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12-Year-Old Norman Girl's Salute to Freedom to Debut During OU Game

OERB Gives Oklahomans the Opportunity to Salute Her Brother Serving in Iraq War

Belting out the "Star-Spangled Banner" is 12-year-old Colleen McLaughlin's specialty. And protecting freedom is her family's anthem.

Colleen's talent and the McLaughlin family's dedication to America came together through the Oklahoma Energy Resources Board's "Freedom" TV spot, which features Colleen singing the national anthem during a Little League baseball game. She said she considers the spot a tribute to her father, mother and brother who all have military backgrounds.

"I'm excited for my family to see this," Colleen said. "Especially my brother, who's in Iraq right now. I know it will make him happy to see me singing that song."

Colleen's brother, Christopher McLaughlin, has been in Iraq for the past seven months serving in the Oklahoma National Guard. Their father, Lt. Jim McLaughlin, has served in the U.S. Navy for the past 24 years and their mother, Katherine McLaughlin, served in the U.S. Navy for eight years.

OERB Board Member Dewey Bartlett Jr. said the tribute celebrates freedom and those who help protect it. "We greatly appreciate the hard work and sacrifice of America's military men and women. Along with their efforts, we know that freedom comes from independence. That's what Oklahoma's oil and natural gas producers are working toward – more independence from foreign oil."

Bartlett said the commercial highlights the Oklahoma oil and natural gas industry's strong commitment to domestic energy production. "With global demand skyrocketing and political instability continuing in key producing countries, Oklahoma's producers are drilling for more than just energy – they're drilling to protect the American way of life."

Jim and Katherine McLaughlin, who live in Norman, attended the filming of the spot at Kingfisher's Homier Field. "We love it," Jim said. "It's small-town U.S.A. It's Little League. It's popcorn and hotdogs. It's America. It's freedom. It's us."

OERB Executive Director Mike Terry said that during casting calls, it was obvious Colleen wasn't just singing with talent – she was singing with heart. "Everyone in the room got chills as soon as she started singing. Not

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only could she sing beautifully, but she also had an air of patriotic pride. After learning about her family's extensive military background, I now know where that comes from."

Jim McLaughlin said Colleen has been singing the national anthem at sporting events since she was 10 years old. Her first experience was at a University of Oklahoma women's basketball game. "She wasn't nervous at all. It's as if she was born to sing that song. When she got to the end, instead of fans yelling the traditional 'and the home of the Sooners,' they stood silent in complete awe."

Jim McLaughlin said it's wonderful to see his daughter perform at sporting events, but the OERB spot will be particularly emotional. "With my son in Iraq and not able to attend those events with us, it's nice to have something we can show him. When I told him that Colleen would be singing the 'Star-Spangled Banner' in the OERB freedom tribute, he was so proud. I think he will be very emotional when he first sees it."

Terry said the OERB encourages Oklahomans to e-mail words of encouragement and appreciation to Christopher and his fellow Guardsmen and women by logging on to www.oerb.com/freedom, which will launch on Friday.

OERB's "Freedom" tribute will first air on Saturday, September 17, during the OU v. UCLA football game.

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