

Editorials

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★ **StarTribune**

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An engaged citizenry needed in 2024

If we were living in the pages of a novel — or perhaps in the computer simulation posited by thinkers of deep thoughts — the convergence of suspenseful plot lines at the dawn of this new year would be a little much.

The incumbent president, Joe Biden, is doggedly pressing his re-election campaign despite a chorus of voices expressing doubt that he can win. COVID-19 is surging once again, with a new strain that appears to be especially transmissible. Donald Trump is surging too, his numbers making him a cinch to win the Republican nomination and perhaps the presidency, despite criminal indictments that would have hobbled any other candidate.

Antisemitism is rising. The horrible Hamas attack of Oct. 7 has sparked a horrible war in Gaza. Anti-immigrant sentiment in Washington has imperiled aid to Ukraine, possibly spelling a victory for Vladimir Putin's Russia and a harsh blow to American leadership abroad.

Climate change has evolved from troubling theory to worrying fact, evoking decades-old warnings that if the world waited until the threat was prov-

able it might also turn out to be unstoppable. Here in Minnesota, this hottest year on record has culminated in a brown, rainy Christmas, a canceled ice maze in Eagan and a winter-recreation industry that is literally and figuratively on thin ice.

Artificial intelligence is generating fake news and bogus information, just as it had been predicted to do, creating an existential crisis for journalism, for academia and possibly for humanity as well.

Add to those plot lines a slew of subplots and assorted annoyances: Spam and scams that foul our mobile phones. Young thugs who steal cars for fun. Scofflaw motorists who perform high-risk, high-speed maneuvers on the freeway as if they were playing a video game. A federal government whose three independent branches seem to be competing with one another for the prize of most diminished in stature.

So when you wish someone a happy new year, do you detect a note of sarcasm in your own voice? Are you celebrating the arrival of 2024 with a tinge of gallows humor?

We offer two observations.

Sure, it might look
bleak now, but
America has a way
of surviving its
greatest challenges.

The first concerns the recent successful effort to design a new seal and flag for Minnesota. For all the disparagement and ridicule heaped upon some of the finalists via social media, the process was an exercise in community engagement of a high order. Whether you like the final designs or not — and we like both of them — everyone had a chance to be heard. The flag's final design was not precisely the same as any of the 2,000-plus original submissions. It is the product of deliberation and negotiation and, finally, consensus. That is an accomplishment.

Our second observation is that, chaotic as our times seem to us now, they are not uniquely so. Our country has been through a civil war, a great depression, two world wars, assorted epidemics, slavery, Jim Crow, anti-immigration hysteria, witch hunts — and by that we mean actual hunts for witches — assassinations, impeachments, the genocide of Native Americans, Vietnam, fisticuffs on the floor of Congress and more. Witnesses to those periods of our history might remind us that this country has a way of righting itself.

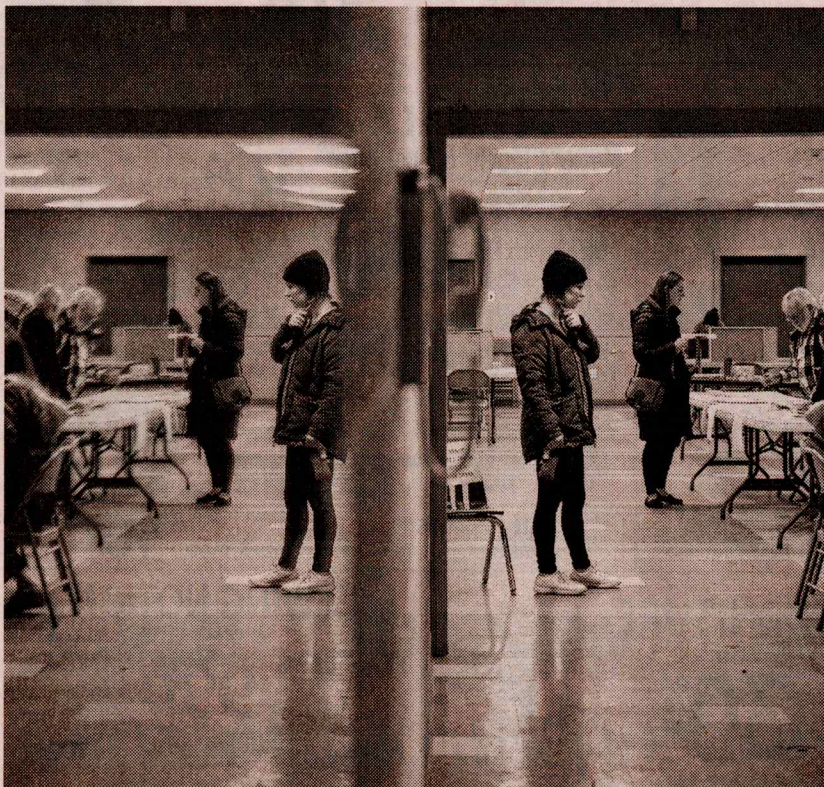
Those of us old enough to remember Richard Nixon and Watergate will recall the words of comfort uttered when it was over: "The system worked." Until then, it had not been clear that the system would work — or that any system could work in the face of criminal behavior at the highest levels of government.

We are not living in a suspense novel, and we're pretty sure this is not a computer simulation. The events of 2024 will not be imposed on us; they will be at least partly the result of our actions. Will our system work? That will depend on what our citizens do.

Our country does have a way of righting itself. In the meantime, remember that this is an election year. Be sure to vote.

And it wouldn't hurt to fly the flag.

Editorial Board members are David Banks, Jill Burcum, Scott Gillespie, Denise Johnson, Patricia Lopez, John Rash and D.J. Tice. Star Tribune Opinion staff members Maggie Kelly and Elena Neuzil also contribute, and Star Tribune CEO and Publisher Steve Grove serves as an adviser to the board.



ALEX KORMANN • Star Tribune

Voters (and their reflections) waited in line in Duluth on a past Election Day.