

The Annual Review:

Here it is, the New Year, again. It's time to reevaluate our deeds and misdeeds of the past year. It's time to take a deep breath and list the areas where we need to pick up the pace a bit. It's also time to take a minute and give a pat on the back wherever a pat is due.

There are so many people I'd like to thank for making this year such a memorable one. So many folks who were at the right place at the right time, folks who had a quote or an opinion or an idea that sparked the imagination. I'm afraid that I will leave someone out who deserves mention. Please be patient with me and know that omissions are not deliberate but simply oversights that will be corrected in the future.

First, I want to thank Rudy Giuliani for giving new standing to two numbers that had been largely ignored. Rudy has spoken the words "nine" and "eleven" more often than anyone had thought possible. The old record was set by Ms. Grace's fourth grade class at St. Sixtus School in Michigan. They established the lofty standard while they were working on their times tables. Rudy has utterly smashed their mark. And he's making it known that, if he is nominated, he will set out to break his own record by endlessly repeating "9/11" throughout 2008.

Praise goes out to Senator Clinton's campaign for repudiating the mention of Senator Obama's drug use every time they mention Senator Obama's drug use. It's important for any organization to be self-policing. It shows integrity. And it lets you continue to say the things you shouldn't say as long as you say that you are against saying those things, every time that you say them.

The EPA gets a nod for their courageous ruling that high standards for auto emissions, set by individual states, would be confusing and burdensome for Americans. I, personally, feel so much better now. Every time California raised the bar and forced automakers to make cleaner cars I found myself dazed and stumbling. I wondered how I would know what the best standard is for dirty air. Now, I can count on air to be consistently lousy, on a national, uniform scale. Relieved.

Fred Thompson. Yes, Fred Thompson. What a campaigner. He brings to the Primary Battles the energy and fire of an aging sloth. I have complained bitterly that our political campaigns are way too long, too noisy and too costly. I have found my man. He's running for president but he doesn't show up *and* he doesn't say much. He is not a bother.

Thanks, Fred, you make me want to sit on the couch and vote absentee. If I get around to it.

This was a big year for Mother Nature, especially in our neck of the woods. August 18th and 19th will long be remembered as the days that our Mother delivered a firm reminder that we are not entirely in charge of the sky above us and the earth beneath us. She is. Pay attention to her warnings. Get out of the way of what you can't stop. Put back what falls down. Be thankful that you're still here to follow her instructions.

Mr. Putin, Czar Vladimir the First, stands out for his Audacity on top of Audacity. It takes a special kind of guy to follow a KGB career (poisoning, torture, assassinations etc.) with overwhelming victories in Russia's presidential elections. From the Kremlin he has successfully silenced his opposition, jailed the naysayers and will have gotten himself appointed Prime Minister by his hand picked successor. He has also become extremely wealthy along the way and is soon to be named a Director of Russia's natural gas monopoly. Impressive. Makes Dick Cheney look like a Boy Scout.

I was joking when I suggested in a column that the only place Paul Wolfowitz might find a new job would be back with the Bush Administration. But how could I have guessed that Condoleezza Rice would be prepared to offer Wolfy a job with the State Department? I like Condi. I can't imagine what her life has been like trying to be a diplomat for a boss who does not value diplomacy. But Wolfy? Really? Maybe she'll put him in charge of hiring. I know Paul's girlfriend would be excited about that. So I'm giving Ms. Rice a pat on the back for Loyalty Beyond Reason. She has recycled the unsalvageable. She has taken a cracked teacup that was headed for the dump and placed it back in the Nation's china cabinet.

I've saved the best for last. And this time I'm not fooling.

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