



Presidential State Funerals: Past Practices and Security Considerations

Updated December 3, 2018

On November 30, 2018, former President George H.W. Bush died. In the tradition of past presidential deaths, President Bush will receive a state funeral (designated as a National Special Security Event), which includes several ceremonial events in Washington, DC, prior to his burial at the [George H.W. Bush Presidential Library Center](#) at [Texas A&M University](#) in College Station, TX. The state funeral process is carried out by the [Joint Task Force-National Capital Region](#), a division of the [Military District of Washington \(MDW\)](#). The official schedule for President Bush's state funeral is available from [MDW's website](#).

Presidential State Funerals

According to the [MDW](#), a state funeral is “a national tribute which is traditionally reserved for a head of state” and is conducted “on behalf of all persons who hold, or have held, the office of president....” In total, [nine Presidents](#) (not including President George H.W. Bush) have been honored with a state funeral. Prior to President Bush's death, the last state funeral occurred for [President Gerald Ford](#).

For more resources on presidential funerals, see CRS Report R45121, *Presidential Funerals and Burials: Selected Resources*, by Maria Kreiser and Brent W. Mast.

Presidential Proclamation

To initiate a state funeral, the President traditionally issues a proclamation to announce the former President's death, authorize the MDW to begin the state funeral process, order flags to fly at half-staff, and declare a national day of mourning. [President Trump's proclamation](#) was issued on December 1, 2018.

Military Honors

As part of a state funeral, former Presidents are afforded [military honors](#), which include

- a military escort for the former President's immediate family,

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- a guard of honor,
- armed forces body bearers to carry the casket,
- military clergy to assist and escort the President's family and family clergy,
- a flag draped casket,
- a military flyover with the missing man formation,
- a caisson to carry the President's casket,
- a caparisoned (riderless) horse,
- a 21-gun salute,
- the firing of three volleys over the President's grave, and
- military musical honors.

Lying in State in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda

A total of 11 Presidents have lain in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda—Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, Taft, Harding, Kennedy, Hoover, Eisenhower, Reagan, and Ford. Presidents Nixon, Truman, and Franklin D. Roosevelt were honored with state funerals but did not lie in state in the Capitol.

Since the U.S. Capitol Rotunda is jointly controlled by the House of Representatives and the Senate, the use of the Rotunda often involves a concurrent resolution, agreed to by both the House and Senate, to authorize an individual lying in state. For example, S.Con.Res. 115 (108th Congress) authorized the use of the Rotunda for President Ronald Reagan to lie in state June 9-11, 2004. **Figure 1** shows President Ford lying in state in the Rotunda following his death in 2006.

Figure 1. President Gerald R. Ford Lying in State in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda

December 30, 2006 to January 2, 2007



Source: Smithsonian Institution, "In Memoriam: President Gerald R. Ford (1913-2006)," at <http://www.americanhistory.si.edu/news/ford.htm>.

For more information on the use of the Capitol Rotunda, see CRS Report RL34619, *Use of the Capitol Rotunda, Capitol Grounds, and Emancipation Hall: Concurrent Resolutions, 101st to 115th Congress*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Memorial Service and Burial

Following the President's lying in state in the Rotunda, the President's body is traditionally moved to the [National Cathedral](#) for a memorial service. Since Congress approved the National Cathedral's charter in 1893, it "has been the location of funeral and memorial services for nearly all of the 21 U.S. Presidents" who have served during that time. **Figure 2** shows the interior of the National Cathedral during President Ford's state funeral. Following the memorial service, President Bush will be interred at the George H.W. Bush Presidential Library Center at Texas A&M University next to his wife, former First Lady Barbara Bush, and their daughter, Robin.

Figure 2. State Funeral for President Ford at the National Cathedral



Source: U.S. President (George W. Bush), "Boy Scouts Attending the State Funeral serve for former President Gerald R. Ford at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.," January 2007, at https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2007/01/images/20070102_v010207db-0382-515h.html.

Security Considerations

Presidential state funerals are National Special Security Events (NSSEs). [P.L. 106-544](#) designated the U.S. Secret Service (USSS) as the lead federal agency responsible for coordinating, planning, exercising, and implementing security for NSSEs. Prior to the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) in January 2003, the President determined what events of national significance were designated as NSSEs. Since then, the DHS Secretary—as the President's representative—has had the responsibility to designate NSSEs. NSSE designation factors include

- anticipated attendance by U.S. officials and foreign dignitaries,
- size of the event, and
- significance of the event.

When an event is designated an NSSE, USSS becomes the lead federal agency in developing, exercising, and implementing security operations. The USSS's Dignitary Protective Division (DPD) is responsible for NSSE planning and coordination. Some of the coordination includes advance planning and liaison for venue and air space security, training, communications, and security credentialing. Additionally, DPD coordinates and conducts liaisons with other federal, state, and local law enforcement entities.

NSSE operational plans include the use of physical infrastructure security fencing, barricades, special access accreditation badges, K-9 teams, and other security technologies. To ensure consequence management, DHS pre-positions Domestic Emergency Support Teams, Urban Search and Rescue Teams, National Emergency Response Teams, Nuclear Incident Response Teams, and the Strategic National Stockpile and Mobile Emergency Response System. Specific teams and groupings of teams are designed for each event based on coordination with other federal entities, state and local jurisdictions, available local resources, and mutual aid agreements.

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