

January 6, 2025

The Presidential Inaugural Parade: Past Practices and Congressional Considerations

Every four years, following the swearing-in ceremony, inaugural address, and congressional luncheon at the U.S. Capitol, the newly sworn in President traditionally travels to the White House and observes the inaugural parade from a reviewing stand. The next inaugural parade is scheduled to occur on January 20, 2025. **Figure 1** shows President George H. W. Bush watching the 1989 inaugural parade.

Figure 1. President George H. W. Bush Reviewing the Inaugural Parade, 1989



Source: Library of Congress, “Presidential Reviewing Stand at the Inaugural Parade for President George H.W. Bush on January 20, 1989, Washington, DC.”

Inaugural Parade Past Practices

The inaugural parade has changed over the course of American history. The first inaugural parade appears to have occurred in 1789 for George Washington’s inauguration in New York, when the President-elect was escorted to Federal Hall (then the capitol of the United States) by “Grand Marshall Colonel Morgan Lewis and a military contingent of 500 men.”

When the capital moved to Washington, DC, parades appear to have initially been less formal affairs, and there is not consensus about which inauguration might have had the first parade in the District of Columbia. For example, some credit the first parade-like activity to President Thomas Jefferson’s second inauguration. In 1805, after taking the oath of office, President Jefferson, “rode on horseback from the Capitol to the President’s House (the name then used for the White House) amid music and a spontaneous gathering.”

Others credit the first parade-like activities to President James Madison’s first inauguration in 1809, when he was “escorted to the Capitol” by musicians. Still others note that President James Monroe’s first inauguration in 1817 could be the first. For President Monroe’s inauguration, citizens followed the President-elect and Vice President-elect to the

Capitol Building where he delivered an inaugural address outdoors.

With the exception of 1789 for President Washington and 1805 for President Jefferson, each parade prior to the 1841 inauguration of William Henry Harrison appears to have occurred to escort the President to the Capitol for the swearing-in ceremony. In 1841, the parade occurred after the swearing-in ceremony, when a committee of local Whig Party organizations organized a parade to accompany the President from the Capitol to an open house at the White House.

Over the years, the inaugural parade has experienced many firsts. **Table 1** lists selected inaugural parade firsts.

Table 1. Selected Inaugural Parade Firsts

Year	President	First
1837	Martin Van Buren	Parade floats
1841	William Henry Harrison	Parade planning committee
1865	Abraham Lincoln	African Americans participated
1881	James Garfield	Review of procession from a stand at the White House
1909	William Howard Taft	Automobile
1917	Woodrow Wilson	Women participated
1921	Warren G. Harding	President rode in an automobile
1965	Lyndon B. Johnson	Bullet-proofed, closed limousine

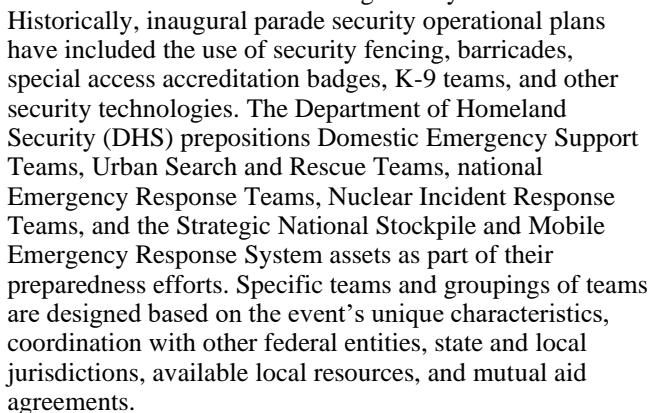
Source: Architect of the Capitol, “Inauguration at the U.S. Capitol”; U.S. President (Clinton), “Inaugural Traditions,” *The Inauguration in Presidential History*; and Library of Congress, “The Inaugural Site.”

Inaugural Parade Administration

In modern times, the inaugural parade is traditionally organized by the military’s Joint Task Force-National Capital Region (JTF-NCR) on behalf of the Presidential Inaugural Committee (PIC). The Department of Defense established the predecessor to the JTF-NCR, the Armed Forces Inaugural Committee (AFIC), for President Dwight D. Eisenhower’s first inauguration in 1953. The AFIC was renamed as the JTF-NCR in 2003.

The January 20, 2025, presidential inauguration is a National Special Security Events (NSSE). NSSEs are nationally or internationally significant events that typically involve either a large number of attendees or a large number of the public, and are attended by U.S. officials and foreign dignitaries. The U.S. Secret Service (USSS), a component of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), was designated as the lead federal agency responsible for coordinating, planning, exercising, and implementing security for NSSEs by P.L. 106-544. Every inauguration since President George W. Bush's first inauguration on January 20, 2001, has been designated an NSSE.

Due to the evolution of threats to national security and the security of senior U.S. officials, specific security operations for NSSEs like an inaugural parade cannot be detailed publicly. However, some basic security operational information about such events is generally known.



Additionally, USSS sponsors training seminars for command-level federal, state, and local law enforcement and public safety officials to provide principles for managing major event security and strategies for reducing vulnerabilities related to terrorism. The seminars also discuss key strategies and lessons learned from past NSSEs.

One ongoing issue associated with NSSEs, such as inaugurations and inaugural parades, is how states and localities fund their assistance to NSSE operations. Currently, the USSS does not have a process for reimbursing state, local, tribal, and territorial (SLTT) partners for their contributions to securing NSSEs.

For more information on the inauguration, see CRS In Focus IF11710, *Inauguration Security and Operations*, by Shawn Reese, Jacob R. Straus, and Christina Miracle Finch; CRS In Focus IF11688, *Inaugural Tickets: Past Practices and Considerations for 2025*, by Jacob R. Straus, and CRS Report R42603, *Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies: History, Membership, and Inaugural Activities*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Jacob R. Straus, Specialist on the Congress
Shawn Reese, Analyst in Emergency Management and
Homeland Security Policy

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Congressional offices historically have not had a role in the distribution of inaugural parade tickets. In the past, access to ticketed areas along the inaugural parade route has been distributed through the PIC. Information on the distribution of inaugural parade tickets is included in information on the Trump-Vance PIC website: <https://t47inaugural.com/tickets>.

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