

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 1 of 73

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- We the People Column](#)
- [4- NFL Scores from yesterday and today's schedule](#)
- [5- Coming up this week on GDILIVE.COM](#)
- [6- GDI Fitness Center Ad](#)
- [7- Wolves Sweep Jamestown in NSIC Action](#)
- [8- From ESG: When Trump's Quiet Part Isn't Quiet: Oil, Power, and the U.S. Takeover of Venezuela](#)
- [10- Sunday Extras](#)
- [28- Gov. Rhoden's Weekly Column](#)
- [29- Sen. Thune's Weekly Column](#)
- [30- Weekly Round\[s\] Up](#)
- [31- Rev. Snyder's Column](#)
- [33- South Dakota Average Gas Prices](#)
- [34- Drought Monitor](#)
- [35- SD SearchLight: A New Year's resolution for South Dakota: Stop flushing dollars, then pinching pennies](#)
- [36- SD SearchLight: Trump says US 'will run' Venezuela during transition after capture of President Maduro](#)
- [41- Weather Pages](#)
- [45- Daily Devotional](#)
- [46- Subscription Form](#)
- [47- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [48- News from the Associated Press](#)



Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship 9 a.m.; League Movie Night, 6 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m.; and at Zion, 11 a.m.

United Methodist: Worship with communion at Conde, 8:15 a.m.; at Groton, 9:30 a.m.; at Britton, 11:15 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 10:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

4th Grade BBB Practice, 2 p.m.

6th Grade BBB Practice, 6 p.m.

Monday, Jan. 5, 2026

No School

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Boys Wrestling at Oakes, 4:30 p.m.

1st Grade BBB Practice, 4:30 p.m.

MS Boys Wrestling Jamboree at Milbank, 5 p.m.

5th/6th Grade Volleyball Practice, 6 p.m.

5th Grade BBB Practice, 6 p.m.

Kindergarten BBB Practice, 6 p.m.

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We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

American Character and a Resurgent Congress Can Restore a Constitutional Presidency

At year's end, we lament the decline of constitutionalism—respect for and adherence to the separation of powers, checks and balances, the Bill of Rights and the rule of law. But in America, hope springs eternal. We are an optimistic nation. Stirred by leaders' eloquent appeals to hope, and historic reminders that we have overcome great challenges—Civil War, Great Depression, grave threats, foreign and domestic—our citizenry has pressed on, rowing longer, running faster and working harder, time and again, refusing to lie down and accept defeat. Such is the American character.

So it is with a grand experiment, and America is an experiment. We take pride in our nation, extol the virtues and values expressed in the Declaration of Independence, which charts the American Creed. We teach it and preach it, even when we don't achieve it. As readers know, when Americans are knocked to the canvass, we don't stay down; we rise and resume fighting for our causes. Since Lexington and Concord and Selma, Americans have fought for liberty and constitutional government, justice and legal protections, representation and remedies.

As participants in a historical experiment—a government of, by and for the people, as Abraham Lincoln described it—citizens understand that defense of democracy requires hard work and vigilance. James Madison, in Federalist 51, emphasized the fact that governmental accountability requires a "principal reliance" on the people, who have a high duty to scrutinize governmental actions, policies and programs, and to demand of those holding office fulfillment of their constitutional responsibilities and progress toward the expectations of the people.

Many across our country have justly expressed deep concerns about governmental institutions—the current indifference, for example, of the president and Congress to constitutional principles. Thoughtful readers have asked about the ways and means necessary to restore a constitutional presidency, which has been a central concern of this column. We may add to this project, as readers have suggested, the responsibility of Congress in accounting for the rise of an imperial presidency, and to ask how the "first branch of government," as Madison explained it, can contribute to the rehabilitation of the executive. These insightful questions and suggestions reflect among the citizenry an intense and admirable interest in self-government, indeed, the experiment launched by our founders, 250 years ago.

It may be that the hope of restoring a constitutional presidency hinges on a genuine resurgence of congressional power, which requires recovery from its own lethargy, passivity and impotence, and a renewal of its institutional integrity and pride. What cannot be ignored, of course, is that the rise of presidential government has been aided by congressional retreat. There would be no imperial presidency were it not for an indifferent Congress, unwilling to assert its powers and defend its turf. What is sorely missing in America is a Congress that takes the Constitution seriously.

Who will sound the trumpet call for a revival of the spirit, fortitude and integrity of congressional bodies that have sought to check executive power, as seen in the assertiveness of the Senate Select Committee that investigated the Watergate scandal, or the Church Committee that endeavored to curb the abuses of

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 3 of 73

the CIA? Is it reasonable to believe that Congress will recover its institutional honor and prevent the further deterioration of the American Republic? As a body, and across the years Congress, whether in the hands of Republicans or Democrats, has been gripped by both partisanship and a lack of institutional dignity. If, at this juncture, when executive power has reached a historic peak, America hopes to witness a legislative reassertion of its lawmaking, foreign affairs, appropriations and oversight powers, in a manner befitting its central role in our constitutional system, for the purpose of renewing a moribund doctrine of checks and balances, then Congress simply must regain its institutional character and curb its partisan loyalties to the occupant in the White House.

This congressional reversal will require leadership, certainly, and quite possibly the leadership that arises from an aroused citizenry triggered by a renewed appreciation for the virtues and values of constitutionalism. In a republic, as Madison told us, there is no substitute for a vigilant citizenry. Let this be our first, and lasting, New Year's Resolution for 2026.

David Adler is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality and civic education. This column is made possible with the support of the South Dakota Humanities Council, South Dakota NewsMedia Association and this newspaper.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 4 of 73

NFL Scores — Saturday, Jan. 3, 2026 (Week 18)

Tampa Bay Buccaneers 16, Carolina Panthers 14 — The Bucs held off a late season surge by the Panthers in a rainy matchup. Tampa Bay QB Baker Mayfield threw a touchdown to Cade Otton and kicker Chase McLaughlin added multiple field goals. The win keeps Tampa Bay alive in the NFC South race with key playoff implications heading into Sunday.

Seattle Seahawks 13, San Francisco 49ers 3 — Seattle clinched the NFC West title and the No. 1 seed in the NFC playoffs with a stout defensive effort. Zach Charbonnet scored the lone offensive touchdown, and Seattle's defense controlled the game throughout.

Key Highlights from Saturday

Buccaneers vs. Panthers

Tampa Bay survived a rainy, physical battle and kept their NFC South hopes alive, with Mayfield's leadership and clutch field goals by McLaughlin. Carolina's Bryce Young threw two TDs, but the Panthers fell just short.

Seahawks vs. 49ers

Seattle's defense dominated, holding San Francisco to just a field goal. The Seahawks sealed the NFC's top postseason seed and a first-round bye, giving them huge advantage heading into the playoffs.

NFL Schedule — Sunday, Jan. 4, 2026 (Week 18)

Here are today's matchups with kickoff times and where to watch (all times in Eastern):

1:00 PM ET Kickoffs

Matchup	TV Channel	Streaming
Green Bay Packers at Minnesota Vikings	CBS	Paramount+, NFL+
Cleveland Browns at Cincinnati Bengals	CBS	Paramount+, NFL+
Indianapolis Colts at Houston Texans	CBS	Paramount+, NFL+
Dallas Cowboys at New York Giants	FOX	FOX Sports App, NFL+
New Orleans Saints at Atlanta Falcons	FOX	FOX Sports App, NFL+
Tennessee Titans at Jacksonville Jaguars	FOX	FOX Sports App, NFL+

These games decide final playoff seedings and divisional races across the league.

4:25 PM ET Kickoffs

Matchup	TV Channel	Streaming
New York Jets at Buffalo Bills	CBS	Paramount+, NFL+
Detroit Lions at Chicago Bears	FOX	FOX Sports App, NFL+
Los Angeles Chargers at Denver Broncos	CBS	Paramount+, NFL+
Kansas City Chiefs at Las Vegas Raiders	CBS	Paramount+, NFL+
Washington Commanders at Philadelphia Eagles	CBS	Paramount+, NFL+
Miami Dolphins at New England Patriots	FOX	FOX Sports App, NFL+
Arizona Cardinals at Los Angeles Rams	FOX	FOX Sports App, NFL+

Action-packed Sunday afternoon slate across FOX and CBS — divisional positions and final playoff spots are on the line.

8:20 PM ET — Sunday Night Football

Matchup	TV Channel	Streaming
Baltimore Ravens at Pittsburgh Steelers	NBC	Peacock, NFL+

Featured primetime game — fight for the AFC North and a final playoff berth.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 5 of 73



Coming Up on
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Tigers
Groton, SD

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Groton Daily Independent



For more info: GDILIVE.COM



Tues., Jan. 6, 2026

Rich Bosma and Mike Imrie
Paul Kosel and Jeslyn Kosel

**Doubleheader at Warner
Girls at 6:30 p.m., Boys at 8 p.m.**



Thurs., Jan. 8, 2026

Rich Bosma and Mike Imrie
Paul Kosel and Jeslyn Kosel

**Doubleheader at Clark/Willow Lake
Girls at 6:30 p.m., Boys at 8 p.m.**



Sat., Jan. 10, 2026

Rich Bosma and
Jeslyn Kosel

**Doubleheader at Lennox
Girls at 3:30 p.m., Boys at 5 p.m.**

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Annual Membership Rates

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2-Person is \$55.45 per month or \$575.10 per year
Family is \$67.10 per month or \$702.26 per year

Month-to-Month Rates

Student is \$35.15 per month
Single is \$40.48 per month
2-Person is \$59.78 per month
Family is \$72.43 per month

**While many other rates have gone up, ours has not.
Same rates for several years!**

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 7 of 73

Wolves Sweep Jamestown in NSIC Action

Jamestown, N.D. — The Wolves of Northern State University earned a road sweep Saturday, as both the men's and women's basketball teams posted Northern Sun victories over the University of Jamestown at Taylor Center.

Men Cruise Past Jimmies, 86-77

The Northern State men returned to the win column with an 86-77 victory, their second win over Jamestown this season, improving to 5-3 in the Northern Sun Intercollegiate Conference.

Northern seized control early, building a 41-26 halftime lead and finishing with a season-high 60.8 percent shooting from the floor. The Wolves knocked down six 3-pointers and were efficient at the line, converting 18-of-22 free throws. Defensively, they limited Jamestown to 40.6 percent shooting overall and just 20.7 percent from beyond the arc, forcing 10 turnovers that led to 14 points.

Joshua Book led the way with 19 points on 70 percent shooting while adding five rebounds and a team-high four assists. Simon Akena and Marshawn Smith followed with 17 points apiece, combining to shoot better than 54 percent from the field. Northern also dominated inside, scoring 48 points in the paint, and received 31 points from its bench.

Jamestown held a 36-28 rebounding edge, but Northern's efficiency and balance proved decisive in front of a crowd of 341.

Women Earn 67-58 Conference Win

Earlier in the day, the Northern State women notched their third conference victory with a 67-58 win over the Jimmies, controlling play for most of the contest by outscoring Jamestown in the first, second, and fourth quarters.

Megan Counts turned in one of the most efficient performances of the season, scoring 17 points on 6-of-7 shooting and a perfect 5-of-5 effort at the free-throw line. She added six rebounds in the win. Izzy Moore matched Counts with 14 points while dishing out seven assists and collecting five steals, accounting for half of Northern's 14 assists.

Off the bench, Reagan Rus added 14 points and three steals, while Lily Klein contributed a well-rounded line of nine points, seven rebounds, three assists, and two steals. Northern finished the game shooting 48.9 percent from the field and forced 13 Jamestown turnovers.

Jamestown was led by Allie Berns, who scored 31 points and was the only Jimmie in double figures.

Up Next

The Northern State men remain on the road next weekend with conference games at Wayne State on Friday and Augustana on Saturday. The women continue NSIC play Monday night in Sioux Falls, facing the Cougars with tipoff set for 7:30 p.m.

When Trump's Quiet Part Isn't Quiet: Oil, Power, and the U.S. Takeover of Venezuela

ESG University



On January 3, 2026, President Donald Trump openly acknowledged what many analysts had long suspected but could not prove: Venezuela's vast crude reserves are central — perhaps the central — motive behind the United States' dramatic intervention in Caracas. What was once whispered in geopolitical corridors has now been spoken aloud by the commander-in-chief.

Trump announced that the U.S. had not only removed President Nicolás Maduro from power after a surprise military operation, but that Washington would take over the governance of Venezuela and oversee its oil industry — a declaration that places crude at the heart of American policy toward the country.

"We're going to run the country."

In blunt terms that echo imperial incursions of the 20th century, Trump said the United States would "temporarily run Venezuela" — and that American oil firms would rebuild and manage its oil infrastructure, repairing the "badly broken" petroleum industry and exporting its output.

"We're going to have our very large United States oil companies ... go in, spend billions of dollars, fix the infrastructure and start making money for the country," Trump told reporters, asserting that oil production would not only pay for reconstruction but also yield profits.

Here, in the president's own strategic framing, is a confession: oil is not incidental. It is central.

The U.S. Oil Industry Has Been Locked Out — Until Now

Venezuela holds the largest proven oil reserves on Earth. But since the nationalization of its energy sector — completed under Hugo Chávez in 2007 — American majors were effectively barred from meaningful participation. Sanctions, nationalization, and political hostility kept ExxonMobil, ConocoPhillips and others on the sidelines, even as Venezuela's output collapsed from millions of barrels per day to a fraction of its former capacity.

Trump used this history to frame U.S. intervention as a kind of overdue re-entry: he accused Venezuela of "stealing our oil" — claiming its nationalization was one of the greatest thefts of American property in history — and argued that returning to control Venezuelan oil justifies intervention and occupation.

From Sanctions to Seizures to Regime Change

The path from economic pressure to military action was gradual but unmistakable:

In late 2025, the U.S. seized a sanctioned Venezuelan oil tanker and declared its intent to keep the oil aboard — a move Caracas denounced as international piracy.

Washington also imposed fresh sanctions targeting the Venezuelan oil sector as part of a broader campaign to strangle Caracas's revenue streams.

A substantial U.S. naval buildup in the southern Caribbean, repeated strikes on vessels alleged to be trafficking drugs, and the deployment of special operations forces created a de-facto military pressure campaign — one that culminated in the raid that ousted Maduro.

The Trump administration has justified these actions on multiple grounds: narcotics interdiction, regional security, and the need to protect American citizens. But the military operation that captured Maduro — executed without congressional approval — came without clear presentation of evidence for the stated drug threats and with unmistakable emphasis on oil resources.

Oil Is the Centerpiece — Not a Side Note

When political leaders publicly declare their intentions and prioritize policies based on national interest, historians take note. Trump's explicit linking of military intervention, regime removal, oil reconstruction, and U.S. corporate engagement is a statement of intent. It separates rhetoric about drug trafficking and

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 9 of 73

democracy from the core economic objective: taking control of Venezuela's oil and putting it — and the companies that produce it — back in the game.

Trump's position is not just a policy preference; it is strategic doctrine. He has framed the U.S. presence in Venezuela not as temporary humanitarian or security assistance, but as active governance and economic management of energy resources — in perpetuity if necessary.

What This Means for Oil Companies

Trump promised billions in investment by American oil majors, but executives have been reticent. Chevron — the only U.S. firm still with a footprint in Venezuela — has been cautious, emphasizing compliance and employee safety over grand investment declarations. Other majors have stayed silent or called speculation premature.

From a corporate perspective, Venezuela's oil has long been a "giant with clay feet": massive reserves on paper, but devastated infrastructure, legal complexity, unresolved arbitration awards and sovereign risk that scares even the most capital-rich firms. Modernizing production — to say nothing of navigating occupation and political transition — is not simply a matter of writing a check.

Imperial Echoes, Academic Realities

Critics and scholars will point out that national sovereignty, international law, and the history of post-intervention chaos matter. Past U.S. adventures — from Iraq to Libya — demonstrate that defeating a regime and governing a country are very different undertakings. The legal basis for a U.S. takeover of an oil-producing nation — without UN Security Council sanction and without clear multilateral mandate — raises profound questions about international norms and hemispheric stability.

But Trump's candid articulation of why the U.S. moved — and what it seeks to extract — upends the usual diplomatic obfuscations.

This is not solely a story about narcotics or democracy.

This is not a job-creation program for energy companies.

This is about one thing that has defined global conflict for a century: energy resources.

President Trump didn't just hint that oil was central to U.S. action in Venezuela — he spelled it out, publicly and unapologetically.

And now the world knows it too.

Lauren McAllister is an oil and gas industry reporter covering the intersection of energy markets, regulatory policy, and community impact. Her work often highlights the balance between innovation, environmental responsibility, and the realities of keeping the world powered.

ESG University is a reader-supported publication.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 10 of 73



THE ILLUSTRATED BIBLE

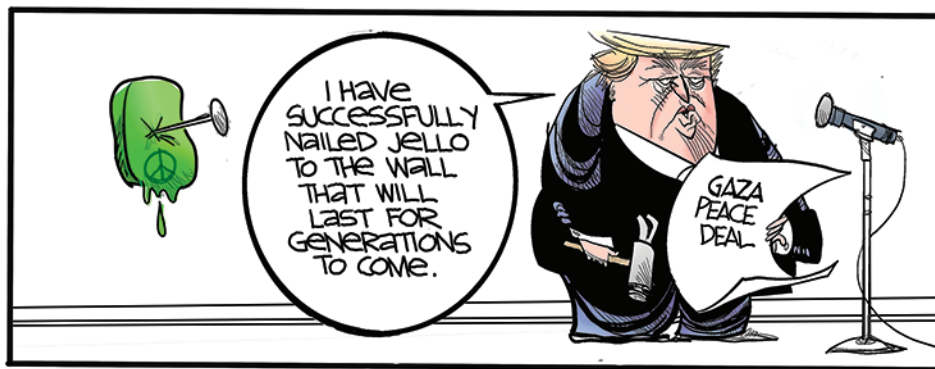
Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass. Brethren, pray for us.

❧ 1 Thessalonians 5: 23-25 ❧



Detail of "St. Jerome in Prayer"
by Rembrandt, 1632

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BIBLE

TRIVIA

by Wilson Casey

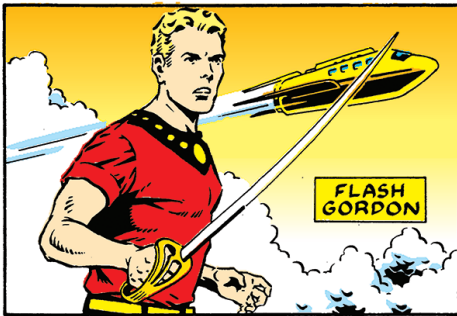
1. Is the book of Titus (KJV) in the Old or New Testament or neither?
2. From Joshua 2, who hid two spies on a roof? *Hosea, Ezra, Satan, Rahab*
3. What was the first bird released from Noah's Ark? *Raven, Pigeon, Sparrow, Dove*
4. From 2 Kings 9, what creatures ate the carcass of Jezebel? *She-bears, Dogs, Frogs, Worms*
5. Which of these worked seven years to earn a wife? *Isaiah, Abraham, Jacob, Joshua*
6. From Joel 3, what was the mountain of the Lord? *Sinai, Zion, Nebo, Moriah*

ANSWERS: 1) New, 2) Rahab, 3) Raven, 4) Dogs, 5) Jacob, 6) Zion

Find expanded trivia online with Wilson Casey at www.patreon.com/triviaguy. FREE TRIAL!

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 12 of 73



FLASH GORDON

12-21 BY JIM KEEFE

IN HER DREAM SHE'S SCREAMING.

AAAAAAA

HELD FAST BY A DEMON AS IT DRAWS HER EVER CLOSER TO ITS SALIVATING JAWS.

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AS DALE AWAKENS, SHE REALIZES HER NIGHTMARE HAS ONLY JUST BEGUN!

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WE'RE GOING TO DIE -- SOB -- ALL GOING TO DIE!

RENSHAW..?

WHERE'S FLASH? IS HE..?

FLASH?!

FLASH ESCAPED... AND HE LEFT US ALL HERE TO DIE!

NO..

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...GORDON MUST NOT ESCAPE!

YOU WILL TELL GARAKAHN WHERE IS GORDON... OR NEXT BE EATEN!

NEXT: PLEA BARGAIN!

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Play Better Golf with JACK NICKLAUS

ON ALL SHOTS FROM THE DRIVER TO THE PUTTER THE MORE YOUR HANDS WORK IN UNISON DURING THE SWING, THE BETTER YOU'LL PLAY.

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UNIFY YOUR HANDS BY SETTING THEM AS CLOSE TOGETHER ON THE CLUB AS POSSIBLE.

YOU CAN BEST DO THAT BY EITHER OVERLAPPING, OR, AS I DO, INTERLOCKING THE FIRST FINGER OF YOUR UPPER HAND AND THE LITTLE FINGER OF YOUR LOWER HAND.

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Using and Strengthening the Immune System To Prevent CANCER

DEAR DR. ROACH: I have read about using the immune system's response as a mechanism to battle cancer (such as brain and pancreatic) and to reduce the devastating impact that cancer and its treatment has on humans. I understand current drug trials show promising results. How do doctors and scientists use the immune system to treat cancer? -- J.W.

ANSWER: The concept of using the immune system to treat cancer is old, but the ability to do so has dramatically improved in the past few years. There are a few specific types of treatments that I'd like to highlight:

Immune checkpoint inhibitors are treatments that release inhibitions on the immune system. (These "strengthen" the immune system, which has beneficial but also potentially toxic effects.) For melanoma, the most dangerous form of skin cancer, these treatments have revolutionized treatment and led to dramatically improved outcomes in people whose melanoma has spread. Response rates are up to 60% in a disease where the prognosis used to be dismal.

The unleashed immune system can destroy cancer very effectively, but it also can attack healthy organs, with many people (between 10% to 60% depending on drugs and doses) developing damage to the skin, lungs, liver, thyroid, colon and heart. These toxicities range from mild to life-threatening.

The body's own immune cells can be genetically engineered to kill cancer cells. Chimeric antigen receptor T cells (CAR T cells) can be specifically changed to recognize cancer cells. This can lead to complete remission with some cancers, especially some leukemias and lymphomas. Unfortunately, they can also attack the body, leading to neurological damage that can be very serious.

Developing cancer vaccines is a highly promising strategy for personalizing the immune system to attack a person's own cancer. Although the United States has recently made dramatic cuts to its support of this research, researchers in other countries continue to study this. It can be used in combination with other traditional or immune-based treatments.

The immune system can be used to help treat cancer effectively, but there is still the potential for serious side effects.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am 89 years old and doing reasonably well, but I have noticed some loss of energy and a bit of my balance. I try to walk, do some exercises, and then hit the hot tub every day to help relax my joints. I recall reading an article about a study, which concluded that 15 minutes in a hot tub equated, cardio-wise, to a 15-minute jog. I would really appreciate your opinion on this proposition. -- J.D.

ANSWER: I read the study that I think you are referencing from Coventry, England, and the headline writers overstated the more cautious conclusions of the actual study. Being in a hot tub or sauna does increase the heart rate and the ability of the heart to exert itself when done daily for four weeks in people with heart failure.

Other studies have found that healthy volunteers also get small but significant improvements in their cardiac reserve, similar to (but not quite as much as) what would be expected with exercise.

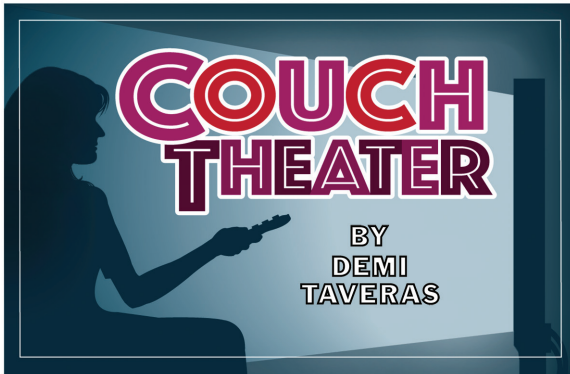
The benefits of exercise are well-known and large and go beyond the effects of the heart, while the benefits of regular hot-tub or sauna bathing appear to give some but not all the benefits of regular exercise. At age 89, there is a risk of heat-related injuries, including lightheadedness and falling, so I would urge caution for new users not to use too high of a heat or stay in for too long, especially when first starting.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu.

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 14 of 73



From left, Elizabeth Olsen, Miles Teller and Callum Turner star in "Eternity." (Courtesy of MovieStillsDB)

"Wicked: For Good" (PG) -- The second part of "Wicked" is out now to rent after bringing in \$503.9 million at the box office. While it didn't beat its predecessor in earnings, fans were still elated

to return to theaters and see Cynthia Erivo back as Elphaba and Ariana Grande as Glinda. The second part focuses more on Glinda's inner emotional conflict as she tries to find balance between her bond with Elphaba and her duty to the Wizard. The film received mixed reviews from critics (both real and internet), but highlights include Ethan Slater's performance as the Tin Man, Erivo's rendition of "No Good Deed," and Jonathan Bailey and Erivo's rendition of "As Long as You're Mine." "Wicked: For Good" has received five Golden Globe nominations and seven Critics' Choice nominations so far. (Apple TV+)

"Eternity" (PG-13) -- Miles Teller ("The Gorge"), Elizabeth Olsen ("The Assessment"), and Callum Turner ("Atropia") are an unlikely but warm trio in this rom-com "set in the afterlife." Although it was distributed by A24, it barely made up its budget by bringing in \$29 million at the box office. Olsen plays Joan, a woman with terminal cancer who is married to Larry (Teller). In a funny turn of circumstances, Larry ends up passing away first after choking on a pretzel, but Joan shortly passes away after him. They meet again at the Junction, an in-between space where those who died must decide where they would like to spend the rest of eternity. While there, Joan also encounters her first husband, Luke (Turner), who died in war. Now split between what could have been and what is familiar, Joan must figure out which man she wishes to spend eternity with. Out now to rent! (Amazon Prime Video)

"31st Annual Critics' Choice Awards" (TV-PG) -- Chelsea Handler hosted this year's Critics' Choice Awards on Jan. 4 in Santa Monica, California, making it her fourth consecutive year of hosting the ceremony. This marks the beginning of an award season that stretches into March, finishing with the Oscars. Leading the film category are "Sinners" with 17 nominations, "One Battle After Another" with 14, and "Hamnet" and "Frankenstein" with 11. Leading the TV category are "Adolescence" with six nominations, "Nobody Wants This" with five, and a good handful of shows with four (including "All Her Fault" and "Severance"). Categories to watch are Best Actor/Actress and Best Supporting Actor/Actress, as both categories are stacked with incredible performances from critically acclaimed stars. See who brought home the gold now! (Peacock)

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 15 of 73



1. Name the group that released "Feels Like the First Time."
2. Who released "After the Love Has Gone"?
3. Name the group that released "Can't You Hear My Heartbeat."
4. Which artist wrote and released "Holly Holy"?
5. Name the song that contains this lyric: "When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me."

Answers

1. Foreigner, in 1977. The song was used in 2013 in "Anchorman 2" and in 2017 in "I, Tonya."
2. Earth, Wind & Fire, in 1979. The song won Best R&B Vocal

Performance by a Duo or Group after also being nominated for Record of the Year and Song of the Year.

3. Herman's Hermits, in 1965. Goldie & the Gingerbread released a cover, but it wasn't noticed because the Hermits' version was released first. The Gingerbread did, however, get noticed by the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

4. Neil Diamond, in 1969.

5. "Let It Be," by the Beatles, in 1970. There were two different versions of the song, the single versus the one on the album of the same name. It was the group's last single just before McCartney let it be known that he would be leaving the group.

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GRIN and BEAR IT ^{Wagner}



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"Now I have to go take it all back for the recall!"

Just Like Cats & Dogs

by Dave T. Phipps



NOW THERE, YOU SEE? DIDN'T I TELL YOU I WOULD END UP USING IT SOONER OR LATER?

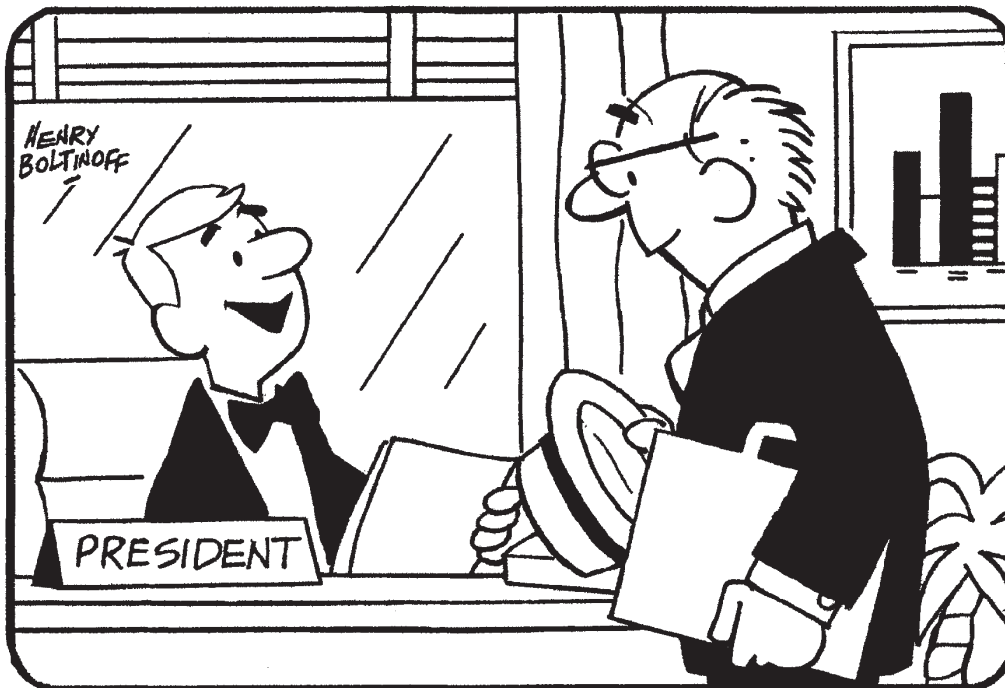
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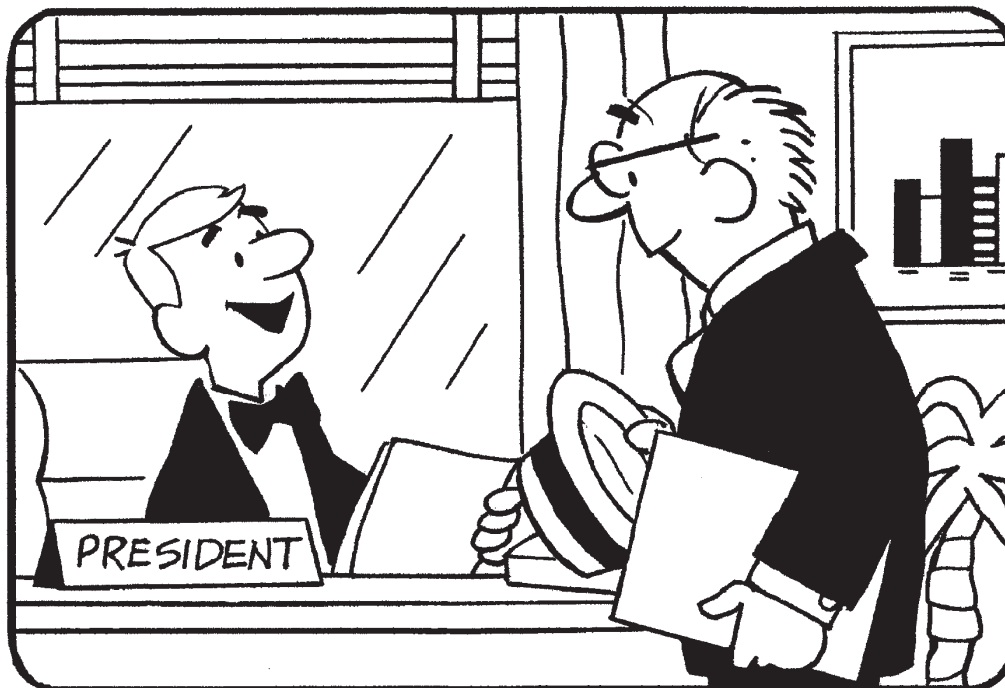
Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 16 of 73

HOCUS-FOCUS

BY
HENRY BOLTINOFF



Find at least six differences in details between panels.



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Differences: 1. Band around hat is wider. 2. Blinds are different. 3. Chart is different. 4. Plant is taller. 5. Briefcase handle is missing. 6. Thumb is moved.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 17 of 73



* "Here's a great chore for little kids. Our family seems to leave shoes all over the house. I will have my 4-year-old collect the shoes and deliver them to the room of the person to whom the shoes belong. It's a very easy chore and even like a game sometimes." -- A.J. in Texas

* "When cooking from a recipe that I'm not super familiar with, I tape it to the front of my kitchen cabinet. It's in a central location, easy to see and won't get dirty. If it turns out to be something I like, I put it in a plastic sleeve protector in my cookbook. I can still pull it out and tape it to the cabinet when necessary." -- R.G. in Georgia

* I love baked goods. These are some good tips that I use all the time. Use a wine glass to cut biscuits. Set a loaf of baked

bread on a tea towel top down, then use a serrated knife to cut from the bottom. Your slices will look perfect, as you won't crush the top.

* If your family likes stuffing, try baking it in muffin tins for single servings. It works very well.

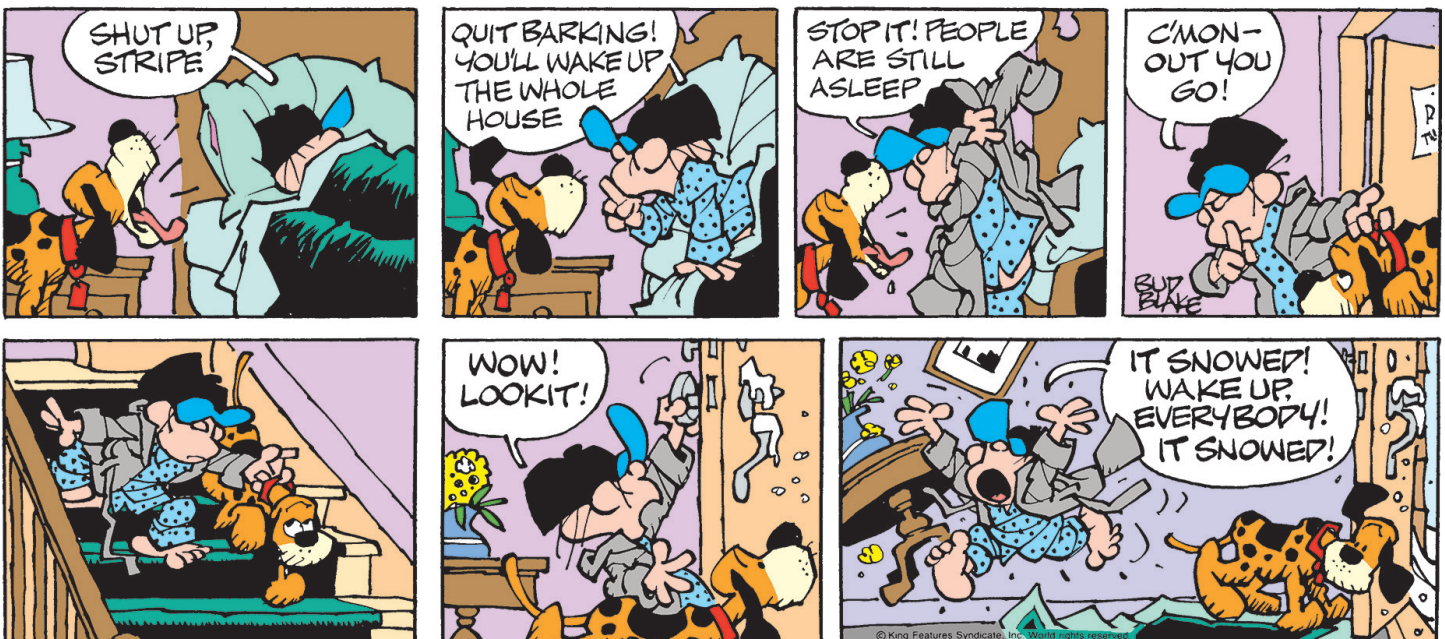
* "I use a garment rack to dry outerwear overnight. Hang from skirt hangers (the ones with clips) and make sure there is plenty of room for air to circulate around the damp pieces. I use a small fan pointed at the rack, and make sure it's in a warm location, as this doesn't work so well in our cold utility room." -- D.L. in Michigan

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803.

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TIGER

by BUD BLAKE



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 18 of 73

King Crossword

ACROSS

- 1 Sketch
- 5 Old name for France
- 9 Microwave
- 12 Top-of-the-line
- 13 Golden Rule preposition
- 14 "As I see it," in a text
- 15 Lady of Spain
- 16 Teen fave
- 17 Stannum
- 18 Out of control
- 19 Pool unit
- 20 Faction
- 21 Humorist
- 23 Follower (Suff.)
- 25 Cerebral
- 28 Car safety feature

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48				49					50			
51					52					53		
54					55					56		

- 32 Tree bumps
- 33 Unfettered
- 34 Closed tight
- 36 Outlaw
- 37 Summer in Paris
- 38 Flavor enhancer, for short
- 39 Aspic shaper
- 42 Pair
- 44 Now, in a memo
- 48 Rock producer Brian
- 49 TV's Griffin
- 50 Painter Magritte

- 51 Thesaurus wd.
- 52 DLI doubled
- 53 Partner
- 54 Chopper
- 55 Diminutive suffix
- 56 Dance move
- DOWN**
- 1 Baby's father
- 2 Leeway
- 3 Part of A.D.
- 4 Easily swayed
- 5 Culpable
- 6 Forever — day
- 7 Perfect place
- 8 Texter's guffaw
- 9 Tubular pasta
- 10 During
- 11 Corn concoction
- 20 Coerces
- 22 Map feature
- 24 "The Da Vinci Code" monk
- 25 Small ammo
- 26 Wish undone
- 27 Coach Parseghian
- 29 Physique
- 30 "— was saying ..."
- 31 Retrieve
- 35 Sense
- 36 Low-budget flick
- 39 Small plateau
- 40 Cameo stone
- 41 Single
- 43 Legal document
- 45 Plane reservation
- 46 Pot starter
- 47 Incubator noise
- 49 Bovary's title (Abbr.)

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 19 of 73

King Crossword

Answers

Solution time: 21 mins.

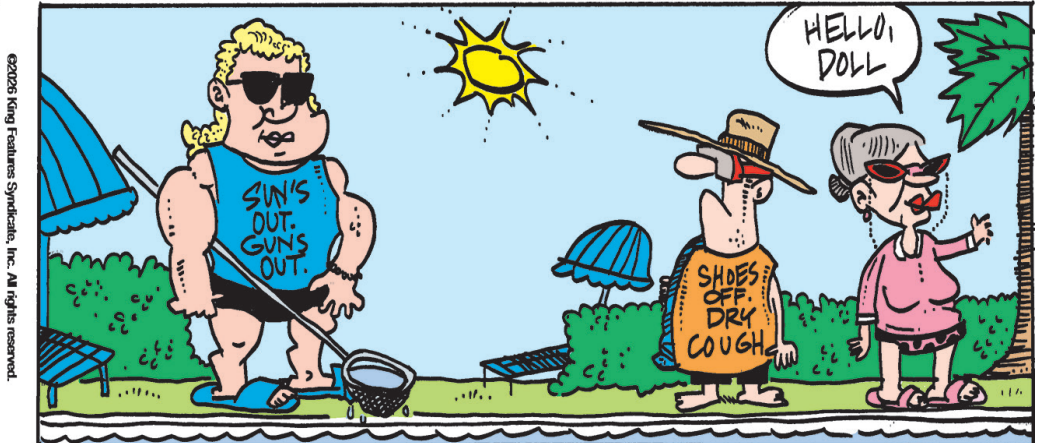
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Olive



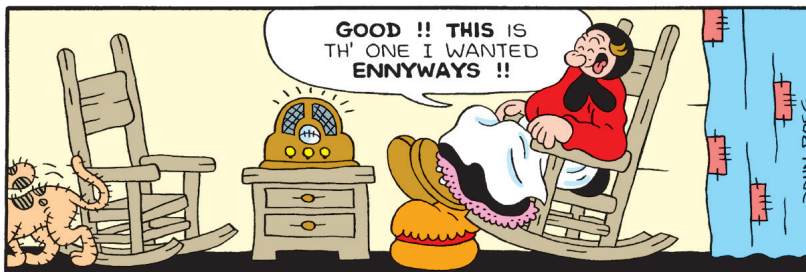
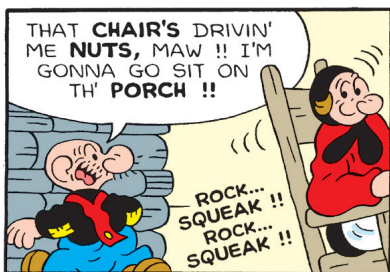
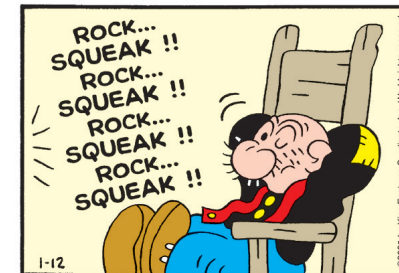
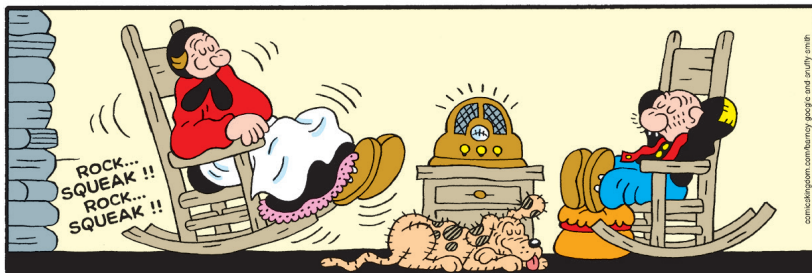
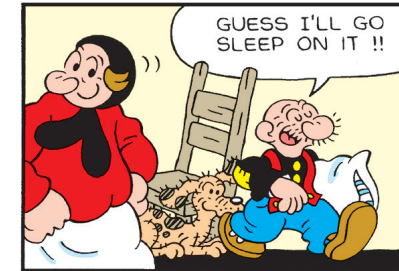
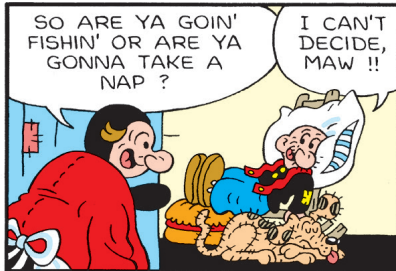
Out on a Limb

by Gary Kopervas



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 20 of 73




Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 21 of 73

HAL FOSTER'S **Prince Valiant**
BY SCHULTZ AND YEATES

AS NATHAN ESCAPES THE PIRATES, THEIR CAPTAIN, STRAKONUS, URGES HIS MEN FORWARD: "KEEP GOING! WE NEED THE BOY!"



"LOOK!" STRAKONUS SHOUTS, "THEY DO NOT HAVE THE NUMBERS TO STOP US!"



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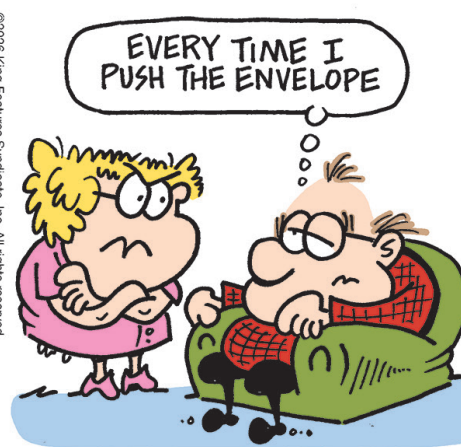
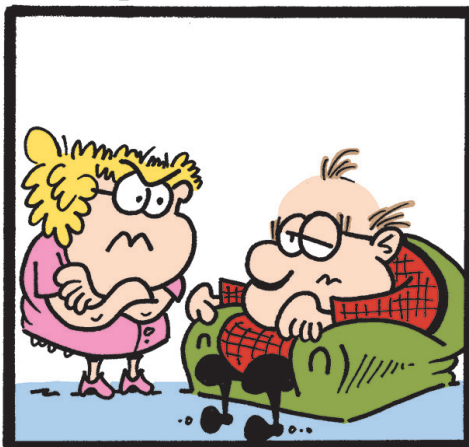
THEY ARE VERY CLOSE TO GRABBING VALS YOUNGEST, WHEN SUDDENLY A THUNDERING MASS CHARGE PAST, FOLLOWED BY YELLING, SHOUTING AND MASS CONFUSION!

4057
YEATES
11/9/14

NEXT: **Thanaa returns**

The Spats

by Jeff Pickering



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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 22 of 73

SENIOR NEWS LINE

by Matilda Charles

Finding help this year

Now that we have our new Social Security benefit amount and see, after the Medicare Part B deduction, just how little it's going to be, many of us are on the edge of panic -- or at least very worried. We barely made it through last year, month by month. What are we going to do this year when the prices are continuing to rise but our Social Security didn't?

Last year the average Social Security benefit was \$2,015, and this year it's slated to be \$2,071, up about \$56 per month. After deducting the \$185 Part B last year, the average benefit was \$1,830 per month. This year Part B has gone up to \$202, making \$1,869 the average benefit. Doing the math, it means that we have \$39 more per month to spend.

And let's not forget that the Part B deductible has also gone up, now at \$283 per year before Medicare kicks in.

We need help.

The National Council on Aging has created BenefitsCheckUp (BenefitsCheckUp.org), which is a one-stop shop for finding help programs. There are 2,000 of them in their database, and it's free to use. You only need to enter your ZIP code and select the type of benefits you want to look at. Then you'll answer a few questions and be presented with a list of options that includes contact information and tells you how to apply for the help.

If you need a little help with that database, call them at 800-794-6559, or click on their "Find Local Help" link for help in your state.

BenefitsCheckUp identifies a wide range of assistance, from free legal advice, to property tax reduction, to "Extra Help" to pay for Part D Medicare drug coverage and deductibles, to heating assistance and much more.

Don't be afraid to apply for the help benefits you're entitled to.

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Downtown Groton

Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460
Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



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Senior Citizens 65+
Physical Therapy. **\$20 a month**

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 23 of 73

1. Between Serbian tennis rivals Jelena Jankovic and Ana Ivanovic, who won more Grand Slam singles titles?

2. The 1951 biographical film "Follow the Sun" starred Glenn Ford as what legendary golfer?

3. What two NFL teams played in a December 10, 2017, game known as the "Snow Bowl" and "Snowvertime," in which 8-9 inches of snow fell during the contest?

4. Name the American sprinter who won a total of four medals at the 1932 Los Angeles and 1936 Berlin Olympics and went on to serve in the U.S. House of Representatives for Illinois in the 1970s.

5. What is the nickname of Kent State University's athletic teams?

6. He scored two touchdowns in Super Bowl I as a running back for the Green Bay Packers. His son played cornerback for the Buffalo Bills and Packers from 1985 to 1990 before working as a broadcaster. Who are they?

7. What Major League Baseball player turned umpire brawled with members of the Chicago White Sox following a 1932 game in which they took exception to his calls?



by Ryan A. Berenz

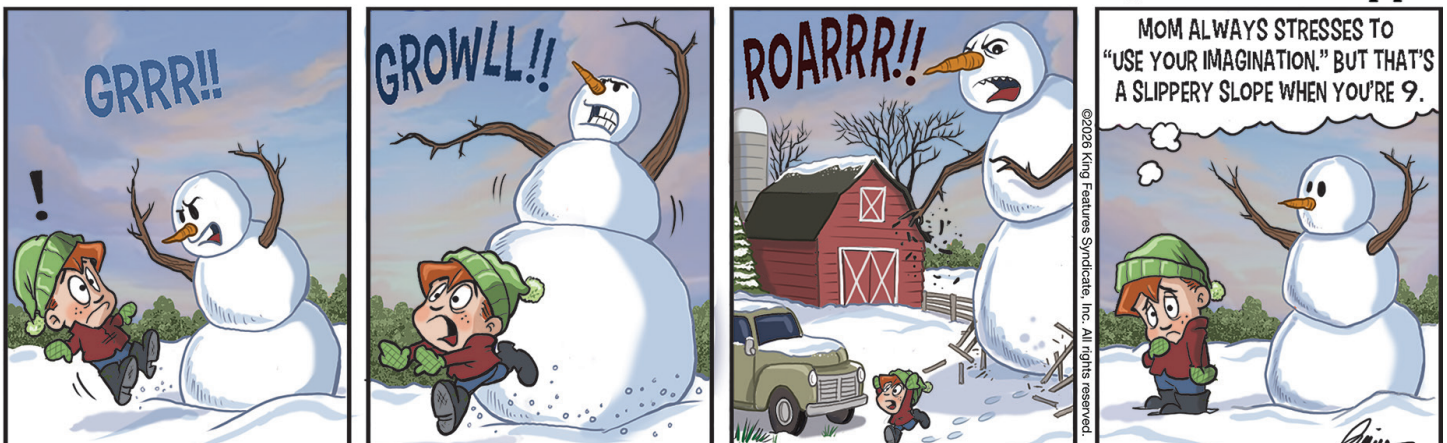
Answers

1. Ivanovic, with one win at the 2008 French Open.
2. Ben Hogan.
3. The Buffalo Bills defeated the Indianapolis Colts 13-7 in overtime.
4. Ralph Metcalfe.
5. The Golden Flashes.
6. Elijah and Ron Pitts.
7. George Moriarty.

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Amber Waves

by Dave T. Phipps



Introducing dogs and cats



DEAR PAW'S CORNER: I have two laid-back cats, my boyfriend has a big sweet dog named "Gabriel," and we are moving in together in a few weeks. Gabe is very well socialized and he spent his puppyhood in a big house with cats, so I'm not worried about him adapting to a new situation. But I'm not sure how my cats will react. How can I make sure life will be low-stress together?
-- Chase T. in Atlanta

DEAR CHASE: You have a great advantage in that your boyfriend's dog is already used to living with cats.

Before your move-in date, gradually get the cats familiar with Gabriel by bringing him over for a few hours, several days per week if possible. Before his arrival,

create a safe space for the cats where they can retreat, because when a big, goofy dog lumbers in the door, they will most likely run for cover.

Once Gabe is settled and calm, have him lie down, with your boyfriend keeping hold of his leash. Bring each cat out, one by one, in your arms, and calmly approach him. When the cat tenses up, hisses or tries to escape, stop and take a few steps back. Stay far enough back that your cat remains calm in your arms but can see the dog. After a few minutes, take your cat back to their safe space and repeat with the other cat.

Repeat this process on each visit to minimize stress and trauma for the cats and the dog. Continue after you move in together. It may take weeks or months for them to be comfortable with each other, but a calm, consistent approach will help.

Send your tips, comments or questions to ask@pawscorner.com.

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 25 of 73

Strange BUT TRUE

* Belize wins the prize for having the national flag with the most colors -- 12.

* A California man discovered that he'd been paying his neighbor's power bill for an astonishing 15 years because his meter was mapped to the wrong apartment.

* Labatt Park in London, Ontario, dating back to 1877, is the oldest continually operating baseball grounds in the world.

* A Japanese man who didn't speak to his wife for 20 years while they still lived together and raised three children admit-

ted his silence was due to jealousy of the attention she paid to their kids. Fortunately, the couple finally reconciled after said kids sought help from a TV show.

* Marie Curie was the first person ever to win two Nobel Prizes, one for physics and the other for chemistry, in honor of her work on radioactivity.

* Hawaiian pizza was invented by a Greek immigrant inspired by the sweet and savory flavors of Chinese cuisine.

* Atoms are nearly 100% empty space.

* Cotard's Syndrome, aka Walking Corpse Syndrome, causes sufferers to believe they are dead or missing body parts.

* Ancient Egyptians pronounced the word "cat" as "mew" or "meow."

* A 2001 study conducted at the University of Leicester showed that when cows listen to slow, soothing songs, they produce 3% more milk.

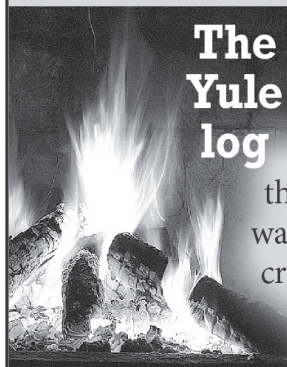
* Those CAPTCHA tests that verify you're human and not a robot have a dual purpose: Each time you identify a bus or traffic light or what have you, you're also helping to improve AI algorithms for companies like Google.

* There are more than 1.4 billion insects for each human on Earth.

Thought for the Day: "Human kindness has never weakened the stamina or softened the fiber of a free people. A nation does not have to be cruel to be tough." -- Franklin D. Roosevelt

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The Garden Bug



The Yule log

Among the northern tribes of Europe, the *jól* (Yule) was an important festival, though the exact dates for its celebration varied from location to location. Around midwinter, an entire tree trunk would be carried into a feasting hall and set ablaze, to burn for many days.

As the people feasted, sacrificed and celebrated around this burning Yule log, they would implore their gods to bring back the warmth and light of summer, so they could grow crops and feed their families in the coming year.

This tradition is one of the world's oldest.

- Brenda Weaver

Sources: matreeservice.com, valkyrja.com, www.almanac.com



by Freddy Groves

Dangerous items in mental health units

It defies belief that these things could have been allowed to happen: The mental health units at a VA facility were loaded up with items that could be used in suicides.

Specifically, some of the items included exposed pipes that could be used for hanging, faucets without rounded edges, protruding cabinet door handles that could be used as anchor points and unsecured cords and equipment.

How does that happen? Consider the steps that were taken when the facility was built.

Blueprints were drawn, and somebody had to sign off on them. Materials lists for things like toilets and faucets were created, and somebody had to sign off on them. The facility had to be inspected as it was being built, and somebody had to sign off on the various stages during construction. And so on all the way until final inspection.

Then we get to the part where the mental health experts who work there showed up at the facility. Trained in suicide prevention, did they not notice all the potentially dangerous items in the facility? Not even during their required twice-annual inspection to look for such hazards? And what about the higher-up staffer whose job it was to ensure that all staff members who enter the mental health unit "are trained on the environmental hazards that represent a threat to suicidal patients, and how to identify and abate them"?

Enter the VA's Office of Inspector General for an on-site inspection. When the OIG saw all the problems, they didn't wait to express their concern in a full report. Instead, they quickly released a preliminary report so that staff in all other VA mental health facilities would also be made aware of potential risks. At the facility in question, staff jumped to remove some of the hazards, per the OIG's request, began 15-minute patient safety checks and started staff education.

Meanwhile, thankfully, the VA OIG will maintain oversight of the facility until a long-term corrective plan is completed.

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 27 of 73

Wishing Well®

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HERE IS A PLEASANT LITTLE GAME that will give you a message every day. It's a numerical puzzle designed to spell out your fortune. Count the letters in your first name. If the number of letters is 6 or more, subtract 4. If the number is less than 6, add 3. The result is your key number. Start at the upper left-hand corner and check one of your key numbers, left to right. Then read the message the letters under the checked figures give you.

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1. GEOGRAPHY: What is the name of the festival of lights that's celebrated in some European countries as the start of the holiday season?

2. MOVIES: Which actor played folk singer Pete Seeger in "A Complete Unknown"?

3. SLOGANS: Which company uses the advertising slogan "The Best a Man Can Get"?

4. HISTORY: What was the 1848 Seneca Falls Convention about?

5. TELEVISION: What is the name of Liz Lemon's show in the sitcom "30 Rock"?

6. SCIENCE: What kind of substance does Boyle's law govern?

7. FOOD & DRINK: What is the primary ingredient in the Italian dish calamari?

8. LITERATURE: Which Shakespeare play introduces the characters Beatrice and Benedick?

9. MATH: What kind of number is pi (3.14)?

10. MUSIC: What is the name of the house band on "The Tonight Show"?

Answers

1. St. Lucia's Day.
2. Edward Norton.
3. Gillette.
4. The first women's rights convention in the United States.
5. "TGS with Tracy Jordan."
6. Gas.
7. Squid.
8. "Much Ado about Nothing."
9. Irrational.
10. The Roots.

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South Dakota Governor



Larry Rhoden



South Dakota: *Under God, the People Rule*

Two Hundred Fifty Years

I'm pretty stoked for 2026. This year brings the 250th birthday of the United States of America, the freest nation in history – and South Dakota remains the freest state in that nation. As Governor Peter Norbeck said in his 1919 State of the State Address, "The proud record and accomplishments of South Dakota surely point to a state whose star shall outshine all others in the flag of our country."

This year, South Dakota has another opportunity to outshine all other states. As the nation celebrates our "semiquincentennial" birthday (that's the long word for "250th" – you'll be hearing it a lot), South Dakota will host the very best and brightest celebration of our nation's birthday when fireworks go off over Mount Rushmore on July 3.

My Administration is already hard at work planning for that event, and we'll be announcing the opening of the ticket lottery very soon. We're working with our partners in the Trump Administration, who seem just as excited as we are!

The four men enshrined on Mount Rushmore National Memorial are well chosen to represent the great and proud history of our nation.

George Washington courageously led our troops to victory in the Revolutionary War. He brought us triumph without tyranny and set the example for citizen-leadership when he chose first to decline to become a king, then to retire to his farm after serving only two terms as President.

Thomas Jefferson penned our greatest statement of purpose: the Declaration of Independence. The vision was not his – it reflected the will of Almighty God, our Creator, who gave us the unalienable rights that include life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Our nation has never been perfect, but the Declaration of Independence gave us an ideal that we always strive to achieve.

Theodore Roosevelt made America a world power and an industrial giant. He paved the way for trade with the Panama Canal, fought for conservation, and treasured the American West. TR showed that growth and conservation don't have to be in conflict – in fact they can often pair together rather well.

Abraham Lincoln preserved our Union in the face of its greatest crisis. Lincoln had perhaps the toughest job of any man serving as our nation's chief executive – and being chief executive is never easy! He did it with humility and wisdom, and he accomplished what many thought impossible – both reuniting our nation and ending slavery.

We're going to hear a lot about our nation's history in this upcoming year. We'll celebrate far, far more than just these four men. And we'll have far, far more celebrations throughout the year than just the Mount Rushmore fireworks!

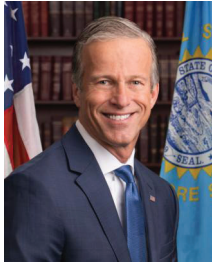
As my good friend Kristi Noem said at that celebration five-and-a-half years ago, "This Independence Day, let us be grateful that we have such words and such examples to follow, and that others were willing to sacrifice so much to create a land in which liberty and law can be protected. Let us not destroy history – let us learn from it by preserving and imitating what is good about it."

There's a lot to preserve and imitate in our nation's past – and in South Dakota's. This year, let us all do our part to look to our history; to proudly wave the Red, White, and Blue; to paint a vision for the future rooted in freedom; and to celebrate America all year long!

Happy 250th birthday to the USA!

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 29 of 73



JOHN THUNE
U.S. SENATOR FOR SOUTH DAKOTA

Breaking Records and Delivering Results

Republicans entered 2025 with a long to-do list. We made a promise to the American people to get our country moving again, to secure our border, and unleash American energy. I'm proud to say that we've delivered on our promises in 2025, but there's still more work to be done, and we'll be keeping our foot on the gas in 2026 to deliver safer streets, put more money in your pocket, and create new opportunities to get ahead.

Senate Republicans spent a lot of time in Washington last year working on executing our agenda. We took the most votes of any Senate in 50 years, and we spent more time in session than the average for the last eight decades. But we won't confuse activity with accomplishment. What matters is what we delivered for the American people – and that's a lot.

Last summer we passed landmark legislation that included the Working Families Tax Cuts. Without action from Congress, a typical South Dakota family would have seen a \$2,500 tax hike in 2026. One of Republicans' top priorities was ensuring that did not happen. The Working Families Tax Cuts made permanent the tax relief that Republicans delivered in 2017. It prevented a massive tax hike on working families, small businesses, farmers, and ranchers. And it delivered additional tax relief, including no tax on tips and overtime, tax relief for seniors, and additional relief for small businesses to spur growth and create jobs.

Our historic legislative effort didn't end with tax cuts, though. It made a critical investment in border security and national security. It repealed anti-energy policies put in place by the Biden administration and helped unleash American energy. And it included measures to strengthen the farm safety net and upgrade our air traffic control system. I often say, this bill rolled 10 years of work into a single bill.

But that's not the only bill we passed in 2025. Republicans got to work at the beginning of the year to pass the Laken Riley Act, which required detention of criminal illegal immigrants when they commit certain crimes in our country. We repealed a number of Biden-era regulations and stopped California from imposing a de facto electric vehicle mandate on the whole country. The HALT Fentanyl Act permanently scheduled fentanyl analogues as the most deadly type of drug, helping law enforcement combat it.

We also had to spend time overcoming Democrats' obstruction, from blocking commonsense legislation to slowing down confirmation of the president's nominees, and of course, Democrats instigated the longest government shutdown in history. Republicans are keeping our foot on the gas to continue working to deliver on our promises to the American people. And we'll have much more to share as 2026 gets underway.

The American people gave Republicans a mandate, and we are delivering on it: safer streets, more money in your pocket, and new opportunities to get ahead. And there's so much more still to come.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 30 of 73



December 15-21, 2025

Welcome back to another Weekly Round[s] Up. The Senate remained full speed ahead this past week to finish up a few items before the end of the year. To cap off a historic year in the Senate, we confirmed 97 of President Trump's nominees to positions within the executive branch.

This brings our total for nominees

confirmed in 2025 to 417, outpacing confirmations during President Biden's term and even President Trump's first term. We also passed the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act on Wednesday, and on Thursday I had the opportunity to go to the White House and watch President Trump sign this legislation into law. I'm now back home in South Dakota to celebrate Christmas with my family. More on the rest of my week in my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakota groups I visited with: Brad Wiemann, Interim CEO and Matt Kurtenbach, VP of Manufacturing at Daktronics, both of Brookings.

Other meetings: General Ingo Gerhartz, Allied Joint Forces Command Brunssum Commander, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); Kevin Hassett, Director of the National Economic Council; the Board of Directors of the Bank Policy Institute; James Braid, Director, White House Office of Legislative Affairs; Mike Tuffin, CEO, America's Health Insurance Plans; phone call with Rob Nichols, CEO of American Bankers Association; and Dario Gill, Under Secretary for Science, U.S. Department of Energy.

In addition, on Thursday night, I was invited to the White House for the official NDAA signing after it passed the Senate on Wednesday.

Briefings: I attended five briefings this past week: one classified briefing from Secretary Rubio and Secretary Hegseth, one Central Intelligence Agency briefing, two Senate Select Committee on Intelligence closed briefings and one Senate Armed Services Committee briefing.

Hearing: This past week I attended a hearing with the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs.

Senate Bible Study and Prayer Breakfast: On Tuesday, I hosted our weekly Senate Bible Study and on Wednesday I attended our Senate Prayer Breakfast where we sang Christmas carols with former Senator Debbie Stabenow accompanying on piano.

President Trump officially signed the Wounded Knee Massacre Memorial and Sacred Site Act into law this past week. The land at this symbolic and sacred site will now be held in possession of both the Oglala Sioux and Cheyenne River Sioux tribes to be preserved for future generations. Read more about it here.

Votes taken: 25 – This past week I voted on multiple nominees including a batch of 97 of President Trump's nominees. As I mentioned, we also passed the 2026 National Defense Authorization Act. This year's NDAA authorizes funding for construction projects at Ellsworth Air Force Base and funding for a facility for the Watertown Army National Guard. It also authorizes a 3.8 percent pay raise for troops and has a total topline of \$900.6 billion in defense spending. This keeps our military ahead of the curve, making certain they never enter a fair fight and always have the advantage over our adversaries. Read more about South Dakota NDAA wins here.

Steps taken: 61,332 steps or 28.72 miles.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 31 of 73



Dr. James L. Snyder Ministries

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Where in the World Did Last Year Go?

It was New Year's Day, and I got up before The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage.

I poured my coffee and then sat in my easy chair to reflect on the day.

I was trying to get all the things in order I was planning to do today.

After all, the Christmas holiday was over, and I needed to get back in the saddle again.

As I was thinking about my plans, a thought bumped into my mind.

I don't have too many thoughts, but once in a while, one comes my way and hits me, and I'm not sure what to do about it.

The thought was simply this: today begins a brand-new year.

I had given this too much thought recently, but last year is over.

Today starts a brand new year.

What in the world happened to last year? And, where did it go? I was getting accustomed to the year at hand and was finally writing 2025 on my checks.

For most of the year, I wrote 2024.

Now, a new year lay before me, and I wasn't sure what I should do.

Just then, The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage came into the living room, greeted me good morning and then said, "What are you thinking about today?" I looked at her and said rather soberly, "Do you know today begins a brand-new year?" "What," she said, "happen to the year we are living? I was just getting adjusted to that year." She went and got a cup of coffee, then came and sat down, just staring at it.

I knew exactly what she was thinking because I was thinking the same way.

What happened over the last year? One of the problems I have is this: Did I accomplish everything I wanted to accomplish last year? I'm not the kind of person who puts together a detailed New Year's resolution list.

I used to, but I never could finish it, and some of the things on that list took me five years to accomplish.

I sat there quietly, thinking back over the past year trying to figure out what I really accomplished.

After all, I've been retired for about four years so I have time.

Sitting in my chair with The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, I thought back over the year and tried to identify what I did.

Was I busy? Did I do what I had planned to do? Looking at The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage, I said, "What do you think about last year?" The living room was relatively quiet for a few moments, and then she spoke up and said, "I really don't know what I did during the past year.

I've been so busy doing things that I can't remember all the things that I did." Then, looking at me, she said, "what about your year?" Last year had 365 days, and for the life of me, the only day I can think of is my birthday.

Thinking about my birthday, I was trying to remember what I did that day.

Looking at The Gracious Mistress of the Parsonage I said, "Do you remember my birthday?" "Oh, yes I do.

It was a wonderful time don't you think?" Not knowing exactly what she was talking about, I tried to find out more.

I said, "What was the best part of my birthday last year?" I wasn't expecting what she came up with, but she did.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 32 of 73

"I think the best time about your birthday was the wonderful present I got you. How did you like that present?" I don't know whether she knew what was happening or was trying to trick me.

I thought, and I thought some more, but I couldn't come up with what she got me for my birthday.

"That was a wonderful present you got me. I appreciate it so much. Thank you for that gift." I sighed very deeply, believing that I had ducked a bullet.

Looking at me with one of her infamous smiles, she said, "I spent a lot of time trying to think of that birthday gift for you. What was the best part of that gift?" Of course, now I am in real deep water. I can't remember that birthday present.

After all, that was six months ago, and I'm not sure what happened this past week. I gave it some thought and tried to remember, but nothing actually came to mind.

That's the thing about getting older: you forget things you should remember, and remember things you should forget.

I didn't know what to say, so I said, "The best thing about that birthday present was your thoughtfulness in getting me such a wonderful present. I will always appreciate you for getting me that present." She smiled at me, and at least it worked this time.

Or so I thought.

When a year passes by, it's not too good to reflect on the past. The best thing is to appreciate the past, but then put the focus on the present.

This time of the year, my favorite Bible verse is Ecclesiastes 1:8, "The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun." We think something is new, and it may be new to us at the time, but there is nothing new under the sun.

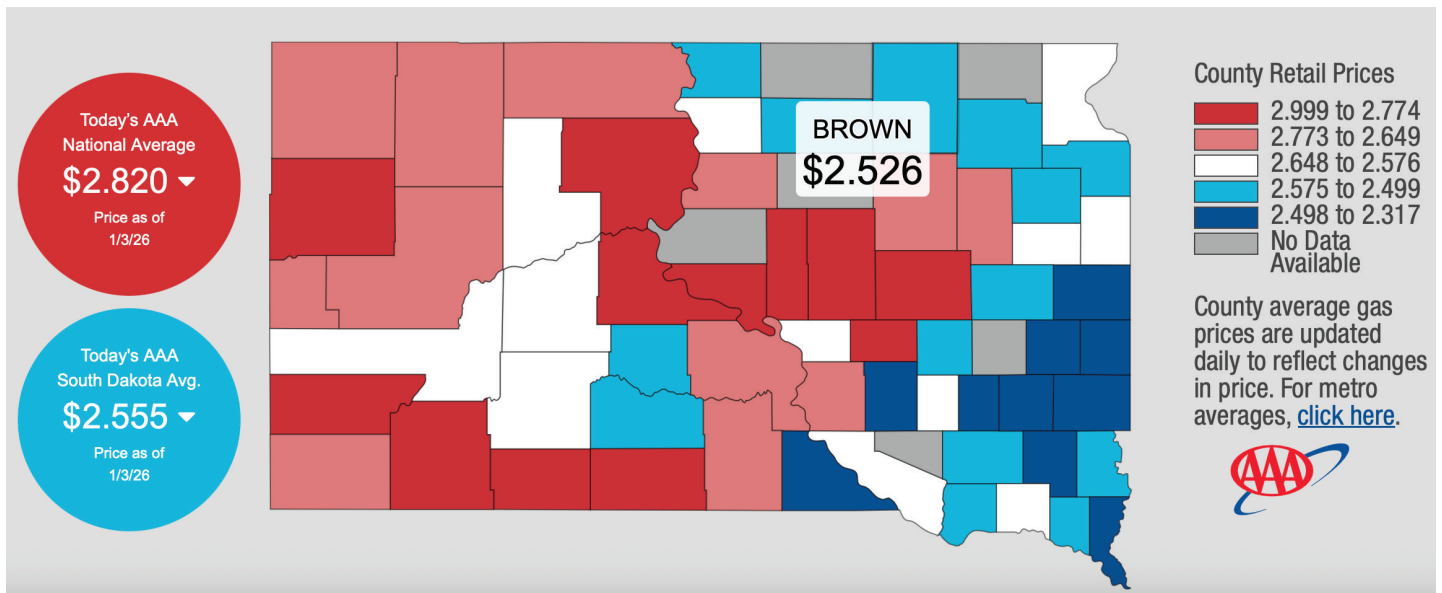
Broton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 33 of 73

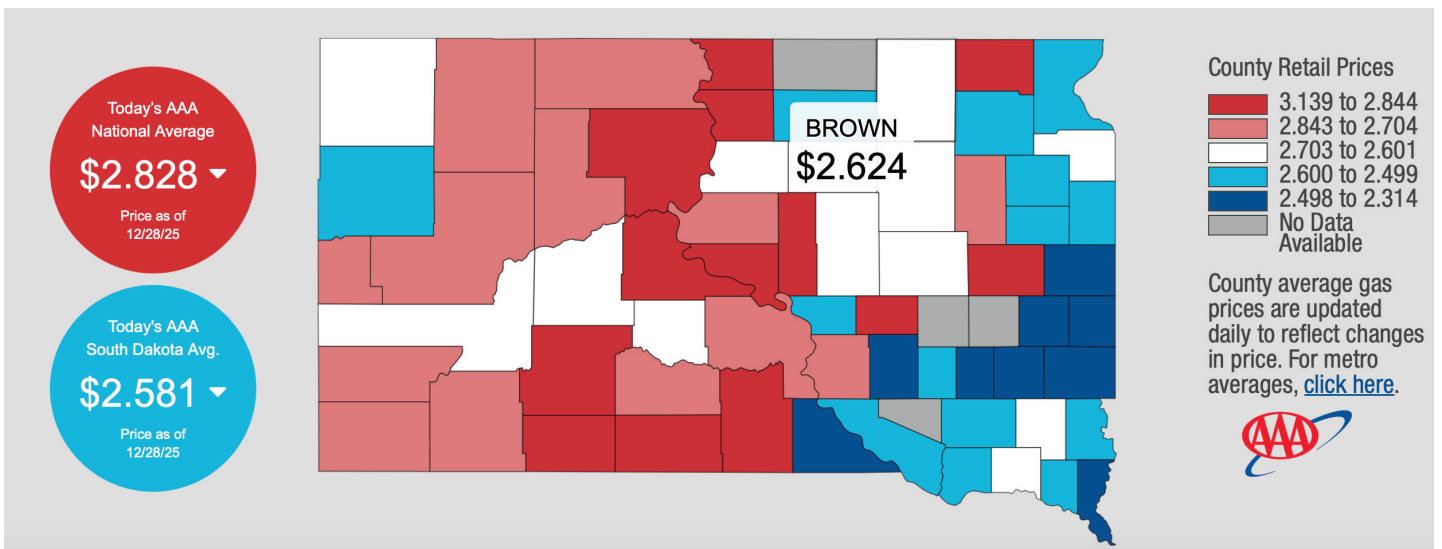
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$2.555	\$2.746	\$3.241	\$3.162
Yesterday Avg.	\$2.564	\$2.760	\$3.228	\$3.187
Week Ago Avg.	\$2.582	\$2.788	\$3.269	\$3.204
Month Ago Avg.	\$2.729	\$2.930	\$3.360	\$3.527
Year Ago Avg.	\$2.845	\$3.058	\$3.517	\$3.254

This Week



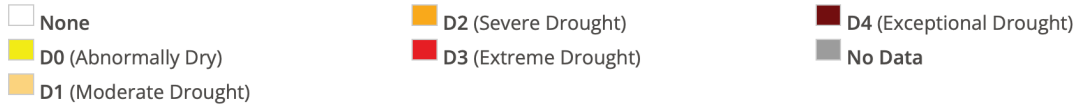
Last Week



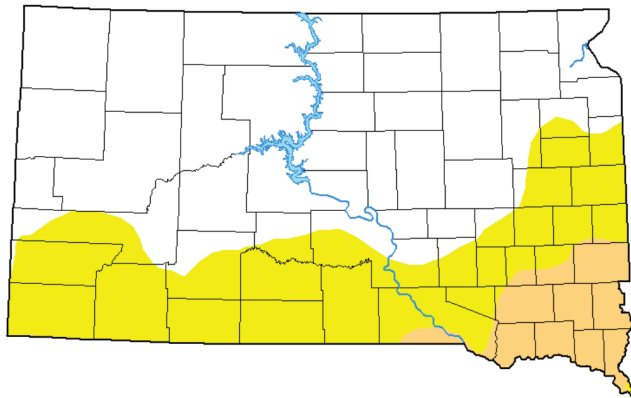
Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 34 of 73

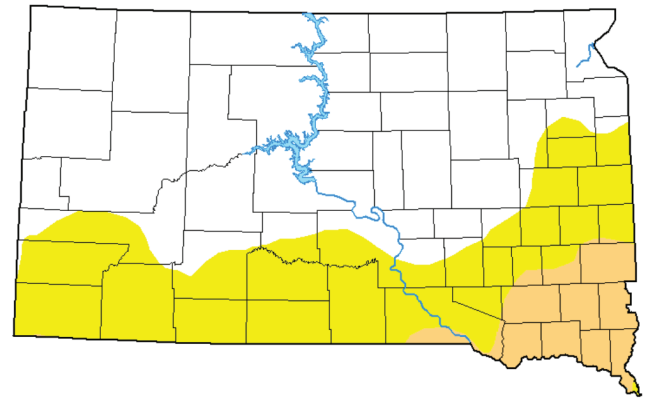
Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



Dec. 30



Dec. 23

Warmer-than-average temperatures dominated the High Plains this week, with departures ranging up to +25 degrees F above normal, while near- to below-normal temperatures were observed along northern portions of the region. Precipitation varied across the region, with most areas reporting near- to below-normal totals. Western Wyoming was the exception, where weekly precipitation totals were 200% to 600% of normal. Consequently, severe drought (D2) was removed from western Wyoming, while moderate drought (D1) and abnormal dryness (D0) improved. Conditions were drier on the east side of the state, justifying the expansion of abnormal dryness in those areas. The majority of the southern half of the High Plains observed temperatures 10 to 20 degrees above normal for the week, while precipitation totals were reported to be 25% or less of normal. Extreme drought (D3) expanded in central Colorado, while moderate drought (D1) expanded in southern Colorado, across northern portions of Nebraska, and in southeast Kansas. Abnormal dryness (D0) expanded across northeast Colorado, southern and northern portions of Nebraska, and in southeast Kansas.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

COMMENTARY

A New Year's resolution for South Dakota: Stop flushing dollars, then pinching pennies **by Seth Tupper**

There was nothing under the tree this Christmas for South Dakota's schools, state employees and health care providers.

Republican Gov. Larry Rhoden proposed no funding increase for them in the next state budget.

"Because our revenues haven't grown much, we have to keep them flat this year," Rhoden said during his annual December budget address.

Hearing that news so close to the holidays, I was reminded of the climactic movie scene in "National Lampoon's Christmas Vacation," when a wife takes her husband to task for eliminating his company's Christmas bonuses.

"You didn't!" she exclaims. "Well, of all the cheap, lousy ways to save a buck!"

Rhoden's plan looks even cheaper and lousier in light of the revenue our state government has surrendered, the money it's wasted, and the questions that have arisen about its spending on economic development.

Three years ago, lawmakers and then-Gov. Kristi Noem decided to reduce the state sales tax rate from 4.5% to 4.2% until 2027. It was an ill-considered attempt to distract homeowners from their property tax complaints by giving them a sales tax holiday they didn't ask for, and it cost the state more than \$100 million in annual revenue. Most consumers, meanwhile, aren't noticing the penny they're saving every time they spend \$3.33.

Noem's administration also squandered \$20 million developing a prison site that ultimately had to be abandoned.

That fiasco began four years ago. The state was flush with cash from federal COVID-19 relief and stimulus funding, so Noem and legislators started stuffing money into a prison construction account. They wanted to replace the oldest parts of the Sioux Falls penitentiary, which dates to 1881.

Noem's Department of Corrections selected a site in rural Lincoln County, and a lawsuit quickly arose from landowners who hadn't been told that a prison might pop up in their neighborhood.

Years of contention boiled over last winter after Noem bolted to run the federal Department of Homeland Security. An insurgent group of legislators led a revolt against the Lincoln County location, and Rhoden — who was elevated from lieutenant governor upon Noem's departure — surrendered to reality. He pushed the reset button and appointed a task force that selected a different site in Sioux Falls.

By that time, the state had already spent an unrecoverable \$20 million on the abandoned land, for myriad expenses including design work, sewer pipes, herbicide application and geothermal test wells.

More recently, questions have arisen about the combined \$69 million of grants, loans and tax rebates that the administrations of Noem and Rhoden have showered on CJ Schwan's. The money is helping the company build a \$550 million frozen food production plant in northern Sioux Falls that will employ 650 people (the math works out to about \$106,000 of state aid per employee, for jobs that will pay an average of \$40,000 per year).

CJ Schwan's employs Noem's former state economic development commissioner, Steve Westra, who pledged the first state grant to the company five years ago before leaving his state job. The company also

has the chairman of the state's Board of Economic Development, Jeff Erickson, on its corporate board, while Erickson is involved with a corporation that rents space to CJ Schwan's in a downtown Sioux Falls office building.

CJ Schwan's is part of CJ Group, a South Korean conglomerate that had \$30 billion in revenue in 2024. That's an amount four times larger than South Dakota's annual state budget.

Now, after flushing so many dollars, Rhoden wants lawmakers to pinch pennies. He's offering schools, state employees and Medicaid-funded health care providers the equivalent of the jelly-of-the-month subscription that Clark Griswold's boss substituted for bonuses in "Christmas Vacation."

Clark called that "the biggest bag-over-the-head, punch-in-the-face I ever got."

South Dakotans might feel the same way if lawmakers adopt Rhoden's budget plan.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

Trump says US 'will run' Venezuela during transition after capture of President Maduro

SD's Thune calls strike 'necessary,' Rounds praises 'decisive action'

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Saturday that the United States will "run the country" of Venezuela until "a proper transition can take place," following the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in a strike against the South American nation, a stunning move conducted without congressional notice or approval.

Trump in a press conference from his Florida estate made it clear how much the secret Friday military operation related to securing oil, and he detailed how petroleum companies would finance the rebuilding of Venezuela's oil infrastructure.

Trump as well as Secretary of State Marco Rubio also signaled other countries, such as Cuba, could face the same interventionist fate as Venezuela. "If I lived in Havana and worked for the government I'd be concerned," Rubio said, referring to the communist nation's capital.

Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, who was also captured, will be brought to New York to face a U.S. indictment on narco-terrorism and conspiracy charges originally levied in 2020. The Venezuelan's reelection to the presidency in 2024 was determined by many countries, including the U.S., to be illegitimate, and he has been characterized by the administration as the leader of a drug cartel.

"This extremely successful operation should serve as (a) warning to anyone who would threaten American sovereignty or endanger American lives," Trump said. "What happened to Maduro could happen to them."

The early morning military strike quickly drew strong rebukes from Democratic lawmakers, who said the action superseded Congress' authority to declare war. It's also caused deep concern among world leaders, some of whom pushed for an emergency United Nations meeting.

However, Republicans in Congress stood by the president's decision, saying it was justified.

SD's US senators react with support for Trump

FROM SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

South Dakota's U.S. senators reacted Saturday with statements of support for President Donald Trump after the capture of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-South Dakota, issued a written statement calling the strike a "necessary action."

"For years, Nicolas Maduro, the cartel he leads, and other cartels in Latin America have trafficked drugs into the United States, which have killed hundreds of thousands of Americans," Thune said, in part. "President Trump's decisive action to disrupt the unacceptable status quo and apprehend Maduro, through the execution of a valid Department of Justice warrant, is an important first step to bring him to justice for

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 37 of 73

the drug crimes for which he has been indicted in the United States.”

U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds, R-South Dakota, posted on the social media platform X that “President Trump has sent a message to the world that if you harm the United States of America, you will face the consequences.”

“Nicolas Maduro is an illegitimate leader and an indicted narco terrorist. His support of the cartels in Venezuela killed thousands of Americans over several years,” Rounds said. “President Trump and his team have taken decisive action to bring him to justice. This will make our communities safer and further secure our border from the flow of illegal drugs.”

Both senators expressed gratitude to the U.S. military for carrying out the operation successfully.

No timeline for US involvement

Trump did not give a timeline for how long the unusual U.S. intervention in Venezuela might go on, but said the next year would look different for the nation.

“We are going to run the country until such time that we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition,” Trump said. He added that the U.S. would make Venezuela safe for “the great people of Venezuela, and that includes many from Venezuela that are now living in the United States and want to go back to their country.”

Since taking office, the Trump administration has tried to end temporary and humanitarian legal protections for hundreds of thousands of Venezuelan immigrants. Trump during the press conference repeated accusations that Maduro has sent Venezuelan immigrants with ties to the Tren de Aragua gang to the U.S.

Friday’s military action campaign, named “Absolute Resolve,” came after Trump waged a months-long pressure campaign to oust the authoritarian leader. Dozens of boat strikes have been carried out in the Caribbean that the president and members of his administration have justified, without showing evidence, by saying the boats were carrying drugs to the U.S.

“The United States of America has successfully carried out a large scale strike against Venezuela and its leader, President Nicolas Maduro, who has been, along with his wife, captured and flown out of the Country,” Trump wrote on his social media site, Truth Social, early Saturday. “This operation was done in conjunction with U.S. Law Enforcement.”

Before the Saturday press event at Mar-a-Lago started, the president posted a picture to social media of Maduro handcuffed, blindfolded and aboard the U.S.S. Iwo Jima Navy ship.

‘We’re not afraid of boots on the ground’

Trump at the press conference was joined by Rubio; Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth; Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Dan Caine; CIA Director John Ratcliffe; and senior White House adviser Stephen Miller, who is a lead architect of the Trump administration’s immigration crackdown.

Trump said that an “overwhelming American military power” was used to capture Maduro and his wife in the “dead of night” from “air, land and sea.”

He added that no U.S. military members were killed in the operation, but did not rule out a continued presence for American troops in Venezuelan territory.

“We’re not afraid of boots on the ground,” Trump said.

Trump said those officials standing behind him at his press conference, “for a period of time,” would “be running” Venezuela.

The president offered few details on what that U.S. intervention would look like, but called it a “partnership.” It’s unclear if there are any American officials or troops stationed yet in or near Venezuela.

Cuba

Trump also lodged a thinly veiled threat against the Cuban government.

“Cuba is not doing really well right now,” Trump said. “I think Cuba is going to be something we’ll end up talking about.”

He added that the U.S. also wants to help Cubans who have been “forced out of their country,” so they

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 38 of 73

can return to the island nation. The Trump administration has also moved to end humanitarian protections for more than 110,000 Cubans.

Rubio, whose parents were part of the first wave of Cuban exiles before the Fidel Castro regime took over the country, agreed, and criticized Cuba's government as being run by "incompetent, senile men."

It's unclear how the next in line to the presidency for Venezuela, Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, will fare.

Trump said that Rubio had a conversation with Rodríguez, and said "she's essentially willing to do what is necessary to make Venezuela great again."

María Corina Machado, the leader of Venezuela's opposition party, and recent Nobel Peace Prize winner for her work to advance democracy in her home country, called for national unity and said that "the hour for freedom has arrived."

"We have struggled for years, we have given it our all, and it has been worth it. What had to happen is happening," she said in a statement.

Indictment in Southern District of New York

Maduro and his wife will face a trial in the U.S. They have been indicted in the Southern District of New York, Attorney General Pam Bondi wrote on social media.

The DOJ also indicted their son, Nicolás Ernesto Maduro Guerra, along with several other Venezuelan politicians, and the alleged leader of the Tren de Aragua Venezuelan gang, Hector Rusthenford Guerrero Flores.

President Maduro is charged with "Narco-Terrorism Conspiracy, Cocaine Importation Conspiracy, Possession of Machineguns and Destructive Devices, and Conspiracy to Possess Machineguns and Destructive Devices against the United States," Bondi said.

In 2020, the first Trump administration lodged the same four counts of narco-terrorism, conspiracy to import cocaine, possession of machine guns and conspiracy to possess machine guns.

The new indictment includes Maduro's wife, son and the alleged leader of the Tren de Aragua gang.

Andy Kim: Officials 'blatantly lied' to Congress

The news drew ire from Congress, which has the authority to declare war. New Jersey Democratic Sen. Andy Kim said for weeks Trump officials briefed Congress that the boat strikes were not "about regime change."

"I didn't trust them then and we see now that they blatantly lied to Congress," Kim wrote on social media. "Trump rejected our Constitutionally required approval process for armed conflict because the Administration knows the American people overwhelmingly reject risks pulling our nation into another war."

However, Senate Majority Leader John Thune, Republican of South Dakota, said the capture of Maduro meant the Venezuelan president would be held accountable.

"President Trump's decisive action to disrupt the unacceptable status quo and apprehend Maduro, through the execution of a valid Department of Justice warrant, is an important first step to bring him to justice for the drug crimes for which he has been indicted in the United States," Thune said.

He added that when senators return to Congress Monday, he looks forward to additional security briefings from Trump officials.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, Republican of Louisiana, made similar remarks and called the attack "justified." He said he's working with the Trump administration to schedule briefings with House lawmakers when they return to Washington.

The top Democrat on the House Rules Committee, Rep. Jim McGovern of Massachusetts, wrote on social media that without "authorization from Congress, and with the vast majority of Americans opposed to military action, Trump just launched an unjustified, illegal strike on Venezuela."

Democratic Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida, who is also co-chair of the Congressional Venezuela Democracy Caucus, said in a statement that the "capture of the brutal, illegitimate ruler of Venezuela ... is welcome news for my friends and neighbors who fled his violent, lawless, and disastrous rule."

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 39 of 73

However, she called for the opportunity for Venezuelans to partake in democracy, such as being able to swear in the presidential candidate who won Venezuela's election in the summer of 2024.

President-elect Edmundo Gonzalez was forced into exile and fled to Spain under asylum. Voter results showed that Gonzalez won by a large margin, but Venezuelan government officials, without providing proof, determined that Maduro won.

Mike Lee speaks to Rubio

Utah's GOP Sen. Mike Lee initially questioned "what, if anything, might constitutionally justify this action in the absence of a declaration of war or authorization for the use of military force."

But Lee later changed course after speaking with Rubio.

"He informed me that Nicolás Maduro has been arrested by U.S. personnel to stand trial on criminal charges in the United States, and that the kinetic action we saw tonight was deployed to protect and defend those executing the arrest warrant," Lee said of Rubio.

Rubio has long stated that Venezuela's president is not legitimate, nor is his government. Rubio accused him of being the head of a drug cartel.

"He is not the legitimate president of Venezuela," Rubio said during Saturday's press conference. "He is a fugitive of American justice."

Rubio, who while in Congress was a senior member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, also defended a lack of notification to lawmakers.

"This is not the kind of mission you can do congressional notification," Rubio said.

For months, Democrats and a handful of Republican lawmakers have tried to curb the president's strikes in the Caribbean, which have killed about 115, but Congress failed to pass several War Powers Resolutions.

The War Powers Resolution of 1973 is a tool for Congress to check the power of the executive branch by limiting the president's ability to initiate or escalate military actions abroad.

Virginia Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine, who has pushed for the Senate to vote on the War Powers Resolution, said he will again advocate a vote to curb Trump's military actions in Venezuela.

Venezuelans in the US

As the U.S. conducts military land strikes on Venezuela, more than half a million Venezuelan immigrants are legally fighting the Trump administration's move to end Temporary Protected Status.

TPS is granted when a nation's home country is deemed too dangerous to return to, due to violence, such as war, or a major natural disaster.

More than 600,000 Venezuelans have TPS, which was initially granted in 2021, just one day before the first Trump administration finished its term. Temporary protections were granted to Venezuelans due to Maduro's regime.

Trump has also tried to apply the Alien Enemies Act of 1798 to any Venezuelan national, aged 14 and older, who is a suspected gang member, for the purpose of removing them from the U.S. without due process.

Trump and Maduro also clashed after several deportation planes carrying Venezuelan immigrants landed in El Salvador, where more than 200 men were detained at a brutal mega-prison known as CECOT.

Maduro called the move a "kidnapping," and several months later the Venezuelans were returned to their home country in a prisoner exchange.

World leaders call for UN to convene

It's unclear what the consequences of the Trump administration's move to capture a foreign leader will have on international relations, but many world leaders disavowed the attacks and called for an emergency United Nations General Assembly meeting.

The U.N., which is five miles away from the New York court where Maduro will stand trial, did not immediately respond to States Newsroom's request for comment.

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo condemned the attacks and said they violated Article 2 of

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 40 of 73

the United Nations Charter.

"Based on its foreign policy principles and its pacifist vocation, Mexico makes an urgent call to respect international law, as well as the principles and purposes of the UN Charter, and to cease any act of aggression against the Venezuelan government and people," she said in a statement.

Sheinbaum Pardo called on the United Nations to "act immediately to contribute to the de-escalation of tensions, facilitate dialogue and create conditions that allow a peaceful, sustainable solution in accordance with international law."

Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs also criticized the attack in Caracas, Venezuela.

"The justifications put forward for these actions have no factual basis. Ideological hostility has prevailed over pragmatic, businesslike approaches and over efforts to build relationships based on trust and predictability," according to Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Brazil's president, Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, said on social media that the U.S. moves to capture Maduro and bomb Venezuela "cross an unacceptable line."

"Attacking countries, in flagrant violation of international law, is the first step toward a world of violence, chaos, and instability, where the law of the strongest prevails over multilateralism," he wrote.

The prime minister of Spain, Pedro Sanchez, called for de-escalation and said that international law "and the principles of the United Nations Charter must be respected."

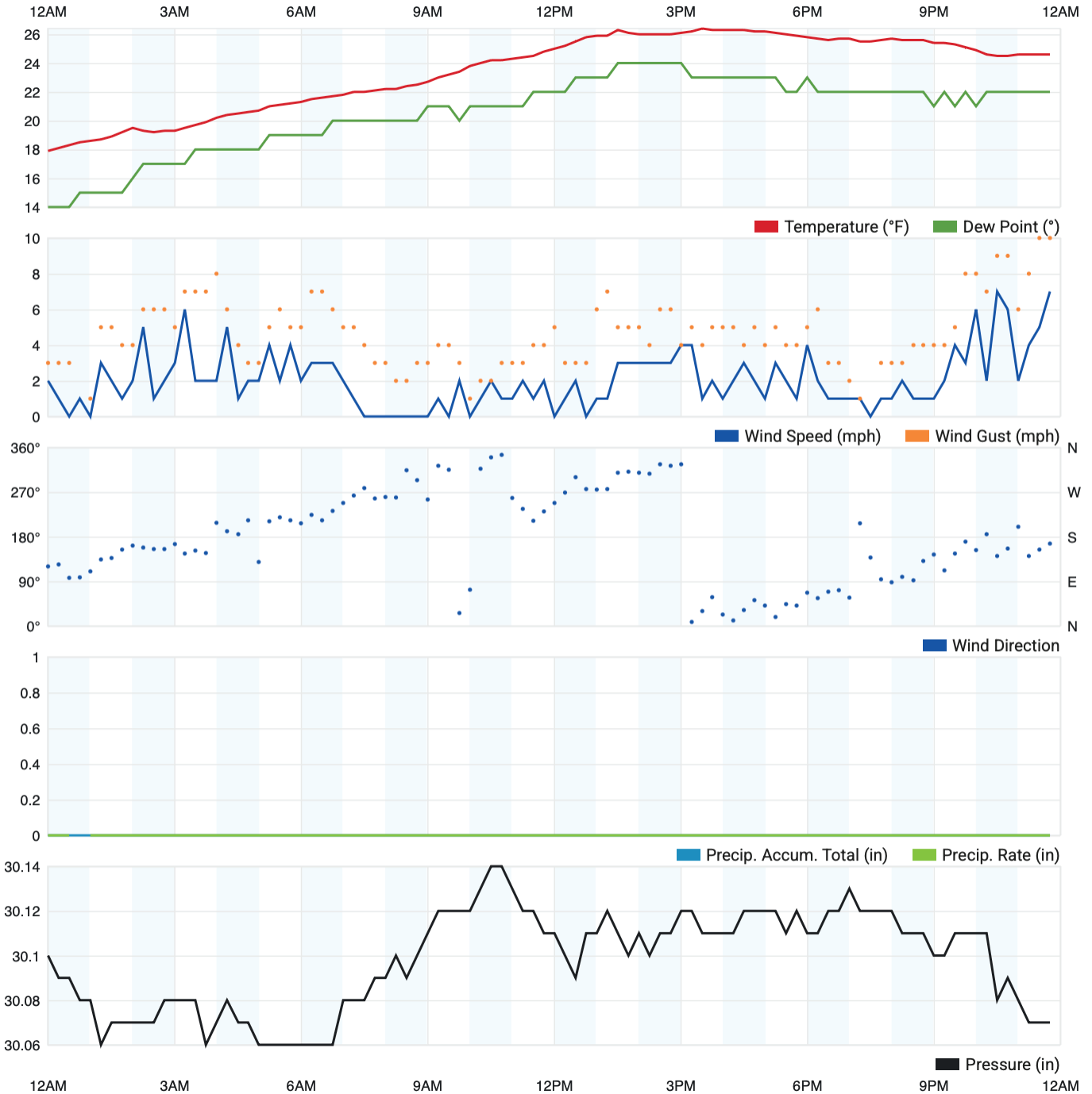
Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include immigration, congressional policy and legal challenges with a focus on how those policies impact the lives of immigrants and migrants coming to the U.S.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 41 of 73

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

January 3, 2026



Broton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 42 of 73

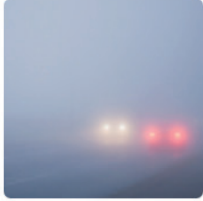
Today

Tonight

Monday

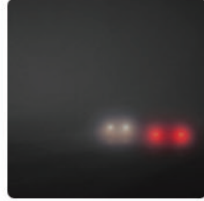
Monday Night

Tuesday



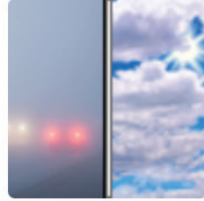
High: 32 °F

Patchy Fog



Low: 21 °F

Areas Fog



High: 35 °F

Patchy Fog
then Mostly
Cloudy



Low: 21 °F

Mostly Cloudy



20 %

High: 32 °F

Slight Chance
Snow then
Mostly Sunny



Fog - Black Ice - Freezing Drizzle

January 4, 2026
3:27 AM

Low level moisture not going anywhere

Key Messages

- Pockets of Dense Fog, Black Ice and Freezing Drizzle scattered across central / north central / northeast South Dakota and parts of West Central Minnesota this morning
- Another system this afternoon with isolated sprinkles may generate a light glaze of ice for far Northeast South Dakota & West Central Minnesota
- Nothing to get rid of the moisture
 - Fog and low clouds to continue into the work week

DENSE FOG IS A ROAD HAZARD



Turn on your low-beam headlights when approaching fog



Drive slowly, and keep your distance from other vehicles



Consider delaying travel when a Dense Fog Advisory is issued

Black Ice

Black ice is difficult to see and makes roads very slippery, especially bridges and overpasses



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

With the low level moisture still in place, we're seeing pockets of dense fog, freezing drizzle and black ice this morning. As the day progresses, should be a little less of this, however there is a weak system moving across the area. This might generate some light rain/sprinkles up in the far northeast, with temperatures right around freezing, so we cant rule out a little light ice. The moisture isn't going anywhere, though temperatures will be moderating over the next few days.

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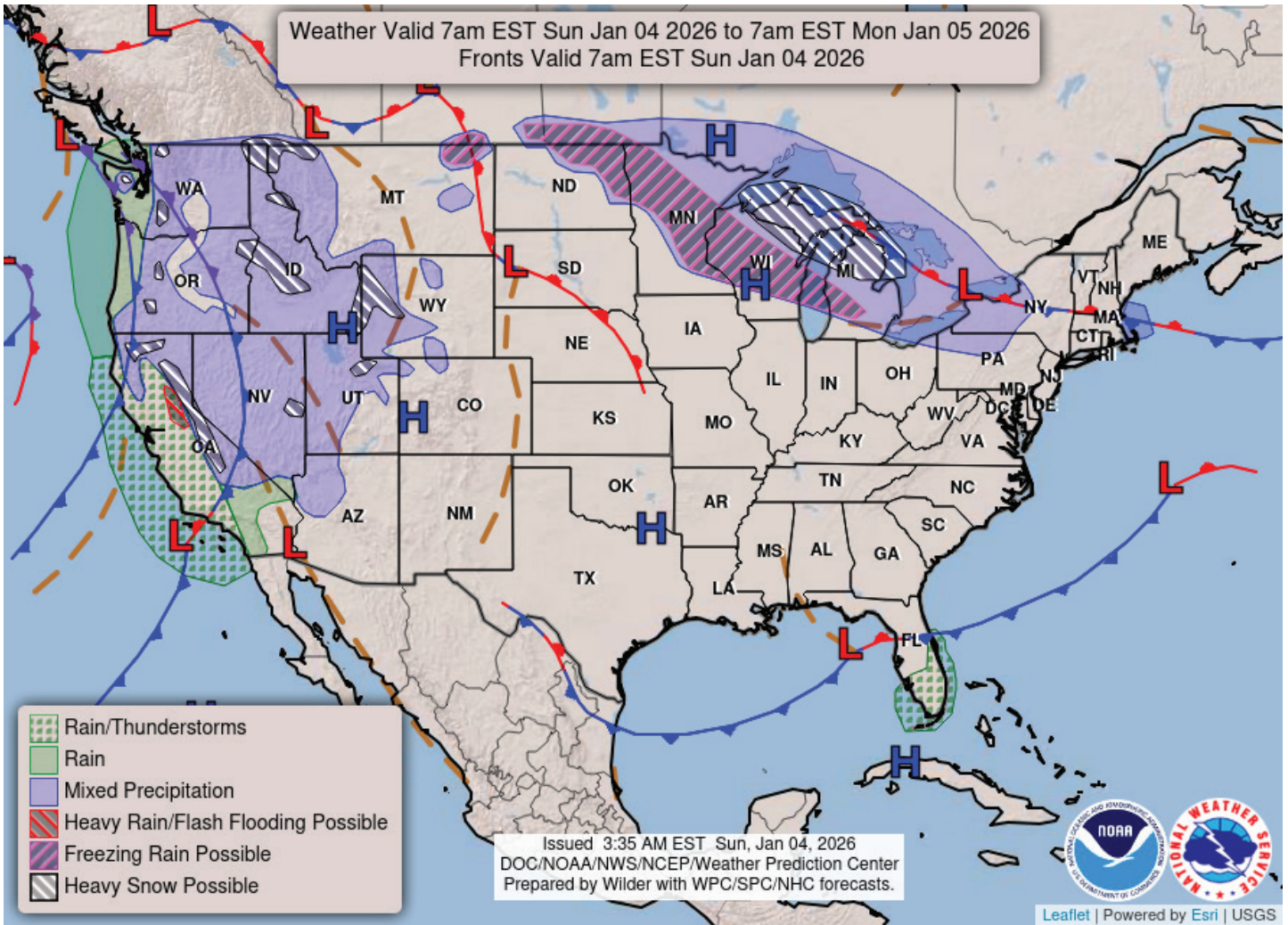
Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 43 of 73

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 26 °F at 3:24 PM
Low Temp: 18 °F at 12:03 AM
Wind: 12 mph at 11:18 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 54 in 2012
Record Low: -34 in 1912
Average High: 24
Average Low: 3
Average Precip in Jan.: 0.08
Precip to date in Jan.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 0.08
Precip Year to Date: 0.00
Sunset Tonight: 5:02 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:12 am



Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 44 of 73

Today in Weather History

January 4, 1986: Snowfall amounts of 1 to 3 inches and winds gusting to around 40 mph produced ground blizzard conditions in western South Dakota. Visibility was near zero in many locations, with blowing and drifting snow blocking some roads. Some roads were closed in western South Dakota. Several accidents occurred, with many cars ending up in the ditch.

January 4, 2005: Heavy snow of up to 10 inches fell across much of Lyman and Jones counties from the 4th until mid-morning of the 5th.

1641: According to historical records, Mount Parker, a stratovolcano on Mindanao Island in the Philippines, erupted on this day. The eruption caused the formation of a crater lake called Lake Maughan.

1888 — Sacramento, CA, received 3.5 inches of snow, an all-time record for that location. The heaviest snow in recent history was two inches on February 5th in 1976. (4th-5th) (The Weather Channel)

1917: A tornado with estimated F3 damage cut a 15-mile path and struck a school at Vireton in Pittsburg County, Oklahoma, killing 16 people. It ranks as the 4th worst school tornado disaster in U.S. history.

1971 — A blizzard raged from Kansas to Wisconsin, claiming 27 lives in Iowa. Winds reached 50 mph, and the storm produced up to 20 inches of snow. (David Ludlum)

1982 — Milwaukee, WI, was shut down completely as a storm buried the city under 16 inches of snow in 24 hours. It was the worst storm in thirty-five years. (David Ludlum)

1987 — A storm moving off the Pacific Ocean spread wintery weather across the southwestern U.S., with heavy snow extending from southern California to western Wyoming. Up to 15 inches of snow blanketed the mountains of southern California, and rainfall totals in California ranged up to 2.20 inches in the Chino area. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 — Frigid arctic air invading the central and eastern U.S. left Florida about the only safe refuge from the cold and snow. A storm in the western U.S. soaked Bodega Bay in central California with 3.12 inches of rain. (National Weather Summary)

1989 — Up to a foot of snow blanketed the mountains of West Virginia, and strong winds in the north-eastern U.S. produced wind chill readings as cold as 60 degrees below zero in Maine. Mount Washington NH reported wind gusts to 136 mph along with a temperature of 30 below zero! (National Weather Summary)

1990 — A winter storm moving out of the southwestern U.S. spread heavy snow across Nebraska and Iowa into Wisconsin. Snowfall totals in Nebraska ranged up to 7 inches at Auburn and Tecumseh. Totals in Iowa ranged up to 11 inches at Carlisle. In Iowa, most of the snow fell between midnight and 4 AM. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1994 — A major winter storm blanketed much of the northeastern U.S. with heavy snow. More than two feet was reported in northwestern Pennsylvania, with 33 inches at Waynesburg. There were ten heart attacks, and 185 injuries, related to the heavy snow in northwest Pennsylvania. Whiteout conditions were reported in Vermont and northeastern New York State. A wind gusts to 75 mph was clocked at Shaftsbury VT. In the Adirondacks of eastern New York State, the town of Tupper reported five inches of snow between 1 PM and 2 PM. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2018: NOAA's GOES-East satellite caught a dramatic view of the Bombogenesis 'Bomb Cyclone' moving up the East Coast on the morning of January 4, 2018. The powerful nor'easter is battering coastal areas with heavy snow and strong winds, from Florida to Maine. Notice the long line of clouds stretching over a thousand miles south of the storm. The storm is drawing moisture all the way from deep in the Caribbean.

A Lifetime of Second Chances **We can do nothing to deserve the Lord's kindness—** **He freely gives it because of His great love.**

Romans 5:1-6

1 Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
2 through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in hope of the glory of God.

3 And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance;

4 and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope;

5 and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

6 For while we were still helpless, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.

Paul used a beautiful phrase to describe the believer's position in Christ: "We have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand ..." (Rom. 5:2, emphasis added). This is no puddle of mercy, but rather a mighty ocean. The Lord's kindness is endless, far greater than all of our mistakes.

Grace is an essential concept for believers to grasp: God sent Jesus to the cross to pay for our sin and now freely offers His forgiveness and favor to all. Many people misunderstand this, however—they may speak about God's kindness as a gift, but their actions show they're still trying to earn it. The truth is, if we have to merit or work for grace, it's not a gift (Ephesians 2:8-9).

While the Word is clear that works can't save us (Galatians 2:16), they can be beneficial for spiritual growth and service. In fact, Christians are called upon to serve the Lord every day. From the outside, it's usually impossible to discern someone else's reasons for good works, but God knows the motivation of every heart.

Keep in mind that serving God in order to earn His favor or ensure that He continues blessing you amounts to trying to barter for His grace. You can do nothing to deserve the Lord's kindness! He pours it upon believers freely, so the only thing you can "do" is receive it.

We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 46 of 73

The Groton Independent

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Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 47 of 73



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.02.26

6 13 34 43 52 4

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$180,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.03.26

3 4 5 25 42 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$11,830,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.03.26

1 2 28 30 43 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 52 Mins 51 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.03.26

7 13 17 28 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$172,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.03.26

28 40 52 53 54 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

01.03.26

18 21 40 53 60 23

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$86,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 48 of 73

News from the **AP** Associated Press

BOYS PREP BASKETBALL

Bismarck, N.D. 92, T F Riggs High School 56
Bison 58, Edgemont 33
Britton-Hecla 54, Tri-State, N.D. 20
Centerville 78, White River 40
Clark-Willow Lake 59, Vermillion 49
Dakota Valley 74, Lakota Tech 35
DeSmet 71, Wynot, Neb. 59
Dickinson Trinity, N.D. 57, Rapid City Christian 54
Hettinger-Scranton, N.D. 64, Faith 59
Huron 68, Sioux Falls Washington 52
Kadoka 60, Lead-Deadwood 57
Leola-Frederick High School 49, Waubay/Summit 48
Luverne, Minn. 44, Baltic 42
Lyman 65, Emery 47
Madison 63, Worthington, Minn. 58
Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 103, Bennett County 58
Miller 55, Bon Homme 25
Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 55, Canistota 43
Rapid City Stevens 63, Rapid City Central 45
South Heart, N.D. 79, Lemmon High School 57
Tea 62, Sturgis Brown High School 40
Viborg-Hurley 61, Wall 51
Wagner 72, Avon 53
Watertown 69, Douglas 49
Wilmot 70, Langford 62
Wolsey-Wessington 64, Faulkton 57
Yankton 68, Aberdeen Central 35

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

GIRLS PREP BASKETBALL

Aberdeen Central 76, Yankton 51
Baltic 50, Belle Fourche 36
Bismarck, N.D. 57, T F Riggs High School 44
Bison 54, Edgemont 50
Britton-Hecla 54, Rosholt 33
Centerville 47, Emery 30
Ethan 66, Wall 39
Faulkton 37, Wolsey-Wessington 28
Harding County 55, Hill City 52
Hettinger-Scranton, N.D. 42, Faith 31
Kadoka 55, Lead-Deadwood 15
Langford 47, Wilmot 19
Lemmon High School 66, South Heart, N.D. 37
Lyman 44, Corsica/Stickney 35

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 49 of 73

Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud 80, Bennett County 35
McCook Central-Montrose 68, Viborg-Hurley 20
McIntosh High School 60, Oelrichs 19
Miller 41, Bon Homme 24
Oldham-Ramona-Rutland 53, Canistota 47
Rapid City Christian 76, Dickinson Trinity, N.D. 30
Sioux Falls Washington 63, Huron 41
Sioux Valley 62, Mobridge-Pollock 47
Tea 49, Sturgis Brown High School 31
Wagner 62, Avon 42
Watertown 44, Douglas 28
Waubay/Summit 57, Leola-Frederick High School 28

Some high school basketball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Youngstown State QB Beau Brungard wins Walter Payton Award as FCS offensive player of year

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Youngstown State quarterback Beau Brungard won the Walter Payton Award as the Football Championship Subdivision offensive player of the year Saturday night at the Stats Perform FCS National Awards Show.

Brungard had 177 points, receiving 28 first-place votes from a national panel. Western Carolina quarterback Taron Dickens with 138 with 10 first-place votes, and North Dakota State quarterback Cole Payton had 94 with six first-place votes.

Brungard edged fellow Western Carolina quarterback Taron Dickens and North Dakota State quarterback Cole Payton in voting by a national panel.

The winner was announced two days before Montana State faces Illinois State in the FCS title game at Vanderbilt University. Former Montana State quarterback Tommy Mellott won the award last year.

The first Youngstown State player to win the award that started in 1987, Brungard completed 277 of 403 passes for 3,230 yards and 26 touchdowns this season. The junior ran for 1,468 yards and 27 touchdowns on 242 carries. The Penguins finished 8-5, blowing a 35-7 halftime lead in a 43-42 first-round loss to Yale.

Mercer defensive tackle Andrew Zock won the Buck Buchanan Award as the top defensive player. He's in the transfer portal.

Uelmen's 17 lead North Dakota over South Dakota State 90-87 in OT

By The Associated Press undefined

GRAND FORKS, N.D. (AP) — Greyson Uelmen had 17 points in North Dakota's 90-87 overtime win against South Dakota State on Saturday.

Uelmen shot 4 of 10 from the field, including 1 for 7 from 3-point range, and went 8 for 8 from the line for the Fighting Hawks (8-10, 2-0 Summit League). Anthony Smith III scored 16 points while going 6 of 10 from the floor, including 1 for 3 from 3-point range, and 3 for 4 from the line and added five assists. Zach Kraft finished 4 of 9 from 3-point range to finish with 14 points.

Joe Saylor led the Jackrabbits (8-9, 1-1) in scoring, finishing with 27 points. Jaden Jackson added 22 points, six rebounds and two steals for South Dakota State. Damon Wilkinson also had 11 points and eight rebounds.

The game was tied at 79 at the end of regulation. Garrett Anderson's 3-pointer with 17 seconds left in overtime gave North Dakota an 88-87 lead and Uelmen added two free throws with eight seconds remaining.

Drone strike kills 1 in Russian border region ahead of Ukraine peace talks

By The Associated Press undefined

One person was killed and two others wounded when a Ukrainian drone struck a car in the Russian border region of Belgorod, local officials said Sunday, ahead of peace talks to end the nearly 4-year-old war in Paris this week.

Belgorod regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said a young child was among the wounded.

In Ukraine, three people were wounded in the Kharkiv region in drone strikes overnight into Sunday, the country's State Emergency Service said.

Meanwhile, the death toll from a Russian missile attack on the city of Kharkiv on Friday increased to four when two other bodies were found under the rubble of a building, Kharkiv regional head Oleh Syniehubov wrote on Telegram Sunday.

The latest attacks came after national security advisers from Europe and other allies visited Kyiv on Saturday to discuss security guarantees and economic support, as a U.S.-led diplomatic push to end the war in Ukraine intensifies.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, preparing to travel to Paris for a meeting with partners, said Saturday that work on the peace proposals could now accelerate as Ukraine has shared all documents under discussion with the 18 national security advisers, including those on security guarantees.

He said representatives from Ukraine's General Staff and military sector would meet on Monday in Paris, followed by a meeting Tuesday of European leaders, where he said he hoped documents on security guarantees would be finalized. He said there also would be meetings with U.S. representatives in Paris.

Maduro arrives in US after stunning capture in operation that Trump says will let US 'run' Venezuela

By REGINA GARCIA CANO, KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Deposed Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro arrived in the United States to face criminal charges after being captured in an audacious nighttime military operation that President Donald Trump said would set the U.S. up to "run" the South American country and tap its vast oil reserves to sell to other nations.

Maduro landed Saturday evening at a small airport in New York following the middle-of-the-night operation that extracted him and his wife, Cilia Flores, from their home in a military base in the capital city of Caracas — an act that Maduro's government called "imperialist." The couple faces U.S. charges of participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy.

The dramatic action capped an intensive Trump administration pressure campaign on Venezuela's autocratic leader and months of secret planning, resulting in the most assertive American action to achieve regime change since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Legal experts raised questions about the lawfulness of the operation, which was done without congressional approval. Venezuela's vice president, Delcy Rodríguez, meanwhile, demanded that the United States free Maduro and called him the country's rightful leader as her nation's high court named her interim president.

Some Venezuelan civilians and members of the military were killed, said Rodríguez, who didn't give a number. Trump said some U.S. forces were injured, but none were killed.

Speaking to reporters hours after Maduro's capture, Trump revealed his plans to exploit the leadership void to "fix" the country's oil infrastructure and sell "large amounts" of oil to other countries.

Trump says US will 'run the country'

The Trump administration promoted the ouster as a step toward reducing the flow of dangerous drugs into the U.S. The president touted what he saw as other potential benefits, including a leadership stake in the country and greater control of oil.

Trump claimed the U.S. government would help lead the country and was already doing so, though there

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 51 of 73

were no immediate visible signs of that. Venezuelan state TV aired pro-Maduro propaganda and broadcast live images of supporters taking to the streets in Caracas in protest.

"We're going to run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition," Trump said at a Mar-a-Lago news conference. He boasted that this "extremely successful operation should serve as warning to anyone who would threaten American sovereignty or endanger American lives."

Maduro and other Venezuelan officials were indicted in 2020 on narco-terrorism conspiracy charges, and the Justice Department released a new indictment Saturday of Maduro and his wife that painted his administration as a "corrupt, illegitimate government" fueled by a drug-trafficking operation that flooded the U.S. with cocaine. The U.S. government does not recognize Maduro as the country's leader.

The Trump administration spent months building up American forces in the region and carrying out attacks on boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean for allegedly ferrying drugs. Last week, the CIA was behind a drone strike at a docking area believed to have been used by Venezuelan drug cartels — the first known direct operation on Venezuelan soil since the U.S. campaign began in September.

Early morning attack

Taking place 36 years to the day after the 1990 surrender and seizure of Panama leader Manuel Antonio Noriega following a U.S. invasion, the Venezuela operation unfolded under the cover of darkness early Saturday. Trump said the U.S. turned off "almost all of the lights" in Caracas while forces moved in to extract Maduro and his wife.

Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said U.S. forces had rehearsed their maneuvers for months, learning everything about Maduro — where he was and what he ate, as well as details of his pets and his clothes.

"We think, we develop, we train, we rehearse, we debrief, we rehearse again and again," Caine said. "Not to get it right, but to ensure we cannot get it wrong."

Multiple explosions rang out that morning, and low-flying aircraft swept through Caracas. Maduro's government accused the United States of hitting civilian and military installations, calling it an "imperialist attack" and urging citizens to take to the streets. The explosions — at least seven blasts — sent people rushing into the streets, while others took to social media to report what they saw and heard.

Under Venezuelan law, Rodríguez would take over from Maduro. Rodríguez, however, stressed during a Saturday appearance on state television that she did not plan to assume power, before Venezuela's high court ordered that she become interim president.

"There is only one president in Venezuela," Rodríguez said, "and his name is Nicolás Maduro Moros."

Some streets in Caracas fill up

Venezuela's ruling party has held power since 1999, when Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chávez, took office, promising to uplift poor people and later to implement a self-described socialist revolution.

Maduro took over when Chávez died in 2013. His 2018 reelection was widely considered a sham because the main opposition parties were banned from participating. During the 2024 election, electoral authorities loyal to the ruling party declared him the winner hours after polls closed, but the opposition gathered overwhelming evidence that he lost by a more than 2-to-1 margin.

In a demonstration of how polarizing Maduro is, people variously took to the streets to protest his capture, while others celebrated it. At a protest in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas, Mayor Carmen Meléndez joined a crowd demanding Maduro's return.

"Maduro, hold on, the people are rising up!" the crowd chanted. "We are here, Nicolás Maduro. If you can hear us, we are here!"

In other parts of the city, the streets were empty hours after the attack.

"How do I feel? Scared, like everyone," said Caracas resident Noris Prada, who sat on an empty avenue looking at his phone. "Venezuelans woke up scared. Many families couldn't sleep."

In Doral, Florida, home to the largest Venezuelan community in the United States, people wrapped themselves in Venezuelan flags, ate fried snacks and cheered as music played. At one point, the crowd chanted "Liberty! Liberty! Liberty!"

Questions of legality linger

Whether the United States violated any laws, international or otherwise, was still a question early Sunday. "There are a number of international legal concepts which the United States might have broken by capturing Maduro," said Ilan Katz, an international law analyst.

In New York, the U.N. Security Council, acting on an emergency request from Colombia, planned to hold a meeting on U.S. operations in Venezuela on Monday morning. That was according to a council diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a meeting not yet made public.

Lawmakers from both American political parties have raised reservations and flat-out objections to the U.S. attacks on boats suspected of drug smuggling. Congress has not approved an authorization for the use of military force for such operations in the region.

Connecticut Rep. Jim Himes, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said he had seen no evidence that would justify Trump striking Venezuela without approval from Congress and demanded an immediate briefing by the administration on "its plan to ensure stability in the region and its legal justification for this decision."

Maduro's ouster sparks celebrations among Venezuelans in South Florida

By VANESSA A. ALVAREZ, TIM REYNOLDS and BRUCE SCHREINER Associated Press

DORAL, Fla. (AP) — Revelers chanted "liberty" and draped Venezuelan flags over their shoulders in South Florida on Saturday to celebrate the U.S. military operation to capture Nicolás Maduro and remove him from the country — a stunning outcome they had longed for but left them wondering what comes next in their troubled homeland.

For some Venezuelan natives, the military action — culminating months of stepped-up U.S. pressure — brought their dreams of reuniting with loved ones closer to reality after years of heartbreaking separations.

People gathered for a rally in Doral — the Miami suburb where President Donald Trump has a golf resort and where roughly half the population is of Venezuelan descent — as word spread that Venezuela's now-deposed president had been captured and flown out of the country.

Outside El Arepazo restaurant, a hub of the Venezuelan culture of Doral, one man held a piece of cardboard with "Libertad" scrawled with a black marker. It was a sentiment expressed by other native Venezuelans hoping for a new beginning for their home country as they chanted "Liberty! Liberty! Liberty!"

"We're like everybody — it's a combination of feelings, of course," said Alejandra Arrieta, who came to the U.S. in 1997. "There's fears. There's excitement. There's so many years that we've been waiting for this. Something had to happen in Venezuela. We all need the freedom."

Some Venezuelan exiles feel hopeful after US actions

For David Nuñez, the regime change offered hope for a long-awaited reunion with loved ones.

Nuñez said he fled to the United States six years ago after being persecuted in Venezuela for his political activism and has not seen his daughters — ages 8 and 17 — since then.

"The most important thing is that we're going to be able to be with our families soon," Nuñez said. "At least for me, I haven't seen my daughters in six years so I have a lot of mixed feelings. I've cried a lot. I'm really happy because I know that I'm going to be able to return to Venezuela very soon."

Trump insisted Saturday that the U.S. government would run the country at least temporarily and was already doing so. The action marked the culmination of an escalating Trump administration pressure campaign on the oil-rich South American nation as well as weeks of planning that tracked Maduro's behavioral habits.

After Trump's press conference about U.S. actions in Venezuela, people still gathered outside of the Doral restaurant sang, danced and waved flags. A percussionist drummed along with the singing crowd.

People started gathering outside the restaurant once the news broke. Cooks were told to stay and prepare more food for anticipated high demand. Hundreds showed up, and the crowd kept growing as the

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 53 of 73

day went on.

Some say Maduro's ouster was long awaited

Alexa Perez said she has waited year for this moment.

"Thanks, President Trump. This is our second liberty. This our independence day from today on," Perez said.

She married a week ago and said the news was the "best wedding gift" possible.

Her husband, Aldo Amenta, said they were scared, excited and confused at first and felt better when they learned their family members were safe.

"We're really happy and excited that the doors are open for Venezuela, for all of our people who deserve a chance," Amenta said.

Perez responded positively to apparent U.S. plans to run Venezuela at least temporarily and tap its vast oil reserves to sell to other nations, saying her homeland has not received anything from Russia, Iran and China.

"We are very poor, we have no hospital, we have no rights for our people," Perez said. "So I think this is going to be a great transition. Because once you know how the U.S. works, you know that everything can work better."

The Venezuelan diaspora grew over decades

About 8 million people have fled the country since 2014, settling first in neighboring countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. After the COVID-19 pandemic, they increasingly set their sights on the United States, walking through the jungle in Colombia and Panama or flying to the U.S. on humanitarian parole with a financial sponsor.

In South Florida, deep-seated concerns in the Venezuelan community about Trump's tough immigration policies gave way to celebrations after Maduro was deposed in the American military operation early Saturday.

In Doral, upper-middle-class professionals and entrepreneurs came to invest in property and businesses when socialist Hugo Chávez won the presidency in the late 1990s. They were followed by political opponents and entrepreneurs who set up small businesses. In recent years, more lower-income Venezuelans have come for work in service industries.

They are doctors, lawyers, beauticians, construction workers and house cleaners. Some are naturalized U.S. citizens or live in the country illegally with U.S.-born children. Others overstay tourist visas, seek asylum or have some form of temporary status.

'Not a guarantee, but a possibility, for recovery'

Niurka Meléndez, who fled from Venezuela in 2015, said Saturday she's hopeful that Maduro's ouster will improve life in her homeland. Meléndez immigrated to New York City, where she co-founded the group Venezuelans and Immigrants Aid, which strives to empower the lives of immigrants. She became a steadfast advocate for change in her home country, where she said her countrymen faced a humanitarian crisis.

Now, she hopes those hardships will fade away.

"For us, it's just the start of the justice we need to see," Meléndez said in a phone interview.

Her homeland had reached a "breaking point" due to forced displacements, repression, hunger and fear, she said. Now there's a need for international humanitarian support to help in Venezuela's recovery.

"Removing an authoritarian system responsible for these crimes creates the possibility, not a guarantee, but a possibility, for recovery," she said. "A future without criminal control over institutions is the minimum condition for rebuilding a country based on justice, rule of law, and democratic safeguards."

Venezuelans wonder who's in charge as Trump claims contact with Maduro's deputy

By REGINA GARCIA CANO, JUAN ARRAEZ and ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuelans on Saturday scrambled to understand who was in charge of their country after the U.S. military captured President Nicolás Maduro, ousting the strongman who had

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 54 of 73

outlasted a botched coup attempt, several army mutinies, mass protests and economic sanctions in the vast nation of 29 million.

"What will happen tomorrow?" asked Juan Pablo Petrone, a resident of Venezuela's capital of Caracas. As fear gripped the city, streets quickly emptied save for long lines snaking from supermarkets and gas stations. "What will happen in the next hour?"

President Donald Trump offered a shocking answer: The United States would take control of Venezuela, perhaps in coordination with one of Maduro's most trusted aides.

Delcy Rodríguez, who is next in the presidential line of succession, served as Maduro's vice president since 2018, overseeing much of Venezuela's oil-dependent economy as well as its feared intelligence service. On Saturday, Venezuela's high court ordered her to assume the role of interim president.

"She's essentially willing to do what we think is necessary to make Venezuela great again," Trump told reporters of Rodríguez, who faced U.S. sanctions during Trump's first administration for her role in undermining Venezuelan democracy.

In a major snub, Trump said opposition leader Maria Corina Machado, who was awarded last year's Nobel Peace Prize, didn't have the support to run the country.

Trump said Rodríguez had a long conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio in which Trump claimed she said, "We'll do whatever you need."

"I think she was quite gracious," Trump added. "We can't take a chance that somebody else takes over Venezuela that doesn't have the good of the Venezuelan people in mind."

Senior officials remain in place

Key Venezuelan officials appeared to have survived the military operation and held onto their jobs, at least for now. There was no immediate sign that the U.S. was running Venezuela.

Rodríguez tried to project strength and unity among the ruling party's many factions, downplaying any hint of betrayal. In remarks on state television before the court decision, she demanded the immediate release of Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, and denounced the U.S. operation as a flagrant violation of the United Nations charter.

"There is only one president in this country, and his name is Nicolás Maduro," Rodríguez said, surrounded by top civilian officials and military commanders.

Seeking to assuage the jittery public, Venezuelan military officials struck a defiant tone in video messages, lashing out at Trump and vowing to stand up to U.S. pressure.

"They have attacked us but will not break us," said Defense Minister Gen. Vladimir Padrino López, dressed in fatigues.

Interior Minister Diosdado Cabello, among Maduro's top enforcers, urged Venezuelans to "get out on the streets" to defend the country's sovereignty.

"These rats attacked and they will regret what they did," he said of the U.S.

Some Venezuelans heeded his call, rallying in support of the government and burning American flags in scattered gatherings across Caracas on Saturday.

But most people stayed inside out of fear.

"What's happening is unprecedented," said Yanire Lucas, another Caracas resident, picking up pieces of glass from an explosion at a nearby military base that blew out the windows of her house.

"We're still on edge, and now we're unsure what to do."

No sign of a political transition

Trump indicated that Rodríguez had been sworn in already as president of Venezuela, per the transfer of power outlined in the constitution.

But state TV did not broadcast any swearing-in ceremony.

During Rodríguez's televised speech, a ticker at the bottom of the screen identified her as the vice president. She gave no sign that she would be cooperating with the U.S., and did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"What is being done to Venezuela is an atrocity that violates international law," she said in her address.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 55 of 73

"History and justice will make the extremists who promoted this armed aggression pay."

The Venezuelan constitution also says a new election must be called within a month in the event of the president's absence. But experts have been debating whether the succession scenario would apply here, given the government's lack of popular legitimacy and the extraordinary U.S. military intervention.

Strong ties with Wall Street

A lawyer educated in Britain and France, Rodríguez has a long history of representing the revolution started by the late Hugo Chávez on the world stage.

She and her brother, Jorge Rodríguez, head of the Maduro-controlled National Assembly, have sterling leftist credentials born from tragedy. Their father was a socialist leader who died in police custody in the 1970s, a crime that shook many activists of the era, including a young Maduro.

Unlike many in Maduro's inner circle, the Rodríguez siblings have avoided criminal indictment in the U.S.

Delcy Rodríguez developed strong ties with Republicans in the oil industry and on Wall Street who balked at the notion of U.S.-led regime change.

Among her past interlocutors were Blackwater founder Erik Prince and, more recently, Richard Grenell, a Trump special envoy who tried to negotiate a deal with Maduro for greater U.S. influence in Venezuela.

Internal tensions could erupt

Fluent in English, Rodríguez is sometimes portrayed as a well-educated, market-friendly moderate in contrast to the military hard-liners who took up arms with Chávez against Venezuela's democratically elected president in the 1990s.

Many of them, especially Cabello, are wanted in the U.S. on drug trafficking charges and stand accused of serious human rights abuses. But they continue to hold sway over the armed forces, the traditional arbiter of political disputes in Venezuela.

That presents major challenges to Rodríguez asserting authority. But some analysts said they expected Venezuela's power brokers to close ranks, as they've done before.

"These leaders have all seen the value of staying united. Cabello has always taken a second seat or third seat, knowing that his fate is tied up with Maduro's, and now he very well might do that again," said David Smilde, a sociology professor at Tulane University who has studied Venezuela's political dynamics over the past three decades.

Much depends on the state of Venezuela's military after the U.S. bombing raid, Smilde added. "If it doesn't have much firepower anymore, they're more vulnerable and diminished."

An snub of the opposition

Shortly before Trump's press conference, Machado, the opposition leader, called on her ally Edmundo González — a retired diplomat widely considered to have won the country's disputed 2024 presidential election — to "immediately assume his constitutional mandate and be recognized as commander-in-chief."

In a triumphant statement, Machado promised that her movement would "restore order, free political prisoners, build an exceptional country and bring our children back home."

She added: "Today we are prepared to assert our mandate and take power."

Trump seemed to throw cold water on those plans.

Asked about Machado, Trump was blunt: "I think it would be very tough for (Machado) to be the leader," he said, shocking many Venezuelan viewers who expected Trump's talk of liberation to mean a swift democratic transition.

"She doesn't have the support or respect within the country."

Machado has not responded to Trump's remarks.

US military operation in Venezuela disrupts Caribbean holiday travel, hundreds of flights canceled

By MATT O'BRIEN, JOSH FUNK and AUDREY MCAVOY Associated Press

The U.S. military operation that captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and flew him out of the country early Saturday also disrupted Caribbean travel at a busy travel time for the region.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 56 of 73

No airline flights were crossing over Venezuela that day, according to FlightRadar24.com. And major airlines canceled hundreds of flights across the eastern Caribbean region and warned passengers that disruptions could continue for days after the Federal Aviation Administration imposed restrictions.

Flights were canceled to and from Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Aruba and more than a dozen other destinations in the Lesser Antilles island group north of Venezuela. Airlines waived change fees for passengers who had to reschedule flights.

But U.S. Transportation Secretary Sean Duffy said Saturday night that the restrictions would end at midnight EST and airlines would be able to resume normal operations Sunday.

Southwest Airlines said in a statement that it added six extra round-trip flights to Puerto Rico on Sunday's schedule and another eight round-trips on Monday to help get travelers home from their vacations. It also added two additional Sunday flights to Aruba.

At the Queen Beatrix airport in Aruba, a popular holiday destination for U.S. vacationers just 15 miles (24 kilometers) off Venezuela's coast, officials said they expected a return to normal Sunday after a day of canceled flights that stranded travelers or blocked them from flying to the island.

In Barbados, Prime Minister Mia Mottley said at a news conference that "the consequences of the conflict have been exceedingly disruptive to both of our ports of entry," an airport as well as a seaport from which cruise ships sail.

In Puerto Rico, Lou Levine, his wife and their three children were due to return to the Washington, D.C., area Saturday morning, but he woke up to his wife saying their flight was canceled. He found out why when he checked his phone.

They first tried calling JetBlue to reschedule. The airline called back about two hours later, but the agent was not able to help them. Levine and his wife saw others messaging JetBlue on social media and did the same. The airline responded and booked them on a flight Saturday, turning their weeklong New Year's holiday into a two-week sojourn.

Levine, a manager at a software company, said he is fortunate to have a flexible and understanding employer. But his daughter will be missing a week of high school. And then there are the unexpected expenses.

"I love it here. But we have dog-sitting and cat-sitting and car rental. It's fine. It's just really painful on the wallet," Levine said.

The Levines hoped to book an earlier trip back if possible.

This weekend was already past the peak 13-day holiday period when AAA projected that 122.4 million Americans would travel at least 50 miles (80 kilometers) from home, but there were plenty of travelers still trying to squeeze in some more time on tropical beaches before heading back to colder temperatures.

"The Caribbean is a top destination this time of the year," AAA spokesperson Aixa Diaz said. "We do have a lot of people who are trying to get back home this weekend ahead of work and school on Monday."

Diaz said "it's understandable we want to unplug," but travelers should keep track of what's going on and allow airlines to send them phone alerts.

An announcement by Luis Muñoz Marín International Airport in San Juan, Puerto Rico, that was posted on the social platform X said restrictions were put in place because of the "security situation related to military activity" in Venezuela.

As a result, nearly 60% of all flights to and from that airport were canceled Saturday, according to FlightAware.com.

Foreign airlines and military aircraft were not included in the restriction, the statement said. Air Canada said its flights to the Caribbean were operating normally, though it gave travelers an option to rebook. Another Canadian airline, WestJet, said it canceled Aruba flights "out of an abundance of caution."

All major U.S. airlines cancelled flights across the Eastern Caribbean Saturday because of the restrictions and adjusted their schedules.

Nearly two dozen island destinations were affected by the cancellations, including Anguilla, Antigua, Curacao, St. Lucia and the U.S. and British Virgin Islands. But destinations farther to the west like the

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 57 of 73

Dominican Republic and Jamaica were generally not affected.

New York-based JetBlue said it canceled about 215 flights "due to airspace closures across the Caribbean related to military activity."

Dutch airline KLM said it too canceled flights affecting thousands of passengers but planned to resume service Sunday to and from Curacao, Aruba, Bonaire and other islands.

The flight disruptions also affected some travelers booked for Caribbean cruises. Cruise operator Virgin Voyages said airline travelers unable to make it to San Juan in time for an upcoming cruise departure would be able to get a full credit for a future trip.

US plans to 'run' Venezuela and tap its oil reserves, Trump says, after operation to oust Maduro

By REGINA GARCIA CANO, KONSTANTIN TOROPIN and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Hours after an audacious military operation that plucked leader Nicolás Maduro from power and removed him from the country, President Donald Trump said Saturday that the United States would run Venezuela at least temporarily and tap its vast oil reserves to sell to other nations.

The dramatic action capped an intensive Trump administration pressure campaign on the South American nation and its autocratic leader and months of secret planning resulting in the most assertive American action to achieve regime change since the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

Legal experts immediately raised questions about whether the operation was lawful. Venezuela's vice president Delcy Rodríguez demanded in a speech that the U.S. free Maduro and called him the country's rightful leader, before Venezuela's high court ordered her to assume the role of interim president.

Speaking to reporters hours after Maduro's capture, Trump revealed his plans to exploit the leadership void to "fix" the country's oil infrastructure and sell "large amounts" of oil to other countries.

Maduro and his wife, seized overnight from their home on a military base, were first taken aboard a U.S. warship on their way to face prosecution for a Justice Department indictment accusing them of participating in a narco-terrorism conspiracy.

A plane carrying the deposed leader landed around 4:30 p.m. Saturday at an airport in New York City's northern suburbs. Maduro was escorted off the jet, gingerly making his way down a stairway before being led across the tarmac surrounded by federal agents. Several agents filmed him on their phones as he walked.

He was then flown by helicopter to Manhattan, where a convoy of law enforcement vehicles, including an armored car, was waiting to whisk him to a nearby U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration office.

A video posted on social media by a White House account showed Maduro, smiling, as he was escorted through that office by two DEA agents grasping his arms.

He was expected to be detained while awaiting trial at a federal jail in Brooklyn. U.S. officials didn't immediately confirm Maduro was at the jail, but the same motorcade of vehicles that brought him to the DEA office from the heliport was seen arriving at the detention center Saturday evening.

Move lacks congressional approval

The legal authority for the incursion, done without congressional approval, was not immediately clear, but the Trump administration promoted the ouster as a step toward reducing the flow of dangerous drugs into the U.S. The president touted what he saw as other potential benefits, including a leadership stake in the country and greater control of oil.

Trump claimed the U.S. government would help run the country and was already doing so, though there were no immediate signs of that. Venezuelan state TV continued to air pro-Maduro propaganda, broadcasting live images of supporters taking to the streets in Caracas in protest.

"We're going to run the country until such time as we can do a safe, proper and judicious transition," Trump said at a Mar-a-Lago news conference where he boasted that this "extremely successful operation should serve as warning to anyone who would threaten American sovereignty or endanger American lives."

Maduro and other Venezuelan officials were indicted in 2020 on "narco-terrorism" conspiracy charges,

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 58 of 73

but the Justice Department released a new indictment Saturday of Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, that painted the regime as a "corrupt, illegitimate government" fueled by a drug trafficking operation that flooded the U.S with cocaine. The U.S. government does not recognize Maduro as the country's leader.

Trump posted a photo on social media showing Maduro wearing a sweatsuit and a blindfold on board the USS Iwo Jima.

Early morning attack

The operation followed a monthslong Trump administration effort to exert pressure on the Venezuelan leader, including a major buildup of American forces in the waters off South America and attacks on boats in the eastern Pacific and Caribbean accused of carrying drugs. Last week, the CIA was behind a drone strike at a docking area believed to have been used by Venezuelan drug cartels — the first known direct operation on Venezuelan soil since the U.S. began strikes in September.

Maduro had decried prior military operations as a thinly veiled effort to topple him from power.

Taking place 36 years to the day after the 1990 surrender and seizure of Panama leader Manuel Antonio Noriega following a U.S. invasion, the Venezuela operation unfolded under the cover of darkness early Saturday as Trump said the U.S. turned off "almost all of the lights" in the capital city of Caracas while forces moved in to extract Maduro and his wife.

Gen. Dan Caine, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said U.S. forces had rehearsed their maneuvers for months, learning everything about Maduro — where he was and what he ate, as well as details of his pets and his clothes.

"We think, we develop, we train, we rehearse, we debrief, we rehearse again and again," Caine said. "Not to get it right, but to ensure we cannot get it wrong."

Early Saturday, multiple explosions rang out and low-flying aircraft swept through Caracas. Maduro's government accused the U.S. of hitting civilian and military installations, calling it an "imperialist attack" and urging citizens to take to the streets.

The assault lasted less than 30 minutes, and the explosions — at least seven blasts — sent people rushing into the streets, while others took to social media to report what they saw and heard. Some Venezuelan civilians and members of the military were killed, said Rodríguez, the country's vice president, without giving a number. Trump said some U.S. forces were injured but none were killed.

Video obtained from Caracas and an unidentified coastal city showed tracers and smoke clouding the landscape as repeated muted explosions illuminated the night sky. Other footage showed cars passing on a highway as blasts illuminated the hills behind them. The videos were verified by The Associated Press.

Smoke was seen rising from the hangar of a military base in Caracas, while another military installation in the capital was without electricity.

Under Venezuelan law, Rodríguez would take over from Maduro. Rodríguez, however, stressed during a Saturday appearance on state television that she did not plan to assume power, before Venezuela's high court ordered that she assume the interim role.

"There is only one president in Venezuela, and his name is Nicolás Maduro Moros," Rodríguez said.

Some streets in Caracas fill up

Venezuela's ruling party has held power since 1999, when Maduro's predecessor, Hugo Chávez, took office, promising to uplift poor people and later to implement a self-described socialist revolution.

Maduro took over when Chávez died in 2013. His 2018 reelection was widely considered a sham because the main opposition parties were banned from participating. During the 2024 election, electoral authorities loyal to the ruling party declared him the winner hours after polls closed, but the opposition gathered overwhelming evidence that he lost by a more than 2-to-1 margin.

In a demonstration of how polarizing a figure Maduro is, people variously took to the streets to protest his capture and celebrate it.

At a protest in the Venezuelan capital, Caracas Mayor Carmen Meléndez joined a crowd demanding Maduro's return.

"Maduro, hold on, the people are rising up!" the crowd chanted. "We are here, Nicolás Maduro. If you

can hear us, we are here!"

Earlier, armed people and uniformed members of a civilian militia took to the streets of a Caracas neighborhood long considered a stronghold of the ruling party.

In other parts of the city, the streets remained empty hours after the attack. Some areas remained without power, but vehicles moved freely.

"How do I feel? Scared, like everyone," said Caracas resident Noris Prada, who sat on an empty avenue looking down at his phone. "Venezuelans woke up scared, many families couldn't sleep."

In Doral, Florida, home to the largest Venezuelan community in the U.S, people wrapped themselves in Venezuelan flags, ate fried snacks and cheered as music played. At one point, the crowd chanted "Liberty! Liberty! Liberty!"

Questions of legality

Some legal experts raised immediate concerns about the operation's legality.

The U.N. Security Council, acting on an emergency request from Colombia, planned to hold a meeting on U.S. operations in Venezuela on Monday morning, according to a council diplomat, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a meeting not yet made public.

Lawmakers from both political parties in Congress have raised reservations and flat-out objections to the U.S. attacks on boats suspected of drug smuggling near the Venezuelan coast. Congress has not specifically approved an authorization for the use of military force for such operations in the region.

Connecticut Rep. Jim Himes, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said he had seen no evidence that would justify Trump striking Venezuela without approval from Congress and demanded an immediate briefing by the administration on "its plan to ensure stability in the region and its legal justification for this decision."

In their words: Survivors and others talk about fatal Swiss Alpine bar fire

CRANS-MONTANA, Switzerland (AP) — In the aftermath of a fire inside a Swiss Alpine bar that killed 40 people celebrating the new year, survivors, friends and family members, the region's top authorities and even Pope Leo have spoken to the public in remarks in French, Italian, German and English, reflecting the tradition of Swiss multilingualism.

More than 100 people were injured in the blaze early Thursday as it ripped through the busy Le Constellation bar at the ski resort of Crans-Montana, authorities said. It was one of the deadliest tragedies in Switzerland's history.

Investigators said Friday that they believe sparkling candles atop Champagne bottles ignited the fatal fire when they came too close to the ceiling of the crowded bar.

Here's a look at what people said in the wake of the disaster:

— "I'm looking everywhere. The body of my son is somewhere," Laetitia Brodard told reporters Friday in Crans-Montana as she searched for her son, 16-year-old Arthur. "I want to know where my child is and be by his side. Wherever that may be, be it in the intensive care unit or the morgue."

— "We were bringing people out, people were collapsing. We were doing everything we could to save them, we helped as many as we could. We saw people screaming, running," Marc-Antoine Chavanon, 14, told The Associated Press in Crans-Montana on Friday, recounting how he rushed to the bar to help the injured. "There was one of our friends: She was struggling to get out, she was all burned. You can't imagine the pain I saw."

— "It was hard to live through for everyone. Also, probably because everyone was asking themselves, 'Was my child, my cousin, someone from the region at this party?'" Eric Bonvin, general director of the regional hospital in Sion that took in dozens of injured people, told AP on Friday. "This place was very well known as somewhere to celebrate the new year," Bonvin said. "Also, seeing young people arrive — that's always traumatic."

— "I have seen horror, and I don't know what else would be worse than this," Gianni Campolo, a Swiss

19-year-old who was in Crans-Montana on vacation and rushed to the bar to help first responders, told France's TF1 television.

— "Despite the heavy smoke, I could see bodies pressed against the glass," Gianni's father, Paolo Campolo, told French news broadcaster BFM TV as he explained how he found an emergency exit behind the bar. With another volunteer, he managed to open the glass door. "That's when several bodies fell. We immediately pulled them out, one after the other. I think we had to pull out about ten bodies in total," he said.

—"The priority today is truly placed on identification, in order to allow the families to begin their mourning," Beatrice Pilloud, the Valais region's attorney general, told reporters Friday during a news conference in Sion.

Pope Leo said in a telegram Friday to the bishop of Sion that he "wishes to express his compassion and concern to the relatives of the victims. He prays that the Lord will welcome the deceased into His abode of peace and light, and will sustain the courage of those who suffer in their hearts or in their bodies."

—"We have numerous accounts of heroic actions, one could say of very strong solidarity in the moment," Cantonal head of government Mathias Reynard told RTS radio Friday. "In the first minutes, it was citizens — and in large part young people — who saved lives with their courage."

—"Switzerland is a strong country not because it is sheltered from drama, but because it knows how to face them with courage and a spirit of mutual help," Swiss President Guy Parmelin, speaking on his first day in the position that changes hands annually, told reporters Thursday.

Iran's leader says rioters 'must be put in their place' as protest death toll reaches at least 15

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's supreme leader insisted Saturday that "rioters must be put in their place" after a week of protests that have shaken the Islamic Republic, likely giving security forces a green light to aggressively put down the demonstrations.

The first comments by 86-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei come as violence surrounding the demonstrations sparked by Iran's ailing economy has killed at least 15 people, according to human rights activists. The protests show no sign of stopping and follow U.S. President Donald Trump warning Iran on Friday that if Tehran "violently kills peaceful protesters," the United States "will come to their rescue."

While it remains unclear how and if Trump will intervene, his comments sparked an immediate, angry response, with officials within the theocracy threatening to target American troops in the Mideast. They also take on new importance after Trump said Saturday that the U.S. military captured Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, a longtime ally of Tehran.

The protests, have become the biggest in Iran since 2022, when the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody triggered nationwide demonstrations. However, the protests have yet to be as widespread and intense as those surrounding the death of Amini, who was detained over not wearing her hijab, or headscarf, to the liking of authorities.

Khamenei makes first comments on protests

State television aired remarks by Khamenei to an audience in Tehran that sought to separate the concerns of protesting Iranians upset about the rial's collapse from "rioters."

"We talk to protesters, the officials must talk to them," Khamenei said. "But there is no benefit to talking to rioters. Rioters must be put in their place."

He also reiterated a claim constantly made by officials in Iran that foreign powers like Israel or the United States were pushing the protests, without offering any evidence. He also blamed "the enemy" for Iran's collapsing rial.

"A bunch of people incited or hired by the enemy are getting behind the tradesmen and shopkeepers and chanting slogans against Islam, Iran and the Islamic Republic," he said. "This is what matters most."

Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard ranks include the all-volunteer Basij force, whose motorcycling-

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 61 of 73

riding members have violently put down protests like the 2009 Green Movement and the 2022 demonstrations. The Guard answers only to Khamenei.

Hard-line officials within the country are believed to have been pushing for a more-aggressive response to the demonstrations as President Masoud Pezeshkian has sought talks to address protesters' demands.

But bloody security crackdowns often follow such protests. Protests over a gasoline price hike in 2019 reportedly saw over 300 people killed. A crackdown on the Amini protests of 2022, which lasted for months, killed more than 500 people and saw over 22,000 detained.

"Iran has no organized domestic opposition; protesters are likely acting spontaneously," the Eurasia Group said in an analysis Friday. "While protests could continue or grow larger (particularly as Iran's economic outlook remains dire), the regime retains a large security apparatus and would likely suppress such dissent without losing control of the country."

Deaths overnight in protests

Two deaths overnight into Saturday involved a new level of violence. In Qom, home to the country's major Shiite seminaries, a grenade exploded, killing a man there, the state-owned IRAN newspaper reported. It quoted security officials alleging the man was carrying the grenade to attack people in the city, some 130 kilometers (80 miles) south of the capital, Tehran.

Online videos from Qom purportedly showed fires in the street overnight.

The second death happened in the town of Harsin, some 370 kilometers (230 miles) southwest of Tehran. There, the newspaper said, a member of the Basij, the all-volunteer arm of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, died in a gun and knife attack in the town in Kermanshah province.

Demonstrations have reached over 170 locations in 25 of Iran's 31 provinces, the U.S.-based Human Rights Activists News Agency reported early Sunday. The death toll had reached at least 15 killed, it added, with over 580 arrests. The group, which relies on an activist network inside of Iran for its reporting, has been accurate in past unrest.

The state-run IRNA news agency separately reported on what it described as violence in Malekshahi County in Iran's Ilam province, some 515 kilometers (320 miles) southwest of Tehran. It offered no specific details.

Hengaw, a Kurdish human rights group, and the Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights put the death toll at four in the violence there. Both groups accused Iranian security forces of opening fire on demonstrators.

The semiofficial Fars news agency, believed to be close to the Revolutionary Guard, alleged without offering evidence that demonstrators carried firearms and grenades. Firearms are more prevalent in western Iran, along the border with Iraq, but there's been no clear evidence provided by the government to support allegations of demonstrators being armed.

The protests, taking root in economic issues, have heard demonstrators chant against Iran's theocracy as well. Tehran has had little luck in propping up its economy in the months since its June war with Israel in which the U.S. also bombed Iranian nuclear sites in Iran.

Iran recently said it was no longer enriching uranium at any site in the country, trying to signal to the West that it remains open to potential negotiations over its atomic program to ease sanctions. However, those talks have yet to happen as Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have warned Tehran against reconstituting its atomic program.

Baker Mayfield and the Buccaneers beat the Panthers 16-14, stay alive in chase for NFC South title

By ROB MAADDI AP Pro Football Writer

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Baker Mayfield and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers find themselves in the uncomfortable position of rooting for the New Orleans Saints. The Carolina Panthers are pulling for the Atlanta Falcons.

The winner of the NFC South will have a losing record and be crowned at home watching on television.

Mayfield threw a touchdown pass to Cade Otton, Chase McLaughlin kicked three field goals and the

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 62 of 73

Buccaneers avoided elimination with a sloppy 16-14 victory over the Carolina Panthers on a rain-soaked Saturday.

The Buccaneers (8-9) need New Orleans (6-10) to beat or tie Atlanta (7-9) on Sunday to clinch a fifth straight NFC South title.

If the Falcons win, the Panthers (8-9) will secure their first division championship since coach Ron Rivera and quarterback Cam Newton led them to a 15-1 record and a Super Bowl appearance 10 years ago.

The Buccaneers hold a two-team tiebreaker over the Panthers. But Carolina holds the three-team tiebreaker over Tampa Bay if Atlanta also finishes 8-9.

"I never thought I'd see a day where I'm rooting for the Saints," Bucs veteran linebacker Lavonte David said.

Before the Bucs faced New Orleans in October, Mayfield accused the Saints of dirty play and said: "I do not like them."

Now, Tampa Bay's playoff hopes hinge on the Saints beating the Falcons on the road on Sunday.

"A tie still gets us in," Mayfield said with a smirk.

Bucs coach Todd Bowles plans to watch the game at home. Mayfield said some players might have a watch party.

"I think we'll all be on the edge of our seats," Panthers coach Dave Canales said. "Hoping for the Falcons to come through, but at the same time, at least we have that hope to look at. We have to look at ourselves and we have to make sure that in these championship moments that we play our best."

The Buccaneers were 0-8 in games where Mayfield threw an interception before overcoming his ninth pick in the last eight games.

"It was a gutsy performance," Bowles said. "We gave ourselves a chance. It's all we can ask for."

After McLaughlin's 38-yard field-goal try was blocked with just over five minutes remaining, Carolina got within 16-14 on Bryce Young's 8-yard TD pass to Jalen Coker with 2:27 left.

Mayfield tossed a short pass to Otton for a 20-yard gain on third-and-4 to extend Tampa Bay's drive and run off more time. The Panthers got the ball back at their 3 with 18 seconds and no timeouts left. The game ended on a desperate series of laterals that resulted in a fumble.

Mayfield connected with Otton on an 18-yard TD pass for a 7-0 lead as the Bucs scored a touchdown on their opening drive for the third straight game. It was Otton's first TD of the season.

Down 10-0, the Panthers turned Christian Rozeboom's interception into a quick score. Rozeboom returned the pick 20 yards to Tampa Bay's 19. Young then connected with Tommy Tremble on an 8-yard TD pass to cut it to 10-7.

Jacob Parrish picked off Young late in the second half and the Buccaneers got a 36-yard field goal from McLaughlin to take a 13-7 halftime lead.

McLaughlin kicked a 48-yard field goal early in the fourth to extend Tampa Bay's lead.

Carolina's Ryan Fitzgerald missed a 54-yarder short on the opening drive of the third quarter.

Mayfield completed his first six passes before misfiring on a cross-field, 13-yard toss to Payne Durham, who was wide open in the end zone. The Bucs settled for McLaughlin's 29-yard field goal and a 10-0 lead.

End of an era

Gene Deckerhoff, the voice of the Buccaneers for 37 years on radio, is retiring after the season. Six-time Pro Bowl wide receiver Mike Evans and David could have played their last game with the Buccaneers and possibly in the NFL if they choose to retire.

David was a second-round pick in 2012, made one Pro Bowl, was a first-team All-Pro once and second team All-Pro twice.

Evans, the No. 7 overall pick in 2014, had a 1,000-yard season every year of his career until this one, when he broke his clavicle in October and missed several games.

Injuries

Panthers: DT Bobby Brown III (head) left the game to be evaluated for a concussion.

Buccaneers: LB Anthony Walker (ankle) was injured on the opening kickoff. ... CB Jamel Dean (shoulder) and OLB Anthony Nelson (knee) didn't play. ... DT Calijah Kancey (pectoral) was active for the first time

since Week 2.

Up next

Panthers: Host a wild-card game or start the offseason.

Buccaneers: Host a wild-card game or start the offseason.

After ousting Maduro in Venezuela, Trump commits himself to another foreign policy project

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Donald Trump declared Saturday's military operation that led to the ouster of Nicolás Maduro a major success as he offered a vague plan for his administration "to run" Venezuela until a transition of power can take place.

While there are no visible signs of a U.S. presence on the ground in Caracas, Trump was demonstrating chutzpah that's become the trademark of his foreign policy approach. It's one marked by a grand confidence that his will on the international stage is an immovable force.

"This was one of the most stunning, effective and powerful displays of American military might and competence in American history," Trump declared at a news conference at his Mar-a-Lago resort in Florida.

The president strode into office with a promise to turn the page on America's decades of foreign entanglements. But on Saturday, he committed the U.S. to help Venezuela usher in a period of "peace" and "justice" after decades of rule by strongmen.

The president's pledge to a Venezuela project comes as he finds himself struggling to bring about a permanent peace between Israel and Hamas in Gaza and find an endgame to Russia's nearly four-year war in Ukraine.

But the path ahead is treacherous. The White House will need to grapple with any power vacuum caused by Maduro's ouster and inevitable complications of trying to maintain stability in a country that's already endured years of hyperinflation, food and medicine shortages and brain drain despite its vast oil wealth.

It also remains to be seen what lessons U.S. adversaries may take from Trump's decision to demonstrate American might in its sphere of influence in the aftermath of Trump's play in Caracas. China's Xi Jinping has vowed to annex the self-ruled island of Taiwan and Russia's Vladimir Putin has designs on neighbor Ukraine and diminishing NATO's eastern flank.

Yet Trump was unflinching in his confidence that the bad actors of the old government will be pushed aside as he helps make Venezuela "great again." He also sought to reassure American taxpayers that they won't be on the hook for his plan to help out Caracas.

"The money coming out of the ground is very substantial," Trump said. "We're going to get reimbursed for everything that we spend."

Trump hasn't shied away from flexing U.S. military might even as he has vowed to keep America out of war. He's now twice used U.S. forces to carry out risky operations against American adversaries. In June, he directed U.S. strikes on key Iranian nuclear sites.

Saturday's action stirred fresh anxiety in capitals around the world that have sought to adjust to a new normal in Trump 2.0, where the idea of the U.S. trying to find global consensus on issues of war and peace is now passe.

What's next for Venezuela?

European allies had expressed concern as Trump built up a massive presence of troops in the Caribbean in recent months and carried out dozens of lethal strikes on suspected drug smugglers — many that the administration claimed were effectively an arm of the Maduro government.

Now the Trump administration's dead-of-night extradition of Maduro and his wife and its plans to "run" the country, even temporarily, are raising stark new questions about the legality of the U.S. moves under a broader campaign against the South American nation.

Maduro was hardly viewed as a choir boy by the international community. His 2018 and 2024 elections were seen as riddled with irregularities and viewed as illegitimate.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 64 of 73

But many U.S. allies greeted news of Maduro's capture with a measure of trepidation.

European Commission President António Costa said he had "great concern" about the situation in Venezuela following the U.S. operation.

France's Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot said "the military operation that led to the capture of Maduro infringes the principle of the non-use of force that underpins international law."

The criticism from some Democrats over Trump's military action to oust Maduro was immediate.

"This war is illegal, it's embarrassing that we went from the world cop to the world bully in less than one year." Sen. Ruben Gallego of Arizona wrote on X. "There is no reason for us to be at war with Venezuela."

Russia's foreign ministry condemned what it called a U.S. "act of armed aggression" against Venezuela in a statement posted on its Telegram channel Saturday. The ouster of Maduro, who was backed by the Russians, comes as Trump is urging Putin to end his war on Ukraine.

"Venezuela must be guaranteed the right to determine its own destiny without any destructive, let alone military, outside intervention," the statement said.

Similarly, China's foreign ministry in a statement condemned the U.S. operation, saying it violates international law and Venezuela's sovereignty.

Capture follows months of pressure

The operation was the culmination of a push inside the administration led by Secretary of State Marco Rubio and other like-minded foes of Maduro who have been urging Trump to take action against the Venezuelan leader for years.

In south Florida — the epicenter of the Venezuelan diaspora opposition to Maduro that has influenced Rubio's thinking — Saturday's operation was cheered as an era-changing moment for democracy.

Rep. Carlos Gimenez, a Florida Republican, said he had spoken to Rubio and thanked Trump for having "changed the course of history in our hemisphere. Our country & the world are safer for it," he wrote on X, comparing Maduro's extradition to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Rubio took the moment to send a warning to Cuba, another U.S. adversary in the Caribbean and ally of the Maduro government. "If I lived in Havana, and I was in the government, I'd be concerned — at least a little bit," Rubio said.

Trump: Venezuela has no chance without his intervention

Maduro had sought a pathway to exit from power while saving face.

Venezuelan government officials had floated a plan in which Maduro would eventually leave office, The Associated Press reported in October.

The proposal called for Maduro to step down in three years and hand over to his vice president, Delcy Rodríguez, who would complete Maduro's six-year term that ends in January 2031. Rodríguez would not run for reelection under the plan.

But the White House had rejected the proposal because the administration questioned the legitimacy of Maduro's rule and accused him of overseeing a narco-terrorist state.

Maduro earlier this week said Venezuela was open to negotiating an agreement with the United States to combat drug trafficking and work with Washington on promoting U.S. further investment in the Venezuelan oil industry. Trump said Maduro was recently offered chances to surrender but declined.

Rubio held a long phone conversation on Saturday with Rodríguez, Trump said. In an address to the nation, she demanded the U.S. free Maduro but left open the possibility of dialogue with Trump.

"If we just left, it has zero chance of ever coming back. We'll run it properly. We'll run it professionally," Trump said. "We'll have the greatest oil companies in the world going in, invest billions and billions of dollars. ... And the biggest beneficiary are going to be the people of Venezuela."

Venezuela's opposition says the rightful president is the exiled politician Edmundo González, an ally of opposition leader María Corina Machado.

Trump said he wasn't ready to commit to a certain leader but pledged his administration has to remain "very involved" in Venezuela.

"We can't take a chance of letting somebody else run it — just take over where (Maduro) left," Trump said.

Capture of Maduro and US claim that it will run Venezuela raise new legal questions

By LISA MASCARO, JOSHUA GOODMAN and BEN FINLEY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Trump administration's capture of Venezuela's president and claims that it will "run" the country are raising stark new questions about the legality of the U.S. actions and its future operations in the South American nation.

The middle-of-the-night seizure of Nicolás Maduro, who was transported with his wife on a U.S. warship to face narco-terrorism conspiracy charges in New York, is beyond even the most high-profile historical examples of aggressive American actions toward autocratic governments in Panama, Iraq and elsewhere, legal experts said. It came after a surprise U.S. incursion that rocked the Venezuelan capital with overnight explosions.

"This is clearly a blatant, illegal and criminal act," said Jimmy Gurule, a Notre Dame Law School professor and former assistant U.S. attorney.

The stunning development caps months of aggressive U.S. military action in the region, including the bombing of boats accused of trafficking drugs and seizures of oil tankers off the coast of Venezuela. The Trump administration has conducted 35 known boat strikes against vessels, killing more than 115 people since September, and positioned an armada of warships in nearby waters.

The bigger debate than legality is yet to come, said John Yoo, an early architect of the George W. Bush administration's policy in Iraq and now a law professor at the University of California, Berkeley.

"It's easier to remove a dictator," he said, based on his experience in the Iraq War. But ensuring the transition to a stable democratic government is "the harder part."

Maduro's arrest on anniversary of Noriega's surrender

Maduro's arrest came 36 years to the date of the surrender of Panama's strongman Manuel Noriega, a notable milestone in American involvement in the Western Hemisphere. The U.S. invaded Panama in 1989 to arrest Noriega on drug trafficking charges.

In Panama, however, U.S. national security interests were directly at stake in the form of the Panama Canal as well as the safety of American citizens and U.S. military installations in the country.

By contrast, Congress has not authorized any American military strike or law enforcement move against Venezuela.

"The President will claim that this fits within a vast body of precedent supporting broad executive power to defend the United States, its citizens, and its interests," Matthew Waxman, a Columbia University law professor who was a national security official in the Bush administration, said by email. "Critics will charge that this exceeds the bounds of presidential power without congressional authorization."

While U.S. agents have a long history of snatching defendants abroad to execute arrest warrants without authorization, federal courts have long deferred to the White House in foreign policy and national security matters.

For example, U.S. bounty hunters, working under the direction of the Drug Enforcement Administration, in 1990 abducted in Mexico a doctor accused of killing DEA agent Enrique "Kiki" Camarena.

"Courts give great deference to the president on issues related to national security," said Gurule, who led the prosecution against Camarena's killers. "But great deference does not mean absolute deference and unfettered authority to do anything."

Congress has yet to authorize or ban US actions

Trump's administration has declared the drug cartels operating from Venezuela to be unlawful combatants and has said the United States is now in an "armed conflict" with them, according to an administration memo obtained in October by The Associated Press.

The memo appears to represent an extraordinary assertion of presidential war powers, with Trump effectively declaring that trafficking of drugs into the U.S. amounts to armed conflict requiring the use of military force. That is a new rationale for past and future actions.

Congress, which has broad authority to approve or prohibit the president's war powers, has failed to do

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 66 of 73

either, even as lawmakers from both political parties grow increasingly uneasy with the military actions in the region, particularly after it was revealed that U.S. forces killed two survivors of a boat attack with a follow-up strike.

Congress' Democratic leaders, Sen. Chuck Schumer and Rep. Hakeem Jeffries, demanded immediate briefings for the "gang of eight" leaders on Capitol Hill, which includes top members of the Intelligence committees, as well as for other lawmakers. Congressional leaders were not notified of the actions until after the operation was underway.

"The idea that Trump plans to now run Venezuela should strike fear in the hearts of all Americans," Schumer said. "The American people have seen this before and paid the devastating price."

Michael Schmitt, a former Air Force lawyer and professor emeritus at the U.S. Naval War College, said the entire operation — the boat strikes as well as the apprehension of Maduro — clearly violates international law.

"Lawyers call it international armed conflict," Schmitt said. "Lay people call it war. So as a matter of law, we are now at war with Venezuela because the use of hostilities between two states clearly triggers an internal armed conflict."

War powers vote ahead

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., said the administration "is working to schedule briefings" for lawmakers next week.

Republican lawmakers in Congress largely welcomed the capture of Maduro as ridding the region of a leader they say is responsible for drug trafficking, but Democratic lawmakers warned that in veering from the rule of law, the administration is potentially greenlighting other countries such as China or Russia to do the same.

"Beyond the legality, what kind of precedent does it send?" asked Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, the top Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee. He said in an interview that the rebuilding plan ahead has echoes of the Iraq War as the Trump administration promises to use Venezuela's oil revenue to pay the costs.

Waxman, the Columbia University law professor, said seizing control of Venezuela's resources opens up additional legal issues: "For example, a big issue will be who really owns Venezuela's oil?"

The Senate is expected to try again next week to curtail Trump's actions, with a vote expected on a bipartisan war powers resolution that would block using U.S. forces against Venezuela unless authorized by Congress.

Senate Majority Leader John Thune, R-S.D., said he is grateful for the armed forces "who carried out this necessary action." He said he spoke to Secretary of State Marco Rubio and wants more information.

"I look forward to receiving further briefings from the administration on this operation as part of its comprehensive counternarcotics strategy when the Senate returns to Washington next week," Thune said.

Rubio said at a briefing Saturday with Trump that because of the nature of the surprise operation, it was not something that could be shared beforehand with the lawmakers.

Infielder Kazuma Okamoto and Blue Jays agree to \$60 million, 4-year contract, AP sources say

By ROB GILLIES Associated Press

TORONTO (AP) — Infielder Kazuma Okamoto and the Toronto Blue Jays agreed to a \$60 million, four-year contract, two people familiar with the negotiations told The Associated Press on Saturday.

The people spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the agreement had not been announced.

Okamoto will get a \$5 million signing bonus, a \$7 million salary this year and \$16 million in each of the following three seasons.

A six-time All-Star, Okamoto has a .277 average with 248 homers and 717 RBIs in 11 Japanese big league seasons, leading the Central League in home runs in 2020, 2021 and 2023. He homered off Colorado's Kyle Freeland to help Japan beat the U.S. 3-2 in the 2023 World Baseball Classic final.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 67 of 73

Under the posting agreement between Major League Baseball and Nippon Professional Baseball, a deal must be finalized by 5 p.m. EST Sunday.

Okamoto, a 29-year-old third baseman and first baseman, hit .327 with 15 homers and 49 RBIs in 69 games last year for the Central League's Yomiuri Giants. He injured his left elbow while trying to catch a throw at first base on May 6 when he collided with the Hanshin Tigers' Takumu Nakano, an injury that sidelined Okamoto until Aug. 16.

With five-time All-Star Vladimir Guerrero Jr. at first, Okamoto presumably would play mostly at third. Addison Barger had 67 starts there last year, Ernie Clement 66, Will Wagner 22, Isiah Kiner-Falefa six and Buddy Kennedy one.

Barger also plays right field, and the addition of Okamoto could mean Andrés Giménez would move from second to shortstop if free agent Bo Bichette doesn't re-sign. Clement and Davis Scheider could share time at second.

Under MLB's posting agreement with NPB, the Blue Jays will owe the Giants a posting fee of \$10,875,000.

After coming within two outs of their first World Series title since 1993, the Blue Jays have made significant additions to the roster. Toronto signed right-hander Dylan Cease to a \$210 million, seven-year contract, agreed to a \$30 million, three-year contract with right-hander Cody Ponce and reached a \$37 million, three-year deal with reliever Tyler Rogers.

Right-hander Shane Bieber also exercised a \$16 million player option for 2026 rather than become a free agent.

How the US captured Venezuelan leader Nicolás Maduro

By MEG KINNARD and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For months, the U.S. military had been amassing a presence off Venezuela's coast and conspicuously blowing up alleged drug trafficking boats and killing the occupants.

At the same time, U.S. intelligence agencies were carefully studying the country's authoritarian President Nicolás Maduro, learning minute details such as his eating habits while special forces secretly rehearsed a plan to forcibly remove him.

Months of covert planning led to the brazen operation overnight, when President Donald Trump gave an order authorizing Maduro's capture. The U.S. plunged the South American country's capital into darkness, infiltrated Maduro's home and whisked him to the United States, where the Trump administration planned to put him on trial.

Trump, during a news conference Saturday at his Florida home, laid out the details of the strike, after which he said Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, were flown by helicopter to a U.S. warship.

The operation termed "Absolute Resolve" unfolded under the cover of darkness, with U.S. forces holding fast in the region, awaiting the ideal weather conditions to give pilots clear routes into Caracas. The extensive planning included practice on a replica of the presidential compound, as well as U.S. service members armed with what Trump said were "massive blowtorches" in the event the steel walls of a safe room needed to be cut open to extract the pair.

"He didn't get that space closed. He was trying to get into it, but he got bum-rushed right so fast that he didn't get into that," Trump said in an interview earlier Saturday morning on "Fox & Friends Weekend."

A carefully rehearsed mission

Gen. Dan Caine, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said at Trump's news conference that U.S. forces had rehearsed their maneuvers for months, learning everything about Maduro — where he was at certain hours as well as details of his pets and the clothes he wore.

"We think, we develop, we train, we rehearse, we debrief, we rehearse again, and again," Caine said, saying his forces were "set" by early December. "Not to get it right, but to ensure we cannot get it wrong."

Trump said on Fox that U.S. forces had practiced their extraction on a replica building.

"They actually built a house which was identical to the one they went into with all the same, all that steel all over the place," Trump said.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 68 of 73

Trump said in the television interview that U.S. forces held off on conducting the operation for days, waiting four days for cloud cover to pass. Caine said that on Friday night, "the weather broke just enough, clearing a path that only the most skilled aviators in the world could move through," adding that helicopters flew low to the water to enter Venezuela and were covered above by protective U.S. aircraft.

Trump said the U.S. operation "was dark and it was deadly," adding that "the lights of Caracas were largely turned off due to a certain expertise that we have," but giving no further details.

The attack, which Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth described as part of "massive joint military and law enforcement raid," lasted less than 30 minutes. At least seven explosions were heard in Caracas, and Venezuela's Vice President Delcy Rodríguez, who under law takes power, said some Venezuelan civilians and members of the military were killed.

In a televised address later Saturday on state television, she demanded that the U.S. free Maduro and called him the country's rightful leader. But Rodríguez also left open the door for a dialogue with the U.S. when she said, "We are willing to have respectful relations."

Yanire Lucas, a Caracas resident whose house sits pressed up next to a Venezuelan military base struck overnight, said she began to hear explosions next to her house around 1:50 in the morning.

Trump said a few U.S. members in the operation were injured, but he believed no one was killed. Caine said one helicopter was struck by fire as it closed in on Maduro's compound but it was able to safely fly on its return.

Months of escalating actions

Trump said Maduro and Flores were flown by helicopter to a U.S. warship and would go on to New York to face charges. He posted on Truth Social a photo of the Venezuelan leader, wearing a gray sweatsuit, protective headphones and blindfold.

The raid was a dramatic escalation from a series of strikes the U.S. military has carried out on what Trump has said were drug-carrying boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean since early September. On Dec. 29, Trump said the U.S. struck a facility where boats accused of carrying drugs "load up." The CIA was behind the drone strike at a docking area believed to have been used by Venezuelan drug cartels, the first known direct operation on Venezuelan soil since the U.S. began its strikes in September.

Few details about how the US will now run Venezuela

Though Trump had warned for months that the U.S. might conduct strikes in Venezuela, he gave little hint on Friday what was coming.

He spent the morning posting on social media defending his health and complaining about the impact of wind turbines on birds before he went shopping for marble and onyx for the ballroom he's building at the White House and a visit to his golf club.

Privately, he was readying to give the go-ahead for a military mission that already has generated criticism in the U.S. and abroad. Now, the president said the U.S. will direct the path forward for Venezuela, as questions have emerged about the legality of both those plans and Maduro's capture.

Trump said at his news conference that the group of officials standing behind him, including Hegseth, Caine and Secretary of State Marco Rubio, will "be a team that's working with the people of Venezuela."

The Republican president left open the possibility that U.S. troops would have a presence in the country. "We're not afraid of boots on the ground if we have to," he said, adding, "We had boots on the ground last night."

The U.S. will now "run" the country until a new leader can be chosen, Trump said.

"We're going to make sure that country is run properly. We're not doing this in vain," he said. "This is a very dangerous attack. This is an attack that could have gone very, very badly."

Security advisers discuss peace proposals in Ukraine ahead of leaders' summit

By VOLODYMYR YURCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — National security advisers from Europe and other allies visited Kyiv on Saturday to discuss security guarantees and economic support as a U.S.-led diplomatic push to end the nearly 4-year-old war in Ukraine intensifies.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, preparing to travel to Paris for a meeting with partners, said work on the peace proposals could now accelerate as Ukraine has shared all documents under discussion with the 18 national security advisers, including those on security guarantees.

"We expect that this further work will now take place in the capitals of European countries as well as Canada, Japan and other representatives of the Coalition of the Willing," he said, referring to the approximately 30 countries who support Kyiv's effort to end the war with Russia on acceptable terms.

"We are not allocating a great deal of time for this process," Zelenskyy added.

He said representatives from Ukraine's General Staff and military sector would meet on Monday in Paris, followed by a meeting Tuesday of European leaders, where he said he hoped documents on security guarantees would be finalized. He said there also would be meetings with U.S. representatives in Paris.

In a briefing earlier in the day, Ukrainian negotiator Oleksandr Bezz said Kyiv is coordinating security guarantee plans with European partners that would include a multilateral framework agreement involving Ukrainian forces as the first line of defense, European-led troops deployed in Ukraine and U.S. "backstop" support.

Ukraine's deputy prime minister, Taras Kachka, said international partners have reached consensus on an economic support package of about \$800 billion for Ukraine over the next decade.

The package, based on calculations by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the European Union, would cover damage compensation, reconstruction, economic stability and a \$200 billion growth "booster" and is tied to Ukraine's EU accession reforms.

Specific funding sources have not been identified, economy minister Oleksii Sobolev said, though roughly \$500 billion is expected from public grants and concessional loans, with details to be worked out over the next two weeks.

Also on Saturday, Zelenskyy announced further changes to the government, saying he had proposed Denys Shmyhal to become energy minister and first deputy prime minister.

Shmyhal, who served most recently as defense minister and formerly as Ukraine's longest-serving prime minister, is well respected. His proposed replacement in defense is Mykhailo Fedorov, who is widely credited with leading the introduction of drone technology into the army in his role as digital transformation minister.

Zelenskyy on Friday appointed the head of Ukraine's military intelligence as his new chief of staff. The president framed the appointment of Gen. Kyrylo Budanov as part of an effort to sharpen the focus on security, defense development and diplomacy.

Meanwhile, the death toll from a Russian missile attack on the city of Kharkiv on Friday increased to two, including a 3-year-old boy, Kharkiv regional head Oleh Syniehubov wrote on Telegram.

An overnight Russian drone attack on the Mykolaiv region targeted critical infrastructure and left some communities without electricity, according to regional head Vitalii Kim. He said engineers spent the night working to restore power and there were no casualties reported.

Wisconsin judge convicted of obstructing arrest of immigrant resigns as GOP threatens impeachment

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

Embattled Wisconsin Judge Hannah Dugan, who was convicted of obstruction last month for helping an immigrant evade federal officers, has sent her resignation letter to the governor.

The letter was sent Saturday. Republicans had been making plans to impeach her ever since her Dec.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 70 of 73

19 conviction. A spokesperson for Gov. Tony Evers, a Democrat, said his office received Dugan's letter, and he would work to fill the vacancy without delay.

Dugan wrote that over the past decade she handled thousands of cases with "a commitment to treat all persons with dignity and respect, to act justly, deliberately and consistently, and to maintain a courtroom with the decorum and safety the public deserves."

But she said the case against her is too big of a distraction.

"As you know, I am the subject of unprecedented federal legal proceedings, which are far from concluded but which present immense and complex challenges that threaten the independence of our judiciary. I am pursuing this fight for myself and for our independent judiciary," Dugan said in her letter.

Last April, federal prosecutors accused Dugan of distracting federal officers trying to arrest a Mexican immigrant outside her courtroom and leading the man out through a private door. A federal jury convicted her of felony obstruction.

The case against Dugan was highlighted by President Donald Trump as he pressed ahead with his sweeping immigration crackdown. Democrats insisted the administration was trying to make an example of Dugan to blunt judicial opposition to the operation.

Republican Wisconsin Assembly Speaker Robin Vos praised Dugan's decision.

"I'm glad Dugan did the right thing by resigning and followed the clear direction from the Wisconsin Constitution," Vos said.

Democrat Ann Jacobs, who is chair of the Wisconsin Elections Commission board, said she agreed with Dugan that Milwaukee should have a permanent judge in place while this fight plays out.

"Despite her situation, she is ever the champion of justice, wanting to remove the judiciary from a political battle over her fate. I'm sure this is terribly hard for her but she is true to her faith and her principles," Jacobs said in a post on X.

On April 18, immigration officers went to the Milwaukee County courthouse after learning 31-year-old Eduardo Flores-Ruiz had reentered the country illegally and was scheduled to appear before Dugan for a hearing in a state battery case.

Dugan confronted agents outside her courtroom and directed them to the office of her boss, Milwaukee County Chief Judge Carl Ashley, because she told them their administrative warrant wasn't sufficient grounds to arrest Flores-Ruiz.

After the agents left, she led Flores-Ruiz and his attorney out a private jury door. Agents spotted Flores-Ruiz in the corridor, followed him outside and arrested him after a foot chase. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security announced in November he had been deported.

Investigation is opened into managers of Swiss bar where fire killed 40

By JOHN LEICESTER and JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

CRANS-MONTANA, Switzerland (AP) — Swiss authorities have opened a criminal investigation into the managers of the bar where a fire at a New Year's party left 40 people dead, authorities said Saturday.

The two are suspected of involuntary homicide, involuntary bodily harm and involuntarily causing a fire, the Valais region's chief prosecutor, Beatrice Pilloud, told reporters. She said the investigation was opened on Friday night and that it would help "explore all the leads." The announcement of the investigation did not name the managers.

More than 100 other people were injured in the blaze that broke out around 1:30 a.m. on Thursday at Le Constellation bar in the Alpine resort town of Crans-Montana. Police have said many were in their teens to mid-20s.

The process of identifying the dead and injured continued on Saturday, leading to an agonizing wait for relatives.

Investigators said Friday they believe sparkling candles atop Champagne bottles ignited the fire when they came too close to the ceiling of the crowded bar.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 71 of 73

'The world needs an answer'

Authorities planned to look into whether sound-dampening material on the ceiling conformed with regulations and whether the candles were permitted for use in the bar. Officials said they also would look at other safety measures on the premises, including fire extinguishers and escape routes.

The Valais region's top security official, Stéphane Ganzer, told SRF public radio Saturday that "such a huge accident with a fire in Switzerland means that something didn't work — maybe the material, maybe the organization on the spot." He added: "Something didn't work and someone made a mistake, I am sure of that."

Nicolas Féraud, who heads the Crans-Montana municipality, told RTS radio he was "convinced" checks on the bar hadn't been lax, the broadcaster reported.

Asked whether the tragedy could have been avoided, Swiss Justice Minister Beat Jans replied that officials could not yet answer and "we know that the world needs an answer on this question."

Difficulty in identifying the dead and injured

The severity of burns has made it difficult to identify the dead and injured, requiring families to supply authorities with DNA samples. In some cases, wallets and any identification documents inside were turned to ash.

On Saturday, regional police said the bodies of four victims — a boy and a girl, both 16, an 18-year-old man and a 21-year-old woman, all of them Swiss — had been identified and handed over to their families.

Several injured people still haven't been identified.

Laetitia Brodard, whose 16-year-old son, Arthur, went to Le Constellation to celebrate the New Year, held out hope that he might be one of them.

"I'm looking everywhere. The body of my son is somewhere," Brodard told reporters Friday evening. "I want to know where my child is and be by his side. Wherever that may be, be it in the intensive care unit or the morgue."

On Saturday, she told French broadcaster BFM TV that "we, parents, are starting to get tired ... and anger is starting to rise."

"It's a wait that destroys people's stability," said Elvira Venturella, an Italian psychologist working with the families. "And the more time passes, the more difficult it becomes to accept the uncertainty, not having information."

Swiss officials said Friday that 119 people were injured and 113 had been formally identified.

On Saturday, Italy's ambassador to Switzerland, Gian Lorenzo Cornado, told reporters he had just been briefed by local authorities that the number of injured stood at 121, with five not yet identified. He said 14 Italians were being treated in hospitals.

Cornado acknowledged "a lot of stress," but said it was right for authorities to share information only when it is "accurate and 100% sure."

Ganzer, visiting the site along with Jans, called the families' wait "unbearable," and said officials' top priority was providing them the "legitimate answers they are waiting for."

Swiss police have said the injured included more than 70 Swiss nationals and over 10 each from France and Italy, along with citizens of Serbia, Bosnia, Luxembourg, Belgium, Portugal and Poland.

Mourners and well-wishers bearing flowers flowed to makeshift memorials outside Le Constellation, some consoling one another with hugs as they shed tears. "RIP you are all our children" one handwritten note said.

From bus driver to president: Venezuela's Maduro never escaped his predecessor's shadow

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Nicolás Maduro, who rose from unionized bus driver to Venezuelan president and oversaw his country's democratic undoing and economic collapse, was captured Saturday during an attack by U.S. forces on his capital.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 72 of 73

U.S. President Donald Trump, in an early morning social media post, announced Maduro's capture. Venezuela's vice president, Delcy Rodríguez, later announced that the whereabouts of Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, remained unknown. Trump's attorney general, Pam Bondi, said Maduro and Flores, would face charges after an indictment in New York.

Maduro's fall was the culmination of months of stepped-up U.S. pressure on various fronts.

He had spent the last months of his presidency fueling speculation over the intentions of the U.S. government to attack and invade Venezuela with the goal of ending the self-proclaimed socialist revolution that his late mentor and predecessor, Hugo Chávez, ushered in 1999. Maduro, like Chávez, cast the United States as Venezuela's biggest threat, railing against Democratic and Republic administrations for any efforts to restore democratic norms.

Maduro's political career began 40 years ago. In 1986, he traveled to Cuba to receive a year of ideological instruction, his only formal education after high school. Upon his return, he worked as a bus driver for the Caracas subway system, where he quickly became a union leader. Venezuela's intelligence agencies in the 1990s identified him as a leftist radical with close ties to the Cuban government.

Maduro eventually left his driver job and joined the political movement that Chávez organized after receiving a presidential pardon in 1994 for leading a failed and bloody military coup years earlier. After Chávez took office, the former youth baseball player rose through the ranks of the ruling party, spending his first six years as a lawmaker before becoming president of the National Assembly. He then served six years as foreign minister and a couple months as vice president.

Appointed the political heir to Chávez

Chávez used his last address to the nation before his death in 2013 to anoint Maduro as his successor, asking his supporters to vote for the then-foreign affairs minister should he die. The choice stunned supporters and detractors alike. But Chávez's enormous electoral capital delivered Maduro a razor-thin victory that year, giving him his first six-year term, though he would never enjoy the devotion that voters professed for Chávez.

Maduro married Flores, his partner of nearly two decades, in July 2013, shortly after he became president. He called her the "first combatant," instead of first lady, and considered her a crucial adviser.

Maduro's entire presidency was marked by a complex social, political and economic crisis that pushed millions into poverty, drove more than 7.7 million Venezuelans to migrate and put thousands of real or perceived government opponents in prison, where many were tortured, some at his direction. Maduro complemented the repressive apparatus by purging institutions of anyone who dared dissent.

Venezuela's crisis took hold during Maduro's first year in office. The political opposition, including the now-Nobel Peace Prize winner María Corina Machado, called for street protests in Caracas and other cities. The demonstrations evidenced Maduro's iron fist as security forces pushed back protests, which ended with 43 deaths and dozens of arrests.

Maduro's United Socialist Party of Venezuela would go on to lose control of the National Assembly for the first time in 16 years in the 2015 election. Maduro moved to neutralize the opposition-controlled legislature by establishing a pro-government Constituent Assembly in 2017, leading to months of protests violently suppressed by security forces and the military.

More than 100 people were killed and thousands were injured in the demonstrations. Hundreds were arrested, causing the International Criminal Court to open an investigation against Maduro and members of his government for crimes against humanity. The investigation was still ongoing in 2025.

In 2018, Maduro survived an assassination attempt when drones rigged with explosives detonated near him as he delivered a speech during a nationally televised military parade.

Bedeviled by economic problems

Maduro was unable to stop the economic free fall. Inflation and severe shortages of food and medicines affected Venezuelans nationwide. Entire families starved and began migrating on foot to neighboring countries. Those who remained lined up for hours to buy rice, beans and other basics. Some fought on the streets over flour.

Groton Daily Independent

Sunday, January 04, 2026 ~ Vol. 26 - No. 214 ~ 73 of 73

Ruling party loyalists moved the December 2018 presidential election to May and blocked opposition parties from the ballot. Some opposition politicians were imprisoned; others fled into exile. Maduro ran virtually unopposed and was declared winner, but dozens of countries did not recognize him.

Months after the election, he drew the fury after social media videos showed him feasting on a steak prepared by a celebrity chef at a restaurant in Turkey while millions in his country were going hungry.

Under Maduro's watch, Venezuela's economy shrank 71% between 2012 and 2020, while inflation topped 130,000%. Its oil production, the beating heart of the country, dropped to less than 400,000 barrels a day, a figure once unthinkable.

The first Trump administration imposed economic sanctions against Maduro, his allies and state-owned companies to try to force a government change. The measures included freezing all Venezuelan government assets in the U.S. and prohibiting American citizens and international partners from doing business with Venezuelan government entities, including the state-owned oil company.

Out of options, Maduro began implementing a series of economic measures in 2021 that eventually ended Venezuela's hyperinflation cycle. He paired the economic changes with concessions to the U.S.-backed political opposition with which it restarted negotiations for what many had hoped would be a free and democratic presidential election in 2024.

Maduro used the negotiations to gain concessions from the U.S. government, including the pardon and prison release of one of his closest allies and the sanctions license that allowed oil giant Chevron to restart pumping and exporting Venezuelan oil. The license became his government's financial lifeline.

Losing support in many places

Negotiations led by Norwegian diplomats did not solve key political differences between the ruling party and the opposition.

In 2023, the government banned Machado, Maduro's strongest opponent, from running for office. In early 2024, it intensified its repressive efforts, detaining opposition leaders and human rights defenders. The government also forced key members of Machado's campaign to seek asylum at a diplomatic compound in Caracas, where they remained for more than a year to avoid arrest.

Hours after polls closed in the 2024 election, the National Electoral Council declared Maduro the winner. But unlike previous elections, it did not provide detailed vote counts. The opposition, however, collected and published tally sheets from more than 80% of electronic voting machines used in the election. The records showed Edmundo González defeated Maduro by a more than 2-to-1 margin.

Protests erupted. Some demonstrators toppled statues of Chávez. The government again responded with full force and detained more than 2,000 people. World leaders rejected the official results, but the National Assembly sworn in Maduro for a third term in January 2025.

Trump's return to the White House that same month proved to be a sobering moment for Maduro. Trump quickly pushed Maduro to accept regular deportation flights for the first time in years. By the summer, Trump had built up a military force in the Caribbean that put Venezuela's government on high alert and started taking steps to address what it called narco-terrorism.

For Maduro, that was the beginning of the end.

Jake Paul drops out of WBA cruiserweight rankings after loss to Anthony Joshua

PANAMA CITY (AP) — Jake Paul has slipped out of the WBA cruiserweight rankings after the YouTuber-turned-boxer was soundly beaten by former world heavyweight champion Anthony Joshua last month.

Paul's jaw was broken in two places and the American needed surgery to repair the damage after Joshua's sixth-round knockout victory in a heavyweight bout in Miami.

Paul (12-2, 7 KOs) had entered the WBA's cruiserweight rankings at No. 14 in July shortly after he beat 39-year-old Julio César Chávez Jr. by unanimous decision in Anaheim, California.

He was at No. 15 entering the bout against Joshua.