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Regulators making nursing shortage worse

By Mikhail Shneyder

It's September, and hundreds of nursing school graduates across California, including those in San Diego County, are fully educated and trained but barred from taking the exam that would let them join the nursing workforce. These graduates aren't waiting for paperwork. They're waiting on the California Board of Registered Nursing, the very agency responsible for solving this state's nursing shortage. Instead, the board is making it worse.

That's why Nightingale College filed suit against the Board of Registered Nursing in Sacramento County Superior Court on Aug. 24. Our complaint asks the court to void two standards the Board of Registered Nursing has used to block our graduates' license applications — standards never lawfully adopted through the state's own rulemaking process. The board also discussed enforcement of these standards at public meetings without placing the matter on the agenda, in violation of California's Open Meeting Act.

We didn't take this step lightly. We acted after months of documented outreach asking the Board of Registered Nursing for a specific explanation and timeline. We received neither.

Consider two San Diego nurses caught in the middle.

— Jessica Leonard, an Oceanside resident and mother of three, spent three and a half years earning her bachelor of science in nursing from Nightingale while working full time as an advanced care technician at a local medical center. She's a finalist for a new-graduate registered nurse residency on the same oncology unit where she already works. Her application is complete and paid for. She cannot get a testing date, and she cannot tell her employer when or whether she'll be licensed.

— Sasha Wiltjer, a San Diego licensed vocational nurse of 11 years who works at a San Diego hospital, completed her Nightingale bachelor of science in nursing this spring while working full-time night shifts and raising four children. She has already passed her licensing exam and holds an active registered nurse license — in Utah. She was hired into the hospital's Sept. 18 new-graduate registered nurse cohort. However, because California still won't process her application, the hospital has agreed to defer her position until March 2027.

Both women met every requirement the law imposes. Neither has been given a reason for the delay.

Nightingale College, which has produced nearly 2,000 licensed California nurses since 2015 and currently serves 8,152 California learners, is the largest single nursing education provider in the state. The hold on bachelor of science in nursing graduates began as a request tied to a single graduate's application; that graduate has since tested and is now a licensed nurse. Yet the board continued and expanded its hold on hundreds of other graduates — who had nothing to do with that original request — without a new explanation or timeline. As of late August, 439 graduates have been formally notified their applications are on hold; roughly 70 have already lost a job offer, and nearly 200 more are at risk.

This matters most acutely here. San Diego County is part of a state where nearly 60% of counties already qualify as nursing shortage areas. Two-thirds of qualified nursing school applications statewide are turned away for lack of space, and California already has the worst projected nursing shortage in the nation. San Diego hospitals need these nurses now.

A licensing board's job is to administer nursing licensure, not to sit on applications from graduates when it has articulated no basis for concern. If the board has substantive issues with our bachelor of science in nursing program, we welcome that conversation. We've asked for it directly and repeatedly, long before filing suit.

Jessica and Sasha aren't asking for anything handed to them. They're asking to take an exam they've already earned the right to sit for. California doesn't have a shortage of nurses willing to work. It has an abundance of nurses forbidden to start.

Shneyder is the founder and CEO of Nightingale Education Group, the parent company of Nightingale College, founded in 2012. He trained in nursing and received an MBA from the Haas School at UC Berkeley.

Military war on drugs has been a flop

By Daniel DePetris

Sept. 2 came and went as if it was an ordinary day. But the date held significance: It marked the one-year anniversary of Operation Southern Spear, the Trump administration's military campaign against drug trafficking organizations based in Latin America.

That campaign, which includes airstrikes against alleged drug-carrying vessels on the high seas and the occasional deployment of U.S. special operations forces, continues to this day. The results have been far less impressive than the White House claims.

As the White House tells it, Operation Southern Spear is meant to tackle drug trafficking in a different way. President Donald Trump, Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth and Secretary of State Marco Rubio spent the months before the operations began making the case about why the old way of fighting the so-called war on drugs was grossly ineffective.

There was so much cocaine and fentanyl pouring into the country, they said, that business as usual was not only a poor prescription for the problem but also akin to enabling the very national emergency — drug addiction — that continues to kill tens of thousands of Americans every year. Simply interdicting drugs and arresting the perpetrators, Rubio alleged, didn't work.

"What will stop them is when you blow them up, when you get rid of them," he declared.

The Trump administration has spent the last year trying to make good on that statement. Cartels in Mexico and gangs in Ecuador are now considered to be in the same league as al-Qaida and the Islamic State — this, despite the fact that cartels have no political ideology and are predominantly concerned with making money, not overthrowing governments.

This image from video provided by the Pentagon shows a vessel accused of trafficking drugs in the eastern Pacific Ocean shortly before it was destroyed by a U.S. attack that killed two on Jan. 23. PENTAGON VIA AP

Washington has listed nearly two dozen Latin American drug trafficking groups as foreign terrorist organizations, a designation U.S. officials argue provides them with unique authorities they otherwise wouldn't have. Any person even remotely connected to these groups, whether it's the poor fisherman being pressured to run drugs for them or the teenager peddling drugs on the street corner, is now fair game for U.S. targeting.

Over a year's time, the United States has conducted 68 strikes on small boats in the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific that U.S. officials assessed were smuggling drugs up north. More than 225 people have been killed. The Pentagon has made a big show of these strikes, posting clips of exploding vessels on social media and giving speeches outlining all of the supposed success the United States is having.

But just because U.S. officials are claiming success doesn't necessarily mean it's true.

In fact, the boat strikes don't seem to be doing much of anything to reduce the flow of drugs to the United States, a conclusion analysts at the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Pentagon's own intelligence agency reaffirmed in their own assessments.

By waging an actual war on drugs, the powers that be in Washington are confusing tactical accomplishments with strategic ones.

If the boat strikes were truly working, we would be seeing two things happening. First, U.S. agents would be seizing fewer drugs at the southern border. And second, the price of drugs on the street would rise because of the squeeze on overall supply.

With respect to cocaine, the predominant narcotic that cartels in South America produce and smuggle to the United States, we aren't seeing either trend.

According to the most recent data available by U.S. Customs and Border Protection, approximately 63,200 pounds of cocaine were seized at the border in the 10 months since the boat strikes began — a nearly 1% increase from the same time period prior to the campaign.

In other words, there has actually been more cocaine heading north, not less. If the Pentagon's intention is to deter the cartels from trafficking drugs here, it has failed.

At best, the boat strikes are forcing traffickers to search for alternative routes and modes of delivery. At worst, they've made the job of the DEA even harder.

Trump, however, can take some pride in the fentanyl numbers. U.S. border officials registered a 45% drop in fentanyl seizures between 2024 and 2025, and the number is projected to decline again once this year is out.

But these figures have nothing to do with the U.S. military activity that's occurring in Latin American waters. Mexico produces fentanyl, not countries in South and Central America.

The drop in fentanyl exports has far more to do with the cooperation Washington is receiving from Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum's government as well as the technology-driven measures U.S. border officials are using at legal points of entry.

In the months to come, the Trump administration will likely expand its war on the cartels to land targets in Ecuador and Colombia. In June, the United States even conducted a strike in Venezuela to eliminate the head of the Tren de Aragua criminal network.

Whether any of this will produce the victory Trump is so desperate to declare remains to be seen. But based on what we've seen so far, don't bet on it.

DePetris is a foreign affairs columnist for the Chicago Tribune.

U.S. must see China as an adversary, not a rival

By Roslyn Layton

Is China a competitor — or an adversary?

The distinction matters because "competitor" implies a contest governed by rules. Competitors agree to play the same game, use common standards, submit to refereeing and accept the outcome. Economic competition assumes a positive sum: companies compete, consumers benefit, innovation expands the market and the overall pie grows.

That's not how the Chinese Communist Party sees it. For China, engagement is a struggle for national power and global dominance. There is no need to fire a missile if you control the technology, supply chains, capital, data, industrial capacity and critical infrastructure on which the world depends.

China has repeatedly demonstrated its willingness to deploy economic, technological, legal, diplomatic and intelligence tools in pursuit of strategic objectives. Intellectual property theft, cyber espionage, state subsidies, market restrictions, forced technology transfer and economic coercion are tools in the box.

Beijing's National Intelligence Law requires organizations and citizens to support, assist and cooperate with national intelligence work. China maintains extensive authority over companies and can mobilize economic resources in pursuit of national security objectives.

Washington wagered that capitalism would "democratize" China. That was the prevailing hope surrounding China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001. Under Xi Jinping since 2012, however, the Communist Party has built a military capable of challenging the United States, clamped down on human rights and tightened its control over enterprise. If the expectation was that American companies would enter China and flourish, the opposite happened. Nike, Starbucks, Best Buy, Home Depot, Uber, Google, LinkedIn, Yahoo, eBay and Gap have exited or significantly reduced their footprint in the Chinese market. Most U.S. media and content companies were never allowed to compete in the first place.

Meanwhile, China has built enormous industrial capacity, often with state support that has been the subject of WTO disputes. China now accounts for 80% or more of global production capacity in major parts of the solar photovoltaic and battery supply chains and dominates electric vehicles, telecommunications equipment, drones, shipbuilding, steel and critical-mineral processing, among other strategic industries such as biotech.

The problem is not simply that foreign companies lose market share. Once industries become dependent on China, economic dependence becomes a source of leverage. Nor is the problem Chinese enterprise or its extraordinarily capable, industrious and innovative entrepreneurs. The problem is a political system that can capture foreign assets and technology, direct private enterprise toward state objectives, and use economic tools to advance national power.

The same distinction must be made between the Chinese people and the Chinese Communist Party. China's citizens should not be conflated with the government. Millions have little meaningful ability to challenge state policy, organize politically or seek independent redress. Chinese military, government, business and cultural figures who challenge the party can face detention, disappearance, imprisonment or, in some cases, execution. Leaders of Hong Kong's Tiananmen vigil received lengthy prison sentences. Human rights movements in Tibet, Xinjiang, Inner Mongolia and elsewhere are crushed while ethnic and religious assimilation is enforced. Taiwan is next on the roadmap.

Americans are vulnerable, particularly to Chinese technology. TikTok's ownership structure leaves China's ByteDance with a 19.9% stake and ownership of the recommendation algorithm, which it licenses to the U.S. joint venture. Cameras, smartphones, telecommunications equipment, cloud services, sensors, wearables, vehicles and other connected devices generate extraordinarily valuable information. China excels in aggregating data on identities, relationships, locations, purchases, communications and behavior on an enormous scale, creating another instrument of geopolitical power.

President Donald Trump knows China does not play by WTO rules. Xi comes to Washington seeking access to essential American tech. Let's hope Trump keeps America first.

Layton is executive vice president of Strand Consult and a senior fellow at the National Security Institute. She wrote this for InsideSources.com.