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SERVING ANTHONY, VINTON, CANUTILLO, EAST MONTANA, HORIZON, SOCORRO, CLINT, FABENS, SAN ELIZARIO AND TORNILLO

JANUARY 15, 2026

Texans can apply for school vouchers in February

By Alfredo Vasquez
Special to the Courier

TEXAS – Beginning in February, families who want to enroll their children outside of the public school system may apply for Texas' new statewide school voucher program. State officials recently released details for the \$1 billion initiative, known as Texas Education Freedom Accounts (TEFA).

State officials acknowledged that they have not finalized all of the timelines, but they did confirm that initial funds are expected to be available for next school year.

The voucher plan is designed to deposit taxpayer dollars into Education Savings Accounts (ESA) for families participating in the program. Most families will receive about \$10,000 per student each year or 85 percent of a public-school student's allotment from the state. Homeschooled students are eligible for \$2,000 annually, and students with disabilities could receive up to \$30,000 depending on their needs, according to state officials.

Guidelines stipulate that the program is open to all students, but if applications exceed available funding, the state will use a lottery system to determine which families receive vouchers. Priority will first go to students with disabilities from families earning up to \$240,000 per year for a family of four. Next in line are students from households earning roughly twice the federal poverty level, or about \$60,000 for a family of four, followed by families earning between \$60,000 and \$240,000. Families earning more than that would have the lowest priority.

ESA funds may be used for a wide range of



– Internet

ALTERNATIVES – Texas' public schools, like the one in photo above, will have to compete with private schools for students as Texas' new voucher program is slated to go into effect next school year. Starting in February parents may submit their applications for the voucher program and decide where to spend funds awarded by the state.

education-related expenses, including private school tuition, meals and uniforms, approved online or out-of-state programs, transportation costs and pre-kindergarten education. However, the money

cannot be used to pay a family member. Texas Governor Greg Abbott signed the voucher

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– Photo courtesy Anthony ISD

A BANNER DAY – Anthony Middle School educators gather outside the school for a picture to commemorate their CHILDREN AT RISK ranking.

Anthony Middle School receives top rating for at risk children

Anthony ISD Staff

ANTHONY, TX – Anthony Middle School has been rated as the top ranked

El Paso area Gold Ribbon School among all middle schools. The ranking is by the organization CHILDREN AT RISK, a non-partisan research nonprofit dedicated to understanding and addressing the root causes of child poverty and inequality.

CHILDREN AT RISK ranks schools that excel in student achievement,

growth and college readiness. In a separate category called Gold Ribbon Schools – schools that serve

See AMS, Page 3

To the pessimistic patient, “consultation” means that his doctor has decided to call in an accomplice.

– Quips & Quotes

Don't annex Greenland

China, Russia and Iran had to be alarmed by the display of U.S. power in Venezuela, but so did Denmark, a NATO ally of the United States.

In the aftermath of the snatch-and-grab of Nicolas Maduro, Trump spoke to The Atlantic about his other foreign-policy priorities: "We do

need Greenland, absolutely."

It might have been easy not too long ago to dismiss this as bluster. Not anymore – not after the strikes on the Iran nuclear program and the Venezuelan operation. We've gone from "Trump always chickens out" when he was backing off his Liberation Day tariffs to "dismiss Trump's threats at your own peril."

Trump doesn't do everything he says, but almost everything he does do, he talks about openly beforehand. In this respect, enemies of the United States can never complain that they weren't warned – and perhaps allies, too.

Denmark controls Greenland as a semi-autonomous territory. It colonized the sparsely populated island several hundred years ago. Mostly within the Arctic Circle, Greenland is not desirable real estate by any typical metric, but has outsized strategic

significance.

As more waters become navigable in the Arctic Ocean, the top of the world opens up for greater geopolitical contention.

Greenland occupies a crucial spot. It sits on a key naval lane between the Atlantic and the Arctic, and it has prodigious reserves of critical minerals, and maybe fossil fuels, as well.

If it fell into our lap, it'd be an excellent addition to our territorial holdings. There's a reason that American statesmen have long coveted the island.

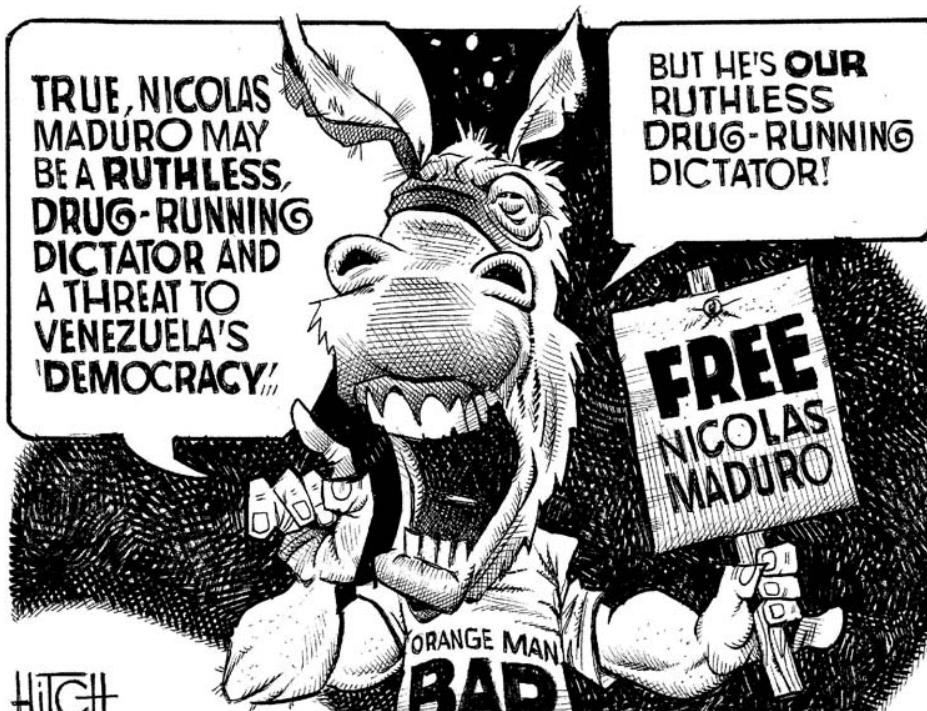
The problem is that it's not currently available. What are other options? A lightly armed contingent of U.S. crossing guards could probably take it over in a couple of days. The challenge, though, is political and diplomatic, not military.

A NATO ally seizing the territory of another NATO ally would obviously be a grave threat to the integrity of the alliance. Would Denmark invoke Article 5 against the United States? It has the makings of a good spoof musical, but it's not something anyone should want to experience in reality.

Although Trump has said in the past that he doesn't



THE
RICH
LOWRY
COLUMN



Vouchers

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program into law last year, under Senate Bill 2. The initiative has been a divisive program with supporters asserting that it gives parents more opportunities and autonomy over their child's education, and opponents decrying that the program pulls resources from already struggling public schools.

Texas now joins more than 30 states and the District of Columbia in having some sort of voucher program. In recent years there has been an increase in states

adopting universal voucher programs or expanding their existing voucher program to be universal. ESAs, which are often considered the most extensive and flexible kind of voucher, have become the program of choice.

The programs are frequently advertised as a way for lower-income families to access private schools they couldn't otherwise afford. Supporters argue they move families with limited means into new education settings.

However, recent reports indicated that 87 percent of the applicants for the TEFA program are expected to be students who already attend

private schools, which means that the program may serve as more of a tax break for wealthier families, in large part because for low- and middle-income families, vouchers will not cover the full costs of attending private schools. This projection is in line with other states with similar voucher programs.

Also, another recent study showed that voucher-like programs had raised private school enrollment by nearly 5 percent nationally, which revealed that the biggest beneficiaries of the programs are families whose children already attend private school.

As Texas school vouchers begin next school year, opponents of the program also harp on the fact that it will be difficult to measure the progress of recipients in

El Paso County's Texas Education Savings Account (ESA) program

1. Applicants must be U.S. citizens or lawfully present in the United States.
2. Students must be eligible to enroll in a Texas public school for grades K-12 or in a public prekindergarten program.
3. Students must not be enrolled in a public school while participating in the Education Savings Accounts (ESA) program.
4. Students currently attending private schools or those entering kindergarten or pre-K for the first time are eligible.
5. Higher-income families may have their funds allocated based on a lottery system, with priority given to students with disabilities and families earning under 500 percent of the federal poverty level.
6. For more information on the application process and requirements, interested individuals should visit the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts website or contact the participating program's administration.

private schools compared to their public-school counterparts because private school students will not be required to take the same standardized tests.

Education observers warn

parents that they should continue to ask who is keeping tabs on the private schools participating in the program to make sure they maintain

See VOUCHERS, Page 5

WEST TEXAS COUNTY COURIER

1973

53

Years

2026

SERVING ANTHONY, VINTON, CANUTILLO, EAST MONTANA, HORIZON, SOCORRO, CLINT, FABENS, SAN ELIZARIO AND TORNILLO

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"In a time of growing concern around chronic absenteeism, instructional time, and resource equity, these schools stand out as examples of what's possible in Texas education."

— CHILDREN AT RISK on Gold Ribbon Schools

AMS

From Page 1

predominantly low-income populations and still achieve strong academic outcomes are rated.

To be classified as a Gold Ribbon School, a public school needs to serve student populations that are more than 75% economically disadvantaged and still achieve an A or B rating by the Texas Education Agency. These schools exemplify Texas' high-performing, high-poverty campuses — proving that academic excellence can thrive in every community.

"This is even more significant because West Texas schools were the highest ranked in Texas by a regional analysis by CHILDREN AT RISK," said Dr. Oscar A. Troncoso, Anthony ISD superintendent. "This is an amazing achievement because it shows our middle school is the best in the El Paso area at getting results



Dr. Oscar A. Troncoso

from a population with high numbers of economically disadvantaged students," said Troncoso.

West Texas schools had the highest average of overall scores for the 2025 CHILDREN

AT RISK rankings. They also recorded the highest percentage of Gold Ribbon schools statewide at 34%. West Texas schools also reported the lowest percentage of D and F schools in the state.

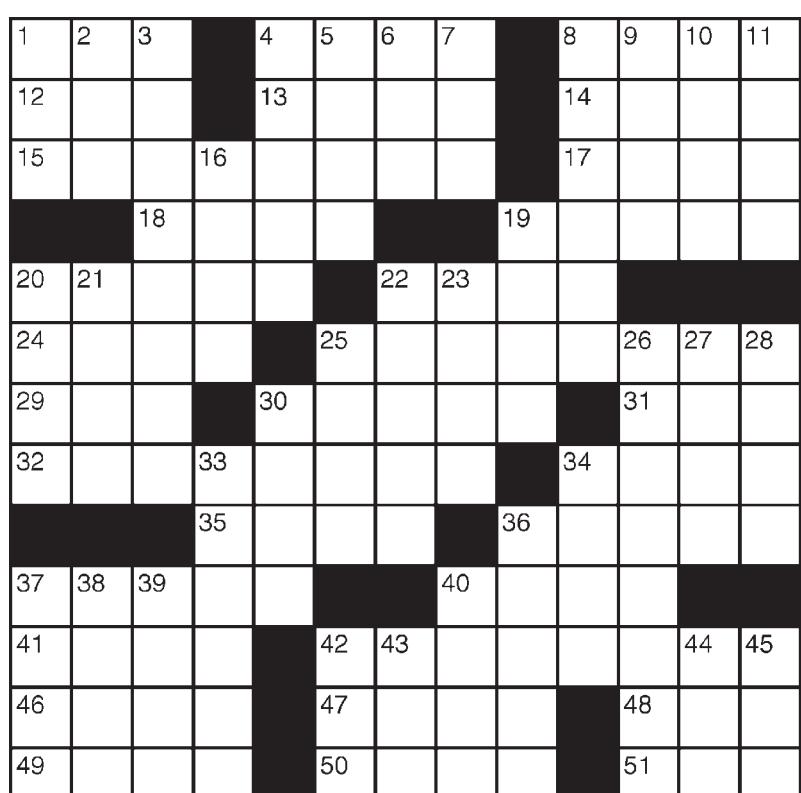
"Progress like this doesn't happen by chance — it happens when dedicated leaders and educators believe in every student's potential and work relentlessly to give them the tools to achieve it," said Dr. Bob Sanborn, President and CEO of CHILDREN AT RISK.

Anthony Middle School Principal, Veronica Ordonez, credits her teachers and staff for their results. "We have outstanding teachers and an incredible staff that is dedicated to the idea that each student, no matter their background, will have academic growth and success."

While ranked as the best Gold Ribbon School in the El Paso area, Anthony Middle was also ranked sixth as part of the top ten overall El Paso Area Middle Schools. The 2024-25 school year analysis covers 208 public schools

in West Texas, including 125 elementary schools and 46 middle schools and 37 high schools. Visit www.childrenatrisk.org for more information on the CHILDREN AT RISK rankings.

King Crossword



Average
Solve Time
26 Minutes

ACROSS

- 1 Ship's sail
- 4 Some TVs
- 8 Corned beef
- 12 Terre Haute sch.
- 13 Greek vowel
- 14 Iso-
- 15 Flop
- 17 Pop's sister
- 18 Coated with gold
- 19 Is boastful
- 20 Forest clearing
- 22 Satiate
- 24 Partially mine
- 25 Screwdriver type
- 29 _ Lanka
- 30 Warning
- 31 Compass dir.
- 32 Sailing challenge
- 34 Wound cover
- 35 Breaks down
- 36 Piles
- 37 Pink hue
- 40 Seniors' org.
- 41 Each
- 42 Unexpected gain
- 46 Story
- 47 Shoppe descriptor
- 48 24 horas
- 49 Building wings
- 50 Yale students
- 51 Conclude
- 52 Skippy rival
- 53 "This _ stickup!"
- 54 Sofia's land
- 55 Rummage
- 56 (through)
- 57 Stallion-to-be
- 58 Standstill
- 59 Plopped down
- 60 Fireplace part
- 61 Water color?
- 62 Crooned
- 63 Chart toppers
- 64 Pot covers
- 65 Cigar remnant
- 66 "Holy cow!"
- 67 Entice
- 68 Secluded spots
- 69 Cooking fat
- 70 Move like a

butterfly
26 Adventure
27 Now, in a memo
28 Society newbies
30 Missing GI
33 Curtains
34 Lowly worker
36 Devil's domain
37 Blanchett of "The
Aviator"
38 Milky gem
39 Sandwich bread
40 "The King"
42 Misery
43 Under the weather
44 Architect Maya
45 Young fellow

Answer Page 4





Moments in time

THE HISTORY CHANNEL

- On Jan. 12, 1967, James Bedford became the first American to have his remains cryogenically frozen, in the hope of future reanimation. Later, as cryogenic companies closed their doors, his family was forced at one point to keep his liquid nitrogen chamber in self-storage. Today he is preserved at the Alcor Life Extension Foundation in Scottsdale, Arizona.
- On Jan. 13, 1999, basketball superstar Michael Jordan of the Chicago Bulls announced his retirement from the sport, for the second time, in front of a crowd at Chicago's United Center, citing a loss of drive necessary to continue playing at such a high level and the desire to spend more time with his family.
- On Jan. 14, 1969, an explosion aboard the aircraft carrier USS Enterprise, caused by an accidentally detonated rocket, destroyed 15 planes, killed 27 people, and injured more than 300 others in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. The Enterprise was the first-ever nuclear-powered aircraft carrier when it launched in 1960.
- On Jan. 15, 1777, a convention of future

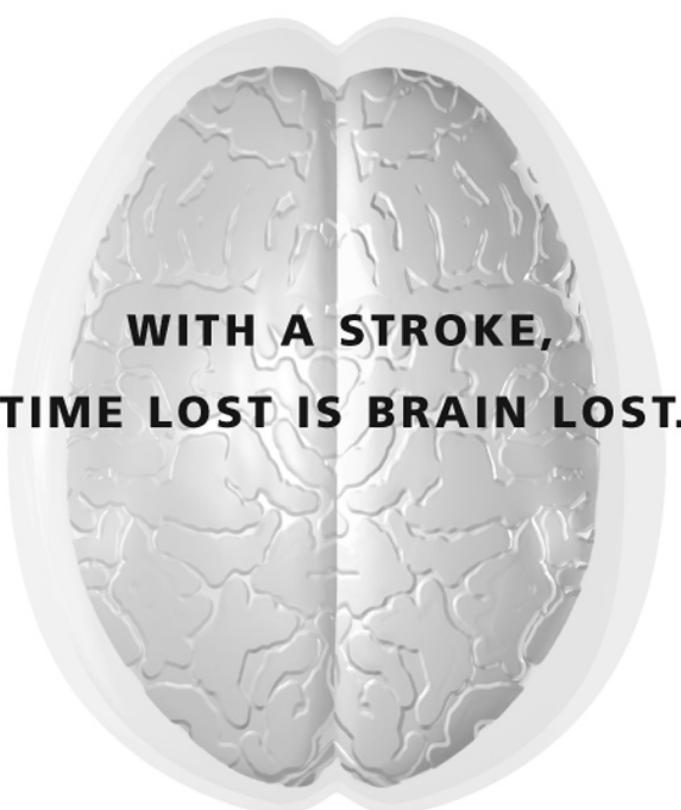
Vermonters got together in Westminster and announced their independence from the crown of Great Britain and the colony of New York. Their delegates included future Vermont governor Thomas Chittenden and Ira Allen, who would later become known as the "father" of the University of Vermont.

On Jan. 16, 1997, actor-comedian Bill Cosby's 27-year-old son Ennis was murdered by Mikhail Markhasev after Ennis had stopped nearby to fix a flat tire along California's Interstate 405 in Los Angeles. Markhasev, reportedly high on drugs at the time, was given life in prison without the possibility of parole.

On Jan. 17, 1916, a group of golf professionals and several leading amateur golfers gathered at the Taplow Club in New York City, in a meeting that resulted in the founding of the Professional Golfer's Association (PGA).

On Jan. 18, 1968, Eartha Kitt, the actress and singer known for playing Catwoman on the 1960s Batman TV series, caused a stir during a White House luncheon when she confronted Lady Bird Johnson about the Vietnam War. Her remarks led to her being blacklisted as a performer in the U.S.

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Vouchers

From Page 1

high standards. On the other hand, advocates of the program emphasized that Texas' voucher program remains a work in progress with some details still being developed and private school partners' requirements yet to be finalized.

"TEFA is designed to put parents in the driver's seat, and the early responses from

schools show that Texas families will have meaningful choices when applications open in February," acting Texas Comptroller Kelly Hancock stated in a recent news release.

Beginning in February, families will be able to apply for the ESA program through an online portal operated by the finance and technology company Odyssey, which is tasked with distributing funds to eligible and accepted families for the 2026–27 school year. Odyssey could earn more than \$50 million for implementing the \$1 billion program.

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The 2026 Sun Bowl could look very different

By Steve Escajeda
Special to the Courier

I know that 2026 is now here but I'd like to take a quick look at the very end of 2025, the very last day to be exact.

Of course, that would be New Year's Eve, and for El Paso, that means the Tony the Tiger Sun Bowl.

This past game, like so many others over the last 10 years, was a thriller that went right down to the wire.

Duke, which lost to Arizona State 36-31 when they met in the Sun Bowl 10 years ago, returned the favor by taking a come-from-behind 42-39 victory.

Everything was great for the game, the skies were bright and sunny, the high was in the sixties and a whopping

44,975 showed up for the game. That attendance figure was the second highest (except for the over 48,000 that showed up for Notre Dame three years ago) over the last decade.

So, everything went well this year; everything has gone well in recent years and everything will go well in the future, right?

Well, before we give that question a thumb's up, we'll have to wait and see.

Many crucial agreements expired at the end of the 2025 game and the truth is, we don't have a clue what the Sun Bowl will look like next year.

First of all, we don't know if there'll be a big bowl of Frosted Flakes near the end zone for players to jump into next year. In other words, our contract with Kellogg's has ended and it's not sure whether they are going to re-up

or not.

The 2026 Sun Bowl game does not have a title sponsor – yet.

Don't worry, the Sun Bowl will certainly obtain a great title sponsor no matter who it is, but I kind of like seeing that big orange tiger walking around the city.

What day will next year's Sun Bowl be played and what conferences will be involved? Who knows.

The Sun Bowl has been tied to the ACC and the Pac 12 for many years, but those contracts have also ended.

It all starts with the Pac 12, who isn't even the Pac 12 anymore with teams like UCLA, USC, ASU, Oregon, Washington, Stanford, Cal and Arizona all splitting for other conferences and more money.

So, it's totally up in the air as to who will play in next year's game.

I've spoken to sources within the organization that say the Sun Bowl would like to keep the ACC and hopefully either go back to the Big Ten or possibly the Big 12.

The Big Ten would mean that teams like Michigan, Ohio State, Indiana, Penn State, Nebraska, Oregon, USC, UCLA, Wisconsin, Iowa, Michigan St. and Washington would be available.

The Big 12 would offer teams like Arizona, ASU, Baylor, BYU, Houston, Iowa St., Kansas St., TCU, Texas Tech and Utah.

Of the two, it looks like an ACC vs. Big Ten would bring in better teams, but an ACC vs. Big 12 would feature regional teams that would bring in more visitors from out of town.

The final thing that needs to be decided is when the game will be played.

Everything is up in the air because of the college playoff system. Are they going to stay with 12 teams? Are they raising it to 16? Are they going to 24? Are they going to have home games? Are they playing the first round at bowl game sites?

That last question could affect the Sun Bowl. Let's be honest, not including the Sun Bowl, many of these bowl games are pretty empty. Who wants to pay big money to see a 7-5 and a 6-6 team go at it?

If the playoffs go to 16 teams that means there will be eight first-round games and there's a slight chance they may decide to hold them at bowl sites like the Sun Bowl.

Talk about renewing interest in the mid-tier bowl games.

A first-round playoff game would mean the Sun Bowl being played in early December. If not, probably on Dec. 31.

The only sure thing is that CBS will continue to carry the game nationally through 2030.

The 2026 Sun Bowl will be played and it will continue to be successful.

It just may look a little different.

Senior moment By Matilda Charles

Avoiding Medicare fraud

Medicare is a pot of gold for scammers. There is a lot of money to be made by those who successfully commit fraud against seniors. You, however, can stop them in their tracks by not falling for the scams.

Here are just a few of the scams:

Genetic testing is a hot topic for those who want to be screened for a variety of potential illnesses. If you get a call offering genetic testing (or even at a booth at a senior fair), don't believe the scammer who says that Medicare will pay for it, and that all you need to do is provide your Medicare number. Never give that number out! The only legitimate way Medicare will pay for genetic testing is if your doctor thinks it's medically necessary and orders it.

Even your medical provider shouldn't be completely trusted. When you receive your Medicare Summary Notice showing what was billed and what Medicare paid, look closely at it. Check the dates and services to be sure

that you really did receive those services. While errors could be honest mistakes, maybe they're not. Call your provider and ask them to send you an itemized bill so you can see how they came up with their numbers and to send a corrected bill to Medicare. If they don't, or if you suspect fraud, report it. Call Medicare at 800-MEDICARE (800-633-4227).

To learn more, see the Senior Medicare Patrol (877-808-2468) whose job is to ferret out Medicare fraud. Look for them at smpresource.org. Don't miss the Consequences to Beneficiaries section of the website. The health impacts of fraud are scary: misinformation in our files, incorrect lab results and more. If you want to talk to a Senior Medicare Patrol representative, see the "Find Help in Your State" button.

For an overview of the types of fraud against seniors, see elderaffairs.org/wp-content/uploads/FraudMaterials.pdf. You'll be surprised how many there are!

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CORNER TO CORNER ACROSS

1 Fishhook end
5 Neophyte
9 Negate
15 "Kapow!"
19 "Ben Adhem" (Leigh Hunt poem)
20 Whole bunch
21 Opposed (to)
22 Nevada city on I-80
23 Mild-flavored lettuce
24 Dawn's direction
25 Common corsage flower
27 2019 buddy-cop action-comedy film
29 Leaning Tower city
31 Co-avenger with Electra
32 Wooden shoe
34 Bestow
38 Feedbag grain
39 Jaguar, e.g.
41 "It's not _ deal"
43 Guy who helps people get out of jail
48 Attila the _
49 "I pass," in cards
51 Bic _ Stic
52 Add up to
53 March 15, e.g.
55 Emperor before Caligula
58 In the direction of
62 Unsafe
64 Convent VIP
65 Quilt, e.g.

66 Small bouquets
68 Monkey in "Aladdin"
69 Die-hard devotees
70 What this puzzle's solver does when filling in the upper-left to lower-right diagonal?
74 8-11 p.m., TV-wise
78 Exec's deg.
79 Tattle
84 Old Russian revolutionary
85 German for the verb "love"
88 Sheer fabric
89 States of oneness
90 Filename display area
92 Not far at all
93 GQ or Us
94 Send forth
96 Some pinschers, for short
98 Completed
99 Male sibling by birth
105 Asian fusion restaurant chain
106 Taxing org.
107 French body of water
108 Like an ode
110 Marjanovic of the Rockets
112 Memory loss
116 Like eyesores
118 Citigroup alternative
121 Item for surfing on

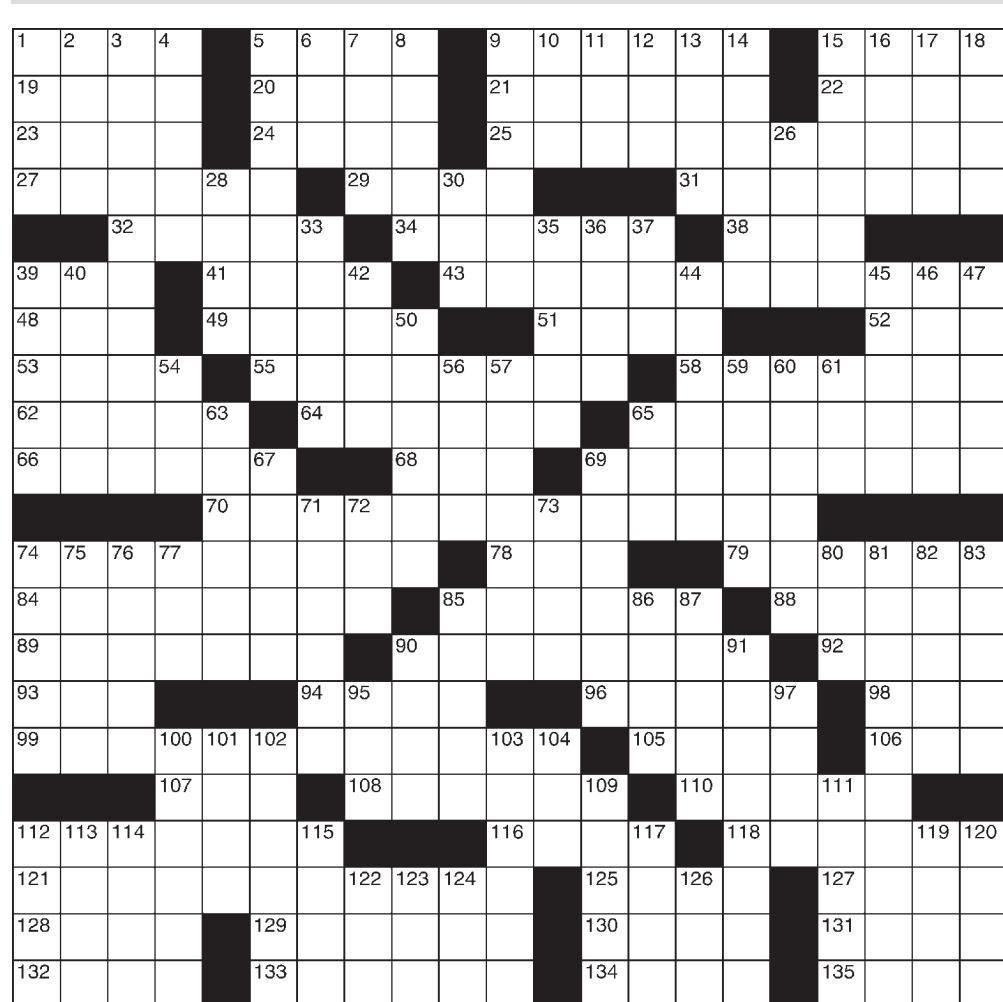
one's stomach
125 Work for "Aladdin"
127 Impose _ on (forbid)
128 Arm bone
129 Princess Beatrice's mom
130 Ran away
131 1967 Peter Sellers film, with "The"
132 Casual tops
133 Brines, e.g.
134 Lays (down)
135 Spin _ (do like Spider-Man)
1 Streisand, to friends
2 Slightly
3 Vigorous quality
4 Gump Shrimp Company
5 Mechanical-looking dance
6 Pro vote
7 Rub roughly
8 Sight-related
9 Beach hut
10 "Selma" director DuVernay
11 Lincoln loc.
12 Boohoo
13 Canadian gas choice
14 NBA star James
15 Twists to pull free
16 Sun output
17 Poker cost
18 Hardness scale
19 Of kidneys

26 Take in a novel, e.g.
28 Abba of Israel
30 Boohoo
33 Leg bone
35 Popular office plant
36 Building wings
37 Hitting stat
39 Bird sound
40 Video's counterpart
42 Last name of the Bee Gees
44 Eight-armed creatures
45 The second Mrs. Trump
46 Actress Eve
47 Bird homes
50 Cheapen
54 Enjoy a slope
56 McEntire of country
57 Lead-in to a proposal
59 Bake-off needs
60 As if that _ enough..."
61 Pooch sound
63 Aden citizen
65 _-de-sac
67 Composer Erik
69 Ocean floor
71 Mouth or face, slangily
72 Rescue squad VIP
73 Upscale Swiss watch brand
74 _ tuckered out
75 Of kidneys

DOWN

1 Streisand, to friends
2 Slightly
3 Vigorous quality
4 Gump Shrimp Company
5 Mechanical-looking dance
6 Pro vote
7 Rub roughly
8 Sight-related
9 Beach hut
10 "Selma" director DuVernay
11 Lincoln loc.
12 Boohoo
13 Canadian gas choice
14 NBA star James
15 Twists to pull free
16 Sun output
17 Poker cost
18 Hardness scale
19 Of kidneys

Super Crossword



Answer Page 4

Comix

OUT ON A LIMB By Gary Kopervas



AMBER WAVES By Dave T. Phipps



THE SPATS By Jeff Pickering



TIGER By Bud Blake



Lowry

From Page 2

take military force off the table – an amazing statement in and of itself – he's also talked of buying Greenland. The Danes, though, say it's not for sale, and the Greenlanders don't want to be bought.

If Trump really pushes the issue and forces Denmark and NATO into a corner with the 82nd Airborne ready to go on an airstrip somewhere, he could probably compel a sale, but it'd be courting a diplomatic crisis and damage the reputation of the United States without enough upside.

We can almost certainly get whatever we need from Greenland without violating a friendly country's sovereignty or straining a world-historical alliance to the breaking point. We already have a missile-defense base there. The 1951 Greenland Defense Agreement between Denmark and the U.S. allowing us to keep bases could presumably be updated and extended. Given the national security importance of rare earths to the U.S. and NATO, it should be possible to unlock

Greenland's minerals.

Instead of clapping back at Trump, Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen should be reaching out for a steak dinner at Mar-a-Lago and offering a deal. While public pressure gets Trump's back up, private persuasion – and a warm relationship – goes a long way. The Panamanians managed to get Trump to stop talking about taking back the Canal (for now) with prudent concessions.

For his part, Trump should realize that making everyone in a friendly nation hate him doesn't help his cause. His talk of annexing Canada last year helped Justin Trudeau's party survive a national election that it should have lost. His Greenland saber-rattling is presumably making it harder for Denmark to work with him on sensible cooperation.

If Nicolas Maduro got what he deserved, Denmark is a different matter. Even the unsentimental, results-oriented Trump foreign policy needs to distinguish between friend and foe.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review. ©2026 by King Features Synd., Inc.

Pulmonary nodules most likely are not cancerous

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am a 76-year-old woman in what I thought was excellent health. On a recent coronary calcium CT scan that was ordered because of my age and slightly elevated cholesterol, an incidental finding was described in the report as "innumerable, tiny noncalcified pulmonary nodules bilaterally." The largest of these is in the "left lower lobe with multiple additional 2- to 4-mm nodules," and they recommended "clinical correlation and a consideration of a dedicated chest CT." I found the report quite scary, especially considering my mother and grandfather died of lung cancer (although they were smokers and I never smoked). My primary physician has ordered the chest CT but wants to wait four weeks. She says that the nodules could be caused by inflammation or infection and might resolve on their own. My fear is that they're actually lung cancer and waiting four weeks might be problematic, not to mention extremely anxiety-producing. I would appreciate your input. – M.S.



I certainly understand why you are concerned about lung cancer given your family history, but primary lung cancer is very unlikely. Since there are so many of these tiny nodules, I agree with your doctor that these are highly unlikely to be lung cancer, which is generally only a single nodule.

Your doctor is correct that there are inflammatory and infectious conditions that can cause a similar appearance on a chest CT. Some of these infections are serious (including tuberculosis), but people generally have symptoms. So, I think this is unlikely. Exposure to lung toxins, especially silicosis and asbestosis, are generally occupational, but they are another potential cause.

Some cancers can spread to the lungs. While the appearance of nodules on a CT scan in a person with no known cancer would be unusual, if the CT scan in four weeks shows that the nodules are enlarging, then this would be concerning. Getting another scan in less than four weeks might not be enough time to see a change.

I am sorry about the unavoidable anxiety in waiting for the scan, but it's likely that the scan won't show a change and you will be able to stop worrying.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I was experiencing hoarseness while taking ibuprofen. A friend got intestinal bleeding due to taking it. My doctor gave me 7.5 mg of meloxicam daily, but I'm not sure it's OK for long periods of time. I'm 73 with osteoarthritis and osteopenia. I exercise daily and eat a healthy diet, and I have high blood pressure that is controlled with losartan and amlodipine. – T.M.H.

Ibuprofen is generally a safe drug, but it does have the potential for side effects – some of them being serious. Gastrointestinal bleeding is a serious one, and it is most common in older women. I would not try a second nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drug (NSAID) like meloxicam in a person who has a history of serious bleeding with any other similar drug.

Hoarseness could be due to an allergy, due to direct irritation of ibuprofen on the throat, or from the worsening of acid reflux, which can cause hoarseness if acid gets all the way into the throat.

Meloxicam is also an NSAID but is chemically in a different class from ibuprofen (Motrin, Advil and others) or naproxen (Aleve and others), which are closely related. It's reasonable to give it a try, but if it causes hoarseness again, then an NSAID probably isn't a good choice for your arthritis. You could consider acetaminophen (Tylenol) or topical NSAIDs, which do not get absorbed enough to cause an increased bleeding risk.

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. ©2026 North America Synd., Inc. All Rights Reserved.



Moore Texas by Roger MOORE
"Washers" is the national yard game of Texas and was probably invented here.

CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: X equals O

CGURTTH YRFWGXF ZRLRUGJH
YHROQTGJL AWXOXF XY CGL
PROHT ZRZZRIF PGOW YIGAAHTF:
ZRJROHH YRGHT.

Answer Page 4

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Weekly SUDOKU

	2	5		3	9	8		
	9	2		4	7			
7			4	5	1			
		8	3	9				
1		7	6		5	3		
2		1		6	8	7		
6	1	3	9		2	4		
	3							
	5	4	6	1		3		

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK: ♦♦

♦ Moderate ♦♦ Challenging

Answer Page 4

♦♦♦ HOO BOY!

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Changes to community medical care

VETERANS POST

by Freddy Groves

Veterans who get their medical care from civilian facilities need to keep an eye on what's coming. In 2026 the contracts (originally signed in 2018) between the VA and community health plan networks are expiring. An RFP (request for proposal) has gone out to solicit new contracts.

Some changes are coming:

- The five regions of VA health care are being reduced to two.

- The new contracts will require the community providers to follow industry standards, which is shocking. Is that not already included in any contract to provide medical care to veterans?

- At this point, 40% of veterans get their care from civilian providers. That will likely increase, as the new plan contracts will open the door for more providers.

Veterans who want to

pursue getting medical care at a non-VA facility need to meet eligibility requirements:

- Must be enrolled in VA health care.
- Live in a state with no full-service VA facility.
- The care needed isn't available through the VA.
- The VA can't meet quality standards.
- Qualifies under the old Choice Program: a 30-minute drive (or 20-day wait) for VA primary care or 60-minute drive (or 28-day wait) for specialty care.

Remember that the two-step rule changed in 2025, and if your doctor agrees you need to see a civilian doctor, a second doctor doesn't need to approve it. Depending on the care you need (there are 30 categories of medical care, such as cardiology and dermatology), you'll likely be approved for one year.

Here's where you come in, should you choose to do so. If you're getting civilian care, will their network administrators be putting in a proposal for the next round of contracts? In other words, will you be able to continue

getting care there? Do they know the deadline for their proposal is March 16? I would ask. This is part of being proactive in your own care... asking questions.

To learn more about community care, see www.va.gov/communitycare.

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• Cookies are so fun to make (and to eat). To save some of your favorites for the new year, simply place dough balls on a cookie sheet and freeze. Pop into a freezer-safe bag, and you can have freshly baked cookies pretty much anytime!

• Many people have heard of using applesauce in place of oil or fats, but here's one from T.L. in Georgia about a sugar replacement: "You can use pureed grapes in place of white sugar in some quick bread or muffin recipes. It's pretty easy to make in the blender, and all you need to do is adjust the dry ingredients a little bit so that your muffins are not too moist."

• "Wine. Nobody I know is wasting it. But if you're done before the bottle is, you can pour the leftover wine into ice cube trays to save it. You can use it later in recipes, or (my favorite) to chill a glass of wine!" – E. in Florida

• If you have a lot of overnight guests, here is a good trick so that everybody can hang up his or her towel: Grab some S hooks from the shop and hang them off the towel bar. Now everyone can have a towel hook.

• I have two carafes that I use for my breakfast bar. In one I keep coffee and the other holds milk or cream. On holiday nights, I prep the cream carafe and put it in the fridge. In the morning, while the first pot of coffee is brewing, I fill the coffee carafe with hot water and let it sit. It keeps the coffee hot longer. Then guests may serve themselves some coffee while the next pot is brewing.

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803. ©2026 King Features Synd., Inc.

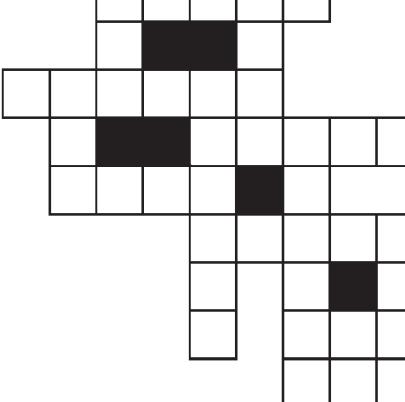
GO FIGURE!

The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.

Answer Page 4

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	+		×		=	56
+		+		+		
	+		×		=	60
×		÷		÷		
	+		÷		=	13
=		=		=		
45	3		14			
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8	9					



Answer Page 4

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Unscramble these twelve letter strings to form each into an ordinary word (ex. HAGNEC becomes CHANGE). Prepare to use only ONE word from any marked (♥) letter string as each unscrambles into more than one word (ex. ♥ RATHE becomes HATER or EARTH or HEART). Fit each string's word either across or down to knot all twelve strings together.