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**Dave Barry Year in Review: Bailing out of 2008**  
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### **How weird a year was it?**

*Here's how weird:*

- *O.J. actually got convicted of something.*
- *Gasoline hit \$4 a gallon -- and those were the good times.*
- *On several occasions, Saturday Night Live was funny.*
- *There were a few days there in October when you could not completely rule out the possibility that the next Treasury Secretary would be Joe the Plumber.*
- *Finally, and most weirdly, for the first time in history, the voters elected a president who -- despite the skeptics who said such a thing would never happen in the United States -- was neither a Bush NOR a Clinton.*

Of course not all the events of 2008 were weird. Some were depressing. The only U.S. industries that had a good year were campaign consultants and foreclosure lawyers. Everybody else got financially whacked. Millions of people started out the year with enough money in their 401(k)'s to think about retiring on, and ended up with maybe enough for a medium Slurpee.

So we can be grateful that 2008 is almost over. But before we leave it behind, let's take a few minutes to look back and see if we can find some small nuggets of amusement. Why not? We paid for it, starting with...

### **JANUARY**

... which begins, as it does every four years, with presidential contenders swarming into Iowa and expressing sincerely feigned interest in corn. The Iowa caucuses produce two surprises:

- On the Republican side, the winner is Mike Huckabee, folksy former governor of Arkansas or possibly Oklahoma, who vows to remain in the race until he gets a commentator gig with Fox. His win deals a severe blow to Mitt Romney and his bid to become the first president of the android persuasion. Not competing in Iowa are Rudy Giuliani, whose strategy is to stay out of the race until he is mathematically eliminated, and John McCain, who entered the caucus date incorrectly into his 1996 Palm Pilot.
- On the Democratic side, the surprise winner is Barack Obama, who is running for president on a long and impressive record of running for president. A mesmerizing speaker, Obama electrifies voters with his exciting new ideas for change, although people have trouble remembering exactly what these ideas were because they were so darned mesmerized. Some people become so excited that they actually pass out. These are members of the press corps.



Obama's victory comes at the expense of former front-runner Hillary Clinton, who fails to ignite voter passion despite a rip-snorter of a stump speech in which she recites, without notes, all 17 points of her plan to streamline tuition-loan applications.

The instant the caucuses are over the contenders drop Iowa like a rancid frankfurter and jet to other states to express concern about whatever people there care about.

Meanwhile George W. Bush, who is still technically the president, visits the Middle East and finds things over there just as confusing as ever.

In sports, LSU wins the national college football championship, easily defeating the Miami Dolphins.

Finally, in what some economists see as a troubling sign, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac invest \$12.7 billion in Powerball tickets.

The worsening economy takes center stage in . . .

## FEBRUARY

. . . when, amid much fanfare, Congress passes, and President Bush signs, an "economic stimulus package" under which the federal government will give taxpayers back several hundred dollars apiece of their own money, the idea being that they will use this money to revive the U.S. economy by buying TV sets that were made in China. This will seem much more comical in the fall.

The battle between Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton heats up as the two engage in a series of increasingly hostile debates, including one in which Secret Service agents have to tackle a large, angry, red-faced man who bursts from the audience shouting incoherently. This turns out to be Bill Clinton, who is swiftly dispatched by his wife's campaign to work his magic on voters in the crucial Guam caucuses.

On the Republican side, John McCain emerges as the front-runner when Mitt Romney drops out of the race, citing "motherboard issues."

Abroad, Fidel Castro steps down after 49 years as president of Cuba, explaining that he wants to spend more time decomposing. In selecting his successor, the Cuban National Assembly, after conducting an exhaustive nationwide search, selects Fidel's brother, Raúl, who narrowly edges out Dennis Kucinich.

In sports, the undefeated New England Patriots lose the Super Bowl to the New York Giants in a stunning upset that confounds the experts, not to mention Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, which had \$38 billion on the Pats to win.

Speaking of losers, in . . .



## MARCH

. . . New York Gov. Eliot Spitzer becomes embroiled in an embarrassing scandal when a criminal investigation reveals that he looks like a large suit-wearing rodent. Also he has been seeing a high-class prostitute known as "Kristen" in a Washington, D.C., hotel. Spitzer resigns in disgrace; "Kristen," hounded by the press and no longer able to pursue her profession, receives a \$23 billion bailout from the federal government.

In politics, Barack Obama addresses the issue of why, in his 20 years of membership in Trinity United Church of Christ in Chicago, he failed to notice that the pastor, Jeremiah Wright, is a racist lunatic. In a major televised address widely hailed for its brilliance, Obama explains that . . . OK, nobody really remembers what the actual explanation was. But everybody agrees it was mesmerizing.

Obama's opponent, Hillary Clinton, gets into a controversy of her own when she claims that, as first lady, she landed in Bosnia "under sniper fire." News outlets quickly locate archive video showing that she was in fact greeted with a welcoming ceremony featuring an 8-year-old girl reading a poem. Clinton's campaign releases a statement pointing out that it was "a pretty long poem."

On the Republican side, John McCain wraps up the nomination and embarks on a series of strategic naps.

On Wall Street, J.P. Morgan buys Bear Stearns; nobody really understands what this means, but it is clearly bad. Abroad, the dollar declines to the point where currency traders are using it solely for wiping up spills. Both Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac apply to be contestants on *Deal Or No Deal*.

In environmental news, Earth Hour is observed on March 29, when cities around the world display their commitment to conserving energy by turning out their lights for one hour. When the lights come back on, Detroit is missing.

In sports, the troubled Olympic torch becomes embroiled in a protest riot in Athens; witnesses claim the torch "reeked of alcohol." In football, beloved Green Bay Packers quarterback Brett Favre retires and embarks on a series of emotional farewell events, several of which are still going on when he signs to play for the Jets.

Speaking of emotional, in . . .

## APRIL

. . . tensions run high in the Pennsylvania Democratic primary, which all the experts agree is extremely crucial. Barack Obama gets into trouble with rural voters for saying that rural Americans are "bitter" and "cling to guns or religion." Responding to charges that this statement is elitist, Obama responds: "You are getting sleepy. Very sleepy."



Seeking to capitalize on Obama's gaffe, Hillary Clinton starts channeling Annie Oakley, tossing down shots of whiskey and talking about her love of guns and hunting. After one particularly long day on the trail, she grabs a Secret Service agent's pistol and attempts to shoot a deer; instead she wounds a reporter, thereby sealing her victory in the Pennsylvania primary, which turns out to not actually be all that crucial because the Democratic race keeps right on going with no sign of ending in the current decade.

On the Republican side, John McCain gets wind of something called the "Internet" and orders his staff to give him a summary of it on index cards.

In economic news, the price of gasoline tops \$4 a gallon, meaning the cost of filling up an average car is now \$50, or, for Hummer owners, \$17,500. Congress, responding to the financial pain of the American people, goes into partisan gridlock faster than ever before, with Republicans demanding that the oil companies immediately start drilling everywhere, including cemeteries, and Democrats calling for a massive effort to develop alternative energy sources such as wind, the sun, tides, comets, Al Gore and dragon breath, using technology expected to be perfected sometime this millennium. It soon becomes clear that Congress will not actually do anything, so Americans start buying less gasoline.

The economic news is also gloomy for the U.S. automotive industry, where General Motors, in a legally questionable move aimed at boosting its sagging car sales, comes out with a new model called "The Chevrolet Toyota."

In sports, the troubled Olympic torch punches a photographer while entering a San Francisco hotel at 3 a.m. with Lindsay Lohan.

Speaking of trouble, in . . .

MAY

. . . the International Atomic Energy Agency releases a report stating that Iran is actively developing nuclear warheads. In response, Iran issues a statement asserting that (1) it absolutely is not developing nuclear warheads, and (2) these are peaceful warheads. The United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Russia and China convene an emergency meeting, during which they manage, in heated negotiations, to talk France out of surrendering.

Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac invest \$17 billion in a Herbalife franchise.

In presidential politics, the increasingly bitter fight for the Democratic nomination intensifies when Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton hold a televised debate, moderated by PBS anchor Jim Lehrer, that consists entirely of spitting.

On the Republican side, John McCain, preparing for the fall campaign, purchases a new necktie.



The big spring Hollywood hit is the film version of *Sex and the City*, which draws millions of movie-goers, including an estimated three men, two of whom thought they were in the theater for the fourth Indiana Jones movie, *Indiana Jones Experiences Frequent Nighttime Urination*. The riveting plot of *Sex and the City*, which runs for nearly two-and-a-half hours, involves the efforts of Carrie, Samantha, Miranda and Charlotte to plan Carrie's wedding -- Finally! -- to "Mr. Big," only to have things go awry when mutant vampire moles bore up through the church floor and suck the blood out of the wedding party through their feet.

In sports, both the Kentucky Derby and the Indianapolis 500 are won by Usain Bolt.

Speaking of victory, in . . .

## JUNE

. . . Barack Obama finally claims the bitterly contested Democratic nomination when Hillary Clinton, behind on delegates and in debt to the tune of \$25 million, including \$9 million for hairspray alone, suspends her campaign and declares that she has "no hard feelings" and will do "whatever it takes" to help Obama get elected "even though he is scum." Bill Clinton, at his wife's side, nods vigorously, but is unable to speak because of the restraining device. A gracious John McCain tells the press that he "looks forward to a spirited debate with Sen. Mondale." Before he can take questions he is informed by his aides that he has an important meeting.

In other campaign-related news, Chicago developer Tony Rezko, a former Obama associate and fundraiser, is convicted on corruption charges, but the press realizes that this is not an issue after Obama explains that it is not an issue.

President George W. Bush takes one last official trip to Europe to meet with European leaders. Unfortunately they are not home.

In economic news, Chrysler announces a plan to lay off workers who have not been born yet. The lone economic bright spot is the iPhone, which is selling like crazy thanks to the release of a new model enhanced with the capability of sucking pieces of your brain out through your ear until all you want to do is play with your iPhone.

Speaking of vegetables, the big scare in June comes from the Food and Drug Administration, which announces that tomatoes are killing people. A wave of fear grips the nation as supermarket shoppers stampede from the produce section, causing several fatal shopping-cart mishaps. At the height of the panic, with the tomato industry reeling, the FDA declares that, oops, the killer might NOT be tomatoes, but some other vegetable, possibly jalapeño peppers, but nobody knows for sure. Eventually everyone calms down, but not before a bank in Cleveland is held up by a man wielding only a stalk of asparagus.

The scientific community is elated by NASA's announcement that the Phoenix lander has detected ice on Mars. The elation turns to concern when, several hours later, the lander detects a Zamboni machine.



Tiger Woods, in an epic performance, wins the U.S. Open playing on an injured and very painful knee, thereby proving, beyond all doubt, that golf is not a real sport.

Speaking of epic performances, in . . .

JULY

. . . Barack Obama, having secured North and South America, flies to Germany *without using an airplane* and gives a major speech -- speaking English and German *simultaneously* -- to 200,000 mesmerized Germans, who immediately elect him chancellor, prompting France to surrender.

Meanwhile John McCain, at a strategy session at a golf resort, tells his top aides to prepare a list of potential running mates, stressing that he wants somebody "who is completely, brutally honest." Unfortunately, because of noise from a lawn mower, the aides think McCain said he wants somebody "who has competed in a beauty contest." This will lead to trouble down the road.

Speaking of trouble, the economic news continues to worsen with the discovery that Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac have sent \$87 billion to a Nigerian businessman with a compelling e-mail story.

Also troubling is the news from Iran, which test-fires some long-range missiles, although Iranian President Wackjob Lunatic insists that Iran intends to use these missiles "for stump removal."

In sports, the government of China, in an effort to improve air quality for the Beijing Olympics, bans flatulence.

Speaking of Olympian, in . . .

AUGUST

. . . Barack Obama, continuing to shake up the establishment, selects as his running mate Joe Biden, a tireless fighter for change since he was first elected to the U.S. Senate in 1849. The Democratic Party gathers in Denver to formally nominate Obama, who descends from his Fortress of Solitude to mesmerize the adoring crowd with an acceptance speech objectively described by The New York Times as "comparable to the Gettysburg Address, only way better."

Meanwhile John McCain, still searching for the perfect running mate, tells his top aides in a conference call that he wants "someone who is capable of filling my shoes." Unfortunately, he is speaking into the wrong end of his cellular phone, and his aides think he said "someone who is capable of killing a moose." Shortly thereafter McCain stuns the world, and possibly himself, by selecting Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin, a nonsense hockey mom with roughly 114 children named after random nouns such as "Hamper."

In yet another troubling economic indicator, Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac rob a liquor store.



Internationally, the big story is the Olympic games, which begin under a cloud of controversy when journalists in Beijing, who were promised unfettered Internet access by the Chinese government, discover that no matter what address they enter into their browsers, they wind up on Chairman Mao's Facebook page (he has 1.3 billion friends). But even the critics are blown away by the spectacular opening ceremony, which features the entire population of Asia performing the Electric Slide.

The games themselves are dominated by swimmer Michael Phelps, who wins eight gold medals, thus putting himself on a sounder financial footing than the U.S. Treasury. China wins the gold-medal count, although critics charge that some of China's 11-year-old female gymnasts are under the minimum age of 16. Chinese officials refute this charge by noting, correctly, that they have tanks.

Elsewhere abroad, war breaks out between Russia and Georgia over South Ossetia and Abkhazia, serving as a stark reminder that, in an increasingly uncertain world, we, as Americans, have no idea where these places are.

Speaking of uncertainty, in . . .

## SEPTEMBER

. . . the Republican convention gets off to a tentative start in St. Paul when President Bush and Vice President Cheney are unable to attend, partly because of Hurricane Gustav, and partly because the organizers told them that the convention was in Atlanta. The mood improves when Sarah Palin dazzles the delegates with her winning smile, detailed knowledge of what is on the teleprompter, and spot-on imitation of Tina Fey. The next night, John McCain, formally accepting the nomination, pledges to run "a totally incoherent campaign." None of this is reported in the media because the entire press corps is in Wasilla, Alaska, investigating rumors that Palin once dated a yeti.

But the presidential campaign is soon overshadowed by the troubled economy. The federal government is finally forced to take over Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac after they are caught selling crack at a middle school. But that is not enough, as major financial institutions, having lost hundreds of billions of dollars thanks to years of engaging in practices ranging from questionable to moronic, begin failing, which gives the federal government an idea: Why not give these institutions MORE hundreds of billions of dollars, generously provided by taxpayers?

This plan is discussed and debated in urgent meetings in Washington attended by the president, the cabinet, congressional leaders, Sen. Obama, Sen. McCain and all other concerned parties except the actual taxpayers, who are not invited because they are, with all due respect, way too stupid to understand high finance. The taxpayers are repeatedly assured, however, that unless they fork over \$700 billion, the economy will go right down the toilet. And so it comes to pass that in . . .



## OCTOBER

. . . Congress passes, and Technically Still President Bush signs, the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act of 2008, and everyone heaves a sigh of relief as the economy stabilizes for approximately 2.7 seconds, after which it resumes going down the toilet. As world financial markets collapse like fraternity pledges at a keg party and banks fail around the world, the International Monetary Fund implements an emergency program under which anybody who opens a checking account anywhere on earth gets a free developing nation. But it is not enough; the financial system is in utter chaos. At one point a teenage girl in Worcester, Mass., attempts to withdraw \$25 from an ATM and winds up acquiring Wells Fargo.

As the crisis worsens, an angry Congress, determined to get some answers, holds hearings and determines that whoever is responsible for this mess, it is definitely not Congress. Meanwhile all the cable-TV financial experts agree that since they totally failed to predict this disaster, they will stop pretending they have a clue what the markets are going to do and henceforth confine themselves to topics they can discuss knowledgeably, such as what time it is.

Just kidding! They'd get that wrong, too.

The economy dominates the presidential campaign, with the focal point being "Joe the Plumber," an Ohio resident who asks Barack Obama a mildly confrontational question about tax policy and within hours is more famous than the Dalai Lama. He draws intense scrutiny from the news media, which, using investigative reporters borrowed from the Palin-yeti beat, determine that "Joe the Plumber" is in fact (1) not named Joe, (2) not a plumber, (3) a citizen of Belgium, and (4) biologically, a woman.

In the presidential debates, John McCain, looking and sounding increasingly like the late Walter Brennan, cites Joe the Plumber a record 847 times while charging that Obama's tax policies amount to socialism. Obama, ahead of McCain by double digits in the polls and several hundred million dollars in money, skips the debates so he can work on his inaugural address. The New York Times declares his performance "masterful."

In non-economic news, a Las Vegas jury convicts O.J. Simpson on 12 counts of being an unbelievable idiot. He faces more than 60 years in jail, which could end his relentless quest to find the killer of the people he stabbed to death in 1994.

In sports, the entire nation rejoices as the World Series is won, yet again, by a team other than the New York Yankees.

Speaking of winning, in . . .

## NOVEMBER

. . . Barack Obama, in a historic triumph, becomes the nation's first black president since the second season of 24, setting off an ecstatically joyful and boisterous all-night celebration that at times threatens to spill



out of The New York Times newsroom. Obama, following through on his promise to bring change to Washington, quickly begins assembling an administration consisting of a diverse group of renegade outsiders, ranging all the way from lawyers who attended Ivy League schools and then worked in the Clinton administration to lawyers who attended *entirely different* Ivy league schools and then worked in the Clinton administration.

But the hopeful mood is dampened by grim economic news. The stock market plummets farther as investors realize that the only thing that had been keeping the economy afloat was the millions of dollars spent daily on TV commercials for presidential candidates explaining how they would fix the economy. As it becomes increasingly clear that the federal government's plan of giving hundreds of billions of dollars to dysfunctional companies has not fixed the problem, the government comes up with a bold new plan: give *more* hundreds of billions of dollars to dysfunctional companies. Soon the government is in a bailout frenzy, handing out money left and right, at one point accidentally giving \$14 billion to a man delivering a Domino's pizza to the Treasury building.

More and more companies seek federal help, among them the troubled "big three" auto makers, whose chief executives fly to Washington in three separate corporate jets to ask Congress for \$25 billion, explaining that if they don't get the money, they will be unable to continue making cars that Americans are not buying.

In space, NASA's woes continue when an astronaut attempting to repair the troubled multibillion-dollar international space station accidentally lets go of a special \$100,000 space tool bag, which drifts away, taking with it the special \$17,000 space washer needed to fix the station's special, but troubled, space toilet. NASA announces that it will now have to send up a special space plumber, who charges \$38 million an hour.

In sports, New York Giants wide receiver Plaxico Burress shoots himself in the thigh in a New York City nightclub, using a gun he carried to protect himself from bad things that might happen to him, such as getting shot.

Speaking of bad things, in . . .

## DECEMBER

. . . the National Bureau of Declaring Things That Make You Go "Duh" declares that the nation has been in a recession since December of 2007. The bureau also points out that, according to its statistical analysis, "for some time now, bears apparently have been going to the bathroom in the woods."

The CEOs of the Increasingly Small Three auto makers return to Washington to resume pleading for a bailout, this time telling Congress that if they can reach an agreement that day, they will throw in the undercoating, the satellite-radio package AND a set of floor mats. "We're actually LOSING MONEY on this deal!" they assure Congress. Finally they reach a \$13.4 billion agreement under which the car companies will continue to provide jobs, medical insurance and pension benefits, but will cease producing actual cars.



The agreement will be overseen by the federal government, using its legendary ability to keep things on budget.

President-elect Obama, continuing to bring change in the form of fresh-faced Washington outsiders, announces that his secretary of state will be Hillary Clinton. The position of secretary of defense, currently held by Bush appointee Robert Gates, will be filled by Bush appointee Robert Gates. Responding to rumors that he also plans to retain Dick Cheney, Obama insists that he has tried to ask the vice president to leave, "but nobody knows where he is."

In other political news, federal authorities arrest Democratic Illinois Gov. Rod "Rod" Blagojevich after wiretaps reveal that he was . . . OK, that he was being the governor of Illinois. Everybody is very, very shocked. Meanwhile the recount in the extremely tight Minnesota Senate race between Norm Coleman and Al Franken is thrown into disarray with the discovery that more than 13,000 of the ballots were cast by residents of Palm Beach County, Fla.

But the economy remains the dominant issue, with retailers reporting weak holiday sales as many shoppers pass up pricier gifts such as jewelry and big-screen TVs in favor of toilet paper and jerky. As the year draws to a close, the president's Council of Economic Advisers warns that the current recession "could spiral downward into a full-blown depression," leaving the U.S. with "no viable economic option but to declare war on Japan."

In another troubling note, U.S. intelligence sources report that Iran is developing "a gigantic rocket-powered shoe."

Adding to the year-end gloom is a congressionally appointed bipartisan commission on terrorism, which releases a troubling report asserting that there is an 80 percent chance that within the next two years, a major U.S. city will be struck, with devastating consequences, by "an 18,000 mile-per-hour tool bag from space."

The point is, if you have any money left, you should spend it soon.

And happy New Year.