

# EL OBSERVADOR

## Venezuelan Protest Calls Out Troops

### Impoverished supporters of president clash with opponents

(AP)—Venezuela troops fought pitched street battles Friday with supporters of President Hugo Chavez who tried to disrupt an opposition rally in an impoverished area of Caracas considered a government stronghold. At least three people were injured.

Troops in armored vehicles arrived at the scene while "Chavistas," as the president's supporters are known, fought back, throwing bottles, rocks and firecrackers at security forces.

Hundreds of national guard troops and police in riot gear launched tear gas grenades to disperse more than 100 rowdy government backers. Columns of black smoke rose from tires burning in the

street and mingled with thick clouds of white tear gas.

One police officer was wounded by gunfire from an unknown source and two others were hurt by rocks, said Pedro Aristimuno, the city's health secretary. The tear gas forced the evacuation of 25 children from a nearby hospital, he added.

Ignoring government warnings that violence could erupt, opposition parties called the rally as part of a series of events in Caracas slums to prove Chavez's traditional support among the poor has evaporated.

Interior Minister Lucas Rincon pleaded with march organizers to take the protest to an area where there would be less potential for violence.

"We alert the population to the security risks that this act carries," Rincon said in an address to the nation late Thursday. "This isn't about impeding a political act. It's about taking it to a less risky one."



Pro-government lawmakers Nicolas Maduro (from left), Francisco Solorzano and Cilia Flores, surrounded by supporters, leave the National Congress building in Caracas, Venezuela. (AP photo)

## Discrimination Banned in Mexico

(AP)—President Vicente Fox signed a law in Mexico City last Monday, banning all forms of discrimination, a groundbreaking measure in a nation struggling to overcome racism and other forms of bias.

"This signature makes this a historic date for our country," Fox said. "It's historic because it establishes that nobody should be excluded from their social well-being because of their ethnic origin, gender, age or religion."

The measure that passed last Monday first sought only to ban

discrimination in the public sector, but after several months of debate it was vastly expanded and approved by both houses of Congress in April.

Interior Minister Santiago Creel said the measure was as important as Mexican laws that established freedom of religion in 1800 and women's suffrage in 1953.

The law does not spell out how violators will be punished. That will likely be decided by a new body promised by Fox, the National Commission for the Prevention of Discrimination.

## Dropout Rate More Likely for Immigrants

(AP)—Hispanics in their late teens born outside the United States are more than twice as likely to drop out of high school as U.S.-born Latinos, according to an analysis of census data released Thursday.

Nearly 34 percent of Hispanic immigrants age 16 to 19 did not graduate or were not

enrolled in high school in 2000, the Pew Hispanic Center found. The rate was unchanged from 1990.

Among U.S.-born Latinos of the same age group, 14 percent were dropouts in 2000, down from 15 percent a decade earlier.

A lack of proficiency in En-

glish and a need to work to send money back to family members in their native countries were key reasons cited by researchers for the difference.

When you pick apart the numbers, you see that the Hispanic dropout problem has several different components that call for different policy

responses," said the report's author, Richard Fry.

Dropout rates are typically given for all Latinos, regardless of where they were born, so discerning between immigrants and those born in United States offers a more accurate picture of the problem, said the center's director, Roberto Suro.

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## Priest Extradited for Alleged Abuse

(AP)—Mexican authorities have extradited a Roman Catholic priest to Italy, where he faces charges of sexually abusing an 11-year-old boy and other minors.

An extradition order against him

said Edgar Gaudencio Hidalgo is accused of sexually abusing a boy when he served as a priest near Naples in 1997. Italian authorities also believe he abused other minors.

In a statement, Mexico's attor-

ney general's office said federal agents arrested Hidalgo at a church in Iztapalapa, outside Mexico City, in August and began preparing extradition proceedings against him several months later.

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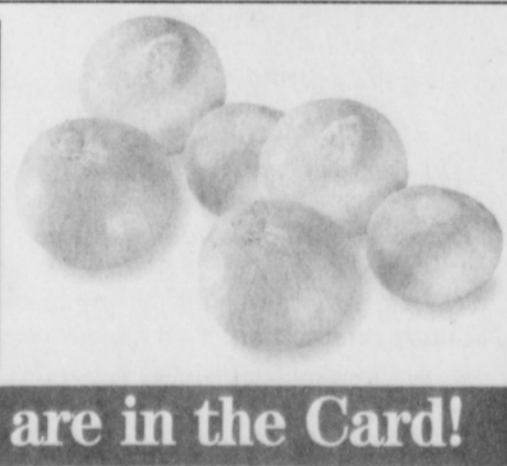
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