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May 1, 2010**

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# OPINION

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## Gun Rights and Public Safety

### Look to the root cause of gun violence

BY JUDGE GREG MATHIS

The U.S. Supreme Court recently ruled that state and local governments can no longer restrict an individual's right to own a firearm. However, the Court's decision and supporting arguments left room for lawmakers to impose some restrictions on ownership and prevent easy access to guns while still protecting this basic right.

In handing down its decision, the court focused its attention on a case that challenged a 28-year-old Chicago ban on handguns. The decision is an extension of the court's 2008 ruling that the



Second Amendment was not intended just for militias and did, in fact, extend to individuals.

While the ruling doesn't guarantee cities will modify their gun ban laws, it does open the door for residents to legally challenge those laws and win.

Officials in these cities, where there are high rates of gun crime, are upset and fear the court's decision will interfere with their ability to craft gun laws that reduce crime. That fear, however, may be unfounded.

The court made certain to note that the right to own a firearm is

not the same as the right to possess and carry a firearm in any manner for whatever purpose. To that end, the court does support restricting firearm ownership for felons and the mentally ill and encourages state and local efforts to close loopholes that allow individuals to purchase guns without a background check.

What we're left with is a hybrid situation — one that protects an American's basic rights while still leaving room for local governments to craft the laws that will keep their streets safe. These lawmakers, especially those in urban areas, should also look at the root causes of crime and gun violence.

Cutting citizens off from guns does little to help reduce crimes when would-be criminals buy their guns on the black market.

There is not much data that shows gun bans in America reduce gun deaths but there is extensive research on the key role community centers, job creation and neighborhood and police partnerships play in keeping citizens safe.

If officials in Chicago and other cities are serious about gun violence prevention, they would, instead of looking for work around to the Court's ruling, begin to think of new ways to reduce gun crimes.

*Greg Mathis is a retired Michigan District Court Judge and syndicated television judge.*

## Keep the Internet Open for All

### Big companies want to manipulate access

BY JOSEPH TORRES

Perhaps the greatest freedom in a democracy is freedom of speech. Throughout our nation's history, people have died fighting not only for our right to speak, but for our right to be heard.

The Internet is the greatest communications network ever created because it allows us to speak for ourselves without first asking permission from corporate gatekeepers. The Internet's importance as a forum for speech is the result of the principle called net neutrality, which prevents the phone and cable companies that provide Internet service from discriminating against content online or interfering with the free flow of Internet traffic.

But net neutrality and the open



Internet may be in serious trouble. Julius Genachowski, the chairman of the Federal Communications Commission, has been holding closed-door meetings with Verizon, AT&T, Comcast, and Google that could pave the way for a corporate takeover of the Internet. The big phone and cable companies want to kill net neutrality so they can control and manipulate the content you can access on the Internet. Those who can pay will have their websites sped up; those who can't may have their sites slowed down or even blocked.

Guess who'll be able to pay that extra cost? The big corporations. Meanwhile, the small or startup business or the new non-profit organization will be pushed to the digital margins.

The FCC, our nation's communications watchdog agency, is currently trying to modernize

its Internet policy framework. Unless it succeeds, the phone and cable companies will be free to censor us online, block the websites we want to see, and track the websites we visit without disclosing their practices. The agency is under immense pressure from the lobbyists to take control of the Internet away from Internet users and turn it over to corporations.

The Center for Responsive Politics reports that these companies spent more than \$20 million lobbying the federal government during the first quarter of 2010 alone. Many of these lobbyists enjoy a direct line to decision-makers in Congress and at the FCC. Glance at a list of the top staffers working on telecommunications just a few years ago, and you'll find name after name now representing industry, unconcerned about advocating for positions they used to

oppose.

The Sunlight Foundation reported that 72 percent of the lobbyists hired by AT&T, Comcast, Time Warner Cable, Verizon, the National Cable & Telecommunications Association, and the U.S. Telecom Association—the leading opponents of net neutrality—have previous government experience. This figure includes 18 former lawmakers and 48 former Hill staffers who worked for the House and Senate commerce committees that provide congressional oversight of the FCC.

The FCC has the power to do the right thing. What the American people want is someone to stand up and fight for them against corporate corruption—whether from BP, AIG or Comcast. It needs to protect the Internet from a corporate takeover.

*Joseph Torres is a senior adviser for government and external affairs at Free Press.*

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