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Inauguration Day: Fact Sheet

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The House of Representatives and Senate Explained

Congressional Procedure

**A Practical Guide to the Legislative
Process in the U.S. Congress**

Richard A. Arenberg

Foreword by Alan S. Frumin

 **TheCapitolNet**

Introduction

Inauguration Day is a quadrennial legal holiday in the District of Columbia and neighboring parts of Maryland and Virginia, observed when the President and the Vice President are sworn into office on January 20. If January 20 falls on a Sunday, Inauguration Day is observed on January 21. It will next occur on Monday, January 20, 2025.

This fact sheet assists congressional offices with work related to the Inauguration Day holiday. It contains historical information, sample speeches and remarks from the *Congressional Record*, presidential proclamations and addresses, and selected historical and cultural resources. The fact sheet does not cover inaugural festivities in detail or related issues such as attendance, cost, or security.

History

Article II, Section 1, clause 8 of the Constitution requires the President to take an oath of office. Public events, such as the delivering of an inaugural address, have historically accompanied this formality since George Washington's first inauguration on April 30, 1789.

After the Constitution was ratified in 1788, the Continental Congress set "the first Wednesday in March next" as the new federal government's start date.¹ That date was March 4, 1789. George Washington's first inauguration was postponed, however, until April 30, 1789, because a quorum of Congress was not present to count electoral votes.²

In the 2nd Congress, March 4 was codified as Inauguration Day with the enactment of the Succession Act of 1792.³ The date was incorporated into the Constitution by the Twelfth Amendment, ratified in 1804. The Twentieth Amendment, ratified in 1933, moved the start date of the presidential term to noon on January 20 starting in 1937.

In 1957, P.L. 85-1 established Inauguration Day as a federal holiday in the Washington, DC, metropolitan area.⁴ In arguing to give federal workers the day off for the inauguration, Representative Edward H. Rees said, "With the intensive and exciting activities of Inauguration Day, it would be most difficult for employees to get to and from work in this area or to perform satisfactorily their functions once at their desks."⁵

The 1957 law specifies that the Inauguration Day holiday is "the 20th day of January in every fourth year" starting in 1957. If January 20 falls on a Sunday, Inauguration Day moves to "the next succeeding day selected for the public observance of the inauguration." Starting in 1877,

¹ *Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, vol. 34 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1937), p. 523.

² *The Debates and Proceedings in the Congress of the United States*, vol. 1 (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1834), pp. 15-18, 99-102.

³ 1 Stat. 239.

⁴ For more information on federal holidays, see CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus. The Washington, DC, metropolitan area was defined as the District of Columbia; Montgomery and Prince George's counties in Maryland; Arlington and Fairfax counties in Virginia; and the cities of Alexandria and Falls Church in Virginia.

⁵ Rep. Edward H. Rees, "Making Inauguration Day a Legal Holiday in Metropolitan Area of District of Columbia," House debate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 103, part 1 (January 7, 1957), p. 303.

Presidents whose terms started on a Sunday were sworn in privately ahead of a public ceremony on Monday.⁶

Federal workers in the Washington, DC, area do not get an additional day off if Inauguration Day falls on a Saturday, as in 2001, or if Inauguration Day falls on the same day as the Birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, as will happen in 2025 and previously occurred in 1997 and 2013.

Several bills were introduced in the 95th and 96th Congresses (1977-1980) to make Inauguration Day a nationwide public holiday, but no further action was taken on any of those proposals.⁷

The inaugural ceremony, traditionally held at the U.S. Capitol, has been organized since 1901 by the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies.⁸ Recent inaugurations have featured a luncheon; a parade; and one or more inaugural balls. Public ceremonies were scaled back in some years, including reportedly for the poor health of the President (Andrew Jackson, 1833),⁹ reportedly in light of wartime austerity and security (Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1945),¹⁰ due to bad weather (Ronald Reagan, 1985),¹¹ or due to fears of civil unrest¹² and public health concerns¹³ (Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 2021). Public festivities have not historically accompanied the swearing-in of the Vice President upon the President's death or resignation.

Legislation

P.L. 85-1—Making Inauguration Day a legal holiday in the metropolitan area of the District of Columbia, and for other purposes (71 Stat. 3; January 11, 1957)

Related CRS Reports

CRS In Focus IF11710, *Inauguration Security and Operations*, by Shawn Reese, Jacob R. Straus, and Christina Miracle Finch

CRS Report R42603, *Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies: History, Membership, and Inaugural Activities*, by Jacob R. Straus

CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus

CRS Report R44648, *Presidential Elections: Vacancies in Major-Party Candidacies and the Position of President-Elect*, by Thomas H. Neale

⁶ Paul F. Boller Jr., *Presidential Inaugurations* (New York: Harcourt Inc., 2001), pp. 23-31.

⁷ H.R. 3906, H.R. 5693, H.R. 1529, H.R. 6925, H.R. 6656, H.R. 7370, and H.R. 7495.

⁸ For more information on the organization of the Inauguration at the Capitol, see CRS Report R42603, *Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies: History, Membership, and Inaugural Activities*, by Jacob R. Straus.

⁹ Louise Durbin, *Inaugural Cavalcade* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1971), p. 41.

¹⁰ Glenn D. Kittler, *Hail to the Chief! The Inauguration Days of Our Presidents* (Philadelphia: Chilton Books, 1965), pp. 191-192.

¹¹ Francis X. Clines, "Reagan Sworn for 2d Term; Inaugural Parade Dropped as Bitter Cold Hits Capital," *The New York Times*, January 21, 1985, p. A1.

¹² Rachel Chason, Jessica Contrera, Emily Davies, and John Woodrow Cox, "A locked-down capital celebrates Biden's inauguration and Trump's departure," *The Washington Post*, January 20, 2021, at https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/dc-celebrates-biden-harris-inauguration/2021/01/20/91ca444c-5aad-11eb-8bcf-3877871c819d_story.html.

¹³ Aishvarya Kavi, "Biden's Inauguration: What You Need to Know," *The New York Times*, January 20, 2021, at <https://www.nytimes.com/article/inauguration-day.html>.

CRS Report R40864, *Presidential Terms and Tenure: Perspectives and Proposals for Change*, by Thomas H. Neale

CRS Insight IN11538, *Presidential Transitions: An Overview*, by L. Elaine Halchin

Sample Congressional Speeches and Recognitions

Senator Chuck Grassley, “59th Inauguration Ceremonies,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 167 (January 20, 2021), p. S66.

Senator Mitch McConnell, “59th Inauguration Ceremonies,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 167 (January 20, 2021), p. S66.

Representative Sheila Jackson Lee, “The 58th Inauguration,” Extension of Remarks, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 163 (January 23, 2017), pp. E79-E80.

Representative Raul M. Grijalva, “Not Attending Inauguration,” remarks in the House, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 163 (January 13, 2017), p. H476.

Senator Richard Durbin, “Inauguration,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, daily edition, vol. 151 (January 20, 2005), pp. S95-S97.

Senator John Warner, “The 1997 Inaugural Ceremonies,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record*, vol. 143 (January 28, 1997), pp. S700-S701.

Presidential Proclamations and Remarks

The new or reelected President traditionally delivers an inaugural address. Most recent inaugurations have also been accompanied by a presidential proclamation.

- President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., “Inaugural Address,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 2021)
- President Joseph R. Biden, Jr., “Proclamation 10140—A National Day of Unity,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 2021)
- President Donald J. Trump, “Inaugural Address,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 2017)
- President Donald J. Trump, “Proclamation 9570—National Day of Patriotic Devotion,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 2017)
- President Barack Obama, “Inaugural Address,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 21, 2013)
- President Barack Obama, “Proclamation 8928—National Day of Hope and Resolve, 2013,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 21, 2013)
- President Barack Obama, “Inaugural Address,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 2009)
- President Barack Obama, “Proclamation 8343—National Day of Renewal and Reconciliation, 2009,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 2009)
- President George W. Bush, “Inaugural Address,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 2005)

- President George W. Bush, “Inaugural Address,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 2001)
- President George W. Bush, “Proclamation 7403—National Day of Prayer and Thanksgiving, 2001,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 2001)
- President William J. Clinton, “Inaugural Address,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 1997)
- President William J. Clinton, “Proclamation 6968—National Day of Hope and Renewal, 1997,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 1997)
- President William J. Clinton, “Inaugural Address,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 1993)
- President William J. Clinton, “Proclamation 6525—National Day of Fellowship and Hope,” *Compilation of Presidential Documents* (January 20, 1993)

Earlier inaugural addresses, going back to 1789, are available through the American Presidency Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara (UCSB).¹⁴

Historical and Cultural Resources

Architect of the Capitol, *Inauguration at the U.S. Capitol*

Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies, *Inaugural Events*

Library of Congress, *U.S. Presidential Inaugurations: “I Do Solemnly Swear ... ” A Resource Guide*

Library of Congress, *Explore Presidential Inaugurations with Library of Congress Primary Sources*

National Archives and Records Administration, *Presidential Elections & Inaugurations*

National Park Service, *Presidential Inauguration*

U.S. House, *Joint Meetings, Joint Sessions, & Inaugurations*

U.S. Senate, *Inaugurations at the U.S. Capitol: Objects from the U.S. Senate Collection*

White House Historical Association, *Presidential Inaugurations*

Author Information

Maya V. Thomas
Reference and Digital Services Librarian

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Ben Leubsdorf originally authored this report.

¹⁴ The American Presidency Project, hosted by the University of California, Santa Barbara, offers browsing and searching of many presidential documents at <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu>.

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