

2016 Year in Review

By Dave Barry

In the future, Americans — assuming there are any left — will look back at 2016 and remark: “What the HELL?”

They will have a point. Over the past few decades, we here at the Year in Review have reviewed some pretty disturbing years. For example, there was 2000, when the outcome of a presidential election was decided by a tiny group of deeply confused Florida residents who had apparently attempted to vote by chewing on their ballots.

Then there was 2003, when a person named “Paris Hilton” suddenly became a major international superstar, despite possessing a level of discernible talent so low as to make the Kardashians look like the Jackson 5.

There was 2006, when the vice president of the United States — who claimed he was attempting to bring down a suspected quail — shot a 78-year-old man in the face, only to be exonerated after an investigation revealed that the victim was an attorney.

And — perhaps most inexplicable of all — there was 2007, when millions of people voluntarily installed Windows Vista.

Yes, we’ve seen some weird years. But we’ve never seen one as weird as 2016. This was the Al Yankovic of years. If years were movies, 2016 would be “Plan 9 from Outer Space.” If years were relatives, 2016 would be the uncle who shows up at your Thanksgiving dinner wearing his underpants on the outside.

Why do we say this? Let’s begin with the gruesome train wreck that was the presidential election. The campaign began with roughly 14,000 candidates running. Obviously not all of them were qualified to be president; some of them — here we are thinking of “Lincoln Chafee” — were probably imaginary. But a reasonable number of the candidates seemed to meet at least the minimum standard that Americans have come to expect of their president in recent decades, namely: Not Completely Horrible.

So this mass of candidates began the grim death march that is the modern American presidential campaign — trudging around Iowa pretending to care about agriculture, performing in an endless series of televised debates like suit-wearing seals trained to bark out talking points, going to barbecue after barbecue and smiling relentlessly through mouthfuls of dripping meat, giving the same speech over and over and over, shaking millions of hands,

posing for billions of selfies and just generally humiliating themselves in the marathon group grovel that America insists on putting its presidential candidates through.

And we voters did our part, passing judgment on the candidates, thinning the herd, rejecting them one by one. Sometimes we had to reject them more than once; John Kasich didn't get the message until his own staff felled him with tranquilizer darts. But eventually we eliminated the contenders whom we considered to be unqualified or disagreeable, whittling our choices down until only two major candidates were left. And out of all the possibilities, the two that We, the People, in our collective wisdom, deemed worthy of competing for the most important job on Earth, turned out to be ...

... *drum roll* ...

... the most flawed, sketchy and generally disliked duo of presidential candidates ever!

Yes. After all that, the American people, looking for a leader, ended up with a choice between ointment and suppository. The fall campaign was an unending national nightmare, broadcast relentlessly on cable TV. CNN told us over and over that Donald Trump was a colossally ignorant, narcissistic, out-of-control sex-predator buffoon; Fox News countered that Hillary Clinton was a greedy, corrupt, coldly calculating liar of massive ambition and minimal accomplishment. And in our hearts we knew the awful truth: *They were both right.*

It wasn't just bad. It was the Worst. Election. Ever.

And that was only one of the reasons why 2016 should never have happened. Here are some others:

- American race relations reached their lowest point since ... OK, since 2015.
- We learned that the Russians are more involved in our election process than the League of Women Voters.
- For much of the year the economy continued to struggle, with the only growth sector being people paying insane prices for tickets to "Hamilton."
- In a fad even stupider than "planking," millions of people wasted millions of hours, and sometimes risked their lives, trying to capture imaginary Pokémon Go things on their phones, hoping to obtain the ultimate prize: a whole bunch of imaginary Pokémon Go things on their phones.
- A major new threat to American communities — receiving at least as much coverage as global climate change — emerged in the form of: Clowns.

- In a shocking development that caused us to question our most fundamental values, Angelina and Brad broke up *even though they are both physically attractive*.
- We continued to prove, as a nation, that no matter how many times we are reminded, we are too stupid to remember to hold our phones horizontally when we make videos.
- Musically, we lost Prince, David Bowie, Leonard Cohen, George Michael and Debbie Reynolds; we gained the suicide-inducing TV commercial in which Jon Bon Jovi screeches about turning back time.

Did anything good happen in 2016? Let us think ...

OK, the “man bun” appeared to be going away.

That was pretty much it for the good things.

And now, finally, it is time for 2016 to go away. But before it does, let’s narrow our eyes down to slits and take one last squinting look back at this hideous monstrosity of a year, starting with ...

JANUARY

... which actually begins on a positive note with the capture of elusive Mexican drug lord [Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán](#), who in 2015 escaped (for the second time) from a Mexican prison when authorities failed to notice the signs reading (in Spanish) “WARNING: ESCAPE TUNNEL UNDER CONSTRUCTION.” Since then Guzmán has been in hiding except for an interview with Sean Penn, a guest spot with Jimmy Kimmel and a series of commercials for Buffalo Wild Wings. Mexican police finally are able to track him down during his four-week stint as a guest judge on “America’s Got Talent.” He is taken to Tijuana and incarcerated in what authorities describe as “a very secure Motel 6.”

In health news, the Centers for Disease Control and prevention, responding to the spread of the little-understood Zika virus, cautions Americans not to have unprotected sex with foreign mosquitoes. Meanwhile the Flint, Michigan, water crisis worsens when samples taken from the city’s main water supply are found to contain traces of a Chipotle burrito.

North Korea successfully tests a hydrogen bomb, although this achievement is tarnished somewhat by the fact that the explosion causes the death, by startling, of the isolated nation’s lone remaining chicken.

In what critics cite as yet another example of declining U.S. prestige, Iran seizes two U.S. naval vessels and captures 10 crew members; what makes the incident particularly embarrassing is

that these vessels were docked in Cleveland. The captured sailors are released, but only after Secretary of State John Kerry assures the Iranian government that he will not deploy James Taylor.

The Powerball jackpot reaches a record \$1.6 billion, with an estimated 45 percent of the tickets being purchased by the city of Detroit using money budgeted for “infrastructure.”

Speaking of huge amounts of money being wasted, in ...

FEBRUARY

... the presidential primary season takes center stage. On the Republican side, the big issue — as you would expect, given the stakes in this election — is Donald Trump’s hand size and whether it correlates with the size of his portfolio, which he claims is huge, although he is reluctant to show it to the non-supermodel public. The hand-size issue is raised by Marco Rubio, who scores in the early polls, then fades as voters realize that he is still in the early stages of puberty. Trump’s strongest rival is Ted Cruz, a veteran debater so knowledgeable and confident that Mahatma Gandhi would want to punch him in the face. Meanwhile Jeb Bush, who was considered the early favorite, fails to gain traction with the voters despite having by far the most comprehensive set of policy initiativezzz

Sorry! We nodded off thinking about Jeb, as did the voters.

On the Democratic side, Hillary Clinton is widely presumed to be the front-runner based on being a historic woman with a lengthy resume of service to the nation who, with her husband Bill, has serviced the nation for decades to the tune of several hundred million dollars. She is declared the winner of the Iowa caucuses via a controversial and confusing process that, in some precincts, involves dodgeball. But Clinton faces an unexpectedly strong challenge from Bernie Sanders, a feisty 217-year-old Vermont senator with a message of socialism, but the good kind of socialism where everybody gets a lot of free stuff, not the kind where starving people fight over who gets the lone remaining beet at the co-op. Sanders wins the New Hampshire Democratic primary, followed — in what some observers see as a troubling sign — by Vladimir Putin.

In other February news:

- A lengthy standoff at a federal wildlife refuge in Oregon finally comes to an end when anti-government militants, after protracted negotiations, are eaten by the federal wildlife.

- Following the death of Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, the nation's political leaders observe a period of mourning and reflection lasting three billionths of a second, then commence the important bipartisan work of not making any progress whatsoever on a replacement.
- The troubled Chipotle chain temporarily closes all of its restaurants after several customers are attacked by what health authorities describe as "E. coli bacteria the size of adult pythons."
- The Denver Broncos win the Super Bowl, thanks in part to a costly unsportsmanlike conduct penalty called on the Carolina Panther defense for stealing Peyton Manning's walker.

Speaking of unsportsmanlike, in ...

MARCH

... the Republican presidential race grows increasingly nasty, spiraling downward in tone to the point where Ted Cruz makes the following statement, which we swear we are not making up: "Donald Trump may be a rat, but I have no desire to copulate with him." This sounds as though Cruz is saying that he *would* copulate with a rat, as long as the rat was not Donald Trump. Presumably that is not what Cruz meant, but nobody really wants to know what he *did* mean. Meanwhile Ben Carson announces, in his extremely low-key and soft-spoken manner, that he is going to suspend his campaign. Or visit Spain. Or possibly rob a train. There is no way to be certain.

On the Democratic side, Clinton and Sanders are also in a tight and testy battle, although Clinton slowly gains the upper hand thanks to the Democratic Party's controversial formula for allocating "superdelegates," which is as follows:

- 57 percent go to Clinton.
- The remaining 43 percent also go to Clinton.

Responding to charges from the Sanders camp that the Democratic National Committee is tipping the scales in Clinton's favor, chairperson Debbie Wasserman Schultz states that "the DNC is scrupulously neutral in the contest between Secretary Clinton and the senile Commie fart."

In other political news, President Barack Obama nominates Merrick Garland to replace Antonin Scalia on the Supreme Court. Republican leaders are quick to note that, while Garland appears to be qualified, his name is an anagram for "Rancid Lark Germ."

But by far the most controversial political issue of the month — which nobody thought about before, yet which all of a sudden is the defining civil rights struggle of the 21st century — is the question of who can pee where in North Carolina.

In foreign affairs, Obama pays a historic visit to Cuba but is forced to leave after three days when he discovers that there is only one golf course. A historic baseball game between the Tampa Bay Rays and the Cuban national team has to be called off in the fourth inning because all but four of the Cuban players have switched sides.

Speaking of historic, in ...

APRIL

... England observes the 90th birthday of Queen Elizabeth II, who celebrates the occasion by wearing a large hat and smiling grimly at horses.

Meanwhile world tension mounts when satellite imagery reveals that North Korea has positioned an 18-story plastic bottle containing an estimated 40 million liters of Diet Coke on the border with South Korea, and has somehow obtained what one military analyst describes as “Mentos mints the size of barns.” North Korea insists that the project is “strictly defensive,” but the United Nations Security Council, responding with its toughest sanctions yet against the rogue nation, votes to unfriend Kim Jong-un on Facebook.

In another alarming international development, Russian fighter jets, continuing a pattern of increasingly provocative behavior toward the U.S., attack the control tower at La Guardia airport. After assessing the damage, airport authorities announce that departing flights will be delayed an average of four months, nearly twice as long as usual. Secretary of State Kerry calls the act “a deliberate provocation” and, in his strongest response to date, warns that the U.S. is considering “a harshly worded memorandum.”

In U.S. presidential politics, Ted Cruz, making a last-ditch effort to stop the Trump juggernaut, announces that his choice for running mate is — prepare for a game-changing jolt of high-voltage excitement — Carly Fiorina. This would be the same Carly Fiorina who dropped out after the New Hampshire primary because she got approximately six votes. On the plus side, Cruz manages to make this announcement without mentioning rats.

In other political news, Hillary Clinton is troubled by a persistent cough that leaves her unable to speak at some campaign stops, forcing her to express her commitment to working families by shattering a porcelain figurine of a Wall Street banker with a hammer. A Trump

spokesperson, speaking on condition of anonymity, says that the Trump campaign “will not speculate on Mrs. Clinton’s health,” adding that “she obviously has some terrible disease.”

Speaking of bad news, in ...

MAY

... tragedy strikes the Cincinnati Zoo when zoo authorities, fearing for the life of a 3-year-old who has climbed into the gorilla enclosure, are forced to shoot and kill a gorilla named Harambe, who instantly becomes way more revered on the internet than Mother Teresa.

In other domestic news, passengers at major U.S. airports complain that they are missing flights because security lines are so long.

Q. How long are they?

A. One of them contains a Wright brother.

Asked for an explanation, a spokesperson for the federal Transportation Security Administration, which is responsible for screening passengers, blames the airline industry, pointing out that “If the airlines didn’t keep selling tickets, we wouldn’t have all these people showing up at airports trying to catch flights.” The spokesperson suggests that people planning to travel by air during busy times should consider other options, such as suicide.

In a medical breakthrough, doctors at Massachusetts General Hospital announce that they have performed the first successful penis transplant in the United States. The patient’s name — we are not making this item up — is “Manning.”

Abroad, satellite surveillance reveals that North Korea has constructed what military analysts describe as “an extremely large slingshot” as well as a latex balloon believed to be large enough to hold a quantity of water equivalent to Lake Tahoe. The North Korean government insists that these items are intended for “medical research.”

In sports, suspicions of doping by Russian Olympic athletes resurface after little-known sprinter Vladimir Raspatovsky, who has never previously posted a world-record time, wins the Kentucky Derby.

Speaking of winners, in ...

JUNE

... it becomes evident that, barring some highly unlikely political development, the next president of the United States will be either Hillary Clinton or Donald Trump. Meanwhile, the nation is in the grip of a worsening heroin epidemic. Coincidence? You be the judge.

Speaking of coincidences: Bill Clinton happens to find himself in the same airport as U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch, and — as any two people would do if one of them was the nation's chief law-enforcement officer and the other was married to the subject of a federal investigation — they meet privately aboard Lynch's Justice Department jet. When word of the meeting leaks out, Lynch assures the press that she and Bill did not discuss the FBI investigation into Hillary's email, adding, "nor did we inhale." For her part, Hillary continues to insist that she never emailed anything classified, and even if she did she actually didn't, besides which so did a lot of other people such as Colin Powell and Harry Truman, and this so-called "scandal" is ancient history from literally years ago that just makes a person sigh and roll her eyes because it is preventing her from fighting for working families while at the same time being a historic woman.

Also for the sake of balance we should note that throughout June, Donald Trump continues to emit a steady stream of truly idiotic statements.

In sports, Cleveland — in a historic upset — actually wins something.

But the big sports story for June, and the year, is the death of Muhammad Ali, a person so remarkable that even the tidal wave of phony saccharine media-manufactured grief-hype that engulfs modern celebrity deaths cannot detract from the simple truth that he really was as great as he said he was.

Internationally, the top story is "Brexit" — the decision by voters in the United Kingdom to leave the European Union. This comes as a big surprise to professional pollsters, who had confidently predicted the opposite result; they enjoy a hearty laugh, then head across the Atlantic to apply their talents to the forthcoming American presidential election.

Meanwhile British politics is plunged into chaos, the result being that in ...

JULY

... Prime Minister David Cameron and other top officials resign, new people take office, and the UK essentially has a new government, ready to move on. This entire process takes about two weeks, or less time than it takes the major American political parties to agree on the seating arrangements for a "town hall debate."

In U.S. politics, the Republicans gather in Cleveland to nominate Trump, although many top party officials are unable to attend because of an urgent compelling need to not be there. Nevertheless Trump receives enthusiastic prime-time endorsements from former celebrity Scott Baio, several dozen Trump children and current Trump wife Melania, who enthralles delegates with a well-received speech in which she tells her heartwarming story of growing up as an African-American woman in Chicago. The dramatic highlight comes on the final night, when Trump, in his acceptance speech, brings the delegates cheering to their feet with his emotional challenge to “grab the future by the p---y.”

On the Democratic side, the month gets off to a rocky start when FBI Director James Comey, announcing the results of the bureau’s investigation, reveals that when Hillary Clinton was secretary of state, her official emails, some including classified material, were basically as secure from prying eyes as a neon beer sign. Nevertheless, Comey says he is recommending that no criminal charges be brought against Clinton, because, quote, “I don’t want to die.”

With that legal hurdle cleared, relieved Democrats gather in Philadelphia for their convention, which opens — in a bid to placate Sanders’ delegates — with the ceremonial caning of Debbie Wasserman Schultz. This is followed by several hundred speeches praising Hillary Clinton for the many accomplishments she has achieved, as well as the achievements she has accomplished, while at the same time being, historically, a woman. In her acceptance speech, Clinton calls on Americans “to join with me in building a better world for us and for our children,” adding, “or I will crush you like an insect.”

In a media shakeup, Roger Ailes resigns as chairman of Fox News following allegations that his name can be rearranged to spell “I ogle rears.”

As the month ends, skydiver Luke Aikins sets a world record by jumping out of a plane 25,000 feet over California without a parachute or wing suit. He manages to land safely in a net despite the fact that on the way down — in what John Kerry calls “a deliberate provocation” — he is strafed by Russian fighter jets.

Speaking of provocations, in ...

AUGUST

... Donald Trump goes to Mexico, having been informed by his team of foreign-policy advisers that this is where Mexicans come from. He meets with Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto, and although he does not try to persuade Peña Nieto that Mexico should pay for the huge imaginary wall that he has promised to build, Trump does demonstrate his legendary prowess

as a hard-nosed businessman by negotiating what he describes as “a fantastic price” on a souvenir sombrero that he claims is “easily 4 feet in diameter.”

Meanwhile, newly released State Department emails cause some people to suggest that the reason a variety of dodgy foreign businesspeople and nations gave millions of dollars to the Clinton Foundation while Hillary Clinton was secretary of state was that they expected — get a load of THIS wacky right-wing conspiracy theory! — to receive special access to or favors from the U.S. government. Hillary has no choice but to roll her eyes and laugh in a violently unnatural manner at this latest attempt to use these discredited smear tactics to prevent her, a historic and lifelong woman, from fighting for working families as well as working for fighting families.

Abroad, the summer Olympic games open in Brazil amid dire warnings about Zika, riots, muggers, muggers with Zika and windsurfers being attacked by predatory oceangoing feces. But the games for the most part go smoothly, the biggest glitch being when one of the diving pools mysteriously turns a dark, murky green. The mystery is finally solved when the pool is drained, revealing a Russian nuclear submarine, which Russia insists is in international waters.

In the athletic competition, Jamaican sprinter Usain Bolt becomes the first athlete ever to win the men’s 100 meter final wearing flip-flops. But the U.S. team dominates the games, with the most memorable performance coming from a team of athletes led by swimmer and rocket scientist Ryan Lochte competing in the Four-Man Gas Station Wall Pee.

Elsewhere in sports, the opening of the National Football League season provides a much-needed diversion to Americans who are sick of being bitterly divided over politics and welcome the opportunity to be bitterly divided over how players respond to the National Anthem.

Speaking of bitter, in ...

SEPTEMBER

... Clinton and Trump square off in the first presidential debate, which leads to a national conversation about an issue of vital concern to all Americans, namely the alleged weight gain of Alicia Machado, Miss Universe 1996. This topic is raised by Clinton in an obvious attempt to bait Trump into wasting valuable campaign time talking about something that cannot possibly benefit him, so naturally Trump, who by his own admission has an extremely high IQ, latches onto it like a barnacle onto the Titanic. He focuses on the former Miss Venezuela with laser-like intensity for the better part of a week before getting back to his previous campaign strategy of engaging in bitterly personal Twitter feuds, often with other Republicans.

But it is also not a totally great month for Clinton, who appears to collapse while being helped into a van after hastily leaving a 9/11 memorial ceremony. Her campaign, responding with the transparency, openness and candor for which it is famous, initially downplays the incident, saying that Clinton felt “overheated.” Ninety minutes later she appears outside her daughter’s apartment building and tells reporters “I’m feeling great.” But later that afternoon her physician releases a statement saying that two days earlier, Clinton was diagnosed with pneumonia. This leads to renewed speculation about Clinton’s health, which is quickly quelled by a vast army of Clinton campaign officials, surrogates, allies, lackeys, henchpersons and media flunkies, all heavily armed with talking points and declaring, in unison, that she has no undeclared health problems and is going to power through this minor, pesky, so-called “pneumonia” which is old news and will not distract her from being a historic person of gender with a lifelong commitment to fighting for working etc.

Speaking of overheating, Samsung announces a recall of all Galaxy Note 7 phones after an attempt to re-brand them as “smart charcoal lighters” meets with consumer resistance. Adding to Samsung’s woes are reports that some of its top-loading washers have exploded, although the company insists that the machines are “perfectly safe when operated using the delicate cycle,” provided that “there are no humans nearby.”

In other technology news, Apple announces the release of the iPhone 7, which is basically the iPhone 6 with the added convenience of not having a headphone jack. The marketing slogan is “At Least It Doesn’t Burst Into Flames.”

In entertainment news, “Game of Thrones” once again wins the coveted Emmy award for Drama Series With The Most Naked People.

But for sheer drama, no TV show can compare with what happens to the American political system in ...

OCTOBER

... when the U.S. presidential election, until now a cross between farce and soap opera, mutates into a full-on horror show.

The early part of the month goes badly for Trump with the release of a 2005 video in which he talks about kissing and groping women, which according to him he can get away with because he’s a star who uses Tic Tacs. Trump quickly apologizes for the video, noting that (a) it was recorded long ago when he was just 59 years old; (b) his remarks were “locker room banter”

such as you would hear in any locker room in America occupied by morally deficient billionaire pigs; (c) Bill Clinton did way worse things; and (d) WHAT ABOUT BENGHAZI?

But the story does not go away. Over the next week Trump is accused of improper groping by enough women to form a professional softball league. Trump responds to these allegations with a five-pronged defense:

Prong One: These women are lying.

Prong Two: ALL of them. They are LIARS.

Prong Three: They are frankly not attractive enough to be groped by a star of his magnitude.

Prong Four: The election is rigged!

Prong Five: WHAT ABOUT BILL CLINTON AND BENGHAZI?

Meanwhile the Clinton campaign is dealing with a steady stream of WikiLeaks emails suggesting that the Clinton Foundation is dedicated to humanitarian relief in the same sense that the Soprano family was dedicated to waste management. But this kind of scandal is ho-hum stuff for the Clinton campaign, whose campaign slogan has slowly morphed from “Stronger Together” into “At Least She’s *Predictably Corrupt.*” As the month wears on and Trump continues to flail away unconvincingly at his alleged groping victims, it appears more and more likely that Clinton has established herself, with just enough voters, as the least-loathsome choice in this hideous, issues-free nightmare of an election.

And then, just when we thought it could not get any weirder or any worse, we are hit with the mother of all October surprises in the form of the incurable genital wart on the body politic known as Anthony Weiner. While probing Weiner’s laptop (Har!) for evidence of alleged sexting with an underage girl, the FBI reportedly discovers thousands of emails that were sent from or to Hillary Clinton’s private email server, which apparently had a higher internet profile than Taylor Swift. FBI director James Comey sends a letter informing Congress that the FBI is taking another look at the email issue. In a display of the intellectual integrity that has made our political class so respected by ordinary citizens, all the Democrats and allied pundits who praised Comey in July as a courageous public servant instantly swap positions with all the Republicans and allied pundits who said he was a cowardly hack. This new development sends the political world into Full Freakout Mode, with cable-TV political analysts forced to change their underwear on an hourly basis. Meanwhile millions of critical swing voters switch from “undecided” to “suicidal.”

In non-campaign-related October news:

- A government report concludes that the Affordable Care Act (Motto: “If You Like Your Doctor, Maybe You’ll Like Your New Doctor”) is going to cost many people a lot more, while continuing to provide the same range of customizable consumer options as a parking meter.
- In a chilling reminder of the nation’s technological vulnerability, a series of cyberattacks disrupts popular internet sites such as Twitter and Netflix, forcing millions of Americans to make eye contact with each other.
- In yet another blow to Samsung, the Federal Aviation Administration announces that it will not permit commercial aircraft to fly over states known to contain Galaxy Note 7s.
- In the arts, Bob Dylan refuses to answer his doorbell, forcing members of the Swedish Academy to leave the Nobel Prize for literature in his mailbox.

The month ends on an upbeat note as Americans celebrate Halloween, a welcome escape from the relentless drumbeat of bad news, as evidenced by this FoxNews.com headline which we swear we are not making up: “Some Florida Parents Plan To Arm Themselves While Going Trick-Or-Treating Over Clown Concerns.”

Speaking of treats, in ...

NOVEMBER

... the Chicago Cubs win the World Series. Finally! Yay! What a fun month! OK, that’s our summary of November. Now it’s time to move along to the events of ...

DECEMBER

No, that would be wrong. This is supposed to be a review of the whole year, warts and all, and we have to face reality. So let’s all take a deep breath, compose ourselves and go back to ...

NOVEMBER

... which begins with yet *another* letter to congressional leaders from FBI Director Comey, who lately has generated more correspondence than Publishers Clearing House. This time he says, concerning the newly discovered emails on Anthony Weiner’s laptop: never mind. This forces Republicans and Democrats to *again* swap positions on whether Comey is a courageous patriot or total scum. For a brief period members of Congress are so confused about who stands where that they are in real danger of accidentally working together and accomplishing something.

Fortunately before this happens the two sides are able to sort things out and resume being bitterly deadlocked.

As Election Day approaches, a consensus forms among the experts in the media/political complex, based on a vast array of demographic and scientific polling data evaluated with sophisticated analytical tools. These experts, who have made lucrative careers out of going on TV and explaining America to Americans, overwhelmingly agree that Hillary Clinton will win, possibly in a landslide, and this could very well mean the end of the Republican Party. The Explainers are very sure of this, nodding in unison while smiling in bemusement at the pathetic delusions of the Trump people.

Unfortunately, it turns out that a large sector of the American public has not been brought up to speed on all this expert analysis. And so it comes to pass that the unthinkable happens, in the form of ...

DECEMBER

No, dammit! We have to do this! What happens in ...

NOVEMBER

... is that *Donald Trump is elected president of the United States*, unless this turns out to be one of those really vivid dreams, like the one where you're at the dentist but you're naked and your dentist is Bette Midler and spiders keep coming out of your mouth.

Trump's victory stuns the nation. Not since the darkest days of the Civil War have so many Americans unfriended each other on Facebook. Some even take the extreme step of writing "open letters." Angry, traumatized protesters cry, march, shout, smash windows, set fires — and that's just the New York Times editorial board. Leading celebrities who vowed to leave the country if Trump won immediately start making plans to ... OK, to not actually leave the country *per se*, but next time they definitely will and YOU'LL BE SORRY.

In Washington, Democrats who believed in a strong president wielding power via executive orders instantly exchange these deeply held convictions with Republicans who until Election Day at roughly 10 p.m. Eastern time believed fervently in filibusters and limited government.

On TV, the professional Explainers, having failed spectacularly to predict what just happened, pause for a period of somber and contrite self-reflection lasting close to 15 minutes before they begin the crucial work of explaining to the rest of us what will happen next.

Joe Biden lies awake nights, staring at the ceiling.

Meanwhile a somber Trump, preparing to assume the most powerful office on the planet, puts the pettiness of the campaign behind him and — facing a world rife with turmoil — gets down to the all-important work of taking Twitter shots at the cast of “Hamilton.” He also begins assembling a cabinet that — reflecting the diversity of the nation he has been elected to lead — includes several non-billionaires. The president-elect also receives classified briefings, during which he learns, among other things, that there are a LOT of foreign countries, including some where he does not even have golf courses.

Meanwhile, the Democrats — now on a multi-year losing streak that has cost them the presidency, both houses of Congress and a majority of the state legislatures — desperately seek an explanation for their party’s failures. After a hard, critical look in the mirror, they are forced, reluctantly, to stop seeking scapegoats and place the blame where it belongs: the Electoral College, the Russians, Facebook and, of course, James Comey.

In the month’s biggest non-election news, the death of Fidel Castro is greeted with expressions of sorrow from several dozen world leaders who never had to live under his rule, and tears of happiness from many thousands of Cubans who did.

As the bitter and tumultuous month finally draws to a close, Americans briefly stop fighting over politics and come together to celebrate Thanksgiving in the same way the Pilgrims did in 1623: fighting over flat-screen TVs.

But the focus turns back to politics in ...

DECEMBER

... during which Trump continues to dominate the news, his face appearing 24/7 on every channel including the Food Network, *even when the TV is turned off*.

The president-elect is busy, busy, busy. Early in the month he ruffles the feathers of the Chinese government when — in what is viewed as a departure from diplomatic protocol — he texts Beijing a poop emoji. Also he threatens a drone strike against Alec Baldwin.

But the big story continues to be the cabinet. Trump’s choice for secretary of defense is James N. “Mad Dog” Mattis, who impresses Trump with his sophisticated understanding of modern military strategy and also by biting the head off a live hamster. Most of the drama, however, involves the herd of hopefuls auditioning for secretary of state, including former Trump foe Mitt Romney, who dons wingtip kneepads for his pilgrimage to Trump Tower, after which he explains to the press that his previous criticisms of Trump have been taken out of context,

particularly his use of the phrase “scum toad,” which Romney says he meant “in the spirit of constructive dialogue.”

In the end, Trump gives the job to ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson on the basis of having a name that sounds like a spaceship captain in a movie called “Escape From Planet Doom.”

Chris Christie dines alone in a Golden Corral in Freehold, N.J., pondering whether to accept the ambassadorship to Belize.

Meanwhile, allegations of Russian interference in the election resurface after intelligence satellites detect the presence of 43,000 stolen HILLARY yard signs in Vladimir Putin’s garage. This leads Democrats, who spent the fall mocking Trump for claiming the election was rigged, to claim that the election was rigged. Vote recounts in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin fail to change the outcome, although several hundred Wisconsin ballots are found to contain disturbingly high levels of cholesterol.

The question of who won the election is formally laid to rest on Dec. 19, when the Electoral College meets and votes to go back to 2015 and start over.

No, seriously, the Electoral College formally elects Donald Trump, confounding professional pollsters who claimed to have detected a late surge for Mike Huckabee.

The New York Times and Washington Post, seeking to improve their understanding of pro-Trump America, partner with TV network news divisions to create “Operation Outreach,” in which teams of reporters will travel to non-coastal regions carrying rucksacks full of chewing tobacco and moon pies, which they will trade with the natives in return for colorful quotes about their political views, religious beliefs, sex practices involving livestock, etc.

Meanwhile abroad:

- French President François Hollande announces that he will not seek re-election, leading professional pollsters to predict, based on scientific analysis of the data, that he will win in a landslide.
- In a disturbing development, North Korean troops mass near the South Korean border armed with what intelligence sources identify as “a large quantity of Samsung Galaxy Note 7s.”

Finally, mercifully, 2016 draws to a close. On New Year’s Eve, a festive crowd gathers in Times Square, and millions more tune in on TV, to watch the ball drop that marks the dawn of the new year. This is one of the great traditions that connect us as a nation, and it serves to remind

us that, although we disagree on many things, we are all part of the same big family — the American family — and when all is said and done, we hate each other.

This is what we are thinking as the big lighted ball begins to slowly descend the pole, traveling roughly two feet before it is vaporized by Russian fighter jets.

Happy New Year, fellow Americans. It's going to be exciting.