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## Presidential Correspondence during the Clinton Administration: Staying in Touch with the American People

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Prof. Dr. Judithanne Scourfield McLauchlan<sup>1</sup>

**PRESIDENTIAL CORRESPONDENCE DURING THE CLINTON  
ADMINISTRATION: STAYING IN TOUCH WITH  
THE AMERICAN PEOPLE<sup>2</sup>**

*Изворна научна статија*  
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**An Abstract**

*The U.S. Congressional studies literature emphasizes the importance of constituent service and correspondence to Members' re-election goals, but this is too often overlooked in the study of the American presidency. In fact, the Office of Presidential Correspondence provides a direct connection between the White House and the American people. Presidential Correspondence provides a way for the President to find out what people are thinking and a way for him to reach out to the public directly. By learning more about the Office of Presidential Correspondence during the Clinton Administration, we can better understand how the White House stays in touch with the American people. This paper provides an overview of the various departments within Presidential Correspondence, including Mail Analysis, Presidential Letters & Messages, Presidential Messages & Proclamations, E-Mail, Student Correspondence, Agency Liaison, the Gift Unit, the Volunteer Office, the Greetings Office and the Comment Line. Nothing provides better evidence for the concept of "personal presidency" (Theodore Lowi) than the work of the department of presidential correspondence. Hundreds of staff, interns, and volunteers assisted the President in staying in touch with the American people, responding to their hopes and fears, questions and concerns.*

**Key words:** *Clinton administration, American presidency, presidential correspondence, personal presidency.*

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<sup>2</sup> An earlier draft of this paper was presented at the 11<sup>th</sup> Presidential Conference, "William Jefferson Clinton: The 'New Democrat' from Hope," November 2005, Hofstra University.

*I doubt if there was any spot in the United States in those days, outside of a battlefield, that was more continually interesting than was the correspondence desk of the Executive Mansion.*

William O. Stoddard, White House secretary for President Lincoln<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Introduction

The U.S. Congressional studies literature emphasizes the importance of constituent service and correspondence to Members' re-election goals,<sup>4</sup> but this is too often overlooked in the study of the American presidency. In fact, the Office of Presidential Correspondence provides a direct connection between the White House and the American people. Presidential Correspondence provides a way for the President to find out what people are thinking and a way for him to reach out to the public directly. By learning more about the Office of Presidential Correspondence during the Clinton Administration (and how the volume and treatment of mail differed from other Administrations), we can better understand how the White House stays in touch with the American people. Below I will provide an overview of the various departments within Presidential Correspondence, including Mail Analysis, Presidential Letters & Messages, Presidential Messages & Proclamations, E-Mail, Student Correspondence, Agency Liaison, the Gift Unit, the Volunteer Office, the Greetings Office and the Comment Line.<sup>5</sup> People felt a direct connection with President Clinton.<sup>6</sup> Bill Clinton had encouraged people at every campaign stop to "keep in touch with him and let him know what was on their minds."<sup>7</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Harold Holzer, ed. *Dear Mr. Lincoln: Letters to the President*. (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Co., 1993), p. 1.

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, Richard F. Fenno, Jr. *Home Style: House Members in their Districts*. (Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman, and Company, 1978); Morris P. Fiorina. *Congress: Keystone of the Washington Establishment, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.* (New Haven: Yale University Press 1989); and David Mayhew. *Congress: The Electoral Connection*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

<sup>5</sup> During the Clinton Administration, I served as the Director of the Comment Line, Greetings Office and Volunteer Program, as well as the Director of the Correspondence Department Internship Program (1997-1999).

<sup>6</sup> Indeed, people still stay in touch with President Clinton. More than 80,000 people took the time to send e-mails or letters offering their prayers and best wishes to President Clinton after he underwent heart surgery. Bill Clinton, "More than 9 Million Children are at Risk: We Must Act Now." *Parade Magazine*, 25 September 2005, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton. *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy: Kids' Letters to the First Pets*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998, p. 9.

And they did! When the Clintons first arrived at the White House large mail bins overflowing with letters lined the hallways of the Old Executive Office Building (OEOB).<sup>8</sup> And the mail kept pouring in at a rate of four to ten thousand letters a day.<sup>9</sup> During the first year of his Administration, President Clinton received a staggering eight million pieces of mail<sup>10</sup> -- in March alone he received 82,000 letters.<sup>11</sup> During the first six and a half years of the Clinton Administration, the White House received a record 20,521,715 pieces of mail (including faxes) and another 3,876,105 e-mail messages.<sup>12</sup> Compare this volume to the yearly averages of other modern presidents: “Eisenhower, 700,000; Kennedy, 1,815,000; Johnson, 1,647,000; Nixon, 2,687,000; Ford, 2,381,000; Carter, 3,532,000; Reagan, 5,802,895; and George H.W. Bush, 6,100,000.”<sup>13</sup> The mail was read, analyzed, and responded to by the Department of Presidential Correspondence, the largest department in the White House Office (WHO). Approximately 70 staff, 1,200 volunteers, and 25-30 interns per session<sup>14</sup> staffed the twelve departments within Correspondence. In addition to the “standing” departments, at times it was necessary to create ad hoc, specialized units to handle a specific influx of mail. For example, the Health Care Office was created to respond to all of the correspondence received when the President and First Lady were focusing on their health care initiative.<sup>15</sup> “Within a few months of publicizing the health care initiative, the Clintons had received 700,000 letters; more came in at a rate of 48,000 a day.”<sup>16</sup> As a result of the White House staff cut that President Clinton promised on the 1992 campaign trail, the Department found itself

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<sup>8</sup> Since renamed the Eisenhower Executive Office Building.

<sup>9</sup> Jim Dorskind, Director of Correspondence, White House Intern Lecture, 5 April 1995.

<sup>10</sup> Bradley H. Patterson, Jr. *The White House Staff: Inside the West Wing and Beyond*. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), p. 383.

<sup>11</sup> Dorskind.

<sup>12</sup> Patterson, p. 383.

<sup>13</sup> Patterson, p. 384. “By comparison, Thomas Jefferson, one of the most prolific correspondents of his day, received an average of 137 letters a month while he was President.” Clinton, *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy*, p. 10.

<sup>14</sup> During my tenure I also served as Director of the Correspondence Department Internship Program. I selected, placed, and served as a resource for 25-30 interns for each of the four sessions (Spring, Summer 1, Summer 2, and Fall) for the twelve Correspondence Departments that hired interns. We had more interns than any other department; only the Office of the Vice President (with its mini White House) rivaled Correspondence in terms of size of intern program.

<sup>15</sup> Dorskind. White House Intern Lecture, 5 April 1995. The office was set up at a nearby off-site location (1800 G Street NW).

<sup>16</sup> Patterson, pp. 383-384.

handling more mail than its predecessors with fewer staff.<sup>17</sup> President Clinton explained in his memoir that he was

. . . finding it a challenge to keep another campaign commitment: cutting the White House staff by 25 percent . . . especially since we had a more ambitious agenda than the previous administration's and we were getting more than twice as much mail. . . The reduction I regretted most was the elimination of twenty career positions in the correspondence section.<sup>18</sup>

That staff cut necessitated an increased number of volunteers and interns to help with the staggering volume of mail. Indeed, the Volunteer Program was housed within the Department because so many of the volunteers were assigned to Correspondence.<sup>19</sup> The Correspondence Department, along with the Office of Records Management and the Executive Clerk, reported to the Staff Secretary.<sup>20</sup> Despite the significant staff cuts, Correspondence was still the largest White House Office (WHO) department; it also had the largest number of career staff in the WHO.<sup>21</sup> Most people might assume that, unlike cabinet departments and executive agencies that are staffed by civil servants, the White House staff would be entirely political; however, there were departments where career staff served the President. At one time, even the Staff Secretary was a career appointee. It was President Nixon who replaced an outgoing career Staff Secretary with a political appointee. Through each subsequent administration, as career staffers retire, they are replaced by political appointments. I would expect that eventually there will be precious few, if any, career staff. The Clinton Administration received a

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<sup>17</sup> The Correspondence Department suffered the heaviest staff cut of the White House Office. Jim Dorskind, White House Intern Lecture, 5 April 1995.

<sup>18</sup> Bill Clinton. *My Life*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2004, p. 486.

<sup>19</sup> During my tenure as Director of the Volunteer Program, 80% of the approximately 1,200 White House volunteers were assigned to Correspondence.

<sup>20</sup> The Correspondence Department has reported to the Staff Secretary as least as far back as the Nixon Administration. Maureen Hudson, Director of Presidential Messages (1971-2001). Phone Interview, 24 October 2005. The Staff Secretary was responsible for everything that came to and from the President, acting as a filter. Anything that the President would read, sign, etc. went through the Staff Secretary. The Office of the Staff Secretary assembled the President's Briefing Books, Trip Books, and, on a weekly basis, would collect reports from the various White House departments. One staffer noted that it was clear that the President read and digested these reports, as the office would get them back from the President with his comments, follow-up questions, instructions to staff, etc.

<sup>21</sup> The Office of Records Management and the Clerk's Office were also staffed with career employees.

record number of incoming letters, and it responded with a record number of outgoing letters. One long-time Correspondence staffer indicated that at the height of the first Gulf War, during President George H. W. Bush's Administration, they received 90,000 pieces of mail, an amount which at the time seemed overwhelming, "but that was nothing compared to the mail we received during the Clinton Administration -- especially at the beginning. It was off the charts!"<sup>22</sup> The staff had never seen anything like it. In the words of one career staffer, they were simply "blown away" by the volume.<sup>23</sup> Why the dramatic increase in volume? People felt a direct connection with President Clinton. They believed that he could, indeed, "feel their pain," and that he was concerned about their concerns. Career staffers in Mail Analysis noticed letters addressed to "Bill and Hillary" rather than "Dear President and Mrs. Clinton." There was a familiarity in the letters – and a belief on the part of those who wrote in that the President was genuinely interested in their issues and concerns. Veteran staffers also speculated that the immediate spike in mail was also a response to the way President Clinton dealt with controversial issues right away (such as gays in the military and health care reform). While career Correspondence staff assured me that all of the Presidents they worked for were committed to ensuring that most people who wrote in to the White House would receive a response, they noted that a major shift that took place during the Clinton Administration: there was a dramatic increase in the number of constituents who received a letter from the *President* in response to their letters. In previous administrations most letters were sent out from the White House under the signature of the Director of Correspondence or another appropriate staffer. In contrast, President Clinton sent out issue-oriented letters to the public under *his* signature. In prior administrations, staff did not want to subject the President to controversy or to offend those who wrote in, so they avoided a discussion of divisive issues in writing. There were pedagogical reasons for having President Clinton respond directly to the citizens who wrote in, and this development was aided by advances in technology. With the advent of computers and word processing software, the Clinton Administration was able to rely less on pre-printed cards. The process of drafting and typing letters had been so much more laborious that most who wrote to the White House under previous administrations received impersonal pre-printed cards thanking them for writing without addressing their specific concerns. During the Clinton Administration, more letters were

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<sup>22</sup> Interview transcript on file with author.

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sent to the White House, and more citizens received a personalized, individual response from the President himself. Despite his interest in what people were communicating to him, President Clinton obviously could not personally read and respond to the hundreds of thousands of letters that came in to the White House. The Correspondence Department would compile a sample of the mail -- “kitchen table mail” -- that was representative of the letters that came in, and President Clinton would sign those response letters personally. The Correspondence Department also prepared reports for President Clinton that included statistics and summaries of the mail so he would know what people were communicating to the White House. The Correspondence staff worked closely with the policy staff to ensure that in there was a clear and concise communication of the President’s policies and programs in response to constituents. The Correspondence Department provided a way for the President to reach out to the people unfiltered by the media. The White House received thousands of letters, gifts, e-mails, faxes, and phone calls every day. Below I will briefly describe how twelve departments within the Office of Presidential Correspondence would handle these various forms of communication.<sup>24</sup>

## 2. Mail Analysis

The thousands of pieces of mail would arrive first in the office of Mail Analysis, where the letters would be read and coded.<sup>25</sup> If the letter requested a presidential greeting, it would be forwarded to the Greetings Office; if the letter was from a child, it would be forwarded to Student Correspondence; letters addressed to the First Lady or to the Vice President would be sent to their respective correspondence offices. Correspondence from friends and close associates of the President would be handled by his personal office in the West Wing. Mail from VIPs would go to Presidential Letters and Messages (PLM) for a personalized response (in consultation with the President’s personal correspondents, to ensure that a friend or someone the President

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<sup>24</sup> All of these Departments had Directors who reported to the Director of Presidential Correspondence. In addition to managing all of the Correspondence departments, the Director closely supervised the drafting and editing of presidential letters, messages, and proclamations.

<sup>25</sup> Whenever possible, the letters would be opened and stapled in the mail room prior to being sent to Mail Analysis for coding. This process has changed completely amid security concerns post-September 11<sup>th</sup>. Now all White House mail is first opened at an off-site location. I was once detained in the First Lady’s correspondence office after a volunteer opened a letter and a white powdery substance billowed out. We had to wait until the Secret Service officers who arrived on the scene determined that it was a non-toxic substance (to avoid having us unwittingly spread infectious toxins throughout the OEOP). There is no longer the danger that this will happen inside the White House complex.



knew well would not receive a letter with an inappropriate tone). Threatening letters would be forwarded to the Secret Service. In most cases, however, the staff in Mail Analysis would respond directly to the issue-oriented mail by sending out the appropriate form letter. Quorum was the software system used to track the mail that was received and the responses that were sent out. If there was an influx of letters on a particular topic for which there was no form letter, the Director of Mail Analysis would suggest to the Director of Correspondence that a letter was needed on that topic. Presidential Letters and Messages (PLM) would then be assigned the task of drafting a response (which would go through the vetting process, described below). Mail Analysis would hold all incoming letters on that topic until the new form letter was ready to be sent out. It was important to the President and his Administration that those who wrote in to the White House received a response. In rare cases, however, letters would be coded NRN: "No Response Necessary." NRN letters included those that did not provide the author's name and address, those that were illegible or nonsensical, those that were crazed or that used offensive language, and, generally, those written in a foreign language. There were some folks who wrote in every day, and they would obviously not continue to receive responses from the White House. The White House typically did not respond to prisoner mail unless it was a request for a pardon, in which case it would be forwarded to the Department of Justice. Responses were not sent out to those who sent in pre-printed postcards or form letters; people who did not take the time to write in themselves would not receive a written response from the President. However, the postcards were counted, and the number of cards sent in on a particular issue would be included in the statistics and summaries of correspondence that the President received weekly. Occasionally the staff in Mail Analysis would read letters from folks asking the President for help programming their VCRs (to stop the annoying "12:00 PM" from flashing) or other odd requests (one woman requested the President change Chelsea's name because it was also the name of her dog, who apparently went crazy every time Chelsea Clinton's name was mentioned on television). Some of the correspondence was sent in on paper towels, toilet paper, zucchini, bricks, or timber<sup>26</sup> while others started their text in the center of the page and then scribbled around in a giant circle. Despite the occasional "oddball" letters

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<sup>26</sup> A photograph of one such letter sent to President Carter is included in Dwight Young's *Dear Mr. President: Letters to the Oval Office from the Files of the National Archives*. Young explained that "More than 100 housing industry workers wrote to Jimmy Carter on wooden 'stationery' during an economic crisis." Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2005, pp. 160-161.



(one staffer said that just when she had thought she had seen it all, the next day something new would surprise her), the overwhelming majority of letters that were received were thoughtful and issue-oriented, and it was important to President Clinton that their authors received a response.

### **3. Presidential Letters and Messages**

This department consisted of a team of editors and writers, each of whom had an area of expertise and appropriate contacts within the White House and executive agencies in order to secure information about the President's policy stances and approved language. The writers would work with the policy staff to develop the "form letters" that were sent out by Mail Analysis (these were revised every year), as well as to work on individual responses to VIP mail or to draft letters in response to a particularly touching letter or other special circumstances. For example, after the tragedy at Columbine High School the parents received personalized responses. The staff and volunteers in Mail Analysis would pull out letters to be considered for special consideration. Those letters receiving specialized attention could also be slated for a "BC sig," the President's signature (rather than the "autopen," which is also the President's legal signature). The "BC sig"s would need to go through the Staff Secretary for approval. Those letters that were sent to the President to sign might, in some instances, be edited by him and then sent back to Correspondence for corrections. As one staffer noted "After all, the President could say it better than we could draft for him." There was a great deal of coordination among various offices throughout the White House. The clearance process was extensive, and tremendous care was taken with each letter before it would be sent out with the President's signature.

### **4. Presidential Messages and Proclamations**

This office handled requests for Presidential Proclamations that were prepared for selected national events, such as Thanksgiving, Mothers Day, and Irish American Heritage Day. There was an average of four to five proclamations per month; approximately 45 were delivered each year, with April and May being the busiest months. For some proclamations, there was a big demand for copies (such as Mother's Day), for others, there was a small, targeted audience (such as White Cane Safety Day for the blind and visually impaired). The large proclamations, or "blue lines," as they were referred to in the office, were printed on oversized cardstock outlined by a blue border.

Some proclamations were offered every year, such as Thanksgiving and Mother's Day, while others might be prepared one year but not the next. The office also processed the requests for Presidential Messages. Messages were letters that were printed on the President's pale green letterhead (the "azure" stationery solely for the President's use, rather than the standard white White House letterhead) to be read at special events. If the President was invited to an event but he was not able to attend, he might send greetings. Messages were also prepared for individuals who were receiving an award, and the Presidential message would be read as a part of the presentation. There were also numerous requests for presidential messages honoring church dedications and ground breakings. When requests arrived in the office, a cover sheet would be stapled onto them for tracking purposes (checkboxes for all of the staffers/departments in the vetting process). If the request met the appropriate guidelines, then it would be entered into Quorum and then sent to one of the writers to draft a message. It would then go to an editor (usually at least twice), then to the Director of Correspondence, and then to Staff Secretary (if "BC sig" was needed). For some types of events a form letter was appropriate, for others, a personalized message was required. If a form letter was sufficient, then the request would be coded for typing (handled in the office of Presidential Support) and then it would go through the process for sign-off. There were many levels of checking and double-checking. The process could get laborious, and it could take a while to make the final edits, but this painstaking process ensured that the messages were well-written, that they were consistent with the President's policies and objectives, and that the recipients were properly vetted. It is hard to overemphasize how immensely proud and pleased the recipients of presidential messages would be. One grateful recipient sent in a newspaper article that described his event and how, as the President's letter was read, "a hush fell over the crowd." After an event in Northern Ireland honoring George Mitchell, the nun who requested the letter sent in a particularly touching thank you note. Through the Office of Presidential Messages, the President of the United States was able to be involved in important events in people's lives.

## 5. E-Mail

The Clinton Administration was the first to respond to e-mail. Citizens who wrote to President Clinton via e-mail would receive an “autoreply” that their message had been received, and then an actual letter would be mailed to them at their home address (via the U.S. Postal Service) in response to the substance of their message. The e-mail message would be printed out and then sent to the office of Mail Analysis for input into Quorum, coding and response; essentially the e-mails were treated the same as mail received through the U.S. Postal Service. responses were not sent via e-mail for fear of impersonators sending e-mail messages to people claiming to be from the White House. While the staff worked with contractors to improve the technology in that regard, supervisors were concerned that responding to e-mail by e-mail might remove some of the necessary formal checks that were in place for the “snail mail” – possibly resulting in inappropriate responses from the President. There was a fear that it would be too easy to lose control of the message. The Clinton Administration was also the first to create a White House website ([www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov)<sup>27</sup>), which provided another way for citizens to “stay in touch” with the White House. One could access press releases and presidential speeches, take a virtual tour of the White House, find out more information about the President, First Lady, the Vice President and Mrs. Gore, and access links to all cabinet departments and federal agencies. Now we take the internet and e-mail access for granted, and it is probably difficult to imagine the Herculean efforts that went into creating the technology infrastructure that first made the White House website and e-mail possible. When the staff first arrived in January of 1993, the White House operators were still plugging to connect calls. (The operators were defensive and declared “This is the state of the art plugging!”) President Clinton explained the urgent need to modernize the White House: “The staff couldn’t even send and receive e-mail, and the phone system hadn’t been changed since the Carter years. We couldn’t do conference calls, but anyone could press one of the big lighted extension buttons and listen into someone else’s conversation, including mine.”<sup>28</sup> The White House received \$25 million from Congress to overhaul the communications systems, which included the new phone system, audix (voicemail), servers, computer networking (there were

<sup>27</sup> We would occasionally get complaints on the Comment Line when a caller had discovered that [www.whitehouse.com](http://www.whitehouse.com) was a pornography site. (As of this writing, [www.whitehouse.net](http://www.whitehouse.net) is a spoof on the official homepage.)

<sup>28</sup> Clinton, *My Life*, p. 486.

computers in the various departments, but they were not networked together), and the internet.<sup>29</sup> There was a lot of building of infrastructure in the first four years to get everything up to speed. When the White House first went on-line, AOL, CompuServe, Prodigy, and Earthlink were all closed systems. Their customers could not get out onto the internet, and subscribers could not e-mail the White House directly. Every week, the Office of Presidential E-Mail would receive FedEx packages from the various providers with diskettes full of e-mails from customers.<sup>30</sup> Eventually, the companies opened up access to the internet. By mid-1994 customers could e-mail the White House directly rather than go through their internet service provider (ISP). Customers did not like going through their ISP to send communications to the White House, and it may be that this desire to communicate with President Clinton fueled technological advances in the private sector as well.<sup>31</sup> In the early years, staff in the Office of Presidential E-Mail found the e-mail messages to be “a joy to read”: they were more thoughtful and interesting than the “snail mail” letters. Staff attributed this to the fact that those with internet access tended to be college professors and researchers. “It was a more educated class of folks using the internet at that time. When the internet became more ubiquitous, that started to change [and e-mails became more like the letters received in Mail Analysis].”<sup>32</sup> The President and Vice President received a quarter of a million e-mails in the first twenty-two months of e-mail.<sup>33</sup> As one would expect, the number of e-mails continued to rise exponentially each year, as more and more people gained internet access. In total 3,876,105 e-mails received in the first six and a half years of the Clinton Administration.<sup>34</sup> During the impeachment, the President received more than 50,000 e-mails a day.<sup>35</sup> One of the most memorable e-mails received was the first e-mail sent from space. Senator John Glenn wrote to President Clinton while orbiting space, and the President wrote back from Air Force One.<sup>36</sup> When the White House went online, other countries initiated official communiqués. The Office of Presidential E-Mail received e-mails from Kings and heads of state of many countries; however,

<sup>29</sup> Steve Horn, Director of Presidential E-Mail, 1993-2001. Phone interview, 24 October 2005.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Jim Dorskind, Director of Presidential Correspondence, White House Intern Lecture, 5 April 1995. Mr. Dorskind indicated that more than a quarter of a million e-mails had been received from June of 1993 through early 1995.

<sup>34</sup> Patterson, p. 383.

<sup>35</sup> Steve Horn, Director of Presidential E-Mail, 1993-2001. Phone interview, 24 October 2005.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. A copy of the e-mail is included in Young, *Dear Mr. President*, p. 175.

the Protocol Office declined to use the internet and wanted to use traditional methods of communication instead. The Office of Presidential E-Mail also received Agency Liaison-type hardship cases. In one case, a father e-mailed the President describing his plight -- his wife died, he lost his job and his daughter was suffering from juvenile diabetes. President Clinton wrote back a handwritten letter of encouragement. This response made headlines in his local newspaper. As a result of the publicity, the man got a job and his life was turned around – all as a result of the President’s response to his e-mail.

## 6. Student Correspondence

The Office of Student Correspondence responded to all mail from children up to the age of 17 and to mail addressed to the First Pets (Socks the cat and Buddy the dog). Tens of thousands of students wrote in, some as a part of a class project, others encouraged by the scholastic publication *The Weekly Reader*. In 1997 the children responded to the magazine’s call with 93,000 letters, poems, drawings, quilts, photographs, audiotapes, videotapes.<sup>37</sup> First Lady Hilary Rodham Clinton, in her book *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy: Kids’ Letters to the First Pets* explained why she and the President believed it was important to respond to the mail sent in by children:

When Chelsea was just five years old, she decided on her own that she wanted to write a letter to an elected official about an issue that concerned her. She was adamant, and so we sat down with her and talked about it and helped her with some of the spelling. She sent it off and every day she waited for a response. I still remember the disappointment I shared with her when one never came. We don’t want anyone who writes to the White House, especially a child who signs his message ‘Your Friend,’ to feel that it is just a one-way street. Back-and-forth communication helps youngsters understand that writing serves a real purpose in our everyday lives. **Even more important, when a letter is reciprocated, it makes people feel that they’ve been heard and that they matter.**<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Stanley Weintraub and Rodelle Weintraub. *Dear Young Friend: Letters from American Presidents to Children*. (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2000), p. 186

<sup>38</sup> Clinton, *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy*, p. 14. Emphasis added.

One long-time Correspondence staffer noted the change in Student Correspondence from previous administrations. During the Clinton Administration children received letters (as opposed to pre-printed cards) from the President in response to their inquiries. In her words, Student Correspondence was “not just a book and picture pony show,” but children were treated with respect. Having said that, the office did produce a number of publications – quarterly newsletters, *A Kid’s Guide to the White House*, *The White House: The House of the People* – and had photos (lithographs) and stickers that read “I wrote to the President and he Wrote Back” to send out to classrooms around the country. In addition to responding to letters from children to the President, the Office of Student Correspondence also handled mail addressed to the First Pets. As of 1998, Socks and Buddy received more than 300,000 letters and e-mails, as well as hundreds of handcrafted gifts.<sup>39</sup> Frequently asked questions included “How does it feel to have all of the food you want?” “Do you have a Secret Service agent?” “Do you ever annoy the President?” and “What do you do for a living?”<sup>40</sup> Indeed, the mail to the first pets was so voluminous that, in addition to the White House operation, volunteers at the U.S. Soldiers and Airmen’s Home in Washington, D.C. volunteered at their facility as well.<sup>41</sup>

## 7. Agency Liaison

The Office of Agency Liaison handled the casework on behalf of the President and First Lady. Often the issues that staff dealt with paralleled the types of assistance that citizens request from their Members of Congress (frequently asking for assistance securing government benefits). The President would periodically see a sample of two or three letters so he would know the type of help people were requesting as well as what the caseworkers were able to do to help. The First Lady described an Agency Liaison success story in one of her weekly columns:

Shortly before Christmas last year, volunteers in my correspondence office were moved by a letter from a young couple trying to adopt a baby from another state.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 10.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p. 12.

<sup>41</sup> We in the Greetings Office would take trips to visit the volunteers, and we would invite them to come to the White House for Volunteer Appreciation Day with the President and Mrs. Clinton. Socks would also visit the volunteers to thank them for handling his mail. Pictures of Socks at the Soldier’s and Airmen’s Home are included in Mrs. Clinton’s *Dear Socks, Dear Buddy* (e.g., see p. 160).

Faced at the last minute with a seemingly impenetrable tangle of red tape, they turned to the White House for help. We were able to refer them to the appropriate officials, who worked together to untangle the issues and unite a very happy couple with their new daughter by Christmas.<sup>42</sup>

Every day “hardship cases” were called in to the Comment Line. Callers were encouraged to write in to the Office of Agency Liaison (in a letter they could provide all of the appropriate details) in order to get a more complete response. However, Comment Line volunteers would take messages to pass along to the caseworkers. In rare instances, the hardship forms would be walked down to the office immediately when the situation seemed truly urgent, such as in the case of a suicide threats. Despite the severe staff cuts that were imposed upon the White House Office, and, in particular, on the Department of Correspondence, the Office of Agency Liaison is one department that saw an increase in staffers. President Clinton explained: “We also beefed up one part of the White House staff: the casework operation that was designed to help citizens who had personal problems with the federal government, often involving an effort to obtain disability, veterans, or other benefits. Usually citizens call on their U.S. Senators or representatives for help with such matters, **but because I had run a highly personalized campaign, many Americans felt they could call on me.**”<sup>43</sup>

## 8. The Gift Unit

This office received, logged and acknowledged the gifts sent to the President and First Family.<sup>44</sup> The President received about 15,000 gifts a year.<sup>45</sup> Each week, a memo would be sent to the West Wing indicating what had come in, and he could indicate which of the gifts he was interested in having sent over to the Oval Office. He would not receive the food gifts, as the Secret Service worried for the President’s safety. Perishable gifts, such as flowers, would be distributed throughout the White House complex. Gifts that were sent to the President in his role as head of state were considered gifts to

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<sup>42</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, “1,010 Volunteers Keep White House in Top Form.” The First Lady wrote a Weekly Syndicated Column, “Talking It Over,” and during National Volunteer Week the First Lady penned this entry. See <https://www.creators.com/features/hillary-clinton>

<sup>43</sup> Clinton, *My Life*, p. 486. Emphasis added.

<sup>44</sup> The Office was also responsible for logging (but not acknowledging) gifts received by the staff.

<sup>45</sup> Lori Krause, Director of the Gift Unit. Phone interview, 27 March 2006.



the people of the United States. As such, they would be considered property of the federal government, not personal gifts to the Clintons. These would be stored by the National Archives until President Clinton's Library was constructed.<sup>46</sup> The General Services Administration (GSA) issued guidelines as far as what the President and First Family could keep (gifts worth under a certain dollar amount could be kept by the President). One of the projects the Gift Unit worked on each year was the Clintons' financial disclosure statement, tracking all of the gifts that were accepted. The President received hundreds of books, t-shirts, and the like, and the Gift Unit regularly made donations to charity on behalf of the President so those gifts would be enjoyed rather than sitting in a box in the Archives. At times people sent in odd packages (e.g., someone sent in silicone testicular implants for Buddy the dog after he was neutered while another sent in his entire CD collection). Most were thoughtful gifts from U.S. citizens while others were spectacular gifts from foreign heads of state. I still remember the beautiful crystal sculpture from the Czech Republic that graced the office for a time. Others that stood out were the mother of pearl carving of the Last Supper sent in by Yasser Arafat and the Waterford crystal bowl sent in by Bertie Ahern. A sample of these remarkable gifts is on display at the Clinton Presidential Library and Museum.<sup>47</sup>

## 9. Volunteer Program

At its peak, the Volunteer Program managed upwards of 3,000 volunteers. At the time I was Director of the Program, we had about 1,200 volunteers who would work in shifts and who volunteered more than 200,000 hours a year. Most worked one or two shifts a week (volunteers were required to work a minimum of 16 hours per month). The volunteers were mostly D.C.-area college students and retirees, some of whom were "snowbirds" who worked with us more intensely for shorter periods of the year. The volunteers were a diverse group, ranging in age from 19 to 92 (although most were retired seniors) and were from 46 states, D.C., Puerto Rico, and 29 foreign countries. Most lived in the D.C.-metro area, but we had some who commuted from Delaware, Pennsylvania, and even Chicago to serve President Clinton.<sup>48</sup> Arkansas Travelers would travel to D.C. to volunteer full-time for a week at a time. The volunteers worked in 40 different White House

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<sup>46</sup> See <http://www.archives.gov/presidential-libraries/laws/1955-act.html> for more information regarding the guidelines under the Presidential Libraries Act.

<sup>47</sup> They can be viewed online at [www.clintonlibrary.gov](http://www.clintonlibrary.gov).

<sup>48</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, "1,010 Volunteers Keep White House in Top Form."

departments, although, as noted earlier, 80 percent of the volunteers were assigned to the Department of Presidential Correspondence. The reliance on volunteers in Correspondence was necessitated by the heavy workload, the cuts in staff, and the commitment to respond to all mail sent to the President. The Volunteer Office was responsible for handling all of the paperwork (security clearances, etc.) and for conducting orientation seminars with new volunteers. The office recruited volunteers and made sure that all of the departments throughout the White House complex had the volunteers they needed in order to accomplish their work. In addition to the regular volunteers who had permanent placements, some volunteers were “floaters” who would serve as “temps” in offices with an employee out sick or in an office that had a short-term project that required additional volunteer support to complete. Volunteers would sign in to the Volunteer Office when reporting for duty. In this way the Office would know who was working where at all times, would be able to track the number of volunteer hours logged, and would be able to keep volunteers abreast of any important policy changes or upcoming events and activities. Some of the volunteers had “hard passes,” including the coveted “blue badge” that would provide access to the White House complex itself (if they worked in the East or West Wing, or if they provided assistance in escorting other volunteers to the East or West Wing, etc.), and the Volunteer Office handled the security paperwork for these credentials as well. I was inspired by the dedication of the White House volunteers and by the hundreds of examples of citizen servants who made personal sacrifices in order to come to the White House every week, like Anna, who gave up her cable TV so that she could afford the bus fare to come into the White House to volunteer three days a week. We in the Volunteer Office worked hard to make sure the volunteers knew how much we appreciated their service. Every year, the President and First Lady would honor their service during “Volunteer Appreciation Day” (usually held during National Volunteer Week in April). In addition, we published a quarterly newsletter, organized a speaker series and a tour series (of D.C.-area attractions) and other special events (e.g., on occasion we were able to distribute tickets for the President’s Box at the Kennedy Center). And volunteers were given the opportunity to volunteer at special White House events, such as the spring and fall garden tours, the White House Egg Roll,<sup>49</sup> and the candlelight tours at Christmas. We also gave

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<sup>49</sup> Pictures of the Easter Eggs and of the Egg Roll are included in Mrs. Clinton’s *Invitation to the White House*, pp. 172-177. Hillary Rodham Clinton. *An Invitation to the White House: At Home with History*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.

each volunteer one of the White House Easter Eggs, a Christmas card,<sup>50</sup> one of the large holiday cards, as well as a copy of the poster from the Egg Roll. Buddy and Socks would also stop by to greet the volunteers (usually visiting the offices in Correspondence, where there was always a high concentration of volunteers) and to thank them for their efforts. Of course, it is an honor to serve the President at the White House, but we wanted the volunteers to know how much we appreciated them. As the First Lady explained in one of her weekly syndicated newspaper columns (“Talking It Over”), which she devoted to the White House volunteers, “It is no exaggeration to say that the White House – and certainly not my office – could not function the way it does without the hours put in by volunteers.”<sup>51</sup> President Clinton said of the White House volunteers in his memoir: “The White House couldn’t function without them.”<sup>52</sup>

### **10. Presidential Inquiries (Greetings Office and Comment Line)**

The Greetings Office and Comment Line were housed in OEOB Room 39, and the label “Presidential Inquiries” was used to capture both departments. The Greeting Office sent out greeting cards on behalf of the President and First Lady – birthday cards (for 80+ birthdays and for 100<sup>th</sup> birthdays<sup>53</sup>), anniversary cards (for 50+ wedding anniversary cards), graduations, sympathy, baby birth, weddings, Eagle Scout/Girl Scout Gold awards, as well as cards for special occasion or milestone events (such as bar mitzvah). More than a half a million greeting cards a year were hand-addressed by one of the approximately 300 Greetings Office volunteers.<sup>54</sup> The incoming mail (2,000 to 4,000 requests a day) would be sorted into cubbies that lined the walls. Birthdays were organized by date, and the cards would be mailed out ten days prior to the event. Volunteers specialized in various

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<sup>50</sup> Pictures of the Christmas cards and of the White House at Christmas are included in Mrs. Clinton’s *Invitation to the White House*, pp. 189-205.

<sup>51</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, “1,010 Volunteers Keep White House in Top Form.”

<sup>52</sup> Clinton, *My Life*, p. 488.

<sup>53</sup> Those who were celebrating wedding anniversaries 75 years or more or 101<sup>st</sup> birthdays and up would be slated for a personalized presidential letter, rather than a card. The Director of the Greetings Office was responsible for revising the language and re-designing the look of the cards every year.

<sup>54</sup> Many of the Greetings volunteers served the White House for many years, going back to the Carter and Reagan Administrations. Whenever possible I took the time to talk to the volunteers about their work in previous Administrations and their observations about trends in presidential correspondence.

types of Greetings requests, and, when reporting for their shift, they would retrieve requests from the appropriate cubbies and get to work addressing the envelopes. Different sections of the office were dedicated to different types of greetings requests, the “100s Desk,” the “Congressional Desk,” etc. The Congressional Desk handled all requests for presidential greetings from Congressional offices. (These requests would be received either directly from Congressional Offices, or they would be forwarded to us by the White House Office of Legislative Affairs.) Volunteer calligraphers addressed the envelopes for the recipients that were requested by Members of Congress. We were flooded with letters requesting presidential greetings. Every so often *Parents* magazine would tell readers how to request one of the baby birth cards, and we would receive tens of thousands of requests. Our volunteers answered them as quickly as possible, but I couldn’t help but worry that the newborn would be entering kindergarten by the time we could get to that request. While we received many touching requests for greetings, I found the most interesting to be those for the 100<sup>th</sup> birthdays; many requesting the centennial birthday cards would include remarkable biographical information about the recipient. At the end of each day, volunteers would prepare cards for the Mail Room. Several thousand cards would be sorted and alphabetized every day to ensure that no duplicates were sent out. They were organized into dozens of mail trays, all unsealed. The mail room sealed all outgoing mail; it was first inspected to ensure that it was official business and that the cards were not tampered with in any way.) Two to three thousand greeting cards would be sent out each day -- more than a half a million greeting cards each year. The cards brought a great deal of joy to their recipients. I still remember the “thank you” call we received from a formerly estranged mother and daughter who, after the mother received a birthday card at the daughter’s request, were reunited after decades apart. The Greetings Office provided a way for the President to be involved in and to celebrate important special events and milestones in people’s lives.

*The Comment Line.* Each day, we would receive thousands of calls directed to the President, and each evening we would prepare reports for the President and senior staff that included the number of calls that came in, the dominant issues, and sample comments. On occasion, I would plot graphs that compared Comment Line data with Gallup and other publicly available polling data. It was remarkable how similar the presidential approval ratings according to pollsters and according to the Comment Line were. In fact, I was

Director of the Comment Line during the impeachment, and this held true during that difficult time as well. Serving as the “ear” of President Clinton as constituents called in to share with him their problems and hopes and fears provided a unique vantage point from which to gauge the connection that ordinary people felt with the White House. Every day, an average of 3,000 to 5,000 people would call the White House Comment Line. While the calls would usually be answered by one of the 15-20 volunteer Comment Line operators working that shift, the President did visit the Comment Line to take calls on occasion. In an age of automated phone systems, people could call the White House and talk to a live operator who would record their message and ensure that it was passed along.<sup>55</sup> The direct line to the Comment Line was (and still is) 202/456-1111, not a toll free number. We also had a TTY/TDD (text telephone)<sup>56</sup> that was answered by one of the supervisors. Generally, our office was open from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM EST<sup>57</sup> Monday through Friday; however, we would stay open later on days during which the President was addressing the nation or other special circumstances. All of the Greetings Office desks were equipped with phone jacks, so we could double the capacity to handle the calls and expand the Comment Line from its approximately 20 carrels to approximately 50 phone lines in the office (for events such as the State of the Union Address). The phones were answered primarily by volunteers and supervised by staff. Occasionally interns (from throughout the White House) and Correspondence staff would help answer the phones if we were short-staffed during a particularly busy time. On most days, fifteen to twenty-five volunteers (in shifts) staffed the phones. All of the approximately 100 Comment Line volunteer operators were trained when they began their service, and we would periodically offer “refresher courses” (e.g., when we revamped the Comment Line Manual, we used that as an opportunity to meet with all of the volunteers in smaller groups to review the new manual’s format as well as proper Comment Line procedures). Volunteers were instructed not to answer substantive questions: their job was to take messages for the President. They were not to offer their personal opinions or commentary.

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<sup>55</sup> In Indonesia President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono apparently gave out his cell phone and said that he wants to hear directly from citizens. “They can send text messages 24 hours a day or even call him. It’s part of an effort to bypass the bureaucracy in a nation still recovering from December’s devastating tsunami. Yudhoyono says the calls and messages will let him know the problems people are facing.” “Mr. President: It’s Another Call.” *Parade Magazine*, 7 August 2005, p. 12. While President Clinton did not give out his cell phone number, the Comment Line operation did ensure that he knew what callers were concerned about.

<sup>56</sup> The TTY/TDD number was 202/456-6213.

<sup>57</sup> Hence, we tended to hear more from the West coast in the afternoons.

(This could be difficult at times, as the volunteers' inclination was to be protective of the President and to defend his policies to critics). However, the Manual provided resources for operators to give out information callers requested (e.g., phone numbers for various government agencies and information about how to tour the White House). Volunteers were also instructed not to give out their names for security reasons (there were a few times when callers came to the White House seeking a particular volunteer who had answered their call); instead, they were instructed to give out their "operator number." When reporting for duty, volunteers would pick up a tally sheet and blank message and hardship forms before sitting down at their desks and donning their headphones. The tally sheets included all of the major issues we had been hearing about (with columns for support, oppose, and the state the caller was calling from). There were also blank rows for issues not already included in the tally sheet. I would update the tally sheets regularly, removing issues that were no longer "hot topics" and adding new issues of interest to callers. I photocopied them onto color paper, and each time the tally sheet was updated I would change the color. That way, when volunteers reported for duty, if the tally sheet had changed color since their last shift, they would know to look for the new issues and would ask a supervisor if they had any questions prior to answering the Comment Line. On the Message Form there was space for the operators to take an extended message, which we would, when appropriate, pass along to the relevant White House Office. (However, to ensure a response from the White House, we encouraged callers to write in with their question or concern). And the Hardship Forms were used to take messages for Agency Liaison. Callers were encouraged to write in, so they could provide all of the necessary details for the caseworkers; however, we would, on occasion, take messages if the caller had already been dealing with Agency Liaison, or if the situation seemed particularly dire or time sensitive (such as in the case of suicide threats). The phones were equipped with caller ID, so we could see the state where the caller was calling from (and this would be tracked on the reports as well). The phones also were equipped with a red button that would connect a threatening call to the Secret Service. When the button was pushed, the Secret Service would begin listening in on the call and then eventually take over. We advised operators to keep the caller on the phone and to continue to ask questions until the Secret Service officer identified herself ("And what kind of bomb did you make?" "Where did you obtain the materials?" etc.). In one instance, a Secret Service Officer arrived at the door of the caller while we were still on the phone with him, but,



in most cases, these were not serious threats against the President. However, we instructed the volunteers to push the red button at first sign that the caller was making a threat against the President, and leave it to the Secret Service to determine whether that threat was substantial or not. During the impeachment, we were open seven days a week, and we stayed open until 11 PM at night.<sup>58</sup> The volume of calls threatened the integrity of the phone system, so it was imperative that all of the calls were handled, and that they were handled in a timely manner. Monica Lewinsky first appeared in Comment Line reports in January of 1998, but it was the day of the grand jury testimony on August 17, 1998 that was the beginning of a new intensity on the Comment Line. From that day in August we were open every day until Christmas Eve. On an average day, we would receive between 3,000 and 5,000 calls; during the impeachment that number rose to 8,000 to 10,000 calls a day. The calls, as publicly available polling at the time would have suggested, were overwhelmingly positive.<sup>59</sup> However, we did receive some nasty, mean-spirited calls, some of which took their toll on our volunteers. Other high-volume periods included the days and weeks surrounding the Elian Gonzalez situation and the weeks after the 2000 presidential election. Those last several weeks of the Administration, when one would expect the Comment Line of a lame duck president to be slow, the Clinton Administration the Comment Line was busy fielding calls from those who were concerned about the fate of the presidential election in the courts.<sup>60</sup> At the end of the day, we would prepare reports that included the total number of calls that came in, the major issues that dominated the calls, the number of operators who answered the calls, and sample representative comments.<sup>61</sup> These daily and weekly reports were a compilation of the tally sheets that the operators completed during their shifts. Occasionally it would be of interest to know the state where the

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<sup>58</sup> We had difficulty staffing the lines at night. Most of the volunteers were senior citizens who did not feel comfortable driving in the dark or taking the metro at night. We pulled interns from other Departments and invited staff to stay late – but – after the initial crisis wore off, it was difficult to keep all of the lines operational after hours and on weekends.

<sup>59</sup> A CNN/USA Today/Gallup poll found that President Clinton's approval rating jumped 10 points in the wake of the House of Representatives' approval of two articles of impeachment to 73 percent. That was not only an all-time high for President Clinton, but it also was higher than the highest approval rating that President Ronald Reagan ever had.

See <http://www.cnn.com/ALLPOLITICS/stories/1998/12/20/impeachment.poll/> (Reviewed 25 March 2006)

<sup>60</sup> Kelley Van Auken, Director of the White House Comment Line, Greetings Office, and Volunteer Program. Phone interview, 27 March 2006.

<sup>61</sup> During the immediate aftermath of the grand jury testimony we were called upon to provide reports throughout the day.



calls were coming from and we would pull that data from the tally sheets and include it in the Nightly Report as well, e.g., when the First Lady was considering a run for Senate in New York, we could track where the calls were coming from and separate out the calls from New York. The issues on the nightly report would be ranked in order of call volume (a minimum number of 10 calls on a topic was needed in order to be included on the report). The reports generally read like the day's newspaper headlines. The calls were dominated by current events and pending legislation, although there were a few perennial issues, such as "free Leonard Pelletier" who had at least 25 callers a day on his behalf. Talk radio hosts would spark their listeners to call in. And interest groups would, on occasion, sponsor "call ins." Environmental groups most frequently used this technique. Call-ins during my tenure were about issues such as paving roads in national parks, global warming, oil drilling in Grand Escalante National Monument in Utah, and logging in national parks. However, it wasn't always interest groups that were behind dramatic spikes in calls. One of the British tabloids once published the White House Comment Line phone number and encouraged all of their readers to call about the treatment of British au pair Louise Woodward. Thousands of callers from the United Kingdom contacted us that morning. And one afternoon Rosie O'Donnell posted our number on the screen during her television show and encouraged her viewers to call us about gun control; more than 85,000 callers tried to reach us that afternoon. The volume of calls tended to ebb and flow. It was generally slower during the holidays and heated up when Congress and the Supreme Court were in session and when there were big issues in the news. The President's travel schedule and world events also affected call volume and content. In addition to the reports that we compiled about the substance of the calls, our office received "traffic reports" from the phone system that provided data about the number of calls, the average length of the calls, the number of "abandoned calls," and the average number of operators. Abandoned calls were those where people called in but did not wait to speak with one of the operators. Usually calls were handled in a timely manner and the number of drop-offs was low. However, there were occasions on which we were short-staffed. Friday afternoons were the least popular timeslots for volunteers, although Friday afternoons were not typically busy times for calls either. The phones had flashing lights that would signal when there was a long line in the cue; this would encourage the operators to dispense with their calls as quickly as possible in order to help the next person in line. The supervisor's phone in the Director's Office would indicate exactly

how many callers were on hold and the average wait time. Depending on the situation, the supervisor might put “all hands on deck” from within the office (all interns and as many Greetings volunteers as could be coaxed) onto the phones; the next step would be to send out a plea within the Correspondence Department for interns to help out on the Comment Line, and, on rare occasions, we would ask the White House Intern Office to send out a call for help from interns from around the complex. The Comment Line could be shut down, and, once a year, on Volunteer Appreciation Day, we would do so, in order to allow all of the volunteers to be recognized by the President and First Lady at Volunteer Appreciation Day. The lines would also be shut down when the federal government was closed for a snow day. (If we did not re-program the phones, the calls would come in (during the hours of 9:00 AM and 5:00 PM) and stay on hold indefinitely.) As the supervisor, I could listen in on calls from a special phone in the Director’s Office. More often, however, I would supervise by walking around the office and listening in on the volunteers as they answered the phones. Operators could push a “supervisor” button on their phones if they needed assistance with handling a call. Several times a day supervisors would be summoned to help answer an unusual question or to placate the most obnoxious callers.<sup>62</sup> The Director’s Office also housed the computer that controlled the phone system, so there was a special security code and lock on the door so the phone system could not be tampered with or disabled. Although we would occasionally talk to “God” or to someone with a UFO in his backyard or someone who was suffering due to the government sending signals through the metal plates in his head, the overwhelming majority of those who called were concerned citizens who wanted to tell the President what they thought about his programs or about current events. The Office of Presidential Inquiries was quite a bustling place. Sixty to eighty volunteers a day would fulfill requests for presidential greetings and answer the phones. My summary has not done justice to the overwhelming volume of work that was accomplished in OEOB Room 39 on a daily basis. Every day

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<sup>62</sup> One staffer recalled her first day on the job as supervisor of the Comment Line which happened to fall on same day as the President’s State of the Union Address. Each year during the State of the Union, we kept the lines open late to take calls in reactions to the President’s speech. This caller (who appeared intoxicated) was adamant that he speak to the President immediately, oblivious to the fact that the President was addressing both Houses of Congress and the nation in his annual State of the Union address. While she recalled her training (and how she was to be polite and not talk back to the caller), she couldn’t help but urge this man to turn on his television set to learn why the President was otherwise engaged. Shivaun Cooney, Staff Assistant, Presidential Inquiries, Phone Interview, 30 March 2006.

thousands of Americans (and some from overseas) would call the White House and leave a message for the President, and thousands of others would receive presidential greetings.

## 11. Conclusion

A record number of people wrote in to President Clinton and a record number of Americans received personalized letters back from him in response. People felt an intimate connection with President Clinton, evidenced by the staggering volume of mail he received. Through the various departments within presidential correspondence, people communicated with the President, and they received responses from him unfiltered by the media. Theodore Lowi described as characteristic of the “personal presidency” that the president has become the embodiment of government and that “millions upon millions of Americans concentrate their hopes and fears directly and personally upon him.”<sup>63</sup> Nothing provides better evidence for this claim than the work of the department of presidential correspondence. Hundreds of staff, interns, and volunteers assisted the President in staying in touch with the American people, responding to their hopes and fears, questions and concerns.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Theodore J. Lowi. *The Personal President: Power Invested, Promise Unfulfilled*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 96.

<sup>64</sup> When designing his presidential library, it was important to President Clinton that he showcase how his policies affected real people. To this end, exhibits feature sample letters with testimonials and the “virtual piers” are filled with letters to the President (8% of the letters in the collection are in the piers). Ralph Appelbaum, remarks about the Clinton Presidential Library and Museum, 11<sup>th</sup> Presidential Conference, “William Jefferson Clinton: The ‘New Democrat’ from Hope,” November 2005, Hofstra University.

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## **ПРЕТСЕДАТЕЛСКАТА КОРЕСПОДЕНЦИЈА ЗА ВРЕМЕ НА АДМИНИСТРАЦИЈАТА НА ПРЕТСЕДАТЕЛОТ КЛИНТОН: ВО КОНТАКТ СО АМЕРИКАНСКОТ НАРОД**

### **Резиме**

*Американските политиколошки истражувања содржат бројни студии за комуникацијата и кореспонденцијата на членовите на Конгресот на САД со нивните гласачи, особено во предизборниот период, но не и за претседателската комуникација со граѓаните. Канцеларијата за претседателска комуникација во Белата куќа овозможува директен контакт на Претседателот на САД со американскиот народ. Таа канцеларија претставува најдобриот начин Претседателот да дознае како размислуваат граѓаните, и како да се стапи во непосреден контакт и комуникација со нив. Преку проучување на ваквата комуникација може подобро да се разбере целиот процес. Овој труд претставува темелна студија на претседателската кореспонденција за време на администрацијата на Претседателот на САД, Бил Клинтон. Се дава сеопфатен преглед на сите оддели и организациски единици на претседателската комуникациска администрација: анализа на писма од граѓаните, претседателски писма и пораки, претседателски прокламации, електронска комуникација, студентска кореспонденција, оддел за комуницирање со федералните агенции, прием на подароци, канцеларија за волонтери, канцеларија за честитки и канцеларија за тековни коментари. Според авторката, претседателската кореспонденција претставува вистинска илустрација за американското претседателство како „персонализирано претседателство“ (Theodore Lowi), а кое, на секојдневна основа, се остварува низ работата на стотици вработени, стажанти и волонтери, со цел да му се овозможи на Претседателот на САД да остане во контакт со американскиот народ, и навремено да реагира на нивните надежи, стравови, грижи и прашања.*

**Клучни зборови:** *Претседател на САД, Бил Клинтон, претседателска кореспонденција, персонализирано претседателство*

