

# The right of the people

Our country has always looked up to the United States as a role model for our political and economic aspirations. Rightfully so, the United States of America continues to remain to be the only superpower in the world, notwithstanding the current financial crisis it is in and the effect it has on the rest of the world.

Naturally, we look upon key developments in America with much interest. Free enterprise can only flourish when it is in an environment that allows market forces to act on their own. Of course, certain regulations need to be in place to put order into the system but once the threshold is breached and the government starts to dictate on the market, that is something else.

The current financial turmoil can easily be used as an excuse by the government to breach this threshold. This is similar to the events of 9/11, which led to the creation of the Department of Homeland Security and their allied agencies, which has changed our way of life. Most noticeable is the scrutiny which all travelers to and from the USA are now subjected to.

Among the favorite rights that is constantly under attack is gun ownership, which has been blamed for all sorts of violence and crime, even in the United States. Thanks to the Second Amendment of the Constitution of the United States of America, this issue has been decided with finality on June 26, 2008 by the Supreme Court of the United States in favor of the people. In the case of District of Columbia, et al versus Dick Anthony Heller, Mr. Heller filed suit that the District of Columbia violated his Second Amendment Constitutional rights, when he was not allowed to legally own a hand gun in his home.

The Second Amendment states "A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed." While the meaning may seem to be clear and obvious, there were arguments made stating that these rights are collective in nature and that their application is when one is serving in a military organization of the state. Fortunately, the Supreme Court of the United States asserted that the right of the people are individual rights and not collective. It was also explained that individuals have rights and governments have powers so the intent of the founders were clear.

Having liberated themselves from the British, the Americans realized that if they had not been able to arm themselves, they would never have been able to achieve independence from the governing authority. In all cases where the government needed to control and subjugate its



## **FREE ENTERPRISE**

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citizens, the first step is always to disarm the population, as was done here during martial law.

Under the guise of controlling crime and violence, various groups both private and in the government have been lobbying for the restriction and even total ban on private gun ownership. According to statistics provided by the Philippine National Police, as of the first semester of 2008, there are a total of 1,081,074 licensed firearms in the Philippines. This number is not really a lot considering our population of more than 91 million.

It is more interesting to note that for the entire 2007, the statistical report on crime incidents involving the use of firearms totaled 5,228 incidents and 5,575 firearms for the entire Philippines. Out of these 5,575 firearms, only 50 were licensed firearms or less than one tenth of 1%! This is a moving testament to the responsibility of our legitimate firearm owners and the effectiveness of the licensing efforts of the Firearms and Explosives Division (FED) of our Philippine National Police (PNP).

Let us do everything we can to preserve the rights of the people. There will always be false justification for the curtailment of certain rights under the pretense of benefiting the people. Let us not be moved by baseless emotional arguments and have a more objective basis for our actions. Once we allow ourselves to be deceived and misled and watch idly as our hard earned rights get eroded, we have no one else to blame but ourselves. The rights of the people can only be preserved if people are willing to stand up for their rights.

'Free Enterprise' is a rotating column of the Financial Executives Institute of the Philippines.

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