



# GAZETTE

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## Librarian of Congress Appoints Juan Felipe Herrera Poet Laureate

Librarian of Congress James H. Billington Wednesday announced the appointment of Juan Felipe Herrera as the Library's 21st Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry. The new Poet Laureate is the author of 28 books of poetry, novels for young adults and collections for children. He has received numerous awards for his poetry, including the National Book Critics Circle Award for "Half the World in Light: New and Selected Poems," and served as Poet Laureate of California from 2012–2015. He answered a few questions on the cusp of the announcement.

### What do you think of the Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry position?

I am close to speechless. Every cell in my being is honored and humbled. All of my family and families before me are thankful.

My mother, Lucha, left Mexico City with my grandmother, Juanita and my aunt, Aurelia, right after the Mexican revolution and arrived in Juárez, Chihuahua. Shortly after my uncles enlisted in the army at Fort Bliss, they brought the family to El Paso, Texas. My father, Felipe, jumped the train from Chihuahua at 14 years of age and headed to Denver, Colorado – before the revolution. I say this to give you a sense of the long road to Here – and an idea of how much it means to me to be honored with this position. To be the Poet Laureate Consultant, in many ways, has to do with being conscious of the nation at large, as a peoples undergoing many changes and blossoming many dreams in these most peculiar times. Poetry is at the heart of all this. What

*LAUREATE, continued on page 6*



James H. Billington is sworn in as the 13th Librarian of Congress, September 14, 1987.

## Dr. Billington to Retire Effective Jan. 1, 2016

**J**ames H. Billington, the 13th Librarian of Congress, Wednesday announced to staff in a video address that he will retire effective January 1, 2016. Following is a transcript of his remarks and reaction from key Members of Congress.

Colleagues,

It is with a heart filled with gratitude that I speak to you today. After 28 years of service at this amazing institution, I am announcing my retirement, which will take effect January 1, 2016. Leading this great one-of-a-kind institution alongside all of you for nearly three decades has been the great honor and joy of my 42 years of public service in Washington, D.C.

The Library of Congress, like no other institution, exemplifies and advances America's ongoing experiment in building a knowledge-based democracy. Our

unique mission of service, established and sustained by the Congress of the United States, continues to inspire me, and the millions of Americans who use our extraordinary resources and services every year.

The Library will complete in September a new strategic plan for the next five years and will bring on a new permanent Chief Information Officer to join our team. Over the years I have been asked if I have been thinking about retirement; and the answer has always been "not really," because this has always been not just my job but my life. And my thoughts have always been focused on its future. I have never had more faith in the leadership and staff of the Library of Congress. The Library's new top management team is as deeply experienced and creatively collegial as any I have ever known. I am confident that they will continue to innovate, adapt and improve on the work

*BILLINGTON, continued on page 3*

## NEWS

*LAUREATE, continued from page 1*

keeps us inspired, reflecting, playful, and most of all in a deep relationship with ourselves, each other and with the world at large? Poetry cannot do it all, of course – however, poetry is the flute that moves us toward the new horizons.

**Can you name some former U.S. Poets Laureate whom you have admired?**

I admire them all. Each one paved the way for me and most of all, each one catapulted poetry – its inner songs, outward verbal murals, mind’s breath-rhythms, experimental texts and the fire-orbs from the heart –to new levels; they showed us that dreamy, serious, and hilarious, and all-in-one human outpouring is central to our existence. How beautiful. Phil Levine was a solid friend, mentor and colleague – I miss him.

**You recently came to the Library for your Poet Laureate orientation. What were your impressions?**

Flabbergasting! Incredible! In true awe. I noticed that the people here – in all the almost-magical departments – are most kind and soulfully dedicated to their work. It is the work of voices and human beings across time into the present with a nudge toward the future. Each person moved me. Each one of their projects made me want to jump up with a pen and write. I cannot wait to come back and visit once again – and the archives. The library is a must for each and every one – it has something that you love but that you do not know exists in true form. Thank you, Dr. Billington, Rob Casper and everyone! I am still electrified.

**What do you hope to accomplish as the U.S. Poet Laureate?**

Human interaction, total expression, experimental formats, online surprises. Think of an infinite piñata. What does it mean for you to be the first Hispanic U.S. Poet Laureate? It’s too early to know the answer. Once again, I am very humbled. Perhaps it means that it is possible that all of our stories, generation after generation, all of our treks and migrant lives, family



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2015 Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera.

after family – like mine and so many others - can be put on online and on-book for all to see and listen to – because it is good, because it is a brilliant, a tall wave that can stay tall and brilliant for all. Poetry words can be the garment of sunlight. I think of my little mother who loved to recite poems dancing in our one-room trailer on the farmworker roads of the ’50s.

**You’re the first Poet Laureate whose first reading will be from a children’s book. What do you think is the relationship between poetry and children’s literature?**

I keep on being the first one – why? Just kidding. You know, I want to read from my new young – adult book, Por-

traits of Hispanic American Heroes (Raúl Colón’s art is mesmerizing). So many things were challenging – choosing 20, finding in-depth research on each one and figuring out the inner fire of each person, for example. There were many connections and revelations. The women were so courageous; many a time they had to go it alone against family and partner restrictions and repercussions – and yet, they were stellar. It is a book that cornered me. How do I write it? I asked myself, week after week, month after month. It deserves a little light under the sun. All these quandaries are similar to what happens with writing poems. By the way, some of my new poems are going to insist that I read them – the feeling already is in my bones. ♦

### Men Living Well

In observance of men’s health month, the Library of Congress Professional Association and the Health Services Office on June 16 will present “Men Living Well: Healthy Lifestyles,” a panel discussion by men for men about their action plans for living well.

The event takes place at noon in the Madison Café multipurpose room.

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