

Presidential State Funerals: Past Practices and Current Considerations

January 6, 2025

On December 29, 2024, former President James Earl “Jimmy” Carter, Jr. died. In the tradition of past presidential deaths, President Carter [will receive a state funeral](#) (designated as a [National Special Security Event](#) [NSSE]), which includes several ceremonial events in Washington, DC, prior to his burial in [Plains, GA](#). The state funeral process is carried out by the [Joint Task Force-National Capital Region](#), a division of the [Military District of Washington](#) (JTF-MDW). The official schedule for President Carter’s state funeral is available from [MDW’s website](#).

Presidential State Funerals

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.” Including President Carter, [11 Presidents](#) have been honored with a state funeral. Prior to President Carter’s death, the last state funeral occurred for [President George H. W. Bush](#).

State funerals are traditionally initiated by a presidential proclamation to announce the former President’s death, authorize the JTF-MDW to begin the state funeral process, order flags to fly at half-staff, and declare a National Day of Mourning. For President Carter’s state funeral, President Joseph Biden [issued a proclamation on December 29, 2024](#). The National Day of Mourning for President Carter will be held on January 9, 2025.

A state funeral often includes three traditional elements:

- [military honors](#) (e.g., a military escort, a guard of honor, Armed Forces body bearers to carry the casket, military clergy assistance, 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, firing of three volleys over the former President’s grave, and military musical honors);
- [lying in state](#) in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda (see “Use of the U.S. Capitol Rotunda” below). Not including President Carter, a total of [12 Presidents have lain in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda](#)—Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, Harding, Taft, Kennedy, Hoover,

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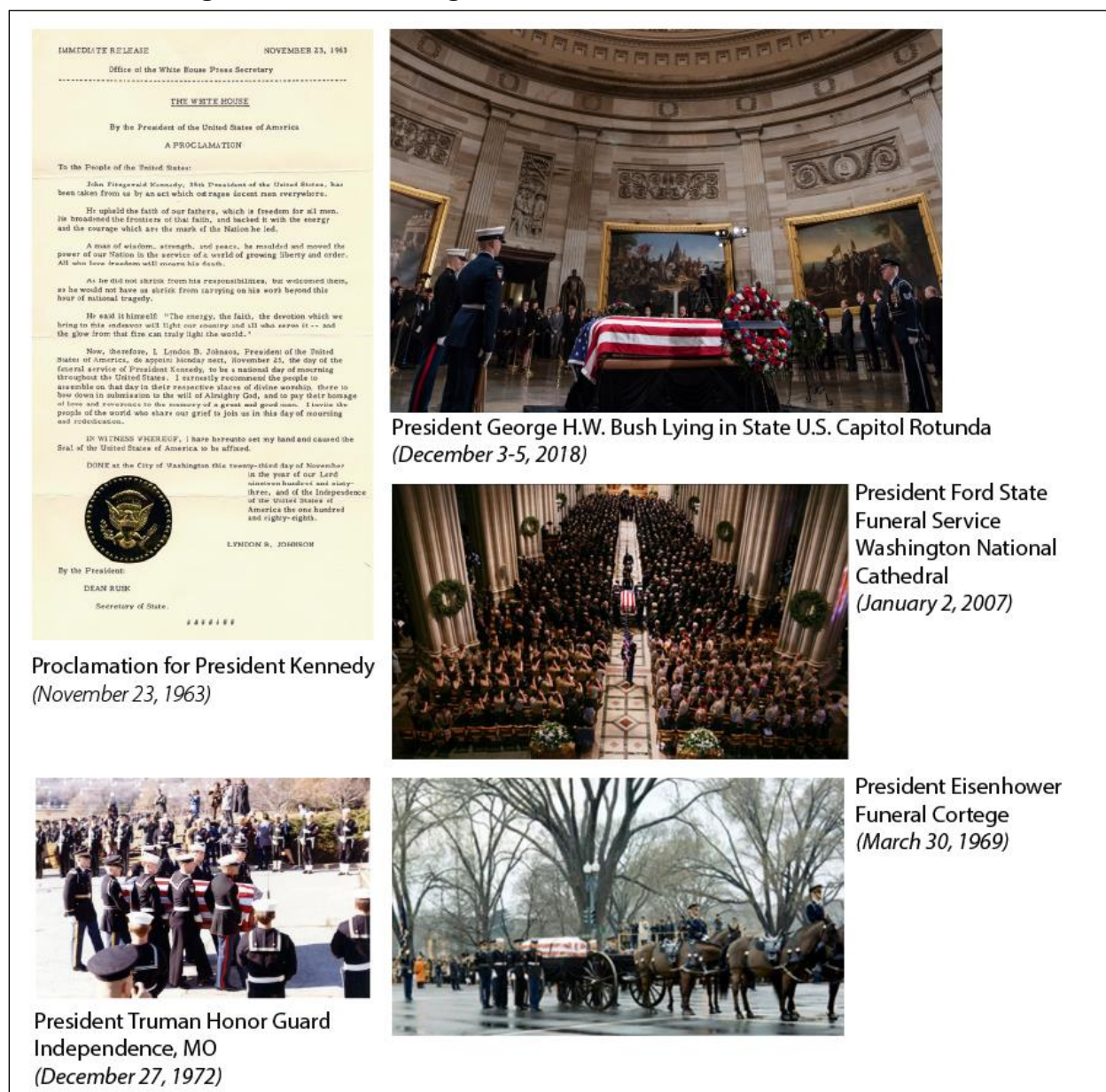
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Eisenhower, Johnson, Reagan, Ford, and George H. W. Bush. Presidents Nixon, Truman, and Franklin D. Roosevelt were honored with state funerals but did not lie in state in the Capitol; and

- a memorial service (often at the [National Cathedral](#) in Washington, DC) and burial service. **Figure 1** shows selected images of aspects of state funeral honors for past Presidents.

Figure 1. Selected Images of Presidential State Funerals Honors



Source: Proclamation (President Kennedy): The Gilder Herman Institute of American History, “[Lyndon B. Johnson Proclaims a National Day of Mourning for JFK, 1963](#),” November 23, 1963; **Lying in State (President George H. W. Bush):** House of Representatives, “[President George H. W. Bush Lying in State](#)”; **Funeral Service (President Ford):** U.S. President (George W. Bush), “[Boy Scouts Attending the State Funeral service for former President Gerald R. Ford at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C.](#),” January 2007; **Funeral Cortege (President Eisenhower):** Dwight D.

Eisenhower Memorial Library, Museum & Boyhood Home, "[Eisenhower Funeral Photographs](#)," March 30, 1969; and **Honor Guard (President Truman)**: Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, "[Honor Guard Carrying Former President Harry S. Truman's Casket](#)," December 27, 1972.

Notes: 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 118th Congresses*, by Jacob R. Straus. For more resources on presidential funerals, see CRS Report R45121, *Presidential Funerals and Burials: Selected Resources*.

Considerations for Congress

Security

President Carter's state funeral will be a NSSE due to the anticipated attendance of current and former Presidents. [P.L. 106-544](#) designated the U.S. Secret Service as the lead federal agency responsible for coordinating, planning, exercising, and implementing security for NSSEs. Designation factors include

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

Past presidential state funeral security operations included the use of physical infrastructure security fencing, barricades, special access accreditation badges, K-9 teams, and other security technologies. For more information on presidential security and NSSEs, see CRS Report RS22754, *National Special Security Events*, by Shawn Reese.

Use of the U.S. Capitol Rotunda

Historically, Presidents lie in state in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. Since the 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. For example, in the 119th Congress (2025-2026), the Senate and the House agreed to S.Con.Res. 3, to authorize the use of the Rotunda for President Carter to lie in state January 7-9, 2025. For more information about the use of the Rotunda, see CRS Report RL34619, *Use of the Capitol Rotunda, Capitol Grounds, and Emancipation Hall: Concurrent Resolutions, 101st to 118th Congresses*, by Jacob R. Straus.

Congressional Attendance

Members of Congress often wish to pay their respects when a President lies in state. Historically, Members of Congress have been afforded several opportunities to do so, including attending the arrival ceremony (when the President's casket arrives at the U.S. Capitol), the public viewing, and the [funeral service](#) at Washington National Cathedral (if the family chooses to hold a service there). To guide Members in their attendance at state funeral-related events, congressional leadership (often through the Sergeant at Arms) has issued guidance on attending the arrival ceremony in the Rotunda, the lying in state, and the funeral service. This guidance may also include instructions for congressional staff members wishing to attend the public viewing. On January 2, 2025, the Sergeant at Arms [issued guidance](#) to Members of Congress for President Carter's arrangements.

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