

Intelligence

BCA Fast Five *By William Garvey*



Miles O'Brien

Former Technology and Environment Correspondent, Cable News Network, New York, N.Y.

A history major at Georgetown University, O'Brien reported news at several local TV stations before applying for the science correspondent's job at CNN. Interviewed by CNN's chief science producer, a molecular biologist, it was quickly apparent O'Brien "didn't know squat about science." He brashly argued that his ignorance combined with his natural curiosity and interviewing skills made him the perfect

candidate for the job — and he got it. A pilot, he reported on a wide range of technological subjects including aerospace for nearly 17 years until the network announced in December it was dismantling its science unit and letting O'Brien go.

'Temporary' D.C. ADIZ Now Permanent Special Flight Rules Airspace

Despite vocal opposition from general aviation pilots, the FAA announced Dec. 15 that the new permanent Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area Special Flight Rules Area (SFRA), a 30 nm radius from the DCA VORTAC, from the surface to 18,000 feet msl will go into effect in February, replacing the D.C. ADIZ. About 22,000 pilots wrote to the FAA opposing the rule. "It's extremely disappointing that the ADIZ — something that was hastily implemented as a temporary measure — has become federal regulation," said Andy Cebula, AOPA executive vice president of government affairs.

1 Do general media reporters and editors have a natural antipathy for business aviation?

O'Brien: Most reporters are contrarians and hard-wired to be skeptical, to the point of bordering on cynical, about the intent of people who sit in corner offices. They address a broad audience and tap into that sense of populism. And when confronted with the hubris and arrogance that goes along with a GIV, it's irresistible; they simply can't pull their punches.

2 And that factored into the coverage on the carmakers coming to Washington in their business jets?

O'Brien: There are certain times, especially with television, when an image provides the perfect metaphor for a larger, more complex story that's difficult to tell. The nature of the carmakers' mission and their arrival by jet sums up lots of things about the mindset of the management that got Detroit where it is. They were coming with tin cups while spewing jet fuel by the hundreds of pounds. It was a target that was impossible to overlook, highlighting the fact that they just don't get it.

3 Any suggestion on how the business aviation community can alter the perspective and the storyline?

O'Brien: We all know why these airplanes have no logos and why they block the N numbers. The argument that it's for security is baloney. It's because they don't want shareholders to know they're jetting around in these things. That's the wrong approach. It gives the media and the public

the sense that the suits are hiding something.

Warren Buffett says of all technologies, only a business jet can give you time and can really change your life. Well, if it's really a time machine and provides efficiency, then companies should promote that fact. They should announce, "Hey, we've got six of them and need them all to stay competitive."

4 You were on the shortlist to succeed Phil Boyer at the AOPA. Had you been offered the job, would you have accepted?

O'Brien: Yes. I was really excited about the challenge. I think general aviation needs to communicate more effectively and in new ways to advance its issues and to grow new pilots. Communicating is what I do. They decided to go with a Washington guy, since working the halls of Congress is an important piece of the job. I'm no lobbyist. I wish Craig Fuller well; he's got a tough job ahead of him. Phil's timing is impeccable.

5 And what about the timing of your departure from CNN?

O'Brien: I'm walking out without a walker, and that's good. CNN is providing a nice financial cushion and that gives me time to figure out what's next. I've heard from lots of people, multiple calls every day, and we're talking about other channels, speeches and maybe a book. This is an exciting time. Would I still be there if they'd not pushed me out? Sure. We all get comfortable and the compensation was good. But I can now pursue things that my contract wouldn't allow and I'm looking forward to it.