


THURSDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2025


RAIN LIKELY
High, 52. Low, 47. > **A15**
seattletimes.com/weather

The Seattle Times

WINNER OF 11 PULITZER PRIZES

INDEPENDENT AND LOCALLY OWNED FOR MORE THAN 129 YEARS

 SEATTLETIMES.COM

\$2.00

Floods hit ‘catastrophic’ stage

EVACUATIONS | Governor estimates 100,000 could be displaced in flooding from Mount Vernon to Everett.

Seattle Times staff

Western Washington residents along the Skagit and Snohomish rivers could face “catastrophic” and life-threatening flooding Thursday from the week’s heavy rainfall, National Weather Service officials said.

Officials ordered evacuations for parts of Orting in Pierce County, Ebey Island in Snohomish County and Skagit County in the 100-year flood plain. An estimated 100,000 Washington residents could face additional evacuation orders because of rapidly rising floodwaters, Gov. Bob Ferguson’s office said Wednesday afternoon.

Ferguson declared a state of emergency and said he would be requesting federal funding to assist in flood recovery. He thanked first responders and

See > **FLOODING, A7**

MORE INSIDE

School closures in King, Skagit and Snohomish counties > **Northwest, A6**

Puget Sound homeowners, farmers brace for flood damage > **Business, A12**

ON THE WEB

More live coverage
seattletimes.com/weather



KEN LAMBERT / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Avory Meling, 43, is rescued from the flooded Pickering Court apartments by Eastside Fire and Rescue, Wednesday afternoon, in Snoqualmie. Meling’s 15-year-old daughter and two dogs were rescued first. Gov. Bob Ferguson declared a state of emergency Wednesday.

Evacuations, angst as flood-prone Skagit River rises to historic levels

By ISABELLA BREDAN
AND CONRAD SWANSON
Seattle Times staff reporters

SKAGIT RIVER — As unrelenting rains fell Wednesday morning across Western Washington, with a forecast for much more in the hours ahead, Mount Vernon Mayor Peter Donovan braced for the worst.

A more severe flood than any other in recent memory could inundate the region if forecasts hold. Even as crews set up a downtown floodwall along the banks of the Skagit River, meteorologists predict the waters could

climb over the barrier.

“We are currently preparing for what appears to be a potentially worst-case scenario, which is a massive flood event for Skagit County,” Donovan said.

The city began evacuating some neighborhoods Wednesday evening.

The National Weather Service warned of “catastrophic” flooding along the Skagit and Snohomish rivers, with a high risk of levees being topped.

Robert Ezelle, the director of the Washington Military Depart-

See > **EVACUATIONS, A6**



NICK WAGNER / THE SEATTLE TIMES

The Skykomish River roars by a cabin on Wednesday near Index, Snohomish County. Crews rescued dozens of people from flooding in King, Snohomish and Skagit counties Wednesday, but forecasters say the worst is still to come.

 **FUND FOR THOSE IN NEED** | Join The Seattle Times in forging a stronger community by raising up children and families.

A baby needed emergency surgery; then Kindering helped fill the gaps in her care

By DANIEL BEEKMAN
Seattle Times staff reporter

BOTHELL — It’s a big moment when a child stands up on their own for the first time. Exciting and emotional.

It was an extra big moment for Yasmin Guzman and her 2 ½-year-old daughter, Emma, considering what they’d already been through together.

Born with Down syndrome and heart defects, Emma had breathing and feeding difficulties as a newborn that required emergency surgery. She still drinks through a stomach tube and may have a heart procedure soon.

But now she’s growing stronger with help from her mother, her grandparents and her therapists from Kindering, a Seattle-area nonprofit organization that serves children with developmental delays and disabilities.

Each week, the therapists visit Guzman’s home in Bothell to work with Emma, who bounces and waves excitedly when they walk in the door.

They tickle her cheeks to get her mouth moving, sing with her to get her talking and move cushions for her to climb, building muscles in the process.

These days, Emma wiggles her arms to cumbia and mariachi music. She balances on a toddler trampoline.



IVY CEBALLO / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Emma, who was born with Down syndrome, embraces Joy Ehlenfeldt, a physical therapist with Kindering, at the Guzman family’s Bothell home during a visit last month.

She plays mommy with her dolls.

Recently, she pushed herself upright and stood alone, clapping in delight.

“She was so proud of herself,” Guzman said, shower-

See > **FUND, A8**

U.S. escalates pressure on Maduro by seizing oil tanker off Venezuela coast

By JOSHUA GOODMAN, REGINA GARCIA CANO, AAMER MADHANI
AND KONSTANTIN TOROPIN
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Wednesday that the United States has seized an oil tanker off the coast of Venezuela as tensions mount with the government of President Nicolás Maduro.

Using U.S. forces to take control of a merchant ship is incredibly unusual and marks the Trump administration’s latest push to increase pressure on Maduro, who has been charged with narco-terrorism in the United States. The United States has built up the largest military presence in the region in decades and launched a

VENEZUELAN Nobel winner appears in Norway. > **A3**

series of deadly strikes on alleged drug-smuggling boats in the Caribbean Sea and eastern Pacific Ocean. The campaign is facing growing scrutiny from Congress.

“We’ve just seized a tanker on the coast of Venezuela, a large tanker, very large, largest one ever seized, actually,” Trump said at the White House, later adding that “it was seized for a very good reason.” Trump did not offer additional details. When asked what would happen to the oil aboard the tanker, Trump said, “Well, we keep it, I guess.”

See > **TANKER, A8**

© 2025 Seattle Times Co.
Our newsprint contains recycled fiber, and inks are reused.



7 59423 24000 4

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

< Tanker

FROM A1

The seizure was led by the U.S. Coast Guard and supported by the Navy, according to a U.S. official who was not authorized to comment publicly and spoke on the condition of anonymity. The official added that it was conducted under U.S. law enforcement authority.

The Coast Guard members were taken to the oil tanker by helicopter from the aircraft carrier USS Gerald R. Ford, the official said. The Ford is in the Caribbean Sea after arriving last month in a major show of force, joining a fleet of other warships.

Video posted to social media by Attorney General Pam Bondi shows people fast-roping from one of the helicopters involved in the operation as it hovers just

feet from the deck.

The Coast Guard members can be seen later in the video moving throughout the superstructure of the ship with their weapons drawn.

Bondi wrote that “for multiple years, the oil tanker has been sanctioned by the United States due to its involvement in an illicit oil shipping network supporting foreign terrorist organizations.”

Venezuela’s government said in a statement that the seizure “constitutes a blatant theft and an act of international piracy.”

“Under these circumstances, the true reasons for the prolonged aggression against Venezuela have finally been revealed. ... It has always been about our natural resources, our oil, our energy, the resources that belong exclusively to the Venezuelan people,” the statement said.

The U.S. official identified the seized tanker as the Skipper.

The ship departed Venezuela around Dec. 2 with about 2 million barrels of heavy crude, roughly half of it belonging to a Cuban state-run oil importer, according to documents from the state-owned company Petróleos de Venezuela S.A., commonly known as PDVSA, that were provided on the condition of anonymity because the person did not have permission to share them.

The Skipper was previously known as the M/T Adisa, according to ship tracking data. The Adisa was sanctioned by the United States in 2022 over accusations of belonging to a sophisticated network of shadow tankers that smuggled crude oil on behalf of Iran’s Revolutionary Guard and Lebanon’s Hezbollah group.

The network was reportedly run by a Switzerland-based Ukrainian oil trader, the U.S. Treasury Department said at the time.

Venezuela has the world’s largest proven oil reserves and produces about 1 million barrels a day.

PDVSA is the backbone of the country’s economy. Its reliance on intermediaries increased in 2020, when the first Trump administration expanded its campaign on Venezuela with sanctions that threaten to lock out of the U.S. economy any individual or company that does business with Maduro’s government. Longtime allies Russia and Iran, both also sanctioned, have helped Venezuela skirt restrictions.

The transactions usually involve a complex network of shadowy intermediaries. Many are shell companies, registered in jurisdictions

known for secrecy. The buyers deploy so-called ghost tankers that hide their location and hand off their valuable cargoes in the middle of the ocean before they reach their final destination.

Maduro did not address the seizure during a speech before a ruling-party organized demonstration in Caracas, Venezuela’s capital.

Maduro has insisted the real purpose of the U.S. military operations is to force him from office.

Sen. Chris Van Hollen, D-Md., a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the U.S. seizure cast doubt on the administration’s stated reasons for the military buildup and boat strikes.

“This shows that their whole cover story — that this

is about interdicting drugs — is a big lie,” he said. “This is just one more piece of evidence that this is really about regime change — by force.”

Vincent P. O’Hara, a naval historian and author of “The Greatest Naval War Ever Fought,” called the seizure “very unusual” and “provocative.” “As far as the principle of seizing ships on the high sea, that’s an important international question,” he said. “Nations go to war over that principle.”

The seizure comes a day after the U.S. military flew a pair of fighter jets over the Gulf of Venezuela in what appeared to be the closest that warplanes had come to the South American country’s airspace. Trump has said land attacks are coming soon.

< Fund

FROM A1

ing Emma with a smile.

It’s the sort of moment that Kindering exists to support, said Mike Stewart, CEO at the nonprofit, which provides direct services and other programs to more than 8,000 children and family members annually.

Founded in 1962 by parents of children with disabilities, the organization is among 13 nonprofits benefiting this year from readers’ donations to The Seattle Times Fund for Those in Need.

The donations will help Kindering reach an increasing number of families in 2026, including families without enough money or insurance to cover the costs of all the services they need.

“That level of care and compassion is why I’m in this field,” Stewart said.

Scary start

Guzman was nine months pregnant when her doctors realized Emma had serious medical conditions. They recommended an emergency delivery.

Five minutes before that began, Guzman learned from test results that Emma would have Down syndrome, a genetic condition that can cause certain physical and developmental challenges. The news was a lot to take in.

“It was just kind of numb,” said Guzman, 28, who was living in Portland at the time. “I was so scared for what (Emma’s) future was going to look like.”

As a newborn, Emma struggled to breathe and feed. Her upper body strained to pull in enough oxygen. It took her an hour to drink one ounce of milk.

But when Guzman took Emma to a hospital emergency room, they were “brushed off” and sent home, so Guzman made a sudden, desperate decision. She and Emma would leave Portland to seek better care.

“Nothing was working. Nobody was listening to us,” Guzman said about her mindset at the time. “I was like, ‘We’re going to Seattle Children’s.’”

They initially moved in with Guzman’s parents in Bothell, sharing their mobile home and leaning on them for support. Now they live next door.

At Seattle Children’s, doctors discovered that small amounts of milk were leaking into Emma’s lungs and throat tissues were affecting her breathing.

The doctors outfitted Emma with a feeding tube. They performed surgery to remove some of the throat tissues. And while Guzman and Emma were at Seattle Children’s, a social worker referred them to Kindering.

In-home services

First, Emma had a developmental evaluation at Kindering’s Bothell campus; the other locations are in Bellevue, Redmond and Renton. Then physical and feeding/



IVY CEBALLO / THE SEATTLE TIMES

Joy Ehlenfeldt is one of the Kindering therapists who works with 2 ½-year-old Emma during visits to the Guzman family’s home in Bothell.

WHERE YOUR MONEY GOES

Kindering

- \$25** Buys a variety of culturally inclusive books for our classrooms.
- \$50** Gets specialized toys to engage and delight young children on the autism spectrum.
- \$100** Buys a safe indoor trampoline to support play-based occupational and physical therapies.

- \$200** Contributes to the purchase of an adaptive motorized scooter that would allow children of all abilities to participate in therapy and play.
- \$300** Helps procure a highchair & recliner to support kids with diverse needs during feeding therapies.

ABOUT THE SERIES

Each year, The Seattle Times Fund for Those in Need raises money for a group of charities that helps children, families and senior citizens. Throughout the fall and winter, The Times is telling how the 13 organizations make a difference in the lives of thousands, and the impact donors can make.

HOW YOU CAN GIVE

When you give to the Fund for Those in Need, 100% of your tax-deductable donation goes to agencies that help our most vulnerable neighbors. The Seattle Times covers the campaign’s administrative costs. You can donate by mail (see coupon on Page A13), or online at ffn.seattletimes.com

speech therapists from the nonprofit started visiting Emma.

The in-home therapy sessions are convenient because Guzman doesn’t have to haul Emma anywhere. They’re also comfortable.

“This allows us to work with what they have at home,” physical therapist Joy Ehlenfeldt said, guiding Emma’s movements around her playroom.

Kids with Down syndrome may have low muscle tone, so building strength is essential. Ehlenfeldt does that by playing with Emma.

“We recently bought these little foam blocks, so we might set them up and encourage her to crawl up or down,” the therapist said.

Marissa Wicher, a feeding/speech therapist, is helping Emma learn how to eat solid foods, drink from a cup and communicate in multiple ways.

Emma is starting to speak some words, but she’s also learning sign language and

using an augmentative and alternative communication device.

The device is basically an iPad with picture icons that represent words. When Emma presses a button with a stick figure pointing at itself and then presses a different button with a smiling stick figure holding a box, the device can speak the words, “I like” or “Me gusta.” It’s equipped for both English and Spanish, because Emma is part of a bilingual household.

“It’s really just another tool to give her a robust vocabulary,” Wicher said. “And it’s fully customizable, so she can even play her favorite songs. If she wants to sing ‘Itsy Bitsy Spider,’ we can press that button.”

The therapists work with Guzman to come up with new activities for Emma and address new challenges. It was Guzman’s idea to give Emma’s favorite doll a stomach-feeding tube to help normalize that aspect of Emma’s life.

“We call it the parent-coaching model. It’s really us supporting a parent in how they can support their child’s development,” Ehlenfeldt said, marveling at Guzman’s ingenuity and resilience. “It’s not just us coming in, doing something with the kid and then leaving. It’s a team effort.”

Stepping Stones

Guzman’s resilience continues to be tested.

Emma needed hernia surgery a few months ago. The same day they got home from the hospital, Guzman was laid off from her job. “Life has its ups and downs,” she said. “You’ve just got to learn how to not sink.”

Staying afloat. Kindering is part of that.

Besides working with therapists at home, Emma attends a therapy-enriched preschool at the organization’s Bothell campus twice a week.

Families pay on a sliding scale. When they can’t cover the entire cost of a program, Kindering and its donors fill the gap with millions of dollars each year. More than one-third of households Kindering serves use Medicaid.

“We never turn a family away,” said Stewart, the CEO.

Kindering’s preschool is called Stepping Stones. The teachers are trained to work with kids of all abilities. It’s a welcoming place for kids like Emma.

“She’s really social. She really loves being around people,” Guzman said. “So through this opportunity, it’s been really great to see her growth.”

Amid the ups and downs, Guzman is grateful for Kindering. She’s even more grateful for Emma, her determined, happy, silly girl. Early on, Guzman worried about milestones Emma might never reach. Not anymore.

“She’s proving everybody wrong,” Guzman said. “It’s hard, and yes, there are challenges. But she’s brought so much joy. She’s just full of life and full of energy. She’s her own little person and she’s showing us every day.”

Daniel Beekman: 206-464-2164 or dbeekman@seattletimes.com

PROFESSIONAL SERVICES, TRAINING AND MORE.

To place an ad, please call 206.624.7355

DOMESTIC CARE/SERVICES OFFERED & WANTED

★★HANDYPERSON★★

Yard Work, Tree & Black Berry Removal, Painting, Fences, French Drain, Power Washing, Gutters Clean Up, Deck and Stairs Repair, Remove and Install Lights Fixtures, Concrete and Cracks Repair, Small Projects of Retaining Wall and Paving, Help of Any Odd Jobs, Hauling.

★Honest & Hardworking★

Free Estimates, Christian 24/7

206-852-4141 or 206-683-1626

DOMESTIC CARE/SERVICES OFFERED & WANTED

PRIVATE CERTIFIED CAREGIVER

Available to work 2-4 days per week. 54 years old with 15+ years of experience.

Safe and reliable driver for families. Rates: \$40/hr for one person, \$50/hr for two people.

Serving Federal Way, South Seattle, Tacoma, and surrounding areas.

206-412-4429

Pet City

See pets online at nwsources.com/classifieds

To place your ad, call 206/624-7355

Dogs

AKC Bullmastiff Puppies - \$2,500 cash. Ready Now! Health guarantee schedule visit. Call or text 541-979-9516 (Albany)

Do good for yourself.

www.seattletimes.com/jobs