

Sing It Again, Ladies, for D.C. Justice

By [John Kelly](#)

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I think the world might be a better place if it were run by the League of Women Voters. You may think, as I once did, that the League of Women Voters is just a bunch of little old ladies. But we ignore little old ladies at our peril, especially these ones.

League members are a little like Marines. Same drive. Same esprit de corps. And I don't think you're ever an *ex*-League member. Wrap them in camo, strap them into parachutes and drop them behind enemy lines and they'd get things done lickety-split.

My late mother-in-law was active in the League. Into her 80s she would motor around town in her Oldsmobile, dropping off the League newsletter to be printed and picking it up to be mailed. I don't know whether that kind of civic-mindedness keeps people energetic well into their "golden" years, or if those who happen to thrive for so long just naturally gravitate to such opportunities. Either way, it's pretty remarkable.

The other day, I received a cassette tape from *Barbara Luchs*, an 83-year-old League member who lives in Northwest Washington. On it was a song she wrote 20 years ago. Then, as now, voting rights for the District were in the news, and Barbara's song -- "Simple Justice" -- is a plea that D.C. residents get the same representation in Congress as their fellow Americans.

Barbara said she remembered the exact moment that inspired the song. She was with a bunch of other LWV'ers at some event -- a unit meeting or putting out the newsletter -- and *Grace Malakoff*, the District chapter's current president, said something that lodged in Barbara's brain.

"She was talking about this voting rights situation. She said, 'It's only simple justice for us to have representation in Congress.' "

It must have been like when *Lennon* and *McCartney* heard *Ringo* say, "Phew, it's been a hard day's night." A light bulb went off in Barbara's head.

"The term struck me with such force that I had to write a song about it," she said.

Barbara doesn't play the piano, so *Glenn Pearson*, a musician friend of her son's, helped translate her melody into music. The song begins:

Simple justice is all we want

Simple justice is only right

We pay taxes like all of you

Our sons go to the front to fight

You can make the difference

Help us win democracy.

Give us simple justice

Representation for D.C.

It wasn't Barbara's first League-inspired song. Twenty-five years ago, after the League had devoted energy to lobbying for a D.C. subway, she wrote a little ditty in praise of public transportation called "Meet Me at the Metro."

Though Barbara and other League members sang "Simple Justice" on the steps of the District Building, she admits it didn't instantly galvanize public opinion in their favor. "People just didn't pay attention to things like that," she said.

All these years later, the hope expressed in her song still hasn't come to pass. Last month, Barbara was among those rallying at Freedom Plaza for D.C.'s right to vote.

I asked Barbara whether she would write a celebratory song when and if the District gets full congressional voting rights.

"I don't know," she said. "It depends on whether I can or not. My ability to write songs is not a self-created thing. . . . You have to be inspired."

Luci Murphy remembers Barbara's song. The 56-year-old Columbia Heights resident is a former LWV board member and president. Seven years ago, she [recorded a jazzy version](#) of "Simple Justice" with pianist *Steve Jones*.

Luci's performing on Saturday at Rumberos in Columbia Heights. Will "Simple Justice" be in her set list?

If someone requests it, we will have to do it," Luci said.

And what about voting rights? What are the odds of *that* happening in the next 20 years?

"Oh, I don't want to say," Luci said. "Hope springs eternal."

Or, as Barbara wrote:

All we ask is that we should be represented like all the rest.

Though our homes are within D.C. that's no reason to fail the test.

Voting rights in Congress, liberate the last colony.

Give us simple justice, representation for Washington, D.C.

To hear a recording of Luci singing "Simple Justice," go to <http://www.washingtonpost.com/johnkelly> and click on [today's column](#).