizens is extremely important.

And it takes public-private partnership. And I can think of no better partnership than we have had since I have been with DBH than we have had with the city of Louisville.

Mr. MCGARVEY. Thank you. We love going to those games. I love taking my own kids.

Very quickly in the time I have got left, one thing that makes me worry is what happens when baseball goes away. And a few years ago, contraction significantly reduced the number of affiliated minor league teams down all the way to 120.

Mr. Chamberlin, do you see any good reason for MLB to further contract when the PDLs expire?

Mr. CHAMBERLIN. Well, I don't think I will necessarily have the answer on that one. I think it was a tough time for our industry when we experienced that contraction from 160 down to 120. And, you know, one of the hardest parts of it was seeing a few affiliated baseball leave 40 markets. There were certainly some reasons for who stayed and who didn't go. The way I would answer your question, even in those markets that lost baseball, what you see is that baseball is coming back in some way, shape, or form. And I think that is a testament to what this sport can do. It will find a way, and that is a great thing for communities just to keep it in some way, shape, or form.

Mr. MCGARVEY. Mr. Chairman, my time has expired. Thank you.

Chairman JACK. Thank you, Mr. McGarvey.

I now recognize Mr. Wied from the great state of Wisconsin for 5 minutes.

Mr. WIED. Thank you, Chairman Jack, and to all of the witnesses for testifying before us today.

When many of us think of baseball, we think of playing at the local sandlot as kids or of our favorite major league player. However, for tens of millions of Americans, Minor League Baseball is the most accessible way to watch professional baseball. Families can watch professional athletes play America's pastime at a more affordable price in their local community without having to drive several hours to a major city.

My district, I am honored to represent Wisconsin's Eighth Congressional District, is home to the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers. During the Minor League Baseball season, thousands of fans gather to watch the Timber Rattlers play at their home stadium in Appleton. This creates an environment for small businesses to thrive, whether a local restaurant or landscaping company, a facility maintenance company, or even the team itself, minor league teams across our nation foster hundreds of millions of dollars of investment for their local economy.

So, Mr. Battle, earlier this year, your company, Diamond Sports Holding, purchased the Wisconsin Timber Rattlers from my good

friend Craig Dickman. Thank you very much for investing and believing in Northeast Wisconsin. What does your company take into consideration when making decisions to add another team to its portfolio?

Mr. BATTLE. Yeah, great, great question. Thank you for that. And we are very excited to be in Appleton and to now be the proud owner of the Timber Rattlers. I was recently there. I am sorry that I missed you, but I was there 2 weeks ago and sat with Craig Dickman and we talked about, you know, through the game, all the way through the fireworks show at the end of the game, just what a great job that they did at the previous owners, the investment that they made in the stadium, the investment that they made in the locker room that have made, you know, this.

So when we look at a team, we are looking at the community, we are looking at the team that runs—we are looking at the team on the ground, the general manager and the staff. We are looking at the support of the fans in the community and the opportunity to grow. So we look at all of the factors. But, you know, we are—I mean, when we started this 4 years ago, I never thought that we would own 44 baseball teams. It has just happened a lot faster than we ever imagined that it could.

And you know, I would also say that, you know, with, with Reid and Joe, we are all in this together. You know, Reid owns his team, Joe owns his teams, we own our teams, but we celebrate each other. And Minor League Baseball is about, you know, how do we work together, how do we share best practices? If Reid or Joe are doing something that work, you can bet that the next game we are going to copy it and we are going to be looking at that as well. And so we look at every community, but we also work together across all of the ownership groups to make sure that we can take and learn and apply best practices.

Mr. WIED. One of the other things that everyone notices is, you know, the community partnerships that you all do, developing that and helping out in the community is so invaluable for our town for sure. What efforts has your company undertaken to support, you know, its minor league team, I mean, of the Appleton area and the development with the community?

Mr. BATTLE. Well, we have only owned the Timber Rattlers for about a month, so, you know, more to come on that. But, you know, as we think about investing in the communities, whether it is through advanced technology—you know, one of the things that we are trying to do is to provide a major league experience to minor league fans. And as you think about, you know, when you go to a big league ballpark and the grab-and-go and all of the technology that exists, if we can invest in that infrastructure and provide that to our teams, to our stadiums, and to our fans, it only enhances the experience. And so that those are the kinds of—in addition to the investment in infrastructure and real estate and stadium improvements that we make, but how can we invest in technology and other things that only enhance the experience of the fans?

Mr. WIED. Thank you. Mr. Ciampi, it is great to see businesses being, you know, a part of the Minor League Baseball and, obviously, I love your passion. I was ready to go play some baseball after listening to you there. But how does having a minor league

team in your hometown, how does that impact your business in the community at large from your perspective?

Mr. CIAMPI. Another good example of the way that the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre RailRiders impacts the business is that they do a lot of things for the youth groups. So the Little Leaguers will come up and they will go position by position, and when the RailRiders get announced, they run onto the field with the players to their position. What could be better than that? And like I alluded to before, bringing the kids up there to volunteer, to help the community a little bit, the people a little less fortunate than them. That is what I love about Minor League Baseball.

Mr. WIED. Very good. Again, thank you all. And I yield back.

Chairman JACK. Thank you, Mr. Wied.

I now recognize Mrs. McIver from New Jersey for 5 minutes.

Mrs. MCIVER. Thank you so much, Chairman and Ranking Member, for convening this hearing. And thank you to our witnesses for being here today.

Minor League Baseball teams play a critical role in connecting communities, supporting local businesses, and preserving the cultural fabric of cities across America. Minor league teams such as New Jersey's own Sussex County Miners, Somerset Patriots, and the Jersey Shore BlueClaws, just to name a few, have played just as important a role in families developing lifelong memories at their games as their major league counterparts. It is essential that federal policies create an environment where these teams and the small businesses that rely on them can thrive. These teams and the bustling small businesses that grow around them represent jobs and community pride. They deserve our support and partnership.

With that being said, I have one question to the entire panel. We have seen that smaller, independent, and affiliated minor league teams often struggle with access to capital, particularly when compared to their major league counterparts. What traditional financing strategies do minor league teams currently use for funding, and how can these funding streams be improved?

Mr. RYAN. I will jump on that. So we have always had a portion of private money that has been part of our municipal deal with the local municipality and our portion of the capital. And we have always used a local bank, just community banks. And we have carried bank debt, you know, as any other business would on our teams. And so I think, as everyone here has said, you know, whether it is Value Bank in Corpus Christi or our bank in Round Rock, we always try to find a local banking partner to be affiliated with and to actually keep the money in the community.

Mrs. MCIVER. Thank you so much for that.

Mr. CHAMBERLIN. Yeah, I would agree with that. In West Michigan, our naming rights partner is Lake Michigan Credit Union, and they also happen to be our lending partner. We are a little bit unique in that we own the team in addition to owning the ballpark and the real estate. So in a way, we own our own house and have always been able to leverage that house to help get projects done.

We are at a unique place right now where we are 30-some years in and working on an infrastructure project that could be upwards

of \$65 million when all is said and done. So I am working on very pragmatic and practical economic development solutions at the state level to help privately owned venues get those sorts of projects done, especially if they spur value-added economic development. So I think it is a really important topic, and thank you for the question.

Mrs. MCIVER. Thank you. Thank you so much for that. Anybody else care to chime in?

Well, I just want to thank each of you for being here. And I will say this has been one of, in my time in Congress, one of the most joyful Committee hearings that I have been in since I have been here. So thank you all so much for coming here and being with us today.

With that, I yield.

Chairman JACK. Thank you, Ms. McIver.

I now recognize Mr. Patronis from the great state of Florida for 5 minutes.

Mr. PATRONIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And, you know, Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for doing this. Thank you to the Clingstones for breaking the Wahoos' 11-game losing streak, 9 to 2. A little bit of bragging rights for the Wahoos.

But, you know, this isn't about me. This is about this guy sitting on the front row, my son Theo. I was a horrible athlete in school. I never understood what coordination was. But now my life is controlled by his baseball and where we go and what we do in our schedule. And he is eat up with it. And however you are communicating to this generation, you know, he is definitely—he is an excited part and consumer of the sport, the products, the support, the fanfare. And it keeps him out of trouble. It keeps him out of trouble.

So I really appreciate, you know, Coach, you giving the flexibility to the Ranking Member—I mean, the Chairman, in order—the Sub-Chairman to be able to pull this off and to be able to let us have this opportunity to kind of just talk about something that is not as really much of a partisan issue, but it is a great way to put aside our differences and talk about what I think is the exciting part is the economic development. So I am a hospitality guy at heart.

And, you know, and then you get those fights. It is kind of like an open question. We get those fights in our community. Years ago, we tried to recruit the Sand Gnats to my hometown. And so then you get the finger-pointing because there was bad tax dollars and all these different ways, you have the way to bring in resources to bring this in for a landing. And so now I am in Congress. The Wahoos is part of my district over in Pensacola, and I am excited. But, you know, again, being able to take that opportunity of that investment, that commitment to be in Pensacola, other suggestions how we take it to the next level in order to encourage more economic opportunity, we try to be versatile with the facility to do other things with it. But, you know, I got a bunch of experts sitting in the room. I would love to hear what else I should be, you know, advocating for in this position to help my support at home. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. RYAN. Well, I will jump in there because our company, one of the things I didn't mention is we also do strategic hospitality for several teams around the country, including Beloit and Pensacola with Quint Studer. And so I will be in Pensacola in a couple of weeks. And we have done—as you know, Quint is very involved. He is the owner of the Wahoos along with Bubba Watson, and they are very involved local communities. So we cater a lot of events out of that stadium. And then we had the football team playing there until they got their new stadium. But he does a lot of stuff with, you know, concerts in the facility. In fact, he put artificial turf in because he was running so many community events on the field. And so our staff there works 365 for Quint and the local ownership group to service the community.

Mr. CIAMPI. So I will jump in with a story. Surprise. My wife never wants to go to a game. I am not sure if she doesn't like baseball or she doesn't want to go with me. So one night a bunch of years ago, you know, we are in Scranton, and they had the office party up at PNC Field. And, you know, I had access to the suite, but I figured my wife wouldn't want to go. Well, let me tell you, she wanted to go, and I was in big trouble when she found out that night. So you could arrange some events, like an office party, up at your field, the wives are going to want to go, so.

Mr. RYAN. Sounds good.

Mr. PATRONIS. Well, Mr. Chairman, thank you for indulging us, to allow us to have this open dialogue. Again, just I think you are all sensitive to it, but there's young guys like—well, stand up, Theo, let everybody see you. He was texting me, wanting to know if he could get pictures of the mascots. I told him of course he could. So, anyway, I'm just going to let the mascots know he is going to get some selfies before he takes off. Anyway, it is just really cool. Thank you all for doing this.

Chairman JACK. Thank you, Mr. Patronis. I now recognize my colleague, Ms. Simon from California, for 5 minutes.

Ms. SIMON. We have smiled more in this hearing than I have seen smiles in the last 5 months that I have been in Congress. Thank you all so much for being here.

And if you would have told me 2 years ago that I would be in the Small Business Committee in Congress or talking about baseball with a big old smile, I would not have believed you. But, but, I am from the city of Oakland, and you know who I am going to talk about. I am going to talk about the Oakland Ballers. I am sure you are familiar, and if you are not, I actually want to tell you a little bit about the origin story.

Three guys I met less than 2 years ago, one from tech, one from show business, the other guy is just a smart business nerd, they used their own money. They did town and gown. They called folks in government, community organizers, folks from culture. And they said, we have this idea that we want to bring Minor League Baseball to West Oakland, which is a Black community that has been under-resourced. And now we have an exhilarating community that is just—it is so incredible. The Oakland Ballers is more than a sports team. They have literally become a catalyst. They are community builders, much like you all. And it is so exciting to actually

talk about something that we can all say yes to, America and baseball and apple pie and literally some good politics.

In their first season, the Ballers brought nearly 100,000 fans to Raimondi Park, a baseball field that was literally in disrepair. No one could practice or even go on the field. They spent literally tens of thousands of dollars in the first 6 months, engaging community and figuring out a way forward. Like many of you have done, going to city council meetings and talking to planning commissions and, again, figuring what is in your savings and drawing down from your 401(k)'s. Baller founders, we see you.

The park is now used for Little League championships, high school tournaments, and movie nights, which none of us could have thought possible. This kind of community investment breathes new life into neighborhoods. It has created opportunities for local small businesses and has built something that my city so desperately has needed: community pride.

The team is now community-driven and fan-owned, like we have talked about today. They have raised \$3 million from over 4,000 fan investors, including Billy Joe Armstrong of Green Day, Go Green Day, and hip-hop and Oakland native superstar Too Short. You wouldn't have thought about that, right? This community-driven model, its ownership model, continues to challenge the notion that communities can't come together particularly to support minor baseball. In Oakland, we have. We are giving fans an opportunity to have real voice in community entrepreneurship, but also just a good old time.

I know very little about baseball, but I love to dance with the mascots, eat hot dogs. Minor League Baseball games, if you haven't been, it is some of the best times that you will ever have. Right? Exactly. Good music, good people. And again, folks, regardless if you are red or blue, we come and we want our teams to win. And it is just an amazing experience.

Oakland's past is rich with championship teams, as you all know, but in recent years we have seen professional teams move away from our community. The Ballers, those three guys, 4,000 sub-owners, came in together to preserve baseball and provide a safe and affordable and fun gathering space for residents.

I can talk on and on about the Ballers because you can tell that I am so blessed that we have again the entrepreneurship spirit here that we are seeing on this panel in our community. But I have learned a lot, you know, watching the Ballers work, watching them work with communities.

And Mr. Chamberlin, I have just a quick question for you. You talked about, again, the innovation opportunities in communities when Minor League Baseball comes into town, to community. What are some of the lessons that folks can take away from this community-centered model of Minor League Baseball and how they can better support small businesses? We talked a little bit about this today, but a couple of lessons that, that we can take on.

Mr. CHAMBERLIN. Yeah, I would—thank you for the question. And I don't know a lot about the Ballers, but I have read a little bit and it is an incredibly cool story and it is a great example of organic baseball finding a way to survive in a market that is truly an incredible baseball market. For us, being a very community-cen-

tric team, I think it starts with truly just being a place where everyone wants to be. We don't view LMCU Ballpark as our ballpark. We view it as the community's ballpark.

And, again, I don't want to go back to the same story I already told, but, you know, when you have a tragedy like the fire that we had in 2014 and literally have season ticketholders coming to donate to the rebuild, you know that you have struck a chord in the community. And if I would offer any advice to your district and to Oakland, it would be, hey, they have struck fire and let's help them be successful because they have proven that they have got something that can work and with some community support it is going to be an incredible thing.

Ms. SIMON. Thank you. My time is up and I yield back. Thank you all for being here today.

Chairman JACK. Well, thank you, Ms. Simon. And I appreciate you mentioning the Ballers. They play in the Pioneer League, which features quite a few teams from the great state of Montana.

So I now recognize Mr. Downing from the great state of Montana for 5 minutes.

Mr. DOWNING. Thank you, Chairman Jack, and thank you to the witnesses being here today. I just want to say I am looking forward tomorrow to participating in this nation's great pastime as we see the congressional baseball team once again dominate on the Republican side with the leadership of Skip—I mean, Chairman Williams here. So looking forward to that.

And just one thing I want to, you know, suggest to the witnesses, if you have any scouts, pay close attention. If you are looking for a new shortstop, give me a call.

So back in my home district of Central and Eastern Montana, we have no local Major League Baseball sports teams. For context, the nearest Major League Baseball stadium, the Colorado Rockies' Coors Field is 550 miles away from Billings. Minor League Baseball is our only opportunity to take our families out to the ballpark to watch a professional baseball team.

I am going to start with Mr. Battle. Your company, Diamond Baseball Holdings, operates over 40 teams across the country, including in small cities in middle America, like Des Moines, Omaha, Wichita. Can you speak to the important role that Minor League Baseball plays in bringing professional sports league locations in middle America that are overlooked by major sports leagues?

Mr. BATTLE. No, it is a great question. And I think that that is, you know, one of the, you know, the real benefit to Minor League Baseball is to bring life to those communities. We talked about the centers of energy that those stadiums represent. And I can't remember if Reid or Joe talked about it, you know, we represent affiliated Minor League Baseball teams, and there are 120 of those. But there are so many different leagues, like the Ballers that we just talked about, so many different leagues and so any minor league professional teams that are playing in communities around the country and they are equally important in terms of the impact that they have on their communities and bringing the communities together.

Mr. DOWNING. Well, can you speak to that? How do minor league teams that you operate engage with local schools, with youth baseball teams to promote the sport?

Mr. BATTLE. Yeah. Again, great question. And you know I can't say that this is across the board, but, you know, if you go to a typical Minor League Baseball game there is probably a youth group from a local church or a local school that is singing the National Anthem. There are, you know, every night teachers are honored, veterans are honored, and the opportunity to bring the stadium to the community and the community to the stadium is extremely important. And, you know, I think that in many cases they are one and the same and they really do work together. And that is how, you know, our teams are trying to promote that in each local market.

Mr. DOWNING. And so how do you not just entrench each team in their local communities, but build out the relationships with, you know, local businesses, with fans? How are you doing now?

Mr. BATTLE. Yeah. We have, you know, great staffs on the ground that I have talked about. In many cases, I mentioned the example earlier in, you know, one of our communities that up to 31 full-time employees, 26 started as interns, and there is just a passion. You know, one of the things that I have always loved, even in the time that I spent in the college space, I have always loved the passion of the employees in Minor League Baseball. It is just different. You know, it is not easy.

You know, if you are in the pro leagues, there are a lot of inbound calls. In the minor leagues, you have to go out into the community. You are going into the local businesses, into the schools, into the churches, and you are engaging with the local citizens, and that is what it is all about. And so in all of our teams we have a general manager, we have a ticket seller, we have sponsorship sellers, we have people that operate the park.

One of the other things about Minor League Baseball employees that is so amazing is they, in many cases, wear four or five hats. They could be selling tickets during the day and pulling tarp at night when it rains or behind the concession stand. And there is just an esprit de corps at Minor League Baseball that is very special.

Mr. DOWNING. Before I run out of time I have got to change hats too. So here you go. So Montana is home and I have got a little swag here, the Billings Mustangs. Montana is home to five Minor League Baseball teams, including the Billings Mustangs in my home district. The Mustangs provide affordable family-friendly entertainment throughout the summer, attracting over 105,000 fans annually to Dehler Park.

So Mr. Battle or Mr. Ryan, in your respective roles you have experienced running minor league teams in small or medium markets. What have you found works best in keeping fans engaged and bringing them back to the ballpark throughout the season? I will start with Mr. Ryan.

Mr. RYAN. Yeah. I think the promotions that we talked about earlier is always fun to have those things. But also, it is knowing the history of the club. I think, you know, some of the people in Billings, they were Reds-affiliated forever, had had so many of

those guys go to the major league, start their pro career in Billings. And people build deep relationships with those players and they keep them for a lifetime. And so I think just the game itself is and will always be the draw because it brings people together.

Mr. DOWNING. Outstanding. Unfortunately, I have run out of time, so we will get back to you. And Mr. Chairman, I yield.

Chairman JACK. Thank you very much.

And I now recognize my good friend, Mr. Addison McDowell from North Carolina for 5 minutes.

Mr. MCDOWELL. Well, thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you, also, to the witnesses for being here today.

I want to talk a little bit about what Minor League Baseball meant to me. As someone that grew up right around the Winston-Salem Warthogs, which has since become the Winston-Salem Dash that is owned by Diamond Baseball Holdings. And some of my most favorite memories with my dad are going to watch the Warthogs as a kid. And I have passed the Winston-Salem Dash stadium every day after church. And my two year old, I ask her every Sunday, would you like to go see a baseball game with Daddy? She says no every single week. But eventually, she is going to say yes. I am going to carry that tradition on with my children.

And so I am grateful to each of you for the role that you play in Minor and Major League Baseball and baseball in general. Because what you do doesn't just spur economic growth. It spurs memories with fathers and sons and fathers and daughters and mothers and sons and mothers and daughters. And that is a great thing. And that is exactly why we have seen today in this Committee folks say things like this is the happiest committee I have been in in Congress. And it is not just because there is mascots sitting in here, which is a first for me, but it is because sports bring people together in a way that very few, if any things do. And I wanted to begin with that. And I am grateful for what you all do in creating memories for the families. It means a lot.

But, Mr. Battle, how would you say that—you know, you touched on the Charlotte Knights, which I have actually been to the Winter Wonderland in Charlotte with my family. But what are some of—outside of that, what are some of the more creative promotional campaigns that you have seen these teams do in small- to medium-sized cities and towns that really foster community engagement?

Mr. BATTLE. Yeah. It is a great question, and I am sure the others can answer that as well. And hopefully, one of the great promotions that we will run soon is your daughter can either sing the National Anthem at a game or throw out the first pitch. We would love to have that at the Dash game. Maybe that will entice her to go.

But, yes, as we have talked about a lot today, you know, there are so many promotions that are fun. You know, one of the things that I have just seen recently that I love and want to amplify across, you know, so many of our communities is in Dayton, Ohio, the Dayton Dragons, which is one of the great stories in Minor League Baseball. They had a campaign called Celebrate Dayton. And, you know, three or four times a week they are celebrating, again, teachers, veterans, kids K through 5 that make good grades,

whatever gives them a reason to celebrate the community. And, you know, a lot of people have touched on this today.

I mean, this is the opportunity that we have and what Minor League Baseball represented. It is the opportunity to bring citizens together and businesses together and to make it work. And so, you know, there are so many—one of the things I love about Minor League Baseball, to your point, is that there are so many crazy promotions that you couldn't run in the pro leagues, you know, whatever it is. Ranking Member Scholten talked about some of the, you know, funny promotions that are running. Every night in a minor league ballpark those are happening. And everybody enjoys it and it is fun and it is one of the things that makes Minor League Baseball so unique and special.

Mr. MCDOWELL. Thank you. Mr. Ryan, you were with the Astros when you secured the major league affiliate for the Fayetteville Woodpeckers. And I touched on my dad there earlier. My dad was actually the PA announcer for the Woodpeckers when they came to Fayetteville, which is not in my district, but it is in my home state. And I am curious, can you touch on how having the backing of a major league team impacts both the success of the team and then by extension the economic development in the surrounding community?

Mr. RYAN. Yeah. So, one of the things that happened was that Major League Baseball put a mandate out that we had to bring all of these facilities up to a certain standard, which was a really good thing. And that forced operators like those at the table, especially Diamond Baseball because they have so many teams, but also the major league affiliates to make decisions on where they wanted their long-term home to be and finding out could they partner with the community.

And so I went all over North Carolina, who wanted to be in that league. We really fell in love with the Fayetteville area because, you know, once again, there wasn't anything to do at night. We heard a lot of the guys on base got in trouble and the local community wanted something not just for the families, but for them as well. And it has been a big success. And, you know, it has been neat to see that part of downtown which has so much history actually develop and get people down there. And they have the Special Forces Museum and everything right there.

So, yeah, if it wouldn't have been for the Astros ownership and the Texas Rangers because they now are in one of the new Diamond Baseball facilities in the Southeast, as well buying those clubs and making that move, it would have never happened. So, it was basically from the top to the bottom.

Mr. MCDOWELL. Got it. Well, Mr. Chairman, my time has expired.

Chairman JACK. Well, thank you very much, Mr. McDowell, and, again, thank you for waving on today.

I will now recognize our Ranking Member, Ms. Scholten, for brief closing remarks.

Ms. SCHOLTEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. And briefly, just to conclude and thank you to all of our witnesses for coming here today to elevate the importance of Minor League Baseball. Your work in our community really serves to strengthen the small

business economies that surround them and bring our communities together. Play ball.

Chairman JACK. Thank you very much.

I will now recognize the Chairman of our full Committee, Chairman Roger Williams, for brief closing remarks.

Chairman WILLIAMS. Well, I want to thank all of you for being here. This has been great. You know, we talk about stories. Baseball is one of the—is the only sport, actually, that has stories. I would venture to say you could ask anybody in this room and everybody will have a baseball story. Not everybody is going to have a football story or a basketball story, but they got a baseball story, and we have heard that. And that is what makes it special.

Also, I am always remembering that baseball, you know, you go back—well, right now we have got—we see what is happening in Los Angeles today. It is a mess. But we are also talking about the Congressional Baseball Game tomorrow. You go back to World War I, baseball drew us out of World War I. Baseball kept going in World War II. Baseball and President Bush kept us going on 9-11. So, that is the kind of sport it is. It is the American sport and no other sport has got that.

And then the other thing I always remind people, baseball is the only sport that has a play in it called the sacrifice. And that is what America is about.

So, I am glad to have all of you here and see my friends. Baseball is the greatest game. It is the hardest thing to do. Of course, your dad is in the Hall of Fame. He was a pitcher. But going in the Hall of Fame, you got to fail 70 percent of the time, don't you? What other business allows you to fail 70 percent of the time and you go to the Hall of Fame? That is because hitting a round ball with a round bat and hitting it square is the hardest thing to do.

So, anyway, I want to thank you all for being here. It has been a great hearing. You may be in trouble. We may make this an annual event.

Chairman JACK. Without objection. Thank you to Ranking Member Scholten and Chairman Williams and each Member of this Subcommittee for your questions. And thank you to our witnesses for your testimony today.

Without objection, Members have 5 legislative days to submit additional materials or written questions for the witnesses to the Chairman, which will be forwarded to the witnesses. I ask the witnesses to please respond promptly.

Thirty minutes after we adjourn, we will host a reception in this room honoring America's pastime. The reception will feature three beloved mascots in costume behind you today: Fuzzy from the Columbus Clingstones, Buddy Bat from the Louisville Bats, and Gus from the Fredericksburg Nationals. The reception will also feature autograph stations with former major leagues Jim Sundberg and Larry Hardy, baseball coach Johnny Watson, and our Chairman Roger Williams. Baseball souvenirs and ballpark food will be provided, and all are welcome to attend.

Thank you to our incredible staff, led by Staff Director Lauren Holmes, for helping produce today's hearing and reception. We hope to see all of you at the Congressional Baseball Game tomorrow night.

And if there is no further business, without objection, this Subcommittee is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 4:09 p.m., the Subcommittee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Opening Statement – Pat Battle

Beyond the Ballpark: The Role of Minor Leagues in Economic Growth

Opening Statement

- Thank you, Chairman Jack, Ranking Member Scholton, and distinguished members of the committee for inviting me to testify today about the importance of MiLB in helping to drive economic growth across the Country.
- My name is Pat Battle, and I am the Executive Chairman of Diamond Baseball Holdings.
- DBH is an organization that owns select affiliated MiLB Baseball Clubs, all of which are run as independent organizations by a passionate group of, on average, 25 employees in each of the communities that we serve.
- MiLB exemplifies the best of America. It is community focused, rooted in deep tradition, and representative of the broad cultures and customs across our country.
- This is why I am grateful to this committee for shining the spotlight on MiLB today, and why I am proud to share with you our mission (along with my colleagues on the panel) to preserve, protect, and enhance MiLB and, through that, to fuel small business economic growth for generations to come

MiLB reaches many different constituencies, and represents something uniquely special to each group:

1. For MLB and its 30 big league clubs, MiLB serves as the training ground for developing its future players, and also supports the growth of Baseball's fanbase at the grassroots level
2. The second group are professional baseball players, where MiLB represents their opportunity to achieve lifelong dreams as the path to make it to The Show. DBH relishes its role in supporting those dreams through close collaboration with MLB and our local municipal partners. The MLB HoF is full of great players who got their start in the minor league system
 - o Willie Mays at the historic Rickwood Field in Birmingham
 - o David Ortiz in Appleton, Wisconsin
 - o Aaron Judge in Scranton, Pennsylvania
3. A third group impacted by MiLB are the 120 communities who host affiliated MiLB teams. The stadiums in which the teams play serve as the centers of energy in these communities and represent an important and vibrant gathering spot for local citizens. At DBH it is our desire for these stadiums, in addition to hosting roughly 70 baseball games a year, to host many events such as concerts, high school state championships, graduations, weddings, corporate outings, and the list goes on and on

- In April, I was proud to attend the opening of a new MiLB stadium in Columbus, GA. The ballpark has welcomed a wide sampling of citizens from across the region and we believe will have a transformative impact on its surroundings
- And the community impact extends beyond what happens inside the stadium. We are proud of our planned stadium-adjacent mixed use entertainment district in Louisville, KY. In close partnership with the Louisville Metro Government and the State of Kentucky, the project will help revitalize downtown and create meaningful jobs for the local economy
- 4. The next constituency impacted by MiLB are the fans who reside in each community. At DBH, we believe we are in the memory making business, and we strive to do that in a fun, affordable way for families, friends, and colleagues. Affordability and accessibility are a top priority in MiLB. Our approach is to execute in a hyper local manner, celebrating the nuances which make each of our communities special and unique.
- 5. Last but certainly not least is what MiLB represents to the more than 1,000 small businesses who partner with our teams in a variety of ways. Whether through advertising, sponsorship, vending, and more, these partnerships broaden their relationship with fans, other businesses, and the community as a whole.

Thank you

- I hope I have given you a sense today of why we're so passionate about MiLB and its wide-reaching impact.
- DBH is committed to fostering small business relationships, public partnerships, community connections, and special memories giving communities something to root for together.

Independent Graphics Inc. is a family-owned and operated printing and direct mail company located in West Wyoming, PA. We are celebrating our 45th year in business. The company was founded by my late father, Lou Ciampi, Sr. My brother Jim and I are co-owners. I started full-time in the business in January 1986 as a sales manager and am now the President. Over that period, we have built the company from 5 full-time employees to 35. Throughout our tenure doing business with the Railriders, our sales have surged.

We have been doing printing for the Scranton/Wilkes-Barre Railriders since 2008. We have done some pretty interesting projects for them during this time—one of the first projects involved Roger Clemens. Roger came down to Triple-A from the big Yankees for an assignment in 2008. A photo was taken when he threw out the first pitch of the game. The image was emailed to us at Independent Graphics, where we produced about 15 posters and then rushed them to the ballpark, where Roger signed them before he left the stadium (no, we didn't get a signed copy).

The ballpark was renovated in 2012. At the beginning of opening night in 2013, another photo was taken and emailed to Independent Graphics. Using several digital printing units, we produced over 5,000 framed, high-quality 8x10 prints, which were distributed to fans leaving the ballpark that night. Rush projects for sure.

We have been doing their program books for all of these years. When the contract began in 2008, each night had variable content. About 70 percent of the content was static for a home stand. However, each game had its own cover, along with eight variable pages that included updated statistics on a game-by-game basis. Before the home stand started, we would print all of the static pages. Each night after a game, we received an email with the updated pages for the next game's printing. Books would be printed and bound overnight during the third shift and delivered the next day by game time. While the books are no longer printed in this fashion (now the same books are printed and used each night of a home stand), I genuinely believe that some of these "just in time" printing drills have helped us grow

our business with other clients. Speed to market is a common term in our company. The Railriders have certainly helped us to put the “rush” into our business model.

Independent Graphics and the Ciampi family have some very fond memories of Railriders Baseball. We are both a vendor and an advertiser. Over the years, it has been great fun to see our advertising at the ballpark and to spend time in our suite, which we rent for half of the home games. As many Sundays as we could, the whole Ciampi clan would go up to the park to watch the ball games. Lou Sr. was a huge Yankees fan (Yogi was his favorite ball player). Whether it was taking in the game or meeting Roger Clemens, Dwight Gooden, Darryl Strawberry, or Reggie Jackson, memories of a lifetime have been made at the park. This Saturday, the 14th of June, we will be celebrating our 45th Anniversary in the left field box. I, for one, cannot wait.

Hello, my name is Reid Ryan, and I'm the CEO of Ryan Sanders Baseball. I'm honored to be here today to discuss the positive impact that minor league baseball has had on communities across our country. Baseball has been a lifelong passion for me.

My father, Nolan Ryan, is Major League Baseball's all-time strikeout and no-hitter leader and a member of the National Baseball Hall of Fame. When I was born, he was pitching for the New York Mets, and as I grew up, our family spent time with the California Angels, Houston Astros, and Texas Rangers organizations.

After playing college baseball, I was fortunate enough to be drafted by the Texas Rangers and assigned to the Hudson Valley Renegades in Poughkeepsie, NY. That experience marked my very first minor league game. Having grown up around the big leagues, I was amazed by the fun, family-friendly environment that minor league baseball offered. I couldn't believe that this type of entertainment existed all over the country, and yet I had never experienced it until I became a player myself.

Over the next two years, I played in the New York-Penn League, the South Atlantic League, and the California League. Traveling across the country, I witnessed the same thing in every market—from the East Coast to the West Coast—families and communities coming together around the game of baseball. It wasn't just about the sport; it was about affordable family fun, community pride, and a sense of belonging.

When my playing career ended, I set my sights on becoming an owner of a minor league baseball team. In 1998, at just 26 years old, I discovered a Houston Astros AA club in Jackson, MS, that was playing in an aging ballpark and needed to be moved closer to Houston. I assembled a group, secured a loan, and purchased the ball club. Little did I know that my efforts would help spark a renaissance in the minor league baseball industry.

In 2000, we opened the Dell Diamond in Round Rock, TX, building a major league-quality stadium on a minor league scale. Since then, I have owned or operated several clubs across the country, including the Corpus Christi Hooks, the San Antonio Missions, and the Fayetteville Woodpeckers.

Along the way, I've also spent time in the major leagues, working with the league on various committees and serving as president of the Houston Astros. I share this to illustrate that I have seen the game from every angle, and I always return to my love of minor league baseball. There is something truly special about the fans and the communities we serve that makes our game a cherished part of Americana.

Minor league baseball is, at its core, a hyper-local small business. Our games are played for fans at the ballpark, not for those watching on TV. The fans, sponsors, and staff are all deeply involved in the local community, and the ballpark often becomes the "front porch" of these towns. It's a place where people watch baseball, but more importantly, where they connect with neighbors, friends, and loved ones.

Throughout my career, I've been fortunate to build new stadiums in four markets, and I am currently working on my fifth in San Antonio, TX. In every case, the local economy has benefited.

- In Round Rock, the ballpark spurred the development of restaurants, hotels, and businesses.
- In Corpus Christi, a water park, concert venue, and restaurant were developed next to the ballpark.
- In Fayetteville, NC, a hotel and downtown living spaces emerged adjacent to the stadium.

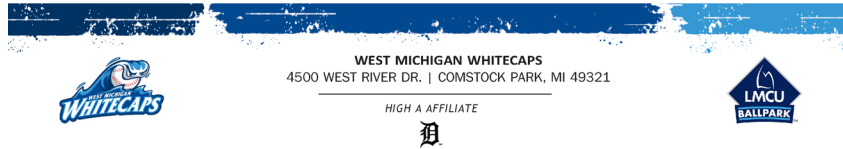
- In San Antonio, we are in the process of developing downtown living as part of our project.

In every instance, the ballpark has revitalized or spurred growth in the surrounding area.

One of my favorite sayings comes from former First Lady “Lady” Bird Johnson, derived from the Bible: “To whom much is given, much is expected.” That’s how I feel about my role in minor league baseball. I’ll close by saying that my goal has always been to leave the game and my community better than I found them. By investing in minor league baseball and the areas around our stadiums, we have improved the quality of life in our local communities and helped small businesses grow and thrive.

Thank you.

Reid Ryan



Chairman Jack, Ranking Member Scholten, and members of the subcommittee, I am honored to be before you today to share my story and, most importantly, to talk some baseball. This was certainly an exciting, albeit unexpected, invite. When I shared the news with my wife Dana, she wanted me to make sure they had the right guy.

My name is Joe Chamberlin, and I am the CEO and Managing Partner of two baseball franchises that call the great state of Michigan home. The West Michigan Whitecaps, located just north of Grand Rapids, are the High-A Minor League affiliate of the Detroit Tigers. The Traverse City Pit Spitters are a collegiate wooden bat league team playing in the Northwoods League. Both Traverse City and West Michigan are incredible communities and incredible sports markets. I am, of course, biased—both teams represent the best version of what a franchise can achieve at each level of play.

For me, baseball has become the family business. The Whitecaps were founded by my dad, Lew Chamberlin, and his business partner, Denny Baxter, in 1994. Lew was the quintessential entrepreneur; he believed that West Michigan could support a professional baseball club—and he believed it long before most others did. With the help of many along the way, he spent the better part of ten years on a journey to make that dream a reality for his West Michigan community. That day came in 1994 when the Whitecaps played their first home game, and, in many ways, the rest was history. Out of the gate, the Whitecaps broke every single-A attendance record that existed in Minor League Baseball, consistently drawing over 500,000 fans a year. We were named the MLB franchise of the decade in the 1990s and have long been viewed as one of the premier markets and franchises in our industry.

Because of our entrepreneurial origin story, we have always operated a little differently than most teams. Lew was the “idea guy,” not the “capital guy.” Based on a strong business plan and proven success in another market, he formed a partnership and raised the capital needed to purchase a team and build our ballpark. Because of that history, we own our privately funded stadium—and can proudly say that no taxpayer dollars were used for its construction in 1994 or for upkeep since. It is unique for a club to be actively run by its entrepreneurial founding family rather than being held as part of a larger portfolio. As such, we have always been incredibly hands-on owner-operators who run our clubs as our primary business and require that they perform profitably every season. For us, the Whitecaps and the Pit Spitters are not part of our portfolio—they are the portfolio—and we have always taken pride in being sports owners who remain actively involved at every level of their success.

The success of the Whitecaps in the early nineties proved that our community could support professional sports teams and vibrant stadiums. In the years following our inaugural season, Grand Rapids has been lucky to see other teams and amenities added to our city's roster. Today, Grand Rapids is home to an AHL hockey team, a G League basketball team, a professional volleyball franchise, and, debuting in 2026, a professional soccer club. The collective impact of these teams saw Grand Rapids recognized as the best minor league sports market in the country in 2019. We are extremely proud that the Whitecaps proved the thesis that sports-centric infrastructure investment and economic development work in West Michigan.

To this day, both the Whitecaps and the Pit Spitters are hyper-local, small- to medium-sized companies that have an incredibly symbiotic relationship with their communities. If you want a barometer of the health of a community's small businesses, look no further than its stadiums. Our outfield walls and sponsorship inventory are filled with small business advertising—showcasing the great work their companies do. Our hospitality areas are filled with businesses entertaining employees and families. The Whitecaps take pride in selling more corporate group tickets than any other team in Minor League Baseball. On game days, our stadiums are full of local employees of all ages earning competitive wages. Our organizations employ over 1,000 seasonal staff members between the Whitecaps and the Pit Spitters each summer, in addition to our 65 full-time front-office staff members. And, where do we spend the majority of our significant expense budgets? In large part, right in our own backyards—with local companies. We estimate the local economic impact of the Pit Spitters and Turtle Creek Stadium exceeds \$10 million each year, while the Whitecaps and LMCU Ballpark contribute over \$40 million annually.

While there has been a lot of success, as all of you know, running a small business is hard, and our industry has felt that pressure over the last five years. During the pandemic, we lost our entire baseball season and went over 18 months without generating revenue. Shortly after, our industry experienced significant contraction and governance changes. Although specific policy issues are not on my agenda today, I do think it's worth sharing a few observations. First, uncertainty is the enemy of nearly every small business out there. To the extent that legislators at both the state and federal levels can steer a steady ship—allowing businesses like mine to have predictable inputs and consistent regulatory environments—I can assure you that people like me will thank you and work hard every day to create more jobs, invest in communities, and spur economic development.

On the topic of economic development, which I am working very hard on at the state level, I think it's also important to recognize how truly transformational a sports team can be for its community when done right. As opportunities arise, please continue to consider practical and pragmatic policies and programs that help keep Minor League Baseball teams thriving across the country. The returns on those kinds of initiatives are significant in many ways.

In closing, I want to thank the committee for this opportunity and for highlighting our incredible industry. As a family business owner, I tend to take the long-term view and seek sustainability. That philosophy has served us very well in an industry with such a rich history—one that has proven for generations to be one of the best forms of affordable, family-friendly entertainment out there. Who knows if either of my sons, Crawford and Becker, will ever have an interest in this wonderful world of Minor League Baseball, but my job is to ensure these franchises remain vibrant for the next generation of Whitecaps and Pit Spitters fans—and that we keep all the fun Minor League Baseball can offer thriving in our communities for decades to come.



JOE CHAMBERLIN
CEO & Managing Partner
West Michigan Whitecaps and Traverse City Pit Spitters





Jason Stverak
Chief Advocacy Officer

June 9, 2025

The Honorable Brian Jack
Chairman
Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development
House Committee on Small Business
2361 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Hillary Scholten
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Workforce Development
House Committee on Small Business
2361 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Jack and Ranking Member Scholten:

On behalf of the Defense Credit Union Council (DCUC) and our member credit unions serving military installations across the United States and abroad, I write to commend the Subcommittee for holding this important hearing on "Minor League Baseball's Impact on Small Businesses and Local Communities."

Credit unions play a vital role in supporting the health of local communities, not just through affordable financial services, but also through strategic partnerships with community institutions like minor league baseball teams, local nonprofits, and schools. These partnerships are not acts of vanity or self-promotion, as some critics from the banking industry would have the public believe. Rather, they are investments in the civic, cultural, and economic well-being of the very communities we are chartered to serve.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the flourishing partnerships between credit unions and local sports teams. One compelling example is Members 1st Federal Credit Union in Pennsylvania, which has long supported youth athletic programs, sponsored community events, and, most notably, maintained a valued partnership with local minor league teams including the Harrisburg Senators. This relationship promotes not only the credit union's brand but also sustains the viability of the local sports economy, which in turn supports hundreds of small businesses, from vendors and concessionaires to local hotels and restaurants.

VyStar Credit Union in Florida is another outstanding example, serving as a partner with the Jacksonville Jumbo Shrimp. Their partnership includes not just visibility, but also robust financial literacy programming and community engagement events that benefit residents throughout Jacksonville.

Railway Credit Union in North Dakota proudly sponsors the Bismarck Larks, a popular team in the Northwoods League. Through their ongoing "Railway Credit Union Rally Time" promotion and community support initiatives, they provide financial education, sponsor events, and create a

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welcoming space for families and small businesses to gather and thrive. Their sponsorship is a key part of the Larks' community engagement, demonstrating how local financial institutions can drive civic participation and local economic growth.

7 17 Credit Union in Ohio exemplifies the community-focused spirit of credit unions through its partnerships with both the Akron RubberDucks and the Mahoning Valley Scrappers. As the official credit union of the Akron RubberDucks, 7 17 engages fans with prize giveaways and community events, including sponsoring the "Let Three-Dom Ring" Independence Day celebration at Canal Park. Their partnership with the Mahoning Valley Scrappers includes hosting the annual Financial Wellness Night at Eastwood Field, providing free entertainment and financial education to the community. Additionally, 7 17 has introduced a charitable giving credit card program, donating 7.17 cents to the Scrappers for every purchase made with the card, supporting youth outreach and ballpark improvements.

MSU Federal Credit Union (MSUFCU) in Michigan has been named the field sponsor for the new John Smoltz Strikeout Baseball Stadium in downtown Lansing's Ferris Park. This innovative facility offers a miniature baseball environment designed to be inclusive and accessible, allowing children of all ages and skill levels to engage in the sport. MSUFCU's sponsorship underscores their commitment to community development and youth engagement, providing a welcoming space that fosters teamwork, leadership, and resilience among young players.

These examples represent just a small slice of the broader impact credit unions have through sports partnerships.

As banks attempt to criticize credit unions for sponsoring stadiums or partnering with athletic organizations, we must underscore a simple truth: credit unions are member-owned, not-for-profit cooperatives whose every dollar spent is meant to provide tangible value to members and their communities. Sponsorships are not about glitz or glamor—they are about showing up for Little League games, supporting first responder charities, or ensuring that families in small towns have the opportunity to enjoy a safe, fun evening at a local ballpark.

In defense communities across America, defense credit unions are often among the largest supporters of base-affiliated youth leagues, veteran charities, and community outreach events. In many military towns, where minor league teams provide a critical boost to local morale and economic resilience, credit union sponsorships are the connective tissue that make these institutions viable. These relationships are about promoting financial wellness, providing community enrichment, and reinforcing the local economic fabric—especially in underserved or rural regions.

Rather than condemning these investments, Congress should celebrate them. They demonstrate the cooperative spirit at the heart of the credit union mission: people helping people. And they prove that financial institutions can be community-focused without chasing profit at all costs.

We thank you for the opportunity to highlight the real-world impact of minor league baseball and the role community-based institutions like credit unions play in keeping it strong. DCUC stands

ready to work with this Committee to continue fostering the kinds of partnerships that uplift local economies, enhance community well-being, and ensure our national pastime continues to thrive for generations to come.

Sincerely,



Jason Stverak
Chief Advocacy Officer
DCUC

CC: Members of the House Small Business Committee