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State Funerals

Have all deceased U.S. presidents had state funerals? What is President Reagan's funeral going to be like?

Our nation's capital is preparing for its first presidential funeral since 1973, when Lyndon Johnson died and the former president lay in state under the Capitol dome -- our civic temple to democracy. According to the Senate historian, only 28 individuals have lain in state since the U.S. Capitol Rotunda was built in 1824.

Ronald Wilson Reagan will be the 10th president to lie in state. Other presidents who have lain in state are:

- Abraham Lincoln (1865)
- James A. Garfield (1881)
- William McKinley (1901)
- Warren G. Harding (1923)
- William Howard Taft (1930)
- John F. Kennedy (1963)
- Herbert Hoover (1964)
- Dwight D. Eisenhower (1969)
- Lyndon B. Johnson (1973)



Richard Nixon died in 1994, but he did not want a funeral in Washington, DC. His service and interment took place at his boyhood home in Yorba Linda, California, which is also the site of the Nixon Presidential Library and Museum.

LBJ was the last president to have lain in state in the Capitol Rotunda; that was 31 years ago. Ike was the last president to have a funeral service at the Washington National Cathedral; that was 35 years ago.

To honor President Reagan on his final journey, there are a number of events scheduled over the week of June 7:

MONDAY, JUNE 7

- During the evening, the former president's body is to be transferred from the funeral home in Santa Monica, to the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California. The mahogany, flag-draped casket (which remains closed) is to be placed in the lobby.

TUESDAY, JUNE 8

- A military band plays "Hail to the Chief."
- The Rev. Michael Wenning leads the family in a brief prayer service that includes the 23rd Psalm and the Lord's Prayer.
- Public viewing until 6:00 p.m.

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 9

- At 9:30 a.m., Mrs. Reagan and the family leave with the coffin from the Naval Air Station at Point Mugu, California.
- 5:00 p.m., arrival at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington, DC.
- 6:00 p.m., formal funeral procession from Andrews to the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. At 16th Street and Constitution Avenue, near the White House, the president's coffin will be transferred from the hearse to the horse-drawn caisson.
- 6:50 p.m., the coffin arrives at the Capitol Rotunda and is placed on the catafalque, which is the same rough pine board bier on which President Lincoln's remains reposed.
- 7:00 p.m., state funeral ceremony in the Rotunda, followed by a closed-casket viewing for national and international leaders.
- 8:30 p.m., the former president's body lies in state for public viewing throughout the night.

THURSDAY, JUNE 10

President Reagan's body lies in state in a closed casket, and public viewing continues into the night.

FRIDAY, JUNE 11 -- NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING

- 10:30 a.m., departure ceremony and transportation from the U.S. Capitol Rotunda to the Washington National Cathedral.
- 11:30 a.m., funeral service, closed to the public.
- 1:15 p.m., departure from the Cathedral to Andrews Air Force Base.
- 2:45 p.m., departure from Andrews to Naval Air Station, Point Mugu, California.
- 4:45 p.m. (Pacific time), arrival at Point Mugu.
- 6:00 p.m., arrival at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley.
- Sunset burial service on the grounds of the Library.

REGARDING THE FUNERAL AT THE WASHINGTON NATIONAL CATHEDRAL....

How many people does it take to prepare for the funeral?
Some 200 Cathedral staff are working on the funeral preparations.

Who will lead the funeral service?

- The Rev. John C. Danforth, a former U.S. senator from Missouri and an ordained Episcopal priest. (He was also recently nominated to be ambassador to the United Nations.)

Who will be offering tributes to Ronald Reagan?

- President George W. Bush
- Former President George H. W. Bush
- Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher
- Former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney

Who is invited to the funeral besides family and close friends?

The Hauenstein Center has learned from a former Reagan administration official that the guest list was basically finalized three years ago. Invited guests include:

- all four former U.S. presidents (Clinton, Bush, Carter, Ford)
- the chief justice and justices of the U.S. Supreme Court
- all U.S. senators and representatives
- the joint chiefs of staff
- the diplomatic corps
- governors
- foreign leaders and dignitaries
- leading religious figures from a variety of faiths.

The public will not be able to attend the funeral.

Who will get the best seats?

- family
- former presidents
- kings and queens
- prime ministers.

Who are some of the distinguished members of the audience?

- Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher

- Former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Who are the honorary pall bearers?

- Michael K. Deaver (former Reagan aide)
- Fred J. Ryan (former Reagan aide)
- John E. Hutton (former White House physician)
- Merv Griffin (television personality)
- Charles Z. Wick (former head of U.S.I.A.)

What kind of service will it be?

By law, every former president has the right to a state funeral. The family has great latitude in shaping the service. In President Reagan's case, the religious service will be structured around the burial rite of the Episcopal Church. Many of the details and the protocol will come from the military's "State Funeral Plan." State funerals like this one typically follow military traditions developed in the nineteenth century.

What will the music be?

- The National Cathedral's three choirs -- the men's, boys', and girls' -- will be singing hymns.
- The final hymn will be the "Ode to Joy."
- The choir director is Michael McCarthy, who directed the choral music in such movies as "Lord of the Rings" and "Harry Potter."

Why is the National Cathedral the site of the funeral?

The Washington National Cathedral is an Episcopal church that seats up to 4,000 people. It was completed on September 29, 1990. It is the second largest cathedral in the U.S., and the sixth largest cathedral in the world. It sits majestically atop the highest hill in Washington, DC, called Mount St. Alban. It is said that the foundation of the cathedral is at a higher elevation than the top of the Washington Monument down on the Mall. The official guide to the cathedral says: "Its title, Washington National Cathedral, attests to its role as a national church, one where people of all religions can come together to celebrate the events that shape a nation."* One former president is buried there, Woodrow Wilson, and there are prominent memorials in the nave to George Washington and Abraham Lincoln. President Reagan would also approve of the fact that there is a memorial to one of the greatest twentieth-century champions of tax cuts, former Treasury Secretary Andrew Mellon.

What are the security arrangements?

- There will be 5,000 police on duty during the funeral.
- Sharpshooters will be stationed on rooftops as the funeral parade moves through Washington on Wednesday evening and Friday.
- Capitol police will be working 12-hour shifts.
- Black Hawk helicopters will be flying overhead and U.S. Coast Guard boats will be patrolling the Potomac.

Other interesting fact:

- 100,000 mourners are expected to pay their respects at the Capitol Rotunda.

(Question from Claire C. of McLean, Virginia)