

January 29, 2014

A CNN reporter found the woman who is the voice of Siri on your iPhone.

Sandy Springs, Georgia (CNN) -- For the past two years, she's been a pocket and purse accessory to millions of Americans. She's starred alongside Samuel L. Jackson and Zooey Deschanel. She's provided weather forecasts and restaurant tips, been mocked as useless and answered absurd questions about what she's wearing.

She is Siri, Apple's voice-activated virtual "assistant" introduced to the masses with the iPhone 4S on October 4, 2011.

Behind this groundbreaking technology there is a real woman. While the ever-secretive Apple has never identified her, all signs indicate that the original voice of Siri in the United States is a voiceover actor who laid down recordings for a client eight years ago. She had no idea she'd someday be speaking to more than 100 million people through a not-yet-invented phone.

Her name is Susan Bennett and she lives in suburban Atlanta.

Apple won't confirm it. But Bennett says she is Siri. Professionals who know her voice, have worked with her and represent her legally say she is Siri. And an audio-forensics expert with 30 years of experience has studied both voices and says he is "100%" certain the two are the same. ...

What's it like at the commanding heights of the legal profession? NY Times with an answer.

Anyone who wonders why law school applications are plunging and there's widespread malaise in many big law firms might consider the case of Gregory M. Owens.

The silver-haired, distinguished-looking Mr. Owens would seem the embodiment of a successful Wall Street lawyer. A graduate of Denison University and Vanderbilt Law School, Mr. Owens moved to New York City and was named a partner at the then old-line law firm of Dewey, Ballantine, Bushby, Palmer & Wood, and after a merger, at Dewey & LeBoeuf.

Today, Mr. Owens, 55, is a partner at an even more eminent global law firm, White & Case. A partnership there or any of the major firms collectively known as "Big Law" was long regarded as the brass ring of the profession, a virtual guarantee of lifelong prosperity and job security.

But on New Year's Eve, Mr. Owens filed for personal bankruptcy.

According to his petition, he had \$400 in his checking account and \$400 in savings. He lives in a rental apartment at 151st Street and Broadway. He owns clothing he estimated was worth \$900 and his only jewelry is a Concord watch, which he described as "broken."

Mr. Owens is an extreme but vivid illustration of the economic factors roiling the legal profession, although his straits are in some ways unique to his personal situation. ...

Wired published an item from Mother Jones on the seriousness of this year's flu. *You've probably heard by now that this year's flu season is a bad one. Below is a guide to the viruses that are going around now, plus a refresher on flu basics.*

Is the flu widespread where I live?

Probably:

How many people have died so far this year?

Twenty-eight children have died so far. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not keep track of adult deaths. That's because states are not required to report flu deaths to the CDC. Older adults often die of flu complications or secondary infections rather than the flu itself, so tracking flu deaths is not an exact science. That said, in California, the death toll is currently at 146, including 95 people under the age of 65. At this time last year, just 9 Californians under 65 had died of the flu, and by the end of the season, a total of 106 people had died.

How does this year's season compare to last year's?

As the chart below shows, so far, this season is milder in terms of number of cases. However, CDC spokesperson Jason McDonald notes that more people between the ages of 18 and 64 have been hospitalized for flulike symptoms this year than in previous years. This season's predominant virus strain is H1N1—which, when it originated in 2009, also sent an unusually high number people in the 18-to-64 age range to the hospital. Epidemiologists don't know why H1N1 hits younger people hard, but one theory, says McDonald, is that older adults have built up more immunity to it. H1N1 is similar to the virus that caused the Spanish Flu of 1918, and also to strains that circulated in the '60s and '70s. Another possible factor: Only about 30 percent of younger adults get flu shots, compared to about 40 percent of older adults. ...

The A-10 Warthog is our ugliest airplane, but it protects ground troops. **Real Clear Defense** makes the case for keeping the plane in our quiver.

As the FY15 defense budget is finalized and the fiscal pressure of sequestration endures, there has been informed speculation that the Air Force will seek to retire its A-10 Warthog fleet. Congress has already prevented such a move in the National Defense Authorization Act, but yet the fight continues. Last week, RCD featured a proposal to transfer the A-10 to the Army. This week, J. Furman Daniel, III offers ten good reasons to save the beloved A-10.

1. It is proven

The A-10 is a tried and true design that has served our nation well. In an era of increasingly complex, expensive, and troubled weapons procurement, it is essential to have some systems that are solid and reliable. With only modest changes to the original design, the A-10 has been upgraded to meet the challenges of the future and deliver its trademark firepower, durability, survivability, and persistence to battlefield hotspots for decades to come.

2. It is cheap

The A-10 is and will continue to be cheap. While it is ugly, slow, and old fashioned, it remains the most cost effective way of delivering aerial firepower to the battlefield. While it is possible

todrop ordinance and provide suppressive fire with other fighter platforms few would consider the F-22, F-35, F-15, or F-16 as ideal ways of performing this essential mission. In fact, the F-22 has been excluded from such missions and is in danger of becoming a “force in being” for “big wars” rather than an asset that can actually be used in the conflicts we are currently fighting. A rational force structure would retain the A-10 as the unglamorous but necessary “low” component of a “high-low mix” and would thus free our more expensive platforms for missions such as air superiority and strategic bombing that demand higher performance.

3. It is survivable ...

CNN

'I'm the original voice of Siri'

By Jessica Ravitz ,

Sandy Springs, Georgia (CNN) -- For the past two years, she's been a pocket and purse accessory to millions of Americans. She's starred alongside Samuel L. Jackson and Zooey Deschanel. She's provided weather forecasts and restaurant tips, been mocked as useless and answered absurd questions about what she's wearing.

She is Siri, Apple's voice-activated virtual "assistant" introduced to the masses with the iPhone 4S on October 4, 2011.

Behind this groundbreaking technology there is a real woman. While the ever-secretive Apple has never identified her, all signs indicate that the original voice of Siri in the United States is a voiceover actor who laid down recordings for a client eight years ago. She had no idea she'd someday be speaking to more than 100 million people through a not-yet-invented phone.

Her name is [Susan Bennett](#) and she lives in suburban Atlanta.

Apple won't confirm it. But Bennett says she is Siri. Professionals who know her voice, have worked with her and represent her legally say she is Siri. And an audio-forensics expert with 30 years of experience has studied both voices and says he is "100%" certain the two are the same.



Meet the woman behind Siri's voice



' *Siri' gets flood of interview requests*

Bennett, who won't divulge her age, fell into voice work by accident in the 1970s. Today, she can be heard worldwide. She speaks up in commercials and on countless phone systems. She spells out directions from GPS devices and addresses travelers in Delta airport terminals.

Until now, it's been a career that's afforded her anonymity.

But a new Apple mobile operating system, iOS 7, with new Siri voices means that Bennett's reign as the American Siri is slowly coming to an end. At the same time, tech-news site The Verge posted a video last month, "[How Siri found its voice](#)," that led some viewers to believe that Allison Dufty, the featured voiceover talent, was Siri. A horrified Dufty scrambled in response, writing on [her website](#) that she is "absolutely, positively NOT the voice of Siri," but not before some bloggers had bought into the hype.

And there sat Bennett, holding onto her secret, laughing and watching it all. For so long she'd been goaded by others, including her son and husband, to come forward. Her Siri counterparts in the [UK](#) and [Australia](#) had revealed their identities, after all.

So why not her? It was her question to wrestle with, and finally she found her answer.

"I really had to weigh the importance of it for me personally. I wasn't sure that I wanted that notoriety, and I also wasn't sure where I stood legally. And so, consequently, I was very conservative about it for a long time," she said. "And then this Verge video came out ... And it seemed like everyone was clamoring to find out who the real voice behind Siri is, and so I thought, well, you know, what the heck? This is the time."

The Siri surprise

The story of how Bennett became this iconic voice began in 2005. ScanSoft, a software company, was looking for a voice for a new project. It reached out to GM Voices, a suburban Atlanta company that had established a niche recording voices for automated voice technologies. Bennett, a trusted talent who had done lots of work with GM Voices, was one of the options presented. ScanSoft liked what it heard, and in June 2005 Bennett signed a contract offering her voice for recordings that would be used in a database to construct speech.

For four hours a day, every day, in July 2005, Bennett holed up in her home recording booth. Hour after hour, she read nonsensical phrases and sentences so that the "ubergeeks" -- as she affectionately calls them; they leave her awestruck -- could work their magic by pulling out vowels, consonants, syllables and diphthongs, and playing with her pitch and speed.

These snippets were then synthesized in a process called concatenation that builds words, sentences, paragraphs. And that is how voices like hers find their way into GPS and telephone systems.

"There are some people that just can read hour upon hour upon hour, and it's not a problem. For me, I get extremely bored ... So I just take breaks. That's one of the reasons why Siri might sometimes sound like she has a bit of an attitude," Bennett said with a laugh. "Those sounds might have been recorded the last 15 minutes of those four hours."

But Bennett never knew exactly how her voice would be used. She assumed it would be employed in company phone systems, but beyond that didn't think much about it. She was paid by the hour -- she won't say how much -- and moved on to the next gig.

The surprise came in October 2011 after [Apple released its iPhone 4S](#), the first to feature Siri. Bennett didn't have the phone herself, but people who knew her voice did.

"A colleague e-mailed me [about Siri] and said, 'Hey, we've been playing around with this new Apple phone. Isn't this you?'"

Bennett went to her computer, pulled up Apple's site and listened to video clips announcing Siri. The voice was unmistakably hers.

"Oh, I knew," she said. "It's obviously me. It's my voice."

Seeking proof

It certainly does sound like Bennett. But proving who supplied the voice of Siri isn't easy. It's not like Steve Jobs sent Bennett a thank-you note, or a certificate to hang on her wall.

There are others who vouch for her. But the tech world -- and specifically the text-to-speech, or TTS, space -- is a complicated business, one that's shrouded in secrecy and entangled in a web of nondisclosure agreements.

Bennett is not bound by such restrictions, which is why she's talking. But the industry has a vested interest in keeping their voices anonymous.

"The companies are competing to create the best-sounding and functioning systems. Their concern is driving revenues," said Marcus Graham, CEO of [GM Voices](#). "Talking about the voice talent, from their perspective, is likely seen as a distraction."

Bennett's attorney, [Steve Sidman](#), can't breach attorney-client privilege to share documents and contracts, but since he began representing Bennett in 2012 he's been intensely aware of her connection to Siri.

"I've engaged in substantial negotiations -- multiple, months-long negotiations -- with parties along the economic food chain, so to speak, that involved her rendering services as the voice of Siri," he told CNN. "It's as simple as that."

And then there's Graham, of GM Voices, a man who has built a career around providing voiceover talent for interactive voice technologies.

Graham won't divulge details about any deals he made back in 2005. But he has worked with Bennett for 25 years, has recorded "literally millions of words with Susan" and has installed her voice with clients across the globe. He knows her voice as well as anyone, and he doesn't hesitate when asked if she and Siri are the same.

"Most female voices are kind of thin, but she's got a rich, full voice," he said. "Yes, she's the voice of Siri. ... She's definitely the voice."

A '100% match'

In October 2005, a few months after Bennett made those recordings, ScanSoft bought and took on the name of [Nuance Communications](#). Nuance is [the company widely accepted to have provided to Apple the technology behind Siri](#).

When CNN contacted Nuance to try and confirm Bennett's identity as a voice of Siri, a Nuance spokeswoman said, "As a company, we don't comment on Apple."

Apple, too, declined to comment.

So CNN took the investigation one step further by hiring an audio forensics expert to compare Bennett's voice with Siri's.

[Ed Primeau](#), of Rochester Hills, Michigan, has been doing this work for three decades. He's testified in courts, analyzed "hundreds, if not thousands" of recordings and is a member of the American Board of Recorded Evidence. He spent four hours studying our "known voice" -- in this case Siri -- with the unknown voice of Bennett.

"I believe, and I've lived this for 30 years, no two voices are the same," he said, after finishing his analysis of the Siri voice and Bennett's. "They are identical -- a 100% match."

To reach his conclusion Primeau created back-to-back comparison files, lifted and listened to consonants and reviewed deliveries. He took the hiss off the Siri sound, created in recording from a phone, and dropped it into Bennett's file.

After studying Bennett's normal speaking voice, he was about 70% certain of the match. But once he had audio of her saying the same words as Siri, he knew his work was done. Even so, he said he asked a colleague for a second opinion.

"I understand the importance of accuracy," Primeau said. "Rest assured: It's 100% Susan."

How CNN got this story

This isn't the sort of story I'd naturally go after. Technology is [far from my beat](#). In fact, the first time I ever spoke to Siri was on my work phone -- the kind that's plugged into a wall jack and has a tangled cord attached to the handset.

Bennett was a voiceover artist I was interviewing for a [CNN special project on the world's busiest airport](#) -- Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International -- scheduled to come out next month. I was tracking down the airport's voices, and she, a voice of Delta terminals, was one of them.

In the course of our phone conversation, I asked her to rattle off some jobs she's had over the years. She gave me a quick and general rundown and then added that she's done a lot of IVR work.

"IVR?" I asked.

"Interactive voice response," she answered. "The sort of thing you hear on a company's phone system."

For reasons I can't explain -- I was still struggling to understand my first iPhone -- I blurted out, "Hey, are you Siri?"

She gasped. And then I gasped.

"Oh my God," I said. "You're totally Siri, aren't you?"

What followed was a short, panicked flurry of non-denials and non-confirmations, and a promise from me that I wouldn't do or say a thing.

That was months ago. About two weeks ago, after the confusion over the Verge video, Bennett reached out to me. She was ready to speak as herself and set the record straight.

'My career as a machine'

As a child, Bennett's favorite toy was a play phone-operator system, a big red block with a receiver and lines she could patch in to help imaginary callers make their connections.

Years later, while singing jingles, she was tapped to be the radio and TV voice of First National Bank's "Tillie the All-Time Teller," the first ATM machine. Though that was about 40 years ago, she can -- and does -- still break seamlessly into the high-pitched song.

"I began my career as a machine many years ago," Bennett said. "I'm sure that you hear my voice at some point every day."

But the way she is heard was a surprise even to her.

Music and singing had always been a part of Bennett's life. At Brown University, she sang in a jazz band and also with another group at the Berklee School of Music. After graduating, she toured as a backup singer with Burt Bacharach and Roy Orbison. Today, she and husband Rick Hinkle -- a guitarist, composer and sound engineer -- still play in a band, mostly at private events.

She fell into voiceover work by chance in the 1970s when she walked into Atlanta's Doppler Studios for a jingle job and the voiceover talent was a no-show. The studio owner looked around and said, "Susan, come over here. You don't have an accent. Go ahead and read this."

She did, and a new career path was born.

Bennett wasn't always accent-free, though. She was born in Vermont and grew up all over New England. Her voice -- dropped Rs and all -- was "SNL"-skit ready. Can she imagine Siri as a New Englander? "Neva! Neva!"

A stint in upstate New York helped her lose the accent. By the time she arrived in Atlanta in 1972, with her first husband, former NHL player Curt Bennett of the Atlanta Flames, she was ready to fight off the Southern twang. She fell in love with Atlanta and, after that marriage ended, stayed.

Even though her voice can be heard everywhere, she's enjoyed being out of the spotlight.

"You have a certain anonymity which can be very advantageous," she said. "People don't judge you by how you look ... That's been kind of freeing in a lot of ways."

'Part of history'

Bennett works in a sound-proof recording booth in her home, a tin of lozenges at the ready. Her voice is transmitted to the world, while she -- if she so chooses -- sits in her jammies, or more likely her Zumba clothes. Auditions are done by e-mail. She can grocery shop and go unrecognized.

It's not as though her natural speaking voice, heard out of context in the produce aisle, sparks reactions.

So the idea of coming out as the voice of Siri was one she pushed aside. It probably wouldn't have even occurred to her if not for the goading of others, including her 36-year-old son -- whom she, and he, jokingly refers to as "Son of Siri."

"Her voice has been everywhere throughout my life. I'd call my bank while I was in college in Colorado, and it was my mom telling me I had \$4," said Cameron Bennett, a photographer in Los Angeles.

He first found out she was the voice of Siri while watching an iPhone 4S commercial on TV. There, on the screen, was director Martin Scorsese talking to his mother. When Cameron bought the phone himself, she began barking at him through its GPS feature, prompting him to yell, "Mom, stop!"

"She's part of history," he said. "It was funny trying to explain to her how big it was. She uses her cell phone for 8% of what it can do."

When Bennett upgraded her phone and first talked to ... well, herself, she says she was a little horrified. It was weird, to say the least. But she was blown away, she said, to play a part in such a technological feat.

Being the voice of Siri, though, doesn't mean she's immune to the sorts of frustrations others sometimes have with the technology.

"But I never yell at her -- very bad karma," Bennett said. That said, she knows not everyone is as gracious: "Yes, I worry about how many times I get cursed every day."

Now, though, with iOS 7 she is passing the telephonic torch to a new Siri. Bennett would be lying if she said she wasn't a bit disappointed, but in her field of work she's learned to expect evolution -- and even revolution.

As technology improves, and the concatenation process becomes less robotic and more human, Bennett thinks anything will be possible.

"I really see a time when you'll probably be able to put your own voice on your phone and have your own voice talk back to you," she said. "Which I'm used to, but maybe you aren't."

NY Times

[A Lawyer and Partner, and Also Bankrupt](#)

by James B. Stewart

Anyone who wonders why law school applications are plunging and there's widespread malaise in many big law firms might consider the case of Gregory M. Owens.

The silver-haired, distinguished-looking Mr. Owens would seem the embodiment of a successful Wall Street lawyer. A graduate of Denison University and Vanderbilt Law School, Mr. Owens moved to New York City and was named a partner at the then old-line law firm of Dewey, Ballantine, Bushby, Palmer & Wood, and after a merger, at Dewey & LeBoeuf.

Today, Mr. Owens, 55, is a partner at an even more eminent global law firm, White & Case. A partnership there or any of the major firms collectively known as "Big Law" was long regarded as the brass ring of the profession, a virtual guarantee of lifelong prosperity and job security.

But on New Year's Eve, Mr. Owens filed for personal bankruptcy.

According to [his petition](#), he had \$400 in his checking account and \$400 in savings. He lives in a rental apartment at 151st Street and Broadway. He owns clothing he estimated was worth \$900 and his only jewelry is a Concord watch, which he described as "broken."

Mr. Owens is an extreme but vivid illustration of the economic factors roiling the legal profession, although his straits are in some ways unique to his personal situation.

The bulk of his potential liabilities stem from claims related to the [collapse of Dewey & LeBoeuf](#), which filed for bankruptcy protection in 2012. Even stripping those away, his financial circumstances seem dire. Legal fees from a divorce depleted his savings and resulted in a settlement under which he pays his former wife a steep \$10,517 a month in alimony and support for their 11-year-old son.

But in other ways, Mr. Owens's situation is all too emblematic of pressures facing many partners at big law firms. After Dewey & LeBoeuf collapsed, Mr. Owens seemingly landed on his feet as a partner at White & Case. But he was a full equity partner at Dewey, Ballantine and Dewey & LeBoeuf. At White & Case, he was demoted to nonequity or "service" partner — a practice now so widespread it has a name, "de-equitization."

Nonequity partners like Mr. Owens are not really partners, but employees, since they do not share the risks and rewards of the firm's practice. Service partners typically have no clients they can claim as their own and depend on rainmakers to feed them. In Mr. Owens's case, his mentor and protector has long been Morton A. Pierce, a noted mergers and acquisitions specialist and prodigious rainmaker whom Mr. Owens followed from the former Reid & Priest to Dewey, Ballantine to Dewey & LeBoeuf and then to White & Case.

"It's sad to hear about this fellow, but he's not alone in being in jeopardy," said Thomas S. Clay, an expert on law firm management and a principal at the consulting firm Altman Weil, which advises many large law firms. "For the past 40 years, you could just be a partner in a firm, do good work, coast, keep your nose clean, and you'd have a very nice career. That's gone."

Mr. Clay noted that there was a looming glut of service partners at major firms. At the end of 2012, he said, 84 percent of the largest 200 law firms, as ranked by the trade publication *American Lawyer*, had a class of nonequity or service partners, 20 percent more than in 2000. And the number of nonequity partners has swelled because firms have been reluctant to confront the reality that, in many cases, "they're not economically viable," Mr. Clay said.

Scott A. Westfahl, professor of practice and director of executive education at Harvard Law School, agreed that service partners faced mounting pressures. "Service partners need a deep expertise that's hard to find anywhere else," he said. "Even then, when demand changes, and your specialty is no longer hot, you're in trouble. There's no job security." He added that even full equity partners were feeling similar pressures as clients demanded more accountability. "Partners are being de-equitized," he said, as Mr. Owens was. "That's a trend."

Mr. Owens specializes in financing and debt structuring in mergers and acquisitions, a relatively narrow expertise where demand rises and falls with the volume of merger and acquisition deals that his mentors generate. Former colleagues (none of whom would speak for attribution) uniformly described him as a highly competent lawyer in his specialty and, as several put it, "a lovely person" who relishes spending time with his son. But he does not seem to be the kind of alpha male — or female — who can generate revenue, bring in clients and are generally prized by large law firms.

At Dewey & LeBoeuf, Mr. Owens's name was perennially among a group of partners who were not making enough revenue to cover their salaries and overhead, according to two former partners at the firm. But each time, the powerful Mr. Pierce, then the firm's vice chairman, protected Mr. Owens, they said.

"He was very good at what he knew," a former Dewey & LeBoeuf partner said. "But he wasn't built to adapt. To make it as a law firm partner today, you have to periodically reinvent yourself."

As partners were leaving Dewey & LeBoeuf in droves as it neared bankruptcy in 2012, Mr. Pierce went to White & Case. Mr. Owens followed, but this time as a salaried lawyer, not an equity partner, even though he has the title of partner.

A spokesman for White & Case said Mr. Owens and Mr. Pierce had no comment. Neither did the firm.

Mr. Owens has been well paid by most standards, but not compared with top partners at major firms, who make in the millions. (Mr. Pierce was guaranteed \$8 million a year at Dewey & LeBoeuf.) When Mr. Owens first became a partner at Dewey, Ballantine, he made about \$250,000, in line with other new partners. At Dewey & LeBoeuf, his income peaked at over \$500,000 during the flush years before the financial crisis. In 2012, he made \$351,000, and last year, while at White & Case, he made \$356,500. He listed his current monthly income as \$31,500, or \$375,000 a year. And he has just over \$1 million in retirement accounts that are protected from creditors in bankruptcy.

How far does \$375,000 a year go in New York City? Strip out estimated income taxes (\$7,500 a month), domestic support (\$10,517), insurance (\$2,311), a mandatory contribution to his retirement plan (\$5,900), and routine expenses for rent (\$2,460 a month) transportation (\$550) and food (\$650) and Mr. Owens estimated that he was running a small monthly deficit of \$52, according to his bankruptcy petition. He has gone back to court to get some relief from his divorce settlement, so far without any success.

In his petition, Mr. Owens said he didn't expect things to get any better in 2014.

And they could get worse. The most recent deal on White & Case's website in which Mr. Owens played a role was the relatively modest \$392 million acquisition of the women's clothing retailer Talbots by Sycamore Partners, in which Mr. Owens (working with Mr. Pierce) represented Talbots. That deal was announced in May 2012. The White & Case spokesman did not provide any examples of more recent deals.

"In almost any other context, \$375,000 would be a lot of money," said William Henderson, a professor at the Indiana University School of Law and a director of the Center on the Global Legal Profession. "But anyone who doesn't have clients is in a precarious position. For the last 40 years, all firms had to do was answer the phone from clients and lease more office space. That run is over. The forest has been depleted, as we say, and firms are competing for market share. Law firms are in a period of consolidation and, initially, it's going to take place at the service partner level. There's too much capacity." He added that law firm associates and summer associates had also suffered significant cuts, which has culled the ranks of future partners.

All this "has had a huge effect on law school enrollment," Professor Henderson said.

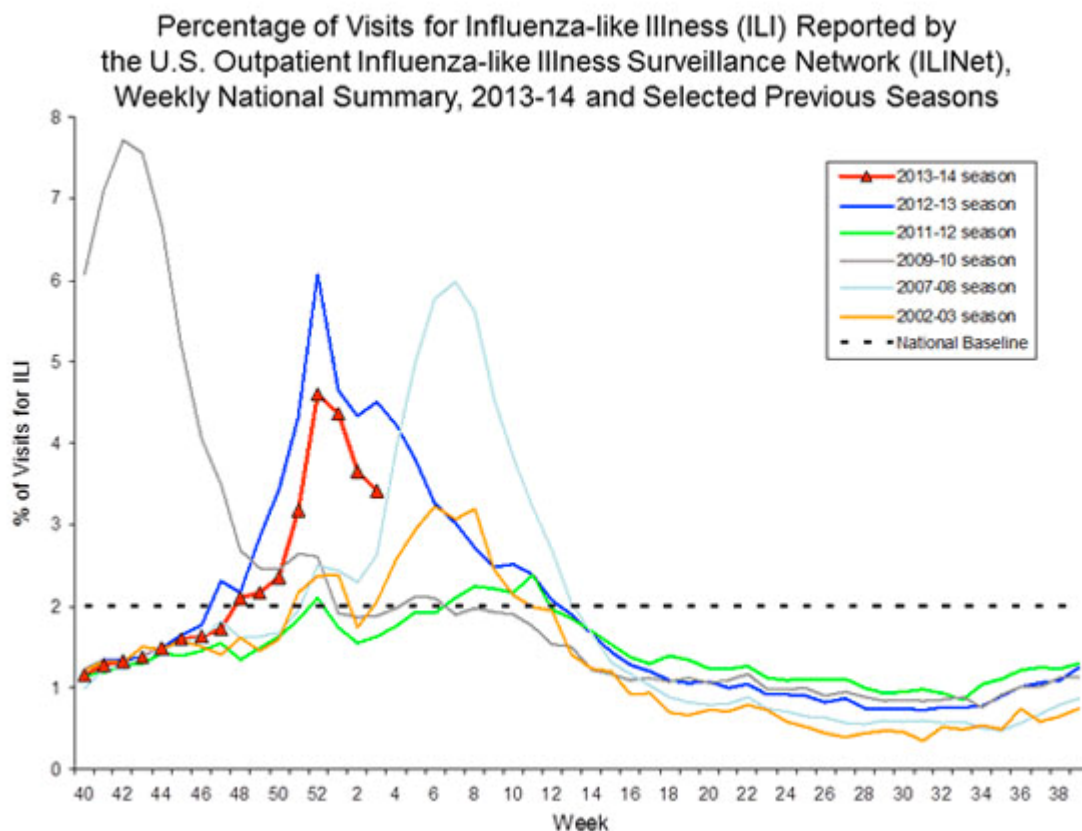
Mr. Clay, the consultant, said many firms had been slow to confront the reality that successful service partners were probably going to need to work more hours than rainmakers, not fewer, to justify their mid- to high-six-figure salaries. Many of them "seem to have felt they had a sinecure," Mr. Clay said. "They're well paid, didn't have to work too hard, they had a nice office, prestige. It's a nice life. That's O.K., except it's not the kind of professional life that will do much

How many people have died so far this year?

Twenty-eight children have died so far. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not keep track of adult deaths. That's because states are not required to report flu deaths to the CDC. Older adults often die of flu complications or secondary infections rather than the flu itself, so tracking flu deaths is not an exact science. That said, in [California](#), the death toll is currently at 146, including 95 people under the age of 65. At this time last year, just 9 Californians under 65 had died of the flu, and by the end of the season, a total of 106 people had died.

How does this year's season compare to last year's?

As the chart below shows, so far, this season is milder in terms of number of cases. However, CDC spokesperson Jason McDonald notes that more people between the ages of 18 and 64 have been hospitalized for flulike symptoms this year than in previous years. This season's predominant virus strain is [H1N1](#)—which, when it originated in 2009, also sent an unusually high number of people in the 18-to-64 age range to the hospital. Epidemiologists don't know why H1N1 hits younger people hard, but one theory, says McDonald, is that older adults have built up more immunity to it. H1N1 is similar to the virus that caused the Spanish Flu of 1918, and also to strains that circulated in the '60s and '70s. Another possible factor: Only about 30 percent of younger adults get flu shots, compared to about 40 percent of older adults.



Is there a cure for the flu?

Doctors sometimes use antiviral medications to treat the flu—but it's worth noting that, according to McDonald, about 1 percent of the H1N1 strains that the CDC has tested are resistant to a common antiviral drug. Although over-the-counter medications can make flu symptoms less severe, a recent [study](#) found that fever reducers like ibuprofen and

acetaminophen actually help spread the flu by making people feel well enough to leave the house before they've kicked the virus.

How do I even know I have the flu? How can my doctor tell?

To know for certain, you'd need to have a blood test. But most doctors won't do that, since it won't really change the treatment (rest, drink fluids). But there are some key differences between a bad cold and a flu, CDC spokesman Curtis Allen told me last flu season. "You will be running a high temperature for several days, and it will keep you in bed for a week or more," he said. But the most distinctive feature of the flu is its sudden onset. "You could be feeling fine at 10 and very sick at noon."

If the flu season has peaked, should I still get a flu shot?

Yes. A typical flu season is 10 to 12 weeks long—so if it just peaked, that means there's still another 5 or 6 weeks left. The caveat: The shot takes about two weeks to kick in, so even if you got the shot today, you could still come down with the flu, said Allen. Even if you think you've already had the flu this year, you should get a shot; it's possible (though unlikely) that you could still come down with a different strain.

Can you get the flu from the flu shot itself?

No. That's impossible, since the virus in the shot is not alive. You might get soreness, irritation, or even a fever after the shot, but that's your body reacting to the shot, not the flu.

Why is there a "season" for the flu?

Last flu season, [Jeffrey Shaman](#), a flu researcher and assistant professor in the department of environmental health sciences at Columbia University's Mailman School of Public Health, told me that there are several reasons. Some have to do with us humans: In the winter, we spend more time indoors sneezing on each other. During this time of short days and long nights, we don't get as much vitamin D or melatonin—both thought to be essential for healthy immune system function. Then there's the virus itself: It seems to thrive when [absolute humidity](#) is low, a common condition in cold winter weather.

So that's why the flu is so bad this year—[the drought](#)! So climate change actually made the flu worse, right?

Wouldn't it be nice if epidemiology were that easy? Unfortunately, it's not. If that were the case, you'd never see the flu in hot, humid places. Other variables make it impossible to predict flu seasons based on weather alone.

It's worth noting, though, that in a 2012 paper, Shaman and his colleagues did document that each of the four flu pandemics of the 20th century were preceded by La Niña cycles, likely because birds mingled with each other differently during these unusual weather patterns. The flu strains that they were carrying probably hybridized and created a strain so new that humans had no immunity to it. Since, as we recently learned from this Climate Desk [video](#), climate change does interact with El Niño/La Niña cycles, it's not completely out of the question that global warming could affect flu transmission, at least indirectly.

Real Clear Defense

[10 Good Reasons to Save the A-10](#)

by J. Furman Daniel, III



As the FY15 defense budget is finalized and the fiscal pressure of sequestration endures, there has been informed speculation that the Air Force will seek to retire its A-10 Warthog fleet. Congress has already prevented such a move in the National Defense Authorization Act, but yet [the fight continues](#). Last week, RCD featured a [proposal](#) to transfer the A-10 to the Army. This week, J. Furman Daniel, III offers ten good reasons to save the beloved A-10.

1. It is proven

The A-10 is a tried and true design that has served our nation well. In an era of increasingly complex, expensive, and troubled weapons procurement, it is essential to have some systems that are solid and reliable. With only modest changes to the original design, the A-10 has been upgraded to meet the challenges of the future and deliver its trademark firepower, durability, survivability, and persistence to battlefield hotspots for decades to come.

2. It is cheap

The A-10 is and will continue to be cheap. While it is ugly, slow, and old fashioned, it remains the most cost effective way of delivering aerial firepower to the battlefield. While it is possible to drop ordinance and provide suppressive fire with other fighter platforms few would consider the F-22, F-35, F-15, or F-16 as ideal ways of performing this essential mission. In fact, the F-22 has been excluded from such missions and is in danger of becoming a “force in being” for “big wars” rather than an asset that can actually be used in the conflicts we are currently fighting. A rational force structure would retain the A-10 as the unglamorous but necessary “low” component of a “high-low mix” and would thus free our more expensive platforms for missions such as air superiority and strategic bombing that demand higher performance.

3. It is survivable

Especially in our wars of choice, the American public is notoriously casualty adverse. We will continue to send our brave men and women into harm's way for the foreseeable future, so it is essential to provide them with the best tools possible to allow them to complete their mission and return safely home. Survivability is the hallmark of the A-10 and many of our pilots owe their lives to its rugged construction. Other low cost options such as the Apache helicopter, Super Tucanos, and the Textron Scorpion do not have the total package of survivability of the A-10.

4. It does things that current aircraft, helicopters, and drones cannot do

The A-10 does a few things better than any other platform in existence. While ground pounding may not be glamorous, it is a function that will not simply go away. If the Air Force eliminates the A-10, it will replace the core competency with some combination of bad options. First, the military could have other fixed-wing aircraft filling the void, but (as described above) this would likely not be the most cost effective option. Second, we could increase the burden on helicopters to perform this task, but they would likely suffer from their inherent limits of speed, payload, and survivability. Finally, force planners could gamble that some as yet unproven combination of drones or smart artillery could provide this firepower for the battlefields of the future. In each of these scenarios, a significant risk is assumed and it remains unclear that the proposed solution could either accomplish the mission or do so at an acceptable cost in blood or treasure. Given the A-10's demonstrated speed, maneuverability, ruggedness, redundant systems, and combat record, why take such risks?

5. Redundancy, Redundancy, Redundancy!

Unfortunately, the US military has a poor track record of predicting when, where, and how the next war will occur. Given this uncertainty and the costs of guessing wrong, the redundancy provided by the A-10 seems like a very good safety net provided at a very attractive cost. While all defense budgeting and planning assumes some degree of risk, it seems very premature to assume that this capability is no longer needed.

6. There is no clear replacement in the development pipeline

If the F-35 program has taught us anything it should be that modern weapons systems have long (and often troubled) development cycles. While there have been calls for a replacement for the A-10, there are currently no replacement in sight. Even if one assumes that such a program could be delivered on time and on budget, it would be decades before the aircraft could be prototyped, de-bugged, produced, delivered, and incorporated into the force. Given the lack of a replacement, prudence should demand that we retain this platform until we have a viable alternative ready to deploy.

7. Once lost, it is hard to reconstitute the CAS community

The A-10 is an essential element of a small but proud community of professionals who have dedicated their lives to providing close-air-support (CAS) for our combat troops on the ground. While this mission is neither glamorous nor the road to a fast promotion within the services, it has an impressive *esprit de corps*, an extraordinary institutional knowledge, and an excellent record of inter-service cooperation. By eliminating the A-10, this community will likely cease to exist and their expertise could be lost forever. If the need for this capability is ever called for again, it would be a dicey proposition to reconstitute it under the strain of combat. The US has

already suffered the painful consequences of neglecting its counterinsurgency and counterterrorism communities in the years between the end of the Cold War and 9/11, and it should not repeat this cavalier mistake with the CAS community.

8. Eliminating this capability may embolden our enemies and frighten our allies

A lot of defense is about signaling. The A-10 sends a very powerful message to friends and foes alike—do not mess with us on the ground! Eliminating this capability undercuts our credibility to deter potential adversaries and may also make our allies uneasy. The obvious example for the need to maintain this capability and its associated signal lies on the Korean Peninsula. Here, keeping the A-10 serves a dual purpose. It deters the large conventional forces of the rouge regime in the north, while reassuring our allies in the south that we are committed to the defense of their homeland. While it is certainly premature to claim that removing our A-10 force would result in bedlam for Korea, doing so would incur additional risk for a relatively minimal cost savings. Across the world, the [United States](#) has not been seriously threatened by a conventional competitor in part because we have clear dominance in all aspects of combat arms. Allowing this advantage to atrophy may save money in the short term, but could have potentially catastrophic unintended consequences in the medium to long term.

9. You cannot save it by giving it to the Army

One of the proposals to save the A-10 is to simply [give it to the Army](#). While this is attractive, it is also an impractical pipe dream that would incur untold bureaucratic, logistical, and budgetary problems. Doing so would require abandoning the Key West agreement which clearly states that the US Army cannot deploy fixed-wing aircraft. Eliminating this agreement would jeopardize branch identities, threaten Goldwater Nichols and the very concept of jointness, and heighten an already tense budgetary landscape. Although the Army may begrudgingly accept the A-10, it would either be forced to make cuts in other key areas or would use this new bureaucratic constituency to undercut the Air Force's budget. Whether the A-10 is seen as a budgetary millstone or a winning wedge issue, it is unlikely to produce any real cost savings for the defense budget as a whole and could, instead, heighten rivalries and interservice competitiveness at the very time when the services should be looking to think holistically and act strategically. The fact is the Army should not deploy fixed-wing aircraft, and the Air Force should begrudgingly accept the fact that a small percentage of their efforts should be dedicated to the CAS mission.

10. Killing it would send a horrible message to the grunts

Perhaps the single best reason to save the A-10 is that it will preserve a working relationship between the Air Force and the troops on the ground. Grunts are superstitious, fickle, needy, and ultimately damn fine creatures that need physical, emotional, logistical, and psychological support. Killing the single best weapon for CAS would be the bureaucratic equivalent of the Air Force giving the Army and Marines on the front lines “the finger.” This blow would be even crueler if it was done to achieve only a modest cost savings. To preserve this relationship and to ensure battlefield dominance for decades to come, the Air Force should maintain the ugly, slow, unsexy, and unparalleled killing machine the A-10.

J. Furman Daniel, III is a Visiting Assistant Professor of International Affairs in the George Washington University Security Policy Studies Program.



STATE OF THE RUIN



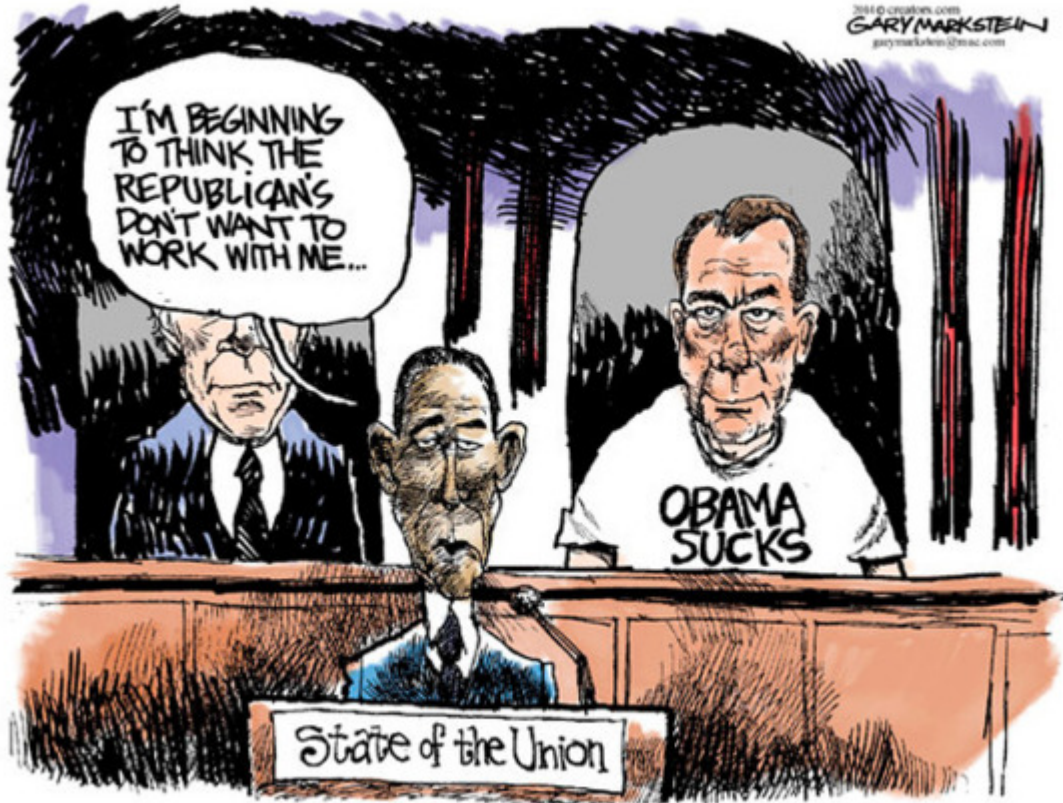






©Taylor Jones - El Nuevo Día

caglecartoons.com



© 2012 creators.com
GARY MARKSTEIN
gary.markstein@mac.com

INVESTOR'S BUSINESS DAILY
2012 © CREATORS.COM



THE STATE OF THE UNION

www.investors.com/cartoons