

January 2009

Tribute to Barefoot Sanders

Larry Temple

Recommended Citation

Larry Temple, *Tribute to Barefoot Sanders*, 62 SMU L. REV. 1735 (2009)
<https://scholar.smu.edu/smulr/vol62/iss5/25>

This Tribute is brought to you for free and open access by the Law Journals at SMU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in SMU Law Review by an authorized administrator of SMU Scholar. For more information, please visit <http://digitalrepository.smu.edu>.

TRIBUTE TO BAREFOOT SANDERS

*Larry Temple
September 24, 2008*

I come today to praise the legacy of Barefoot Sanders' Washington tenure—when he served as Assistant Attorney General of the United States and Legislative Counsel to the President of the United States in the 1960's.

When the stream of laws that formed the Great Society came pouring out of the Congress forty years ago, they did not bear the name of Barefoot Sanders. But they carried his fingerprints—so firmly and indelibly that his mark is and will forever be part of our history.

He was first in the Department of Justice, the point man for shepherding the Johnson administration's civil rights proposals through the legislative shoals.

On one measure alone, which more than any other changed the way we live in America today—the Voting Rights Act, striking down the artificial barriers that prevented black citizens from exercising their most precious constitutional rights—Barefoot Sanders was more responsible for its passage than any other person, save for the President himself. That is not just the biased view of this friend of 50 years.

That is the opinion of the man Barefoot worked for, the Attorney General of the United States. It was also the opinion of President Johnson, who ultimately brought Barefoot over to the White House to manage his entire legislative program.

Even in the troubled last half of the Johnson years, when the President faced an increasingly divided country, with Barefoot leading the way he got eighty landmark laws passed by an increasingly reluctant congress—including the administration's third major civil rights bill, the Fair Housing Act, furthering the historic process of making real the promise of justice.

Barefoot did it all with a modesty and credibility that were legendary among colleagues and congressmen alike. He worked with some towering egos without every acquiring one himself—or without ever losing his cool or cowering in the face of antagonism. He worked not for glory, and certainly not for financial gain. He worked for results. And results were what he got—for the betterment of us all. President Johnson said, "I could not have asked for a better man to represent me to the Congress." And Johnson had half a lifetime's experience with the Congress to back up that claim.

Lyndon Johnson's own tribute to Barefoot Sanders was contained in his letter to Barefoot at the end of his administration which said: "I will always remember the gifts of a wise mind and loyal heart that you brought to me." All of us are beneficiaries of that wise mind and heart that was always so loyal for the good of our country.

Barefoot Sanders stands tall in the history of our time. His own story is in the tradition of unsung heroes whose passage made a difference in the lives of us all, in the common life we share.

All of us know the oft-told story of Barefoot's successful campaign to be President of the University of Texas student body when the students awakened on election day to find imprints of a bare foot all over the campus. I am absolutely certain that when historians review the advances of social justice of the last 50 years, they will find a Barefoot firmly imprinted on the landscape of that era.