

HONORING PIANO LEGEND
JOHNNIE JOHNSON

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 9, 1999

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Congressional Black Caucus to honor one of the most influential musicians in American history, Mr. Johnnie Clyde Johnson.

Johnnie was born the son of a coal miner in Fairmont, West Virginia, on July 8, 1924. He began playing the piano at the age of 5, on a second-hand upright his mother had purchased as a decoration. Unable to afford lessons, Johnnie practices and absorbed the sounds of big band jazz and swing, barrelhouse boogie and country western that he heard on the radio. His heroes were the piano players: Count Basie, Art Tatum, Earl Hines, Pete Johnson and Meade Lux Lewis. Johnnie studied each man's repertoire, mixing and matching until he found his own unique style.

In 1943, with the War in full tilt, Johnnie enlisted in the Marines and became one of the first 1,500 black soldiers in this branch of service. He later had an opportunity to join the company band—The Barracudas—an elite group made up of some of the finest jazz musicians in the world, including members of Count Basie's, Lionel Hampton's and Glenn Miller's bands. It was a dream come true to play alongside his radio idols at U.S.O. shows, and by the time he returned home in 1946, Johnnie had decided to make music his life.

Over the next few years, Johnnie honed his craft studying under the masters. After hearing T-Bone Walker in a Detroit club, he decided to move to Chicago, where the post-War blues scene was at its height. Befriending and sitting in with legends like Muddy Waters, Memphis Slim and Little Walter sharpened Johnnie's skills. When he finally settled down in St. Louis in March of 1952, he formed a band—The Johnnie Johnson Trio—and soon thereafter procured a regular gig at one of the biggest night spots in town—the Cosmopolitan Club.

Then fate stepped in. On New Year's Eve of 1952, Johnnie's saxophonist fell ill and was unable to make the show. Desperate for a replacement, Johnnie hired a fledgling guitarist named Chuck Berry to fill in for the night. Although he had only been playing professionally for six months, Berry had a gift for performance and a way with words that caught the attention of audiences. Johnnie decided to keep him on as a singer/guitarist, and for the next two years, The Johnnie Johnson Trio rocked the Cosmopolitan every weekend.

In 1955, while still performing as The Johnnie Johnson Trio, Johnnie, Chuck Berry and Ebby Hardy traveled to Chicago and, along with Chess studio stalwart Willie Dixon, recorded "Maybellene" for Chess Records. The record was a hit and quickly reached number five on the charts. It was then that Berry approached his partner about taking over the band. Confident of Berry's business acumen, and yearning simply to ply his craft—the piano—Johnnie entrusted Berry with his band. And so it was that Johnnie became the silent partner in the first writing/performing

team in the history of rock and roll. Together, with Johnnie's musical inspiration and Berry's gift of poetry, they collaborated over the course of the next 20 years to create the songs that defined the genre, including "Roll Over Beethoven," "School Days," "Back in the U.S.A.," "Rock and Roll Music" and "Sweet Little Sixteen" among many, many others. In fact, the song that may consider the "national anthem" of rock and roll—"Johnny B. Goode"—was a tribute written by Berry to his musical partner and collaborator—Johnnie Johnson.

Johnnie and Berry performed and recorded together through the 1970s. However, as Berry's popularity grew, and he began traveling internationally, Johnnie elected to stay home in St. Louis. During this time, Johnnie also recorded with the legendary Albert King, for whom he contributed a great number of musical arrangements. But through it all—the birth of rock and roll with Chuck Berry and the inspired recordings with Albert King, Johnnie toiled largely unrecognized by the public.

That is, until 1986, when Rolling Stones guitarist Keith Richards sought out Johnnie for the documentary Hail! Hail! Rock 'n' Roll. Richards observed that many of Chuck Berry's songs were written in piano keys and that without Johnnie's melodies, the most influential songs in rock and roll history would be "just a lot of words on paper." Moreover, Johnnie's performance during the film left no doubts as to his unequalled prowess at the keyboard.

Since the film, Johnnie has begun to receive the public acclaim he so justly deserves. Widely recognized by the industry as the world's greatest living blues pianist, he has released six solo albums and contributed his considerable talent to recordings by John Lee Hooker, Eric Clapton, Buddy Guy, Bo Diddley and the late Jimmy Rogers.

Johnnie Johnson has suffered for his art. Yet, through it all, he has never lost the gentle, self-effacing demeanor that causes everyone he meets to love him. He has no bitterness, no regrets. Equally at home playing in front of thousands, or in a tiny club with a local band, Johnnie plays for the sake of playing. "All I want to do is play my piano," he says. "I'm just glad that I have the chance to make people happy." I am honored, Mr. Speaker, to present to the 106th Congress, a man who has never lost touch with what it means to be a musician—the Father of Rock and Roll, Mr. Johnnie Johnson.

JERRY BUTKIEWICZ, 1999 LABOR
LEADER OF THE YEAR

HON. BOB FILNER

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 9, 1999

Mr. FILNER. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize my friend Jerry Butkiewicz as he is honored at the September 11, 1999, John S. Lyons Memorial Banquet as the 1999 Labor Leader of the Year Award.

As the Secretary-Treasurer of the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council, Jerry Butkiewicz has achieved an outstanding

record of contributions on behalf of working women and men.

Mr. Butkiewicz began his involvement in the labor movement while working for the United States Postal Service in Arizona where he was elected Shop Steward and then President of the local American Postal Workers Union (APWU). He continued his involvement when he relocated to California and was promptly elected President of the Oceanside, California APWU Local.

Soon after, he was appointed the Labor Liaison to the United Way of San Diego County. In 1996, he was the unanimous choice to serve as the Secretary-Treasurer of the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council. In this role, he has worked hard for the cause of working families and has given union members reasons to be proud of their union membership.

Mr. Butkiewicz has also been very active in his community and has served on the Boards of the United Way, the Neighborhood House Association, the Economic Development Board of San Diego County and the Labor Advisory Committee of Kaiser Permanente. He has also committed his time and energies to the San Diego Food Bank, Youth Baseball, and Pop Warner Football.

His leadership exemplifies the high values, standards, and principles exemplified by the late John S. Lyons.

My congratulations go to Jerry Butkiewicz for these significant contributions. I can personally attest to Jerry's dedication and commitment and believe him to be highly deserving of the 1999 Johns Labor Leader of the Year Award.

FEDERAL LANDS IMPROVEMENT
ACT

HON. JOHN J. DUNCAN, JR.

OF TENNESSEE

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, September 9, 1999

Mr. DUNCAN. Mr. Speaker, the Bureau of Land Management [BLM] has 264 million acres that it manages for the federal government. None of this land is national park or national forest land.

The BLM has identified three million acres that it would like to sell, because it is not environmentally significant, surrounded by private land, difficult to manage, or isolated.

Today, I have introduced the Federal Lands Improvement Act which will allow the sale of this land, with proceeds to go; one-third to the counties where the land is located for schools and other needs; one-third to the national debt; and one-third back to the BLM for environmental restoration projects on its remaining land.

As I have already stated, this bill would not sell any national parks or wilderness areas. It only proposed to sell lands that have already been identified for disposal by the BLM.

Currently, the federal government owns 30 percent of all the land in the United States. This is roughly 650 million acres. In comparison, the State of Tennessee is only 26 million acres total.

It only makes sense that the federal government consolidate its holdings so that it can