

Memorandum on Citizen Service April 22, 1998

*Memorandum for the Heads of Executive
Departments and Agencies*

Subject: Strengthening Our Commitment to
Service

Citizen service is one of the most important ways we demonstrate that we care for and are responsible for one another. It is also an American tradition that we meet our challenges as members of a true community, with all of us working together. Thus, citizen service should not just be a temporary pursuit of only a week or a month. The ethic of service must extend throughout a lifetime.

Over the years, great numbers of Federal employees have been generous with their time and talents and have made positive contributions to their local communities, even as they have fulfilled their official responsibilities. At the same time, as the Nation's largest employer, the Federal Government has a responsibility to set an

example by helping to make it possible for its employees to dedicate time to serve others.

Therefore, I am today directing Federal departments and agencies to explore additional measures to expand service opportunities for Federal employees. Each department and agency should review its work scheduling practices and make maximum use of existing flexibilities to allow Federal employees to plan and take time off to perform community service as the public business permits. Each department and agency should also inform its employees of the various flexibilities available to them to participate in volunteer activities. The Office of Personnel Management should provide information to departments and agencies in support of this effort. Each department and agency should then report to the Office of Personnel Management within 90 days on the measures taken to implement this memorandum.

WILLIAM J. CLINTON

Remarks at the Third Millennium Evening at the White House April 22, 1998

[Moderator Ellen Lovell, Director, White House Millennium Council, welcomed the participants and introduced a short film about the Poet Laureate Consultant Program at the Library of Congress. Following the film, Hillary Clinton discussed the influence that poets and their works have had on American culture and welcomed poets laureate Robert Pinsky, Robert Hass, and Rita Dove. Mr. Pinsky, Mr. Hass, and Ms. Dove then read selected poems by various American poets and commented on the importance of poetry on America's past and future.]

The President. I don't mean to be heretical, but I was transported by Robert and Robert and Rita. And I was thinking, this really is a historic moment: first, there were the three tenors—[laughter]—then there were three sopranos, but nobody ever had three such poets before, and we thank them.

A few years ago there was an interesting article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, which asked whether poetry could matter in the 21st century. I reread it a few moments before coming down tonight. You know, in this crazy world we're living in, everything's running around so fast. If it could matter, how could we revive the human value of poetry, its importance to our culture, to our sense of who we are and who we are becoming as individuals and as a people?

Well, tonight there is a poet who was not an American but was very much of the Americas, and I think we would be remiss not to acknowledge. Here's what Octavio Paz said about his craft:

Between what I see and what I say,
Between what I say and what I keep silent,
Between what I keep silent and what I dream,
Between what I dream and what I forget,
poetry.