

Crackdown on illegal gun trade



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In its decision today, the U.S. Supreme Court has reaffirmed the Second Amendment right of private gun ownership for defending home and family against assailants and intruders. The irony of this ruling is that the now-moribund Chicago handgun ban had, according to statistical evidence presented in an amicus brief submitted to the court, resulted in as many as 1,000 fewer homicides since it was enacted in 1983, especially those occurring in the home and involving family members.

Despite the court's protective stand on gun rights in McDonald and previously in the Heller case, state and local governments still retain the authority — if not responsibility — to defend its citizens from the threat of gun crime through rules of owner licensing and gun registration. Chicago, and other cities, should continue to pursue strategies to regulate and monitor the sale and transfer of firearms for public safety purposes.

Over the past decade, the U.S. Congress has, unfortunately, been decidedly gun-friendly, passing measure after measure that limit law enforcement efforts to disrupt the flow of illegal guns into the hands of criminals.

Such moves as restricting the use of A.T.F. gun tracing data, preventing the A.T.F. from forcing licensed firearms dealers to maintain up-to-date inventories and immunizing the gun industry from civil litigation for shoddy business practices have benefited those who profit by diverting weapons into the illegal gun market. Since 2000, even while homicide rates have declined, gun killings have increased, especially in urban areas; and the percentage of felony-related homicides (those stemming from robbery and other serious offenses) continues to inch upward, now at an all-time high of nearly 75 percent.

Regrettably, the gun debate has polarized the two sides rather than gravitating toward some common ground. Gun control advocates unfairly demonize their rivals with the “gun nut” label. Meanwhile, gun rights supporters worry excessively about the “slippery slope” and allege that their opponents wish to eliminate guns altogether. Of course, most Americans are at neither extreme.

Now that the Supreme Court has spoken, it is time for the middle majority of Americans to speak up in support of sensible gun legislation. They need to urge their lawmakers to stand up to the gun lobby and allow A.T.F. and law enforcement freer rein in their efforts to crack down on the illegal gun trade