

# They wanted her to ‘wait her turn’

**POLITICS** How a black teenager fought for her right to run for office.

By Colby Itkowitz



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**1** BY THE TIME Mary-Pat Hector was in high school, she was already a seasoned activist. It began, she says, when she was 9 years old and a friend was struggling with an abusive parent. So Hector wrote a play about the trials young people of different socioeconomic backgrounds face to give her friend’s problems a voice. She called it, “Easy Street Ain’t So Easy.”

**2** Two years later, at 11 years old, she arranged a sit-in of 50 students to advocate for a new community recreation center in response to increasing juvenile crime in her neighborhood. Local media and community leaders ignored her, so she called into Rev. Al Sharpton’s national radio show, and he came down to Georgia to meet her.

**3** The two hit it off, and the famous civil rights advocate made her, at age 14, the national youth director of his organization, National Action Network. In a 2015 Washington Post profile of Sharpton, he referred to Hector as having “a little Sharpton in her.”

**4** So it was little surprise that Hector would be the first among her peers to make good on a promise that she and her friends all made on Election Night to run for public office at the first chance. Now a 19-year-old college sophomore at Spelman College, Hector is running for a City Council seat in Stonecrest, an area in DeKalb County, Ga., that residents voted last year to incorporate as its own city.

**5** But before Hector could even begin campaigning against the four others in her district vying for one of the five council seats, she had to beat back a challenge from one of the candidates



**Mary-Pat Hector, center, campaigning with friends.** | PHOTO: Courtesy Mary-Pat Hector

over whether her young age disqualified her from running. They wanted her “to wait her turn,” she said.

**6** To Hector, it made no sense. She was old enough to vote in the upcoming election, and to defend her country in war, but she couldn’t run for office? As someone who had devoted her young life to the service of others, what message would this send other young people only now engaging in the political process? They needed to be encouraged, not deterred, she said. And so, she did the only thing she knew how: She mobilized, and she fought back.

**7** With the help of a local attorney, Marvin Arrington Jr., who represented her pro bono, she made her case to the DeKalb County Board of Elections during a public hearing. The board voted unanimously that she could remain on the ballot. The small room packed with her friends and supporters erupted in cheers and applause at the decision, according to news reports.

**8** Arrington said he had followed Hector’s burgeoning career from afar, so when he heard she needed help, he wanted to support her. “I think we have to look to influence the younger generation. We always talk about diversity; we talk about it in the sense of race or sex, but we need age diversity, too. Having the voice of a younger person is crucial,” he said.

**9** With a team comprised mostly of college students Hector said she hopes to knock on all 10,000 doors in her district. She’s campaigning on an economic platform geared toward investments and opportunities for young people in their community. She points out the shuttered malls and stores, and tells her would-be constituents to imagine making their town the “Silicon Valley of the South.” ...

**10** For Hector, her campaign is about more than just her own ambition – it’s about showing other young people, many newly energized after this last presidential election, that they can have a real voice in the process. “I will go to marches and I will march, but I think you can’t leave it at that,” Hector said.

**11** “To see change, you have to effect change in an effective manner. If you look across history, it’s because of young people lending themselves to it, and it’s through policy. The only way to do that is to create it, by gaining that power. You have to be part of the school board, the city council. You have to take your activism to another level and be engaged all the way through.”

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**0-1 TO WAIT one’s turn** warten, bis man an der Reihe ist — **to run for office** für ein Amt kandidieren — **seasoned** (ˈsi:zənd) routiniert — **to struggle with s.o.** h.: unter jdm. leiden — **abusive** (əˈbju:sɪv) h.: gewalttätig — **trial** (ˈtraɪəl) Widrigkeit — **to face s.th.** s. etw. gegenübersehen — **easy street** (fɪg) finanziell sichere Verhältnisse — **ain’t = is not**

**2-3 sit-in** Sitzstreik — **to advocate for s.th.** (ædvəkeɪt) s. für etw. einsetzen — **recreation center** (ˌrekreɪʃən) Freizeitzentrum — **in response to** (rɪˈspɒns) als Reaktion auf — **juvenile crime** (dʒu:vənəl) Jugendkriminalität — **to hit it off** s. auf Anhieb gut verstehen — **civil rights advocate** (ædvəkət) Bürgerrechtler (a. Fürsprecher) — **to refer to s.o. as ...** (rɪˈfɜ:ɪ) jdn. als ... bezeichnen

**4 peers** Altersgenossen — **to make good on a promise** ein Versprechen halten — **sophomore** (ˈsɒfəmə:ɪ) (AE) Student im 2. Studienjahr — **city council** (ˈkaʊnsəl) Stadtrat — **county** (AE) Landkreis — **resident** (ˈrezɪdənt) Einwohner — **to incorporate as its own city** (ɪnˈkɔ:pəreɪt) als eigenständige Stadt begründen

**5-6 to campaign** (kæmˈpeɪn) Wahlkampf betreiben — **to vie for s.th.** (vaɪ) um etw. konkurrieren — **to beat back a chal-**

**lenge** (ˈtʃælɪndʒ) s. einer Herausforderung stellen — **to disqualify** (dɪˈskwɒlɪfaɪ) — **upcoming** bevorstehend — **to devote s.th. to s.th.** (dɪˈvəʊt) etw. e-r S. widmen — **to engage in s.th.** s. an etw. beteiligen — **to encourage** (ɪnˈkʌrɪdʒ) ermuntern — **to deter** (dɪˈtɜ:) abhalten

**7 attorney** (əˈtɜ:ni) (AE) Anwalt — **pro bono** kostenlos — **to make one’s case** seine Argumente vorbringen — **board of elections** Wahlvorstand — **unanimously** (juːˈnænɪməsli) einstimmig — **ballot** Wahlzettel — **packed with** voll besetzt mit — **to erupt in cheers** (ɪˈrʌpt) in Jubel ausbrechen

**8 to burgeon** (ˈbɜ:dʒən) aufkeimen — **from afar** (əˈfɑ:) von Weitem — **to influence** (ɪnˈfluəns) beeinflussen — **diversity** (dɪˈvɜ:səti) Vielfalt — **crucial** (ˈkru:ʃəl) äußerst wichtig

**9-11 to be comprised of** (kəmˈpraɪzd) s. zus.setzen aus — **to be geared toward** (ɡɪəd) abzielen auf — **to point out** darauf hinweisen — **shuttered** geschlossen; verlassen — **would-be constituent** (kənˈstɪtjʊənt) potenzieller Wähler — **to energize** (enədʒaɪz) aktivieren; h.: anspornen — **to effect change** Wandel herbeiführen — **to lend o.s. to s.th.** s. für etw. hergeben — **policy** (ˈpɒləsi) Politik — **school board** Schulausschuss

# They wanted her to wait her turn

Die Sprachzeitung mit Übungsmaterial zum Download gibt's im Abo PLUS oder PREMIUM. Ab 10 Exemplaren ist das Übungsmaterial gratis.



Listening comprehension worksheet by Rebecca Kaplan

**1. How is Mary-Pat Hector described in the text?**

As a ...

- famous civil rights advocate.
- 19-year-old sophomore at Spelman College.
- member of the DeKalb, Georgia, County Board of Elections.
- member of the Stonecrest, Georgia, City Council.

**2. For what did other people want Hector to “wait her turn”?**

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**3. Number the events of Mary-Pat Hector’s life in the correct order (1–7).**

a) Arranged a sit-in of 50 students.	
b) Became national youth director of Al Sharpton’s National Action Network.	
c) Began campaigning for a council seat.	
d) Decided to run for a seat on the City Council.	
e) Met with Al Sharpton.	
f) Won the right to run for office from the DeKalb County Board of Elections.	
g) Wrote a play about the problems of young people.	

**4. Which three of these rights of 19-year-olds are mentioned in the text? Tick the correct boxes.**

- The right to drink.       The right to serve in the military.       The right to vote.
- The right to drive.       The right to run for office.

**5. Fill in the numbers with information from the text.**

a) The age at which Hector wrote a play.	
b) The age at which Hector arranged a sit-in.	
c) The age at which Hector became the national youth director for the National Action Network.	
d) The number of other candidates for a seat on the Stonecrest City Council.	
e) The number of seats on the Stonecrest City Council.	
f) The number of homes in Hector’s district.	



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## SOLUTIONS

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- member of the Stonecrest, Georgia, City Council.

**2. For what did other people want Hector to “wait her turn”?**

To run for office.

**3. Number the events of Mary-Pat Hector’s life in the correct order (1–7).**

a) Arranged a sit-in of 50 students.	2
b) Became national youth director of Al Sharpton’s National Action Network.	4
c) Began campaigning for a council seat.	7
d) Decided to run for a seat on the City Council.	5
e) Met with Al Sharpton.	3
f) Won the right to run for office from the DeKalb County Board of Elections.	6
g) Wrote a play about the problems of young people.	1

**4. Which three of these rights of 19-year-olds are mentioned in the text? Tick the correct boxes.**

- The right to drink.       The right to serve in the military.       The right to vote.
- The right to drive.       The right to run for office.

**5. Fill in the numbers with information from the text.**

a) The age at which Hector wrote a play.	9
b) The age at which Hector arranged a sit-in.	11
c) The age at which Hector became the national youth director for the National Action Network.	14
d) The number of other candidates for a seat on the Stonecrest City Council.	4
e) The number of seats on the Stonecrest City Council.	5
f) The number of homes in Hector’s district.	10,000

