

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/features/magazine/chi-0612310404dec31,1,6501782.story?ctrack=1&cset=true>

We'll always have Paris

A thoroughly biased and rarely factual review of a year best forgotten

By Dave Barry. Retired from his weekly column, Dave Barry returns annually to thoughtfully analyze the year's events

December 31, 2006

It was a momentous year, a year of events that will echo in the annals of history the way a dropped plate of calamari echoes in an Italian restaurant with a tile floor. Decades from now, our grandchildren will come to us and say, "Tell us, Grandpa or Grandma, as the case may be, what it was like to be alive in the year that Angelina Jolie, Tom Cruise, Brad Pitt, Britney Spears and Katie whatshername all had babies, although not necessarily in those combinations." And we will smile wisely and emit a streamer of drool, because we will be very old and unable to hear them.

And that will be a good thing, because there are many things about 2006 that we will not want to remember. This was the year in which the members of the United States Congress, who do not bother to read the actual bills they pass, spent weeks poring over instant messages sent by a pervert. This was the year in which the vice president of the United States shot a lawyer, which turned out to be totally legal in Texas. This was the year in which there came to be essentially no difference between the treatment of maximum-security-prison inmates and the treatment of commercial-airline passengers.

This was the year in which—as clearly foretold in the Bible as a sign of the Apocalypse —Howie Mandel got a hit TV show.

Also, there were many pesky problems left over from 2005 that refused to go away in 2006, including Iraq, immigration, high gas prices, terrorism, global warming, avian flu, Iran, North Korea and Paris Hilton. Future generations are going to look back at this era and ask us how we could have allowed Paris Hilton to happen, and we are not going to have a good answer.

Did anything good happen in 2006? Let me think. No. But before we move on to 2007, let's take a moment to reflect back on the historic events, real and imaginary, of this historic year.

Advertisement



Internet |

Most likely

- You a
- The w
- There

What you c

Diagno:

More in

JANUARY -- The month dawned with petty partisan bickering in Washington, D.C., a place where many people view petty partisan bickering as honest, productive work, like making furniture. The immediate cause of the bickering is the Republican ethics scandal involving lobbyist Jack Abramoff and House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, both of whom you can tell, just by looking at them, are guilty of something. The Democrats charge that the Republicans have created a Culture of Corruption and should be thrown out of office so the Democrats can return to power and run the scandal-free style of government for which they are so famous. The Republicans respond that the Democrats are soft on terrorism soft on terrorism soft on terrorism soft on terrorism. Both sides issue press releases far into the night.

The other big focus of the bickering is the nomination of Samuel Alito to the Supreme Court. The bulk of the Senate hearings are spent in the traditional manner, with Democrats trying to trick the nominee into revealing his views on abortion, and Republicans reminding the nominee that he does not have to reveal his views on abortion. The subsequent exchange of press releases is so intense that several government photocopiers burst into flames.

In the War on Terror, Osama bin Laden releases another audiotape, for the first time making it downloadable from iTunes. Bin Laden also starts a blog, in which he calls upon his followers to destroy the corrupt infidels and also try to find out how a person, hypothetically, can get Chinese food delivered to a cave.

FEBRUARY -- President Bush, delivering what is billed as a "major address on energy policy," reveals that the nation has an "addiction" to "foreign oil," which comes from "foreign countries" located "outside of the United States" which are getting this oil from "under the ground." To combat this problem, the president proposes the development of "new technology" in the form of "inventions" such as "a Lincoln Navigator that gets 827 miles per gallon," although he allows that this could take "time."

But this bold energy initiative does not get nearly as much attention as the administration's decision to allow a company owned by the United Arab Emirates to operate six U.S. seaports. This outrages Congress, which briefly ceases partisan bickering to demand that the White House return control of the ports, in the interest of national security, to Anthony Soprano.

Speaking of guys who avoid the limelight: Vice President Dick Cheney, attempting to bring down a quail with a shotgun, shoots attorney Harry Whittington. Local authorities rule the shooting was an accident, noting that if the vice president was going to intentionally shoot somebody, it would be Nancy Pelosi.

In sports, Super Bowl XXXIX takes place in Detroit, and by all accounts it's a big success for the Motor City, with huge crowds thronging to both of the restaurants. The Pittsburgh Steelers win a game featuring a controversial play in which an apparent Seattle Seahawk touchdown pass is called back after the Steeler defender-in what is later ruled an accident-is gunned down by Vice President Cheney.

But the big sporting event is the Winter Olympics, a glorious quadrennial celebration of world-class virtuoso athletic accomplishment in sports nobody has ever heard of. Surprise winners include Latvia in the 500-kilometer Modified Nordic Combined; the Republic of Irvingkahnistan in the 2,300-meter Slavic Personified; and U.S. skier Bode Miller in Most Nike Commercials Featuring A Competitor Who, In the Actual Competitions, Mainly Falls Down.

MARCH -- The real-estate boom appears to be over, as the government reports that, so far in 2006, only one U.S. homeowner managed to sell his house, and he had to offer, as an incentive to the buyer, his

wife. But the employment numbers remain strong, thanks to rapid growth in the sector of people trying to get you to refinance your mortgage for, like, the sixth time.

In the Academy Awards, the overwhelming favorite for best picture is "Brokeback Mountain," the story of two men who discover, while spending many isolated weeks together in the mountains, that they enjoy exchanging instant messages with Mark Foley.

In other entertainment news, a book by two San Francisco Chronicle writers revives suspicions about possible steroid use by San Francisco Giants slugger Barry Bonds, alleging, with extensive documentation, that as recently as 10 years ago, Bonds was a woman.

In foreign news, Israeli voters give a parliamentary majority to acting Prime Minister Ehud Olmert because his name can be rearranged to spell "hot eel drum." Throughout the Middle East, tension mounts in response to mounting tension.

APRIL -- Tom DeLay decides not to seek re-election to Congress, making the announcement via audiotape from a cave somewhere in Pakistan. Republican leaders express relief over DeLay's decision and issue a statement pledging that there will be "no more Republican scandals, unless somebody finds out about Mark Foley."

Meanwhile in the Middle East, tension mounts still higher when Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad announces that Iran has successfully produced enriched uranium, although he claims that his nation plans to use it only for peaceful purposes, "such as cooking." In Iraq, there is good news and bad news for the Bush administration: The good news is that rival Iraqi leaders have finally agreed on a new prime minister. The bad news is that it is Nancy Pelosi.

Domestically, the big story is the price of gasoline, which continues its relentless climb toward an unprecedented \$3 a gallon. Responding quickly, Congress, in a rare display of decisive bipartisan action, takes a recess, with both sides promising to resume bickering the instant they get back.

MAY -- On the terrorism front, the Bush administration comes under heavy criticism following press reports that the National Security Agency has been collecting telephone records of millions of Americans. Responding to the outcry, President Bush assures the nation that "the government is not collecting personal information on any individual citizen," adding, "Warren H. Glompett of Boston, call your wife back immediately, because your dog has eaten your entire Viagra supply."

In another controversial move, the president announces that he will use National Guard troops to stop illegal immigration. The initial troops are assigned to guard the border between Mexico and Arizona, with California, New Mexico and Texas being covered by Dick Cheney.

In Houston, former Enron executives Kenneth Lay and Jeffrey Skilling are convicted of fraud by a federal jury, which apparently is not persuaded by the defense's claim that Skilling and Lay could not have been responsible for the collapse of the \$100 billion corporation because they were, quote, "both getting haircuts."

In sports, Barbaro, the popular racehorse who won the Kentucky Derby, breaks his leg in the Preakness after a freak collision with Bode Miller. Barbaro is forced to retire, although his agent does not rule out future appearances on "Dancing With the Stars."

JUNE -- In politics, the debate over Iraq continues to heat up, with President Bush insisting that "we must stay the course, whatever it may or may not be," while the Democrats claim that they would bring

the troops home "immediately," or "in about six months," or "maybe not for a long time." On a positive note in Iraq, Sunnis and the Shiites agree to try to come up with a simple way for Americans to remember which one is which.

On the legal front, the Supreme Court rules that the Bush administration cannot try suspected terrorists in ad hoc military tribunals, after the court learns that the administration is interpreting "ad hoc" to mean "under water."

Dan Rather, who stopped anchoring the evening news in 2005, announces his retirement from CBS after a career spanning 44 years and several galaxies. Explaining his decision, Rather cites a desire to "explore other options" and "not keep getting maced by the CBS security guard."

On a happier note, the United States marks the 50th anniversary of the Interstate Highway System, an engineering marvel consisting of 47,000 miles of high-speed roads connecting 157,000 Waffle Houses. A formal ceremony is planned, but has to be canceled when Dad refuses to stop.

JULY -- The Tour de France bicycle race is once again tainted by suspicions of doping when the winner, American Floyd Landis, is clocked ascending the Alps at over 200 m.p.h. Landis denies that he uses illegal drugs, attributing his performance to "gears."

But the month's big story occurs in the Middle East, where violence flares along the Israel-Lebanon border in response to the fact that, because of terrible planning, the two countries are located right next to each other. In another troubling international development, rogue state North Korea test-fires ballistic missiles, including two believed to be potentially capable of reaching U.S. soil. World tension goes back down when the missiles, upon reaching an altitude of 200 feet, explode and spell "HAPPY BIRTHDAY." American military analysts caution that these missiles "could easily be modified to spell something more threatening."

AUGUST -- The International Astronomical Union rules that Pluto will no longer be classified as a major planet, on the grounds that it is "less than half the size of James Gandolfini."

In sports, a French medical laboratory burns to the ground following the catastrophic explosion of Floyd Landis' urine sample.

Fidel Castro is rumored to be seriously ill, but Cuban authorities insist that the aging leader is merely recovering from surgery, and that for the time being government operations are in the capable hands of Nancy Pelosi.

As the situation in Lebanon deteriorates, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice warns that, if violence continues, the United States will have no choice but to dispatch Vice President Cheney to the region to hunt doves. Within minutes a cease-fire breaks out.

On the weather front, the until-now quiet hurricane season erupts in fearsome fury in the form of Tropical Storm Ernesto, which hurricane experts, using scientific computer models, predict could become a major storm and inflict devastation upon Texas, or possibly Florida, or Connecticut. A state of near-panic sets in as millions of coastal residents jam gas stations, hardware stores and supermarkets, while many schools and businesses close. Tension mounts for days, until finally Ernesto slams into Florida with all the fury of a diseased fruit fly.

SEPTEMBER -- Americans-al-ready on edge because of concern over terrorism, avian flu, AIDS, nuclear escalation and global warming-find themselves facing a deadly new menace: killer spinach. The

lethal vegetable is removed from supermarket shelves by police SWAT teams; many units of innocent produce are harmed.

Speaking of vegetables, the United States Congress is rocked by yet another scandal with the publication of e-mails and instant messages sent to male pages by Congressman Mark Foley of Florida, in which he explicitly discusses acts of a shepherding nature. As the scandal expands, House Republican leaders issue a statement claiming that they "are not aware of any so-called Congressman Mark Foley of Florida." Democrats cite Foley as another example of Republican corruption, declaring that they would never, ever, under any circumstances tolerate such behavior, unless it involved a consenting page.

In other political developments, The New York Times prints a leaked top-secret government report expressing doubts about the war in Iraq. The Bush administration holds a secret meeting to prepare a response, but within hours the Times prints leaked details of the meeting, including who went to the bathroom, and why. The administration then attempts to take out the Times building with a missile, but the Times, using leaked launch codes, redirects it to the Washington Post.

As the debate over Iraq heats up, President Bush pledges to "keep on continuing to stay the present course while at the same time not doing anything different." Democratic leaders declare that they have a "bold new plan" for Iraq, which they will reveal just as soon as The New York Times leaks it to them.

Rumors about Fidel Castro's health continue to swirl following publication of a photograph showing Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez shaking Castro's hand. The rest of Castro's body is nowhere to be seen.

OCTOBER -- Sen. Barack Obama, looking back on a career in the U.S. Senate that spans nearly 20 months, allows as how he might be ready to move on to the presidency. Obamamania sweeps the nation as millions of voters find themselves deeply impressed by Obama's views, and the fact that he was on Oprah. In a gracious gesture from a potential 2008 rival, Sen. Hillary Clinton sends Obama a good-luck card, which is stapled to the head of a horse.

Opponents of illegal Mexican immigration cheer when Congress authorizes the construction of a 700-mile fence. Their cheers quickly fade when they learn that, because of wording inserted at the last minute by Sens. Robert Byrd (D-W.Va.) and Ted Stevens (R-Alaska), 650 miles of the fence will be constructed in West Virginia and Alaska.

Vice President Dick Cheney again becomes the center of controversy when, appearing on a radio show, he defends the interrogation technique known as "water-boarding" as a legitimate anti-terrorism tool, not torture. At first the host disagrees, but after several "commercial breaks," Dick brings him around.

October ends on a happy note with the celebration of Halloween, a night of magical fun when millions of youngsters, all over America, are kept indoors. The most popular costumes this year, according to retailers, are Power Ranger and Nancy Pelosi.

As the election approaches, polls show that the Democrats have a good chance to regain control of Congress. But then disaster strikes in the form of John "Mister Laffs" Kerry, who, addressing a college audience, attempts to tell a joke, which is like a fish attempting to play the piano. Kerry's "joke" causes widespread outrage, prompting Kerry, with typical humility, to insist that it was obviously humorous, and anybody who disagrees is an idiot. He is finally subdued by Democratic strategists armed with duct tape.

NOVEMBER -- As the campaign lumbers to the finish line, Republicans desperately hope that the

voters will not notice that they-once the party of small government-have turned into the party of war-bungling, corruption-tolerating, pork-spewing power-lusting toads, while the Democrats desperately hope that the voters will not notice that they are still, basically, Democrats.

Nobody really knows what will happen as the voters go to the polls. In Florida, nobody knows anything even after the voting is over, because-prepare to be shocked-many electronic balloting machines malfunction. Voters in one district report that their machines, instead of displaying the candidates for Congress, showed "Star Wars Episode IV." By an overwhelming margin, this district elects Jabba the Hutt.

Nationwide, however, it eventually becomes clear that the Democrats have gained control of both houses of Congress. President Bush handles the defeat with surprisingly good humor, possibly because his staff has not told him about it. For their part, future House and Senate majority leaders Nancy Pelosi and Harry Reid issue a joint statement promising to "make every effort to find common ground with the president," adding, "We are clearly lying."

The first major casualty of the GOP defeat is Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, who, the day after the election, is invited to go quail-hunting with the vice president. He is never seen again.

In celebrity news, Michael Richards, a graduate of the Mel Gibson School of Standup, responds to a comedy-club heckler by unleashing a racist tirade so vile that even John Kerry realizes it is not funny. A chastened

Richards apologizes for his behavior, citing, by way of explanation, the fact that he is a moron.

Speaking of which, O.J. Simpson is once again in the headlines when Fox TV announces that Simpson will be interviewed on a two-night special show in conjunction with his new book, "If I Did It," in which he will explain how, "hypothetically," he would have murdered Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman. This idea is so sick, so disgusting, so utterly depraved, that it would undoubtedly get huge ratings. But Fox, faced with withering criticism, is forced to cancel the project.

On the economic front, the holiday shopping season officially kicks off with "Black Friday," and retailers are pleased with the numbers: 2,038 shoppers hospitalized, up 37 percent from last year.

DECEMBER -- The month gets off to a troubling start, with the worsening situation in Iraq worsening faster than ever. The nation's hopes for a solution are pinned on the Iraq Study Group, a presidentially appointed blue-ribbon panel consisting of five Republicans, five Democrats, and the Wizard of Oz. In accordance with longstanding Washington tradition, the panel first formally leaks its report to The New York Times, then delivers it to the president, who turns it over to White House personnel specially trained in reading things.

In essence, the study group recommends a three-pronged approach, consisting of: (1) a gradual withdrawal of U.S. troops, but not on a fixed timetable; (2) intensified training of Iraqi troops; and (3) the physical relocation of Iraq, including buildings, to Greenland. Republican and Democratic leaders, after considering the report for the better part of a nanosecond, commence what is expected to be a minimum of two more years of bickering.

With the Iraq situation pretty much solved, the world's attention shifts to Iran and its suspected nuclear program, which becomes the subject of renewed concern after U.S. satellites detect a glowing 400-foot-high spider striding around Tehran.

New York City, having apparently solved all of its other problems, bans "trans fats." Hours later, police surround a Burger King in Brooklyn and fire 57 bullets into a man suspected of carrying a concealed Whopper. The medical examiner's office, after a thorough investigation, concludes that the man "definitely could have developed artery problems down the road."

Speaking of health problems, rumors that Fidel Castro is ailing gain new strength when, at an official state dinner in Havana, a waiter accidentally trips over the longtime Cuban leader's urn, spilling most of him on the floor.

In other deceased-Communist news, British police rule that the mysterious death of a former Russian spy in London was a murder, caused by the radioactive element polonium-210. New York immediately bans the element, forcing the closure of 70 percent of the city's Taco Bells.

As the year, finally, nears its conclusion, Americans turn their attention to the holiday season, which they celebrate-as generations have before them-by frantically overbidding on eBay for the Sony PlayStation 3, of which Sony, anticipating the near-homicidal level of demand, manufactured an estimated 11 units. Millions of Americans also head home for the holidays, making this one of the busiest air-travel seasons ever. The always-vigilant TSA responds by raising the Security Threat Level to "ultraviolet," which means that passengers may not board an airplane if they contain blood.

But despite the well-founded fear of terrorism, the seemingly unbreakable and escalating cycle of violence in the Middle East, the uncertain world economic future, the menace of global warming, the near-certainty that rogue states run by lunatics will soon have nuclear weapons, and the fact that America is confronting these dangers with a federal government sharply divided into two hostile parties unable to agree on anything except that the other side is scum, Americans face the new year with a remarkable lack of worry, and for a very good reason: They are busy drinking beer and watching football.

So Happy New Year.

(Burp.)

Retired from his weekly column, Dave Barry returns annually to thoughtfully analyze the year's events.

Copyright © 2006, [Chicago Tribune](#)