

are delivered. He said something must be done quickly to reduce the backlog of surgeries in the province. "A lot of people out there, they want to have the endless debates about who should provide care," Mr. Ford said. "All our government cares about is that you get the care you need quickly and safely."

Other supporters said that the plan could provide patients with more options, give them greater access to timely care and relieve stress on a system that has begun to buckle.

"We need to be more effective at deploying resources we currently have," said Allan O'Dette, chief executive of the Ontario Medical Association, a group that represents 43,000 doctors and medical students and that supports Ontario's plan. "Noncomplicated, low-acuity surgeries can easily be done outside a hospital setting."

[From the Vancouver Sun, May 16, 2023]

SENDING B.C. CANCER PATIENTS TO BELLINGHAM FOR TREATMENT 'A SAD STATE OF REALITY,' CRITICS SAY

(By Katie DeRosa)

Quote from the article: "While the decision by the province to send breast cancer and prostate cancer patients to the U.S. for faster radiation treatment is being welcomed by some, critics say it's an indictment of a flagging health care system that has not kept up with demand. Health Minister Adrian Dix announced Monday that eligible breast and prostate cancer patients will be sent to one of two clinics in Bellingham for radiation treatment, starting May 29. The unprecedented move to send thousands of B.C. patients to the U.S. over the next two years is an attempt to address the backlog in B.C. which has one of the longest waits for radiation treatment in Canada."

Quote from the article: "Dix acknowledged cancer patients face unacceptable waiting times which is why the province opted to strike a deal with the clinics in Washington state. Currently, 82.9 per cent of B.C. cancer patients who require radiation start treatment within 28 days, Dix said. That's well below the national average of 97 per cent, according to figures compiled by the Canadian Institute for Health Information. "We want to be at 95 to 100 per cent within 28 days," he said. The percentage of British Columbians receiving timely radiation has steadily declined, down from 93 per cent in 2019. Dix in February announced the government will spend \$440 million over the next 10 years to reduce the waiting times for cancer treatment. Some of that money will boost wages for radiation technologists and oncologists as part of the recruitment drive, Dix said. The province is also trying to acquire more linear accelerators, a specialized piece of equipment which delivers external beam radiation therapy to target and shrink cancer cells. Radiation therapy is different from chemotherapy, which uses special drugs to kill the cancer cells. More than 30,000 people in B.C. were diagnosed with cancer in 2021 and B.C. Cancer projects that number could rise to 45,000 by 2034. About half of cancer patients need radiation treatment."

The article continues at: https://vancouversun.com/news/local-news/critics-upset-that-b-c-has-to-send-cancer-patients-to-bellingham-for-treatment?mc_cid=4ba8999cb&mc_eid=3337eaf99e.

[From Sky News, July 14, 2023]

BRITONS ARE 'PULLING THEIR OWN TEETH OUT WITH PLIERS' BECAUSE THEY CAN'T ACCESS NHS DENTISTS

Quote from the article: A YouGov poll which spoke to more than 2,000 people found

more than 10% of people had attempted "DIY dentistry"—with more than half of those having carried it out in the last year. People across the UK have had to pull their own teeth out because they can't access or afford an NHS dentist, a report suggests. Extractions have been performed with pliers in some cases, while others have been forced to make a five-hour round trip to see a professional. The Health and Social Care Committee says "urgent and fundamental reform" is needed—and there is evidence of pain and distress that is "totally unacceptable in the 21st century". Its report includes figures from a YouGov poll performed in March 2023 that found 10% of respondents had attempted "DIY dentistry"—and of those, 20% did so because they couldn't find an NHS dentist."

The article continues at: <https://news.sky.com/story/britons-are-pulling-their-own-teeth-out-with-pliers-because-they-cant-access-nhs-dentists-12920715#:g807:text=People%20across%20the%20UK%20have,trip%20to%20see%20a%20professional>.

Mr. GRASSLEY. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

MILITARY PROMOTIONS

Mr. MURPHY. Mr. President, as you know, we are at an unprecedented moment in the history of the Senate. There are hundreds of brave, courageous leaders in our military who are being denied—promotions being denied—the rank that they deserve because of the actions of Senator TUBERVILLE and Senate Republicans.

And Senator TUBERVILLE was out on the floor just moments ago defending his actions. I think most Americans believe that his hold on all of these promotions is indefensible. But what probably won't get covered is an additional idea that he presented to the Senate in his remarks.

Senator TUBERVILLE said today that he thinks that our military leadership should be fired for failing to defeat the Taliban. That is pretty extraordinary. For those of us who have served in the Senate and in the House during the time that we have been in Afghanistan, we had the opportunity to see that mission on the ground. It was a difficult, hard mission. Some might say it was an impossible mission, badly underresourced, right from the beginning.

But the idea that our soldiers or our military leadership—captains, lieutenant colonels, generals—should be fired because they couldn't perform a mission that was likely impossible, that, frankly, will have an even bigger chilling effect than Senator TUBERVILLE's hold on military promotions.

There is no doubt that there should be consequences for gross negligence on the job in any profession, including the military, but for any of us who saw the work being done in Afghanistan, our military from the top down, they were doing the best they could under difficult circumstances.

Refusing military promotions apparently isn't cruel enough. Now, Republicans want military leaders fired when

they can't complete impossible, underresourced missions.

This is a growing attack, a growing set of attacks on our military, and all in the service of a bunch of old men telling young women what healthcare they can get and what healthcare they can't get.

BACKGROUND CHECKS

Mr. President, in May of 2019, Leilah Hernandez had her quinceanera. She was in a bedazzled green gown. She looked absolutely magnificent. She was having a great sophomore year in high school. She was playing basketball, No. 23. She had a lot of friends.

One friend said that Leilah is just one of these people "full of joy and happiness. She knew how to make somebody's bad day turn into a good day."

In September of that year, 2019, Leilah went to a car dealership in the Midland-Odessa area of Texas. Her 18-year-old brother Nathan was buying a truck. This was a big deal for this family. I don't know if it was the whole family, but her mom was there, Nathan was there, she was there, and her 9-year-old brother was there.

And I believe that they were emerging from the dealership. They heard gunshots. Her mother took the younger brother—the 9-year-old—and they ducked underneath a car. Nathan, 18, all he could do was just wrap his hands around Leilah. But the shooting was relentless. Nathan was hit in the arm, but Leilah was hit closer to the neck. Leilah's last words in the embrace of her brother were "Help me, help me."

She was one of seven who died in the Midland-Odessa mass shooting. Thirty-two people were shot. A lot of them, like Nathan, survived, many with injuries that will impact them for the rest of their life. But Leilah Hernandez, just a few months from her quinceanera, died that day.

The young man who shot her was ineligible to own a weapon. He had serious mental illness—serious enough that he was on the list of individuals who was prohibited from buying a weapon. He had tried to buy a weapon, but he had been denied when he tried to do it at a licensed gun dealer. He is one of millions of Americans who have been stopped from buying a gun because they are a felon or they are seriously mentally ill. But this young man was still able, rather easily, to get a weapon.

Why is that? Well, it is because many of our weapons in this country are sold without background checks.

What happened in this case? How did this young man with a serious history of mental illness get his hands on a powerful weapon that allowed him to kill Leilah and six others?

Well, the story runs through a man named Marcus Braziel. Marcus Braziel was a gun dealer. No doubt, he was a gun dealer. He might not have had a brick-and-mortar store, but Mr. Braziel was regularly selling guns. In a 3-year period of time, he bought 90-some-odd guns and resold 70 of them.

In the court papers that were part of his arrest and conviction, he admitted that he routinely bought firearm firing mechanisms, termed “lower receivers,” and used milling equipment to build them into full-fledged guns, and then sold the completed weapons, each one for about a profit of \$100 to \$200.

He listed his firearms on armslist.com, and then he conducted the sales in the parking lot of a local sporting goods store or sometimes out of his garage.

He was a gun dealer, but he never performed background checks because he didn't get licensed. And when he advertised a weapon online, Seth Ator, prohibited from buying a gun from a brick-and-mortar store, answered the ad, bought the weapon, and used it to kill Leilah Hernandez and shoot 32 other people.

This, unfortunately, is not the exception. This is, in America, the rule today. Twenty-two percent of gun owners report that they obtained their weapons without a background check, and an analysis of gun sale ads from 2018 to 2020 revealed that the majority of ads were being placed by people like Mr. Braziel, unlicensed sellers not required to do background checks.

So what that means is that there are tens of thousands of guns, perhaps more, in this country, every single year, being not just sold without background checks but being sold to individuals who are prohibited from buying those weapons, because that is exactly where those people go. People like Seth Ator, the shooter in Midland-Odessa, they know that this black market exists. They know there are people on armslist.com who will willingly sell them weapons without a background check. So, when they get stopped from buying a gun at a gun store, they go and buy one online.

That is the bad news.

The good news is that Republicans and Democrats in the Senate and House recognized this problem, and as part of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, last year, we updated the definition of a gun dealer to make it crystal clear that people like Mr. Braziel need to get a license and they need to conduct background checks. What we did was to basically clarify that it doesn't need to be your full-time job. But so long as you are selling guns predominantly for a profit, you have to get licensed. You have to perform background checks.

The Biden administration, 2 weeks ago, released a draft rule implementing that change that we voted for on a bipartisan basis in the Senate. An analysis of the statutory change that we voted for and the rule that the Biden administration has proposed suggests that up to 328,000 additional dealers could be required to perform background checks. Now, even if those dealers are only conducting a handful of sales a year—and most of these are probably conducting dozens of sales a year, either at gun shows or online on

sites like armslist.com—we are talking about millions of guns—millions of guns that right now are being sold outside the background check system and that will now be sold inside the background check system.

That is a big deal, because that shooter in Midland is not the exception. Like I said, unfortunately, he is the rule. So by having so many more guns go through the background check system and really closing off the ways that felons, criminals, and people with serious mental illness can buy guns, you are saving lives.

Maybe Leilah Hernandez would be alive today. She probably would be if this rule had been in place and Mr. Braziel had looked at that definition and come to the conclusion that he needed to get licensed. Admittedly, today, the definition is a little fuzzy, and without a rule making it clear what constitutes being a dealer and what does not, it is even harder for individuals out there to decide whether they need to be licensed or not.

Now Mr. Braziel's case is a pretty clear one. He obviously should have known that he was a gun dealer. That is why he got prosecuted and put in jail for the actions that led up to the murder of Leilah Hernandez. But many other Americans may not know that they need to be licensed. Now, with this rule that the Biden administration has put forward, they will know, and they will get licensed.

And so I hope that my colleagues will learn about this rule, that my Republican colleagues will understand how far it goes and how far it does not go. This does not mean that an individual who is just selling a gun to a family member is going to have to get licensed. That individual is not a dealer. It doesn't mean that someone who is just liquidating their collection of firearms has to be licensed. That person is not a gun dealer.

The rule makes it very clear who is a dealer based upon their desire to earn a profit, based upon whether they have the trappings of a business, based upon the places where they are selling weapons, where they are more likely to be strangers, on whom they would need to have a background check to understand whether they are selling to a responsible individual. Those people have to be licensed. But there are lots of people who are selling one or two or three guns a year who likely don't have to be licensed under this rule.

So I hope my colleagues will do their own research, not just listen to the spin of advocacy groups, because I think if you do your own research, you will find out that this is exactly what Americans want us to be doing. They want us to be making sure that when there are commercial transactions of weapons, there is a background check.

By the way, the background check takes 5 minutes. When it doesn't take 5 minutes, that generally is for a reason—that the individual likely has a more complicated mental health or

criminal history that has to be unwound.

So I am really excited for the Biden administration's very appropriate steps to implement this provision of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, and I would just finally note that it is the latest in a series of announcements making clear that the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act has had a substantial and important impact. Since the passage of the BSCA, almost 1,000 transactions of weapons to young buyers—those under 21—have been denied. We put in place enhanced background checks for 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds when they are buying rifles and assault weapons. And that additional background check has already identified 1,000 people all across the country, young people who would have gotten the weapon had it not been for the advanced background check, but we found out they had a disqualifying record—a serious mental illness or undiscovered criminal conviction—and they didn't get the weapon.

That is really good news.

Second, more than 100 defendants all across the country have been charged with new BSCA violations of gun trafficking. Gun trafficking wasn't a Federal crime until we passed that law, and now it is. Over 100 cases have been brought against defendants for violations of trafficking firearms. Prosecutions against unlicensed dealers, even before the Biden administration's announcement of the rule, were up by 52 percent.

Lastly, the administration has made 49 awards for red flag incentive grants—\$231 million. Those funds have helped States implement existing red flag laws. But we stood here on the Senate floor and said: We bet you that States are going to pass new red flag laws or stronger red flag laws in part because of the money they are getting from the Federal Government.

That is exactly what happened. Just in the last year, Michigan, Colorado, and Minnesota—to name three States—have passed new red flag laws or strengthened existing red flag laws that will now have additional resources to get the job done.

The Bipartisan Safer Communities Act doesn't do everything we need to do, not even close. We need to have universal background checks. We need to get assault weapons off the street. But we did show that Republicans and Democrats can step up and make meaningful changes in the law to protect people from gun violence.

The Biden administration's rule implementing the change of the definition of a gun dealer is going to mean that millions of gun sales that 2 years ago were made without a background check are now done with a background check. That means a lot fewer dangerous people get guns in this country. That is good news for everybody.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. HIRONO). The Senator from Montana.

NOMINATION OF TANYA J. BRADSHER

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, with a historic number of veterans receiving care and benefits under the PACT Act, the Department of Veterans Affairs needs a qualified second-in-command.

Now more than ever, the VA needs a steady hand to uphold its mission to deliver veterans the healthcare and benefits that they have earned.

I rise today because Tanya Bradsher is that leader. She has an impressive record of serving our country in and out of uniform, especially in her current role—which is VA Chief of Staff—where she has been critical in overseeing the Department's implementation of the PACT Act.

Between her time serving in the U.S. Army—including a deployment to Iraq—and working in Congress and working at the White House and the Defense Health Agency and at the Department of Homeland Security, it is clear that she is qualified for the job and ready to hit the ground running to serve our Nation's veterans.

It is no secret that the VA has a lot of work on its plate. From rolling out the Electronic Health Record Modernization program to working with the Defense Department to improve transition process for servicemembers who are leaving the military, these are challenges VA's No. 2 official is directly tasked with, all while running the day-to-day operations of the VA.

That is why this body needs to come together in a bipartisan way to make Tanya Bradsher the permanent leader—the leader who will tackle these challenges and ensure that the VA is upholding its mission to the veterans and their families.

The fact is, having a permanent leader in this role ensures that we can hold the VA accountable to do their job. And our veterans deserve no less.

In the past, this body has been able to rise above politics to install qualified individuals at the VA responsible for getting vets the healthcare and the benefits they need and that they have earned. Today, we must do that again to confirm Tanya Bradsher as VA's next Deputy Secretary and making her the first woman ever confirmed for this position.

With that, I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Montana.

Mr. TESTER. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that this vote occur immediately.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, so ordered.

CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Pursuant to rule XXII, the Chair lays before the Senate the pending cloture motion, which the clerk will state.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the nomination of Executive Calendar No. 261, Tanya

J. Bradsher, of Virginia, to be Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

Charles E. Schumer, Jon Tester, Raphael G. Warnock, Angus S. King, Jr., Sherrod Brown, Tim Kaine, Tina Smith, Mark Kelly, Debbie Stabenow, Richard J. Durbin, Jeanne Shaheen, Catherine Cortez Masto, Chris Van Hollen, Alex Padilla, Gary C. Peters, Richard Blumenthal, Margaret Wood Hassan.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. By unanimous consent, the mandatory quorum call has been waived.

The question is, Is it the sense of the Senate that debate on the nomination of Tanya J. Bradsher, of Virginia, to be Deputy Secretary of Veterans Affairs, shall be brought to a close?

The yeas and nays are mandatory under the rule.

The clerk will call the roll.

The senior assistant executive clerk called the roll.

The legislative clerk called the roll.

Mr. DURBIN. I announce that the Senator from Illinois (Ms. DUCKWORTH), the Senator from Georgia (Mr. OSSOFF), and the Senator from California (Mr. PADILLA) are necessarily absent.

Mr. THUNE. The following Senators are necessarily absent: the Senator from Indiana (Mr. BRAUN), the Senator from North Dakota (Mr. CRAMER), the Senator from Idaho (Mr. RISCH), and the Senator from South Carolina (Mr. SCOTT).

The yeas and nays resulted—yeas 49, nays 44, as follows:

[Rollcall Vote No. 223 Ex.]

YEAS—49

Baldwin	Heinrich	Sanders
Bennet	Hickenlooper	Schatz
Blumenthal	Hirono	Schumer
Booker	Kaine	Shaheen
Brown	Kelly	Sinema
Cantwell	King	Smith
Cardin	Klobuchar	Stabenow
Carper	Lujan	Tester
Casey	Manchin	Van Hollen
Collins	Markley	Warner
Coons	Merkley	Warnock
Cortez Masto	Murphy	Warren
Durbin	Murray	Welch
Feinstein	Peters	Whitehouse
Fetterman	Reed	Wyden
Gillibrand	Rosen	
Hassan	Rounds	

NAYS—44

Barrasso	Grassley	Murkowski
Blackburn	Hagerty	Paul
Boozman	Hawley	Ricketts
Britt	Hoeven	Romney
Budd	Hyde-Smith	Rubio
Capito	Johnson	Schmitt
Cassidy	Kennedy	Scott (FL)
Cornyn	Lankford	Sullivan
Cotton	Lee	Thune
Crapo	Lummis	Tillis
Cruz	Marshall	Tuberville
Daines	McConnell	Vance
Ernst	Menendez	Wicker
Fischer	Moran	Young
Graham	Mullin	

NOT VOTING—7

Braun	Ossoff	Scott (SC)
Cramer	Padilla	
Duckworth	Risch	

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. HEINRICH). On this vote, the yeas are 49, the nays are 44.

The motion is agreed to.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Jersey.

AZERBAIJAN AND ARMENIA

Mr. MENENDEZ. Mr. President, I rise to speak about a horrific set of events that are taking place in a part of the world that we could do something about.

In this photo, this dead man's body is completely emaciated. The skin, tight over his bones, barely covers his skeleton. Bruises and scars stretch across his chest.

This is not a victim at the side of the road during the Ottoman Turks' Armenian genocide. It is not a holocaust survivor lying on the ground as allies liberated Buchenwald. It is not a human carcass left in the wake of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia or the Hutu in Rwanda or Serbian forces in Bosnia.

It is from the Human Rights Defender's Office in Nagorno-Karabakh, and it is from August—only weeks ago. Because, right now, as the Presiding Officer sits here on the dais and I stand here in the Chamber, the Aliyev government in Azerbaijan is carrying out a campaign of heinous atrocities that bear the hallmarks of genocide against the Armenians in Artsakh. They have purposely and viciously trapped an estimated 100,000 to 120,000 Christian Armenians in the Karabakh Mountains.

There is only one road out connecting Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia for people, food, medicine, and basic supplies. And the Azerbaijanis have blocked it since December of last year.

Now, despite some reports yesterday, no aid has moved. They have tried to deny their role, but make no mistake—the Azerbaijani government is now wholeheartedly embracing this brutal blockade, denying the Armenian community food and fuel and medicine. Aliyev and his regime are trying to starve these people into death or political submission.

“There are no cemeteries and there are no machete attacks,” wrote the former prosecutor at the International Criminal Court, Luis Moreno Ocampo, in a recent report. But he said:

Starvation is the invisible genocide weapon. Without immediate dramatic change, this group of Armenians will be destroyed in a few weeks.

This group of Armenians—we're talking about over 100,000—will be destroyed in a few weeks. Not my observations; the observations of the former prosecutor at the International Criminal Court.

In Artsakh, the shelves at stores are empty. Children wait in lines for the chance of finding bread to feed their grandparents who are too weak to leave the house. There is no gas for ambulances. According to the head doctor at one maternity hospital, mis-carriages have nearly tripled. And the BBC reports that one in three deaths in Nagorno-Karabakh is from malnutrition.

For months, Azerbaijan was just doing the bare minimum, allowing the International Committee of the Red Cross limited access. But in July, Aliyev blocked even the Red Cross. And