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SUNDAY SOURCE **SERIOUSLY FUNNY**

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**10 BUREAUCRATS, 1 COMEDY CONTEST.
AND, NO, WE'RE NOT JOKING.**

BY [DAN ZAK](#) - WASHINGTON POST STAFF WRITER | Sunday, June 10, 2007

Rogue noodles are bobbing in the alphabet soup of our government. During the day they are straightlaced and by the book, commanding the halls of the EPA, the DOJ, the DOT and the CFTC, aspiring to make society run smoothly for us. By night, they are stand-up comics in the glare of the spotlight, aspiring to make us laugh.

Their official job titles are mini-dissertations on blandness. But remember: There aren't many jobs that are considered funny from the outset, says Jimmy Vickers, 23, a Loudoun County resident who has been writing stand-up routines for 10 years and works for the General Services Administration. He's also one of the 10 semifinalists in the first-ever Funniest Fed Competition at the Arlington Cinema 'N' Draffhouse.



Front row from left: Jimmy Vickers, Donna Lewis, Joey Maranto and Freddi Vernell; Back row: Sam Beamon, Marshall Henry, Jeff Maurer, Don Heitman and Shahryar Rizvi; Not pictured is Scott Muschett

"You're not going to see a Funniest Dentist," Vickers says. "Or Funniest Tax Attorney. Or Funniest Accountant."

Still, the stereotype of the lawyer or the accountant isn't as timeless as that of the bureaucrat, says Naomi Johnson, 38, producer of the show and a former fed herself.

"The juxtaposition of federal employees and humor -- that makes people stop and think, 'You gotta be kidding. They must be the most unfunny people,'" Johnson says.

Turns out some of them aren't. On Wednesday, you can see Vickers and nine other semifinalists (down from 32 contestants) use five-minute sets to prove that feds can command attention not just with budget deficits and terrorism alert levels, but with banter and charm.

We sat through their sets. We grilled them on the phone. Here are mini job interviews with 10 comedians vying to become the Funniest Fed. Watch clips from their sets, then vote for the bureaucrat who most deserves the "Funniest Fed" title. | [See the Latest Poll Results](#)

Editor's Note: The semifinals of the Funniest Fed competition [have been postponed](#) until Thursday at 7:30 p.m. The finals are set for Friday at 8 p.m. Both will be held at the Arlington Cinema 'N' Draffhouse, 2903 Columbia

SAM BEAMON
Department of Justice



**VOTE
FOR
THIS
COMIC**



Submit

Age
and
home
town:
36,
Bowie.

Resume: Tied for fourth (out of 120) in the Boston round of the Aspen Comedy Festival in 1998, played clubs throughout the Providence, R.I., and New York City areas (including Caroline's in Manhattan).

Your brand of comedy as wine: "A light wine like chardonnay, something a lot of people would enjoy."

The funniest person ever is... Richard Pryor. "He could take stories that you would think could only apply to him, but he made it so descriptive that you understood what he was going through."

Worst onstage moment? "It was at the Fireside in New Jersey, which was a converted strip club. The audience there was just wanting dirty, filthy material, and I wasn't going to go there. I did 20 minutes and tanked."

What does the future hold? "I have ambitions to turn stand-up into a career on the road and also parlay that into some kind of TV series."

Stand-up advice: "Just go up and do it. And write out your stuff" beforehand to get your thoughts straight

DON HEITMAN
Commodity Futures Trading Commission



**VOTE
FOR
THIS
COMIC**



Submit

Age
and
home
town:
61,

Arlington.

PHOTO: Jay Paul, For The Washington Post; VIDEO: Jonathan Forsythe, washingtonpost.com

Resume: Has worked for the government for 30 years, placed third in the original Funniest Lawyer in Washington contest in 1987, is the go-to host and roaster for going-away parties at work.

What title would you give yourself?: "Superannuated Middle Management Bureaucratic Flunky, [but it] wouldn't fit on the business card."

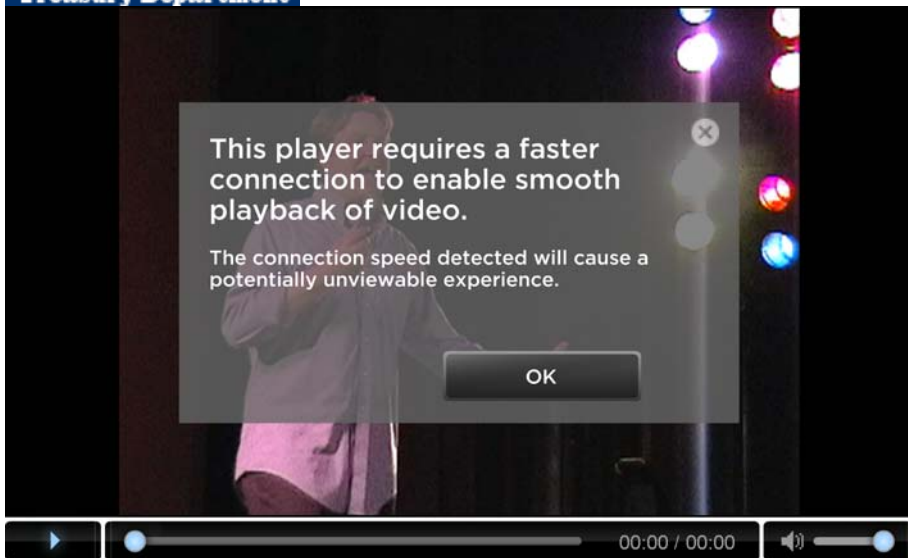
Describe your brand of comedy: "Aging baby boomer angst combined with a neurotic need for approval."

The funniest person ever is ... Mark Twain. "He was a just a very, very clever, witty person."

What does the future hold? "I've thought about comedy as a retirement career. I've seriously thought about that. Like being a cruise ship comic."

Stand-up advice: "Don't explain the joke. Just tell the joke."

MARSHALL HENRY
Treasury Department



**VOTE
FOR
THIS
COMIC**



Submit

**Age
and
home
town:**
31,
Alexandria.

Resume: Opened for Dave Chappelle at the DC Improv last year, gets on local stages two to three times a week.

Describe your brand of comedy: "It's mainly one-liners, probably jokes that you could read and it would be really funny."

The funniest person ever is... Jim Gaffigan. "There's never any dead time with him. Not a single wasted word."

On inspiration at the office: "It's so ridiculous. . . . You see how people work together and how they choose not to work together. . . . I'm afraid comedy's become more of a distraction to take my mind off work."

How do you test material?" On my wife. I torture her with it."

If she laughs, it's good? "No, other way around."

DONNA LEWIS
Department of Homeland Security



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FOR
THIS
COMIC**



Submit

Resume: Went to her first open mike in December but rehearsed for years as a litigator. "The courtroom is like this highly intellectualized version of stand-up comedy. It requires grace, and it requires subtlety."

Workweek: Runs to and from work every day. "While I'm running I talk out my routine. So if you have ever seen a girl with red hair and a huge backpack talking while she's running, that's me."

Psychological motive for doing comedy: "I come from a family that has mental illness on both sides. It's wrenching and it's traumatic and it's also funny. I got from that a very heightened sense of the absurd."

The funniest person ever is ... Chris Rock. "Because he's intelligent and he has a social conscience."

Your brand of comedy as the lovechild of two personalities: "If the Richard Gere and Julia Roberts characters [in "Pretty Woman"] had a daughter, her name would be Amber or Alexis or something else really rich and beautiful and lovely. My humor would be the really nice, level-headed girl who lived down the street."

Stand-up advice: "Ask yourself, 'Am I a good writer?' . . . It's hard watching a comic who has a great concept, and had they spent time writing it out and playing it out . . . they would've had a great act."

JOEY MARANTO

Treasury Department



**VOTE
FOR
THIS
COMIC**



Submit

**Age
and
home
town:**
39,
Bristow.

Resume: Debuted his one-man show, "Good Enough for Government," in January at the District of Columbia Arts Center, emceed at the DC Improv in 2001 for Larry the Cable Guy.

Workweek: "When I was starting out I'd have one-nighter gigs and travel to Richmond: Wake up at 4 or 5 to go to the day job, eat dinner, jump in the car, drive an hour and a half, do a show, drive back, get up and do it again. Nowadays I pretty much practice whenever I can get practice time. Right now, with the job and three kids, if you love it enough you find time."

The funniest person ever is... Sam Kinison, with Bill Hicks in second. "What ties them together is their honesty. They're laying their heart and soul out to you."

Stand-up advice: "Persistence. Even early- to mid-career, I got more silence than laughs. That's telling you the stuff isn't working. Do not get discouraged. Keep plugging away. It took me 10 or 11 years to find my voice with my one-man show."

JEFF MAURER

Environmental Protection Agency



**VOTE
FOR
THIS
COMIC**



Submit

Age and home town: 27, Vienna.

Resume: Several week-long stints as an emcee at the DC Improv.

The funniest person ever is... Jon Stewart, with Patton Oswalt in second. "A lot of times comics have to create a middle-of-the-road persona to reach a broad audience. [Stewart and Oswalt] are funny by being themselves."

Your brand of comedy: "Jon Stewart meets Larry David if neither of them had talent."

Worst onstage moment? "I lost a contest to a crackhead. . . . I was doing a contest in Baltimore and actually had a pretty good set, but then this guy got onstage completely high, babbled incoherently for five minutes and didn't tell a single joke. The crowd loved him."

Shameless fed plug: "My boss has to wear a T-shirt with my face on it to a staff meeting if I can get this statement into the paper: 'EPA's Schools Chemical Cleanout Campaign keeps our students safe by promoting safe chemical management in schools.'"

Stand-up advice: "Everybody bombs their first time, so don't worry about it."

SCOTT MUSCHETT
U.S. Senate



**VOTE
FOR
THIS
COMIC**



Submit

**Age
and
home
town:**
31,
Charleston,
W.Va.

Resume: Started stand-up 1 1/2 years ago and won a bronze medal for stand-up comedy in the 2006 World Championships of Performing Arts in Hollywood.

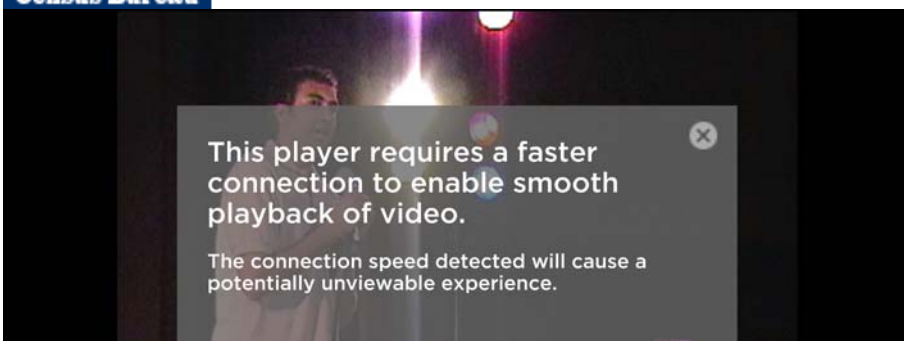
Okay, your nickname is "Caucasian Skills" ... "It comes from when I met Dave Chappelle when he came to the Senate gallery last year. We ended up gabbing like girlfriends. His parting words were, 'Caucasian Skills, represent yourself, baby, represent.'"

Your brand of comedy as a car: "An S-Class Mercedes with a case of Budweiser in the back. By day, I'm an overeducated Senate stiff in a suit, but by night I'm a no-bull, straight-shooting politically incorrect Confederate Democrat."

The funniest person ever is... Ronald Reagan. "He used his own weaknesses to be strong. They would get on him about the deficit, and he would say, 'I'm not worried about the deficit. It's big enough to take care of itself.' He was comfortable in his own skin and clear in his convictions."

What does the future hold? "I want to make it in comedy and end up with the USO, laughing with troops. . . . The least we can do is make them laugh."

SHAHRYAR RIZVI
Census Bureau



**VOTE
FOR
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COMIC**



Age and home town: 26, Laurel.

Submit

Resume:

On his first go at stand-up in 2002, he was named third funniest person at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

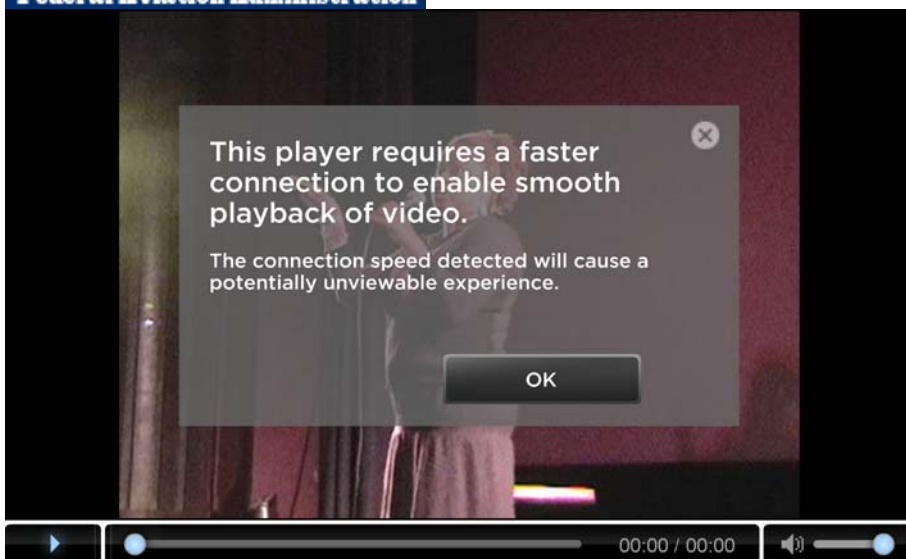
Influences: "My dad is very much into shairi poetry. It's an Urdu tradition: It's a poetry, a type of art, and he's published books of humorous shairi. I think I get a lot of my humor and creativeness from my father."

The funniest person ever is... Jerry Seinfeld, with Dave Chappelle in second. "Chappelle is very loose, very rough, and it's very funny and natural. But I see Seinfeld do it with a suit on, like with "I'm Telling You for the Last Time" on Broadway -- it had a polish to it, it was very professional, and I respect that a lot."

Your brand of comedy as a car: "It's not too fast. It's not a sports car or rough or rugged. Not like an SUV or Cherokee. I like technique and strategy, so the handling would be good."

Stand-up advice: "If you can write, then I think that is solid ground for giving stand-up a shot. If you can't write, then you've got to try it out and see what happens, and hopefully you can rely on delivery."

FREDDI VERNELL
Federal Aviation Administration



VOTE FOR THIS COMIC



Submit

Age and home town:
27,
Silver Spring.

Resume: Chosen for Jamie Foxx's Laffapalooza in Georgia last year, filmed a set for Def Comedy Jam for HBO Mobile, working on "The Freddi Vernell Variety Show" for public access television.

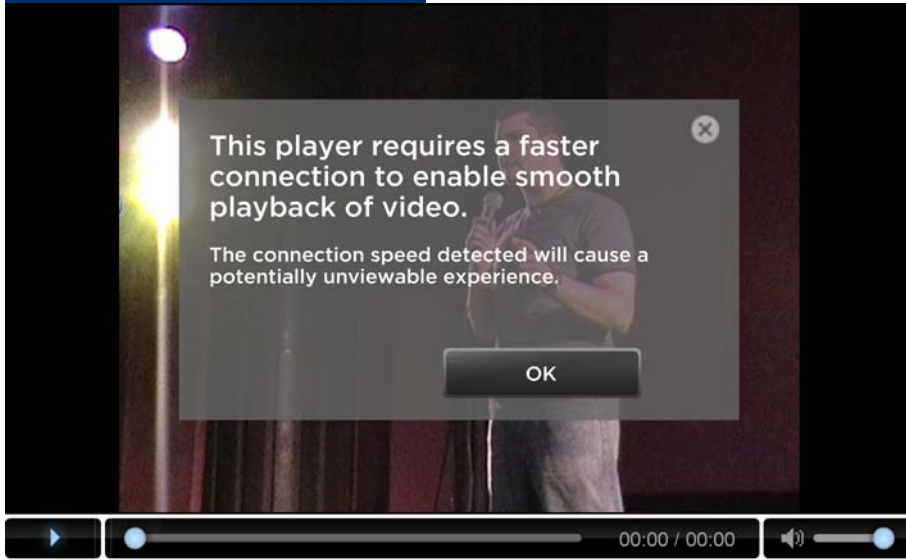
The funniest person ever is... Richard Pryor. "And Lucille Ball because I'm a physical comic. Her whole rhythm was funny to me."

Your brand of comedy as the child of famous people: The parents would be Chris Rock and Lucille Ball. "The surrogate mother would be Margaret Cho."

On women in comedy: "I believe there are not as many women in comedy because it is not a business for the sensitive. I'm still working on that. I think most of us are naturally like that. You wonder if you're gonna miss out on starting a family, or that your family may resent your absence. It can involve a lot of travel to some really unglamorous places."

Stand-up advice: "You have to have a thick skin. That's very important because people will say things to you, good and bad, and the audience will hate you and the audience will love you, and you have to learn to brush yourself off and keep it moving."

JIMMY VICKERS
General Services Administration



**VOTE
FOR
THIS
COMIC**



Submit

**Age
and
home
town:**
23,
Aldie.

Resume: Has been writing stand-up since age 13, first performed at a DC Improv open mike four years ago.

Workweek: "Luckily I'm off at 4, so I have my night to do open mikes. It's slowed down because I joined some softball leagues for the spring. Normally when I get into the full swing, I'll do stand-up Monday, Wednesday and hopefully Thursday through Saturday."

The funniest person ever is... Brian Regan. "He just seems real. He doesn't seem like he's up there putting on an act."

Worst onstage moment? "I had a weird heckler one time. When I first started doing stand-up, I only had about five minutes [of material], and I'd do the same set. One guy was out there every week complimenting me. Then on my first paid gig, he came to the show and started finishing my jokes from the audience."

Stand-up advice: "Come out to an open mike and don't bring a notebook. Have enough respect for the audience to have it all in your head."

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