



Fred  
MORGAN  
Guest  
COLUMN

## Guardians of free enterprise

Free equals not controlled by or under the power of another; at liberty; not bound or constrained; able to move in any direction.

Enterprise equals energy and initiative; an undertaking, especially a big, bold or difficult one; readiness for adventure or risk; a business organization.

Free enterprise equals business governed by the laws of supply and demand, not restrained by government interference, regulation or subsidy.

Almost 40 years ago, future U.S. Supreme Court Justice Lewis Powell wrote a memo to the head of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. In the memo, he said, "The American political system of democracy under the rule of law is under attack, often by the same individuals and organizations who seek to undermine the free enterprise system. ... No thoughtful person can question that the American economic system is under broad attack."

Powell's statements then are even more accurate now. His call to action resonates as clearly as Paul Revere's did in 1776. "American business is 'plainly in trouble'; the response to the wide range of critics has been ineffective, and has included appeasement. The time has come – indeed, it is long overdue – for the wisdom, ingenuity and resources of American business to be marshaled against those who would destroy it," Powell wrote.

The call is clear, and chambers of commerce must not only heed the call, they must lead the charge. It's just as Powell said in his memo, "Independent and uncoordinated activity by individual corporations, as

important as this is, will not be sufficient. Strength lies in organization, in careful long-range planning and implementation, in consistency of action over an indefinite period of years, in the scale of financing available only through joint effort, and in the political power available only through united action and national organizations."

Local chambers of commerce must work to grow and develop their local economies. This is more important than ever. Their role is to serve as the voice for the local merchants and businesses that need representation before their town council, county commissioners and local regulators. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce is the voice for American businesses across the country and around the world. State chambers serve the same role at their state capitols and bring the state business voice to the nation's Capitol in support of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce.

Chambers of commerce are the guardians of free enterprise. The State Chamber of Oklahoma – with more than 2,000 members, more than 100 local chambers and more than 80 trade associations – is truly the united voice of business in Oklahoma and Washington, D.C.

In conclusion, Powell wrote, "The overriding first need is for businessmen (and businesswomen) to recognize that the ultimate issue may be survival – survival of what we call the free enterprise system, and all that this means for the strength and prosperity of America and the freedom of our people."

Oklahoma businesses – small, medium and large – need to join forces in The State Chamber and together raise our voices, our concerns and our issues to our legislators.

*Fred Morgan is president and CEO of The State Chamber of Oklahoma.*