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In Memory of John R. Johnson

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IN MEMORY OF JOHN R. JOHNSON

*A. Kenneth Pye**

I have been privileged to work with many able lawyers during my 40 years at the bar, but none more exceptional than John R. Johnson. He was an extraordinary student at SMU and made his mark on the legal profession in Dallas early in life. Creation of the firm that bears his name was, in retrospect, remarkable for someone of his age. His dedication to increasing its size, improving its quality, and expanding its scope in order to better represent clients was only a reflection of his vision of the future of Dallas and North Texas. He understood that economic progress depended upon capable lawyering and that major law firms must provide a range of high quality services different in kind from those provided by smaller firms of an earlier era. His goal was a law firm that could do anything that a law firm on the east or west coast could do and do it better, thereby providing legal services that had previously been unavailable to Dallas. To this end he scoured the country to attract the best young people to join the firm. His commitment to his community was not limited to the firm, however, and he provided leadership in a wide range of civic activities, attempting to attract major multinationals to Dallas and working to solve the problems of the city and the region.

I knew him best from his service on the Board of Trustees of the University where at different times he chaired the Academic Affairs Committee and the Legal Affairs Committee. Last year he asked to be relieved from the Legal Affairs Committee to concentrate his efforts on Academic Affairs where he brought to the issues before that committee his characteristic thoughtfulness and judgment.

Johnny was a person upon whom members of the Board relied for wisdom when hard choices were necessary in matters of importance. His advice was the product of a wide range of experience and a keen intellect. It reflected a realization that many problems in real life do not involve a choice between good and evil, but the reluctant selection of the least undesirable among a number of alternatives no one would choose in the abstract. He was always available to give a specific answer in a manner within his field of expertise or to provide sound advice in areas where he claimed no particular expertise. Not once did he decline to serve in any capacity where he was needed by the University.

He was not a shrinking violet, but he was a person of great humor whom I

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enjoyed immensely. I particularly recall fishing with him. He was a superb fisherman; I am not. I remember him waving frantically from a flat in a tidal estuary where he had been left by mistake while we were fishing for bonefish on the Yucatan, and his pride in landing a large rainbow trout from a roaring river in Colorado while I had been striking out in an adjacent stocked pond.

He will be missed immensely by all who were privileged to have benefitted from his life.