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# National Special Security Events: Fact Sheet

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## Introduction

Major federal government or public events that are considered to be nationally significant may be designated by the President—or his representative, the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS)—as National Special Security Events (NSSE). 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. The January 20, 2021, inauguration of President-elect Joseph R. Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala D. Harris has been designated an NSSE. The joint session of Congress that met at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, to open, certify, and count the November 2020 presidential election electoral votes was not designated an NSSE.

## Legislative Authority and Presidential Directives

On May 22, 1998, President William J. Clinton issued Presidential Decision Directive 62 (PDD 62)—Protection Against Unconventional Threats to the Homeland and Americans Overseas.<sup>1</sup> PDD 62 established a framework for federal department and agency counterterrorism programs, which addressed terrorist apprehension and prosecution, increased transportation security, enhanced emergency response, and enhanced cybersecurity. PDD 62 also designated specific federal departments and agencies as the lead agencies in the event of terrorist attacks.<sup>2</sup> USSS was designated as the lead agency with the leadership role in the planning, implementation, and coordination of operational security for events of national significance—as designated by the President.<sup>3</sup> Other lead agencies for counterterrorism activities included the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Health and Human Services.

On December 19, 2000, Congress enacted P.L. 106-544, the Presidential Threat Protection Act of 2000, and authorized the USSS—when directed by the President—to plan, coordinate, and implement security operations at special events of national significance.<sup>4</sup> These special events are designated National Special Security Events (NSSEs). Some events categorized as NSSEs include the following:

- presidential inaugurations,
- major international summits held in the United States,
- major sporting events, and
- presidential nominating conventions.

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<sup>1</sup> PDD 62 was superseded by a classified appendix to Annex II of National Security Presidential Directive 46/Homeland Security Presidential Directive 15, *U.S. Strategy and Policy in the War on Terror*, on March 6, 2006. The appendix maintains USSS responsibility in planning, coordinating, and implementing security operations at NSSEs.

<sup>2</sup> Presidential Decision Directive 62 is classified. The White House issued a fact sheet abstract about it, and the Federation of American Scientists has posted an “unclassified abstract” said to be “derived from” PDD 62, available at <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd-62.htm>, October 25, 2007.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Secret Service, Office of Legislative Affairs, “National Special Security Events: Meeting the Counter-Terrorism Challenge” (Washington: 2006), p. 1. This document is available to congressional clients by contacting the U.S. Secret Service’s Office of Legislative Affairs.

<sup>4</sup> P.L. 106-544, Sec. 3; 114 Stat. 2716.

## NSSE Designation

Prior to the establishment of DHS in January 2003, the President determined what events of national significance were designated as NSSEs. Since the establishment of the department, the DHS Secretary—as the President’s representative—has had the responsibility to designate NSSEs. NSSE designation factors include the following:

- anticipated attendance by U.S. officials and foreign dignitaries;<sup>5</sup>
- size of the event;<sup>6</sup> and
- significance of the event.<sup>7</sup>

Recent past NSSEs include President Donald Trump’s 2017 inauguration and the Republican and Democratic presidential candidate nominating conventions in 2020.<sup>8</sup>

## NSSE Security Operations

When an event is designated an NSSE, USSS becomes the lead federal agency in developing, exercising, and implementing security operations. The goal of these security operations is to “develop and implement a seamless security plan that will create a safe and secure environment for the general public, event participants, Secret Service protectees, and other dignitaries.”<sup>9</sup>

The USSS’s Dignitary Protective Division (DPD) is responsible for NSSE planning and coordinates with other USSS headquarters and field offices. Some of the coordination includes advance planning and liaison for venue and air space security, training, communications, and security credentialing.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, DPD coordinates and conducts liaisons with other federal, state, and local agencies—primarily law enforcement entities.

NSSE security is planned, exercised, and implemented through a unified command model that is comprised of representatives of participating federal, state, and local agencies with NSSE responsibilities. During the NSSE’s planning phase, each participating agency is tasked according to their expertise or jurisdictional responsibility. USSS states that, “with the support of hundreds of federal, state, and local law enforcement and public safety organizations, each of these events has successfully concluded without any major incidents.”<sup>11</sup>

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

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<sup>5</sup> Events attended by U.S. Government officials and foreign dignitaries may require federal interest in ensuring that the event is executed without incident and that sufficient resources are available in case of an incident.

<sup>6</sup> A large number of attendees and participants increases security requirements. Additionally, larger events could possibly increase terrorist intentions of attempting to attack the event.

<sup>7</sup> Some events have historical, political, and symbolic significance that may heighten the possibility of terrorist attacks, <http://www.secretservice.gov/nsse.shtml>.

<sup>8</sup> USSS security operations were of a smaller scale in 2020 due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the Democratic and Republican nominating conventions.

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, U.S. Secret Service, Office of Legislative Affairs, “National Special Security Events: Meeting the Counter-Terrorism Challenge” (Washington: 2006), p. 1. This document is available to congressional clients by contacting the U.S. Secret Service’s Office of Legislative Affairs.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Search and Rescue Teams, National Emergency Response Teams, Nuclear Incident Response Teams, and assets from 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.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, USSS sponsors training seminars for command-level federal, state, and local law enforcement and public safety officials to provide principles for managing security at major events and strategies for reducing vulnerabilities related to terrorism. The seminars also discuss key strategies and lessons learned from past NSSEs.<sup>13</sup>

## NSSE Funding

Even though NSSEs have been designated since 1998, Congress has only appropriated funding specifically for NSSEs since FY2006. The following table provides the past eight fiscal year amounts appropriated for NSSEs since FY2013.

**Table I. NSSE Appropriations, FY2013-FY2020**  
(dollars in millions)

Fiscal Year	Appropriation
2013	4
2014	5
2015	5
2016	5
2017	5
2018	5
2019	5
2020	5

**Source:** CRS analysis of enacted FY2013-FY2020 DHS appropriations.

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<sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Office of the Press Secretary, “National Special Security Events Fact Sheet,” July 9, 2003.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

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