

2013 Name of the Year

CLEVELAND EVANS

Bellevue University, Nebraska, USA

The ninth annual Name of the Year vote was held at the American Name Society meeting in Minneapolis, Minnesota on January 3 2014.

For 2013 we had twenty-two total nominees, eight fewer than last year's record. Twenty nominations were made by email before the meeting, and two were nominated from the floor.

There were seven nominations for Trade Name of the Year. The first was Google Glass, the name for a wearable computer with an optical head-mounted display being developed by Google as prototype for a "ubiquitous computer." Google Glass communicates with the Internet via natural language voice commands.

The other six nominees all were the focus of political controversy during 2013. Five persons nominated Obamacare, the informal name for the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. The term was originally created by those opposed to the legislation, but it is now embraced by supporters of the act as well. As one nominator said, the term is a "symbol of the ideological discord surrounding the act." Affordable Care Act, the shortened official name of the law, was also nominated, as was Healthcare.gov, the name of the website through which the uninsured can register for coverage under Obamacare. The many problems with the website just after its launch contributed to the political controversy over the program.

National Security Agency, a part of the federal government much discussed because of Edward Snowden's revelations, was another nominee. Still another was Tealiban, a nickname for the Tea Party blending that term with "Taliban" in response to the group's perceived radical anti-feminist and anti-government stances.

The final trade name nominee was Keystone XL, the name of a proposed pipeline that would carry crude oil from Alberta across the United States to the Gulf of Mexico. The Keystone XL project has been controversial, pitting economic interests against environmental and public safety concerns.

In the first ballot Obamacare prevailed with 85 percent of the votes.

There were three nominees for Place Name of the Year. Tacloban, the city in the Philippines devastated by Typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda in November 2013 resulting in massive news coverage; and Syria, the Middle Eastern country that was much on the minds of Americans because of its bloody civil war as well as the controversy over whether the United States and its allies should bomb Syrian targets in response to the regime's use of chemical weapons, were newly nominated this year. Renominated from the 2012 list was Sandy Hook, the name of an elementary school in Newtown, Connecticut, that was the site of a December 2012 mass shooting, still much discussed in relation to gun violence during 2013.

In the initial vote Tacloban and Syria tied. In the runoff Syria won with 57 percent of the votes.

Eight nominations for Personal Name of the Year were received by email. Two persons proposed Yolanda/Haiyan, the name of the typhoon that devastated the central Philippines, killing over six thousand. At landfall it was the strongest tropical storm ever recorded. Yolanda was the Filipino governmental name for the storm. Haiyan was the name given the storm by the World Meteorological Organization.

Francis, the name chosen by Jorge Mario Bergoglio when he was elected Pope on March 13 2013, also received two nominations. Nominators pointed out that Francis is significant as a name, both because it is the first regnal name of a Pope which had never been borne by previous Popes since Pope Lando in 913, and also because, by naming himself after St Francis of Assisi, the Pope was signaling his concern for the poor and dedication to living more simply than his predecessors.

Two politicians saw their names nominated. Rob Ford, the mayor of Toronto whose admitted drug use and other problems made him the subject of comedians throughout North America, was one. The other, Chris Christie, was nominated not only because of the governor of New Jersey's prominence in the news as a possible future presidential candidate, but because both his given name and surname derive from "Christ."

Edward Snowden, the computer specialist and former National Security agency contractor who disclosed classified documents to publicize his belief that the agency had made unconstitutional invasions of the privacy of ordinary citizens, was another political-influenced nomination.

A celebrity baby name is usually nominated in this category every year. This time, instead of a name that caught the public's attention because of its rarity or creativity, the nominee was George Alexander Louis, name of the first child of Prince William and the Duchess of Cambridge, born on July 22. (Though many Americans find George old-fashioned and out of style, it has been restored to favor in England for over a decade.)

The names of two entertainers were also proposed. Lorde, stage name of the New Zealand popular singer whose real name is Ella Maria Lani Yelich-O'Connor, was nominated partly because of her explanation that the name was chosen because since a child she's been "really into royals and aristocracy" and so feminized the title "Lord" by adding an "e."

English actor Benedict Cumberbatch, who, among other roles, played Khan Noonien Singh in the 2013 film "Star Trek Into Darkness," was nominated because those who find his unusual name fascinating have created an online "Benedict Cumberbatch name generator" where random silly names such as "Danglerack Custardbath" and "Rumblesack Crucifix" are created.

Francis won as Personal Name of the Year on the first ballot with 60 percent of the votes, with most of the other votes going to Benedict Cumberbatch.

Two nominees for Fictional Name of the Year were received before the meeting. The first was Duck Dynasty, the title of an A&E reality television program featuring the Robertson family of West Monroe, Louisiana. In 2013 the program achieved the highest ratings of any cable "reality" series in history. It was also in the news when family patriarch Phil Robertson was suspended after making controversial remarks about gay men and African-Americans, only to be reinstated nine days later.

The second nomination was for Arya Stark, the name of a character played by Maisie Williams on the HBO series “Game of Thrones,” based on a series of fantasy novels by George R. R. Martin. The name received onomastic-related publicity in 2013 when it was reported that Arya had been the fastest-growing name for babies in the United States during 2012. There is also disagreement about the names pronunciation, with Martin himself preferring “Are-yuh” but many fans of the series saying the name as the word “aria.”

This category was the only one this year to receive nominations from the floor. The first such nomination was for “Ender Wiggin,” the name of the title character of “Ender’s Game,” a film based on the Orson Scott Card’s 1985 science fiction novel about a young boy who is trained to destroy an alien race while he believes he is just playing a video game. Though in the novel Ender is said to be a pet form of Andrew, the name also prefigures the character’s status as an inadvertent perpetrator of genocide.

The other fictional name nominated from the floor was Pi, name of the title character in “The Life of Pi,” a film based on Yann Martel’s 2001 novel about an East Indian boy who survives a shipwreck in the Pacific and ends up in a lifeboat with a tiger for a companion. Though the film was released in November 2012, it earned its director Ang Lee an Academy Award in February 2013.

This category produced the closest vote of the year. Ender Wiggin was chosen with 53 percent of the votes, with Arya Stark receiving 35 percent, and Pi 12 percent of the votes.

The four winners in the overall categories automatically became nominees for overall Name of the Year. This year there were no other nominations from the floor. Francis was chosen as overall Name of the Year for 2013, with ten votes to Obamacare’s seven.

For 2014, the American Name Society will again vote on Names of the Year in the four categories of Fictional Names, Place Names, Personal Names, and Trade Names before choosing an overall winner. Send nominations to Dr Cleveland Evans, either by email at cleveland.evans@bellevue.edu, or by postal mail to him at Psychology Department, Bellevue University, 1000 Galvin Road South, Bellevue, NE 68005-3098, USA. Please include a rationale for your nomination, which will be included on the list of nominees presented at our annual meeting in San Francisco during January 2015.