

By: Geren

H.R. No. 1126

R E S O L U T I O N

1 WHEREAS, Texans and other music lovers around the world join
2 in mourning the loss of the concert pianist and cultural ambassador
3 Van Cliburn of Fort Worth, who died on February 27, 2013; and

4 WHEREAS, Harvey Lavan Cliburn, Jr., was born in Shreveport,
5 Louisiana, on July 12, 1934; his mother, Rildia Bee O'Bryan, was a
6 talented pianist who had studied with a student of Franz Liszt, and
7 she began to teach her son the piano at the age of three; when the
8 boy was six, the family moved to Kilgore where his father, Harvey
9 Cliburn, Sr., a purchasing agent for an oil company, built a
10 practice studio for his gifted child; and

11 WHEREAS, At the age of 13, Van Cliburn won a statewide
12 competition and played a piano concerto with the Houston Symphony
13 Orchestra, and when he was 17, he accepted a scholarship from the
14 Juilliard School in New York; he won his first major musical
15 competition, the Leventritt Foundation Award, in 1954, earning a
16 recording contract with Columbia Artists and the opportunity to
17 perform with the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall and with
18 four other major orchestras; and

19 WHEREAS, In 1958, Mr. Cliburn became an overnight, worldwide
20 sensation when he triumphed at the very first Tchaikovsky
21 International Competition in Moscow, which had been created
22 specifically to showcase the talents of Russian pianists; coming at
23 the height of the Cold War, and only a year after the Soviet Union
24 had beaten America into orbit with Sputnik, Mr. Cliburn's victory

1 was astonishing, but even more astonishing was the fact that
2 Russian audiences went wild for a six-foot-four blond Baptist from
3 Kilgore; and

4 WHEREAS, Performing two beloved Russian piano concertos, the
5 Tchaikovsky First and the Rachmaninoff Third, Mr. Cliburn
6 enraptured the standing-room-only audience in the Great Hall of the
7 Moscow Conservatory; the crowd cheered for 10 minutes following his
8 performance, women rushed the stage with bouquets of roses, and one
9 elderly man told a *New York Times* reporter that the young American
10 played as well as, and perhaps even better than, Rachmaninoff
11 himself; even Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev was impressed,
12 asking Mr. Cliburn, "Why are you so tall?" to which Mr. Cliburn
13 replied, "Because I am from Texas"; and

14 WHEREAS, No one was more surprised by the overwhelming
15 response than Mr. Cliburn himself; when he called home from Russia
16 and asked his mother to tell a family friend the news, his mother
17 replied, "She knows, darling, she knows"; returning home as an
18 American hero, he appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine as "The
19 Texan Who Conquered Russia," performed at Madison Square Garden and
20 the Hollywood Bowl, and received the first ticker-tape parade in
21 New York City ever accorded to a classical musician; his recording
22 of the Tchaikovsky concerto topped *Billboard's* charts for months
23 and was the first classical recording ever to be awarded a platinum
24 record; and

25 WHEREAS, The same year as Mr. Cliburn's triumph in Moscow, a
26 group of piano teachers in Fort Worth began the groundwork for an
27 annual piano competition named in his honor, and the first Van

1 Cliburn International Piano Competition was staged in 1962; held
2 every four years, it has since become one of the most prestigious
3 classical music events in the world and has launched the careers of
4 many talented artists; moreover, the Van Cliburn Foundation has
5 become a major force in music education and outreach, providing
6 recordings for the public radio show *Performance Today*, presenting
7 community concerts, and offering music programs to 33,000
8 grade-school children and 119 elementary schools in Texas; and

9 WHEREAS, Mr. Cliburn retired from touring in 1978, and in the
10 1980s, he left New York, where he had been living, and returned to
11 Texas, moving to the Westover Hills suburb of Fort Worth; over the
12 years, he was a beloved presence in the city, often appearing at
13 cultural events and serving as a gracious host at his home; although
14 he never acted as a judge at the Cliburn competition because he
15 couldn't bring himself to rate the contestants, he presented the
16 winners with their medals and generously gave his time to all the
17 attendees; he endowed scholarships at Texas Christian University,
18 Louisiana State University, Juilliard, the Moscow Conservatory,
19 and many other schools; and

20 WHEREAS, In 1987, Mr. Cliburn helped to herald the end of the
21 Cold War when he performed a recital at the White House for
22 President Ronald Reagan and Premier Mikhail Gorbachev, and in 1989,
23 he returned to Russia to play once again at the Great Hall of the
24 Moscow Conservatory; he went on to perform at Carnegie Hall during
25 the 100th anniversary season of the New York Philharmonic, and he
26 appeared as well at major concert halls across the nation; and

27 WHEREAS, During his lifetime, Mr. Cliburn played for every

1 American president since Harry Truman and for many other heads of
2 state; his countless awards include the Kennedy Center Honors, a
3 Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award, the Presidential Medal of
4 Freedom from President George W. Bush, the Order of Friendship from
5 Russian President Vladimir Putin, and, received in 2011, the
6 National Medal of the Arts from President Barack Obama; and

7 WHEREAS, The enormous musical talent of Van Cliburn was
8 matched only by his charm, his humility, and his deep religious
9 faith; during a time of great tension between two nuclear-armed
10 superpowers, this lanky, boyish young Texan reached across the
11 divide and won the hearts of the Russian people with his passion for
12 the music they loved; he was equally beloved during his later years
13 in Fort Worth, where he was as welcome at the Ol' South Pancake
14 House and Broadway Baptist Church as he was at the Kimball Art
15 Museum and Bass Performance Hall; speaking to a friend once, Mr.
16 Cliburn claimed that he experienced his worst stage fright in Fort
17 Worth, because he had so many friends there and he "just couldn't
18 stand to let them down," but in the end, of course, he never did;
19 now, therefore, be it

20 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives of the 83rd Texas
21 Legislature hereby pay tribute to the life of Van Cliburn and extend
22 sincere condolences to his partner, Thomas L. Smith, to his loved
23 ones, and to his countless friends and admirers across the Lone Star
24 State and beyond; and, be it further

25 RESOLVED, That an official copy of this resolution be
26 prepared for his family and that when the Texas House of
27 Representatives adjourns this day, it do so in memory of Van

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1 Cliburn.