

## ARETHA, QUEEN OF SOUL

Victory!! John Glassburner, host of KLCC's ***Straight Street***, can claim victory in his campaign to have the word "Aretha" added to Microsoft Word's Spell Check. His quest began in November, 1998, and involved attempted contact with Bill Gates and the support of Congressman Peter DeFazio. In January, 1999, Microsoft responded and agreed to "...endeavor to do our best to include it (Aretha's name) in a future release of Microsoft Office..."

One passionate fan (with the help of his Congressman) has made a difference!! The world is a slightly better place! Follow the journey below.

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### INTRODUCTION TO STRAIGHT STREET, November, 1998:

Good evening and welcome to Straight Street, where the best in Rhythm & Blues, gospel, and soul music reside. I'm John Glassburner, your host for the next two hours. I have a little story to tell you, my friend, a true story:

After years of preparing for Straight Street with a legal pad and a black, fine-point pen, I have just recently begun making program notes on my computer. One cool feature my word processor program has, is this spell-check deal where a little squiggly red line appears under misspelled words, and then if you right-click on it, it gives you suggestions for correct spellings --a great feature for spelling-challenged people like myself .

Well, yesterday I was working on a piece, which I'm going to do later in the show, which refers to Little Richard's classic tune "Tutti Frutti", and my computer indicated that both words were misspelled. So, I looked at the words again, and they were just fine. EVERYONE knows it's spelled T-U-T-T-I F-R-U-T-T-I, "Tutti Frutti", am I right? For Tutti my computer suggested T-U-T-E-E , which I think may be some African tribe, or T-U-T-U, which of course is a dancing skirt. For Frutti it suggested F-R-U-I-T-Y. Right!

I went on with my work. One tries not to let these things be too distracting.

But, the more I thought about it, the more it bugged me. I began to type in peoples' names to see which ones my computer would recognize. It recognized the last names of George Washington, Gerald Ford, Babe Ruth, and Dustin Hoffman. On the other hand, it did not recognize the last names of Wilson Pickett, Don Covay, Patti LaBelle, or Mighty Sam McClain. It also didn't recognize the last names of Marvin Gaye, OV Wright, James Carr, or even Sam Cooke, great Americans all. But it did recognize these names: O.J., Judas, Ripper, Clinton, Monica, Stalin, and Hitler.

I searched my computer for a way to e-mail Microsoft. I mean, Microsoft is American, isn't it? Seattle is in America, isn't it? No wonder Bill Gates is in so much trouble. He may have billions of dollars, but the man cannot spell Tutti Frutti and he programs software that recognizes Hitler but not Marvin Gaye!

Again I went back to my work, banishing these troubling thoughts from my mind. But then, finishing up a pretty fair opening for the show, I typed in the most important single word to all of us here on Straight Street, the name of our Goddess: Aretha. And to my absolute HORROR, there was the squiggly red line. WORD UNRECOGNIZED! How could this be? Aretha! With a trembling finger I right-clicked on that wondrous name, and up popped the little box with one possible suggestion: U-R-E-T-H-R-A. URETHRA!

With the strength which flows from boundless righteous indignation against a sacrilege too heinous for words, I picked up that God-ess-less computer, marched it downstairs, out the door, and dumped it without ceremony into our recycle bin.

And I swore to myself then, and to you now, my brothers and my sister, never again to do the good work of Straight Street, on a machine that clearly....has... no...SOUL.

## LETTER TO BILL GATES:

To: Bill Gates

From: John Glassburner

Mr. Gates,

I own a personal computer with your Windows and Word programs on it. For the most part I have no complaints. But, the other day I was surprised to find that your spell-check program didn't recognize the classic, American song title, "Tutti Frutti". I went on to discover that your program recognized the last names of Bill Clinton, Jack The Ripper, and Hitler. It did not recognize the last names of Wilson Pickett, Marvin Gaye, or Sam Cooke, three great Americans. I don't mean to advise you on your current problems, Mr. Gates, but perhaps I am not the only person in this great country to consider how your programming might reflect your values.

I would have overlooked all of the above, were it not for my subsequent discovery that your spell-check program did not recognize the first name of a true national treasure, the world's greatest soul singer, Aretha Franklin. It does recognize the name Franklin, but that's probably because of Ben Franklin, am I right? Your program recognizes the first names Jack, Mary, Bob, Dan, Gertrude, and Bill (of course), but not Aretha. When you hear the name Aretha, who comes to mind? Right, Aretha Franklin, one of the most important people of my generation, much more important than most Tom, Dick, or Harry -- three more names your program recognizes, thank you. It adds insult to injury that when you right click on the name Aretha your program suggests U-R-E-T-H-R-A: urethra. If you don't know what that is, your program offers a brief, clinical definition.

I realize, sir, that I can add the name Aretha to my own list of recognized words, but that is not enough. I will not be satisfied until I am assured that your subsequent generations of software automatically recognize the name of Aretha. I do not want to add to your problems, Mr. Gates, and I currently take no position on whether or not your company constitutes a monopoly. But, I am a DJ on public radio station KLCC 89.7 FM in Eugene, and KLCO 90.5 FM in Newport and, while I cannot speak for the station, I do believe I can speak, at least in this regard, for the several thousand listeners who dial in Straight Street every Friday evening. Do you have the time to respond to that many e-mail messages on this subject? Right now, even with all your billions, can you afford a boycott of your products that may easily spread throughout the Northwest and to the rest of the United States? Close your eyes and imagine a large, angry gathering of the NAACP on your manicured lawn, obstructing your fabulous view of Lake Washington there. Wouldn't it be easier, sir, to simply do the right thing. Add the name of our beloved Aretha to your list of Microsoft names.

I await your response,

John Glassburner

[jbq@efn.org](mailto:jbq@efn.org)

## LETTER TO CONGRESSMAN PETER DeFAZIO:

Congressman DeFazio,

My name is John Glassburner. I'm one of your constituents. I live in your district and voted for you every time. By avocation I am a DJ on KLCC 89.7 FM in Eugene and KLCO 90.5 FM in Newport, although I'm not an employee of the station and cannot speak for its management. I'm not exactly Alan Siporin, with whom you are probably on a first name basis, but Straight Street, the show I am lucky enough to host, has a couple of thousand listeners every Friday evening. We're nuts for soul, gospel and rhythm and blues. Maybe you've heard the show when you're home.

I've never written to a congressman before, and the reason I do so now is my Microsoft Word spell-checker program. I know that sounds odd, but bear with me. The other day I was writing a piece for the show when I noticed that my spell-checker program recognized some proper names, first and last, and not others. For instance, it recognizes your first name and mine. It does not, however recognize the most important name of all for those of us on Straight Street, the name of our soul Goddess, Aretha. Now, I agree that Aretha is not as prevalent a name as John or Peter in our corner of Oregon, but, no disrespect Mr. Congressman, it's a lot more famous. When I say "Aretha", most people think "Franklin". When I say "Peter", a whole lot of people are going to say "Rabbit". Am I right?

Now, Mr. Congressman, I'm sure you're thinking that I'm just some sort of refugee from the 60's, hanging out too much with Bill Conde, but, Aretha aside, this is an important issue. The Microsoft Word spell-checker is the modern day dictionary. When the programmers of that software choose which words will be recognized they are making value judgments. Those judgments are passed on to our children who are being raised on these programs. Try taking this multiple choice question:

Which of the following organizational names does your Microsoft Word spell-checker NOT recognize?

- a) Texaco
- b) Dow Chemical
- c) Microsoft
- d) Exxon
- e) Greenpeace

If you guessed "e) Greenpeace", you are right, sir. It makes you wonder where these folks are coming from. Personally, I would rather my children grew up with a spell-checker which recognized Greenpeace rather than Exxon. How about you?

But we will leave that larger issue in your capable hands. We have decided to take a stand at getting Aretha's name added to the list of recognized words on future Microsoft software. It's a small thing. We're not asking that a 90 foot statue of Aretha be constructed on a butte overlooking our town. We agree that would be silly. We are not asking that Aretha's face be added to Mt. Rushmore. Although, that would go a long way toward evening some things out, don't you think?

Almost two weeks ago I e-mailed Mr. Bill Gates, and last week I read that message on the air. The response from the listeners was overwhelming. Mr. Gates didn't respond at all. We were hoping you can help. You could e-mail your own message to Mr. Gates through the Internet site; Microsoft.com. You could e-mail me a message of support which I would happily read to all the Straight Street listeners, many of them also your constituents. You could have a private word with Mr. Gates. I understand that he is having some troubles with the U.S. Government these days, and while it would be inappropriate for you to offer him some sort of quid pro quo for your future support, a word from you might be sufficient to achieve our ends.

If Mr. Gates does not assure us in the next two weeks that he will add Aretha's name to subsequent additions of his software I intend to unleash the awesome power of the righteous indignation of the good listeners of Straight Street. I hope that your actions will be sufficient to ward off such a cataclysm. If they are not sir, you might want to think in advance about Federal Disaster Relief funds.

I therefore beg you not to take our requests, on behalf of Aretha, the world's greatest soul singer,

lightly. We appeal, Mr. Congressman, to your mind, your heart, and to your SOUL.

Sincerely,

John Glassburner

[jbg@efn.org](mailto:jbg@efn.org)

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#### **CONGRESSMAN DeFAZIO'S RESPONSE TO JOHN:**

Dear Mr. Glassburner:

Thanks for your message about the defect in Microsoft's popular word processing program "Word."

It is disturbing that Microsoft Word recognizes brand names like Exxon and Texaco, but doesn't recognize Aretha or Greenpeace. I am using Corel's WordPerfect program, which suffers from the same defect. It's interesting - and perhaps telling - that Corel WordPerfect recognizes the brand name Microsoft, but Microsoft's Word does not recognize Corel. But that's getting off the point.

And believe me, Mr. Glassburner, I take your point. It's quite simple. One of the world's most widely used word processing programs does not recognize the name of the Queen of Soul, Soul Sister Number One, Aretha Franklin! That's got to change.

Perhaps we can forgive Mr. Gates for failing to respond to your e-mail. He's a busy man and may have assumed that you and your radio audience are little more than a chain of fools. At your request I sent Mr. Gates a letter of my own, with your message to me attached. Perhaps that will get him to jump to it.

Think, Mr. Glassburner. You may have started something here. A new wave of RESPECT for soul music and its stellar cast of performers. Or perhaps we're just day dreaming.

But however this crusade turns out, I appreciate your inspiration and insight. And I'll look forward to hearing your show when I'm home in Springfield.

Peter DeFazio

**CONGRESSMAN DeFAZIO'S LETTER TO BILL GATES:**

December 12, 1998

Mr. William Gates  
CEO  
Microsoft Corporation  
One Microsoft Way  
Redmond, WA 98052

Dear Mr. Gates:

I'm attaching an e-mail message from one of my constituents - a Mr. John Glassburner. As you can see from his message, Mr. Glassburner hosts a radio show in Eugene, Oregon. Mr. Glassburner's station - KLCC - is a public broadcasting outlet with translators and (presumably) listeners throughout southwest and central Oregon. His show features rhythm and blues, soul and gospel music. Needless to say, Mr. Glassburner and his listeners are nuts about Lady Soul, who you might know as Aretha Franklin.

Mr. Gates, I understand from media reports that you are concerned about your company's - and your own - standing with the public. Mr. Glassburner has suggested a small but meaningful step you can take to improve your company's image with the growing and influential soul/gospel/rhythm and blues crowd.

Frankly, it is shocking to me that Microsoft Word's spell check recognizes brand names like Exxon, but fails to recognize the first name of the Queen of Soul. It would be a simple matter for your engineers to provide an update - available through Microsoft's website - for current Word users. The update would simply add the word "Aretha" to Word's spelling dictionary. It would be one small step for soul music lovers, but a giant leap forward for Microsoft's public relations effort.

I hope you'll consider our request and look forward to hearing from you about it.

Sincerely,

PETER DeFAZIO  
Member of Congress

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**RESPONSE FROM MICROSOFT VICE PRESIDENT STEVEN SINOFSKY TO JOHN GLASSBURNER AND CONGRESSMAN PETER DeFAZIO:**

John,

Thank you for your letter to Congressman DeFazio. Below is a copy of a reply I sent to him today. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions.

Sincerely,  
Steven Sinofsky

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January 10, 1999

In reply to: Letter to the Honorable Peter DeFazio sent to Mr. Bill Gates  
The Honorable Peter DeFazio  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Sir:

Thank you so much for your letter dated December 12, 1998 sent to Mr. Bill Gates at the Microsoft Corporation on behalf of your constituent Mr. John Glassburner. I apologize for not getting back to you sooner, but the busy holiday season was upon us. Your inquiry related to the contents of the Microsoft Office spelling dictionary, specifically the lack of the proper name "Aretha Franklin", which in your letter refers to "Lady Soul."

At this time, Aretha is not in our dictionary. We will endeavor to do our best to include it in a future release of Microsoft Office in the United States, though I'm unable to give you a specific date when it will be included. For your listeners and others fans of soul around the world, the simplest way to address this need is to follow these simple steps:

1. Start Microsoft Word (or any of the Microsoft Office applications)
2. Type the word Aretha
3. Right click on the phrase (or choose Tools Spelling in Microsoft Excel or Microsoft PowerPoint) and select Add

From that point on, all Microsoft applications on that PC will treat Aretha Franklin as properly spelled. I hope you see that this is far simpler than provided a downloadable dictionary on our web site since this does not even require Internet access or the use of online time to complete.

As you can imagine, we receive many requests to include proper nouns and other phrases in the spelling dictionary. For every language release of Microsoft Office we do our best to include those words and phrases that cover the broadest range of our customer's needs, realizing that for many customers there will always be one or two words that would benefit from inclusion in the default dictionary. We sincerely wish it were as easy as it might seem to include all of those phrases. We currently choose to include first those words that are in standard dictionaries and commonly used in documents. Over time we have adjusted the content of the dictionary based on the frequency of many proper names. As you noticed we include the Fortune 1000 companies in the dictionary since they are quite often referred to in documents. We also include proper names of people, places, things that occur frequently, as we find from numerous research studies and studying printed materials, in each country that Microsoft Office is sold. That is why, for example, the word Franklin is not flagged as misspelled. We must weigh the inclusion of any word or phrase with the increase in disk space and increase in the size of the dictionary. Although a single word might not make a difference, the sum of many additions does begin to add up.

I hope you and your constituents can see it in your heart to accept this respectful solution to the issue raised. Many of the members of the Microsoft Office team are avid fans of R&B, Soul, and gospel and of course mean no slight whatsoever by choosing the contents of our spelling dictionary as we do. I hope your constituent does not still feel the need to, "unleash the awesome power of righteous indignation", as his letter indicated. Obviously we did not take this, or any feedback regarding Microsoft Office, lightly.

If there is anything else I can do to assist you in the future, please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

Respectfully yours,

Steven Sinofsky  
Vice President, Microsoft Office  
Microsoft Corporation  
SJS/ss  
cc: via email: John Glassburner