



December 23, 2020

Inauguration Security and Operations

Introduction

Since the 20th Amendment was ratified, the oath of office for President of the United States has been administered every four years at noon on January 20. In 2021, the President- and Vice President-elect are to be officially sworn in at noon on Wednesday, January 20. Planning for the 2021 inauguration is being challenged by the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID- 19) pandemic; adjustments to traditional ceremonies, customs, and practices are being made. This In Focus presents information related to 2021 inauguration security and operations based on past inaugural activities and announced activities to date.

Current Inaugural Plans

Inaugural events, pursuant to public law (36 U.S.C. §501), include “the day on which the Presidential inaugural ceremony is held, the 5 calendar days immediately preceding that day, and the 4 calendar days immediately following that day.” While the swearing-in ceremony is the only constitutionally required event, other events have become part of the inaugural festivities. These typically include an inaugural luncheon, an inaugural parade, and inaugural balls. The swearing-in ceremony is hosted by the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies (JCCIC) and is most commonly held on the West Front steps of the U.S. Capitol. The JCCIC has announced that “due to the global pandemic ... [it] is committed to traditional, inclusive, and safe ceremonies and will continue to monitor the situation and provide information to all Members as it comes available.” On December 16, 2020, the JCCIC announced that “this global pandemic and the rise in COVID-19 cases warranted a difficult decision to limit attendance at the 59th Inaugural Ceremonies to a live audience that resembles a State of the Union.” As such, each Member of Congress is to receive two tickets to the swearing-in ceremony. Commemorative ticket packets that Members can send to constituents are to be made available after the ceremony.

This is not the first case where inauguration plans have had to be adjusted to address unusual circumstances. For example, when January 20 falls on a Sunday, public ceremonies have historically been moved to Monday, January 21, with the President-elect sworn in during a private ceremony at noon on January 20. In 1985, for President Ronald Reagan’s second inauguration, January 20 fell on a Sunday and the public ceremony was scheduled for the West Front of the Capitol the following day. The January 21 ceremony, however, was moved indoors to the Capitol Rotunda because of freezing weather (an estimated 7°F, with a wind chill of -10°F to -20°F at noon, the constitutionally specified time for the beginning of the new presidential term).

Previous Inauguration Operations and Logistics

Presidential inaugurations are public events that are conducted primarily at the U.S. Capitol complex, on the grounds of the National Mall, and in public spaces along Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, for a traditional parade. **Figure 1** shows a map of the 2017 inauguration ceremonies on the West Front of the U.S. Capitol.

Figure 1. 2017 Inauguration Ceremonies Map



Source: U.S. Capitol Police, “Inaugural Ceremonies-Map and Guidance,” press release, January 12, 2017, <https://www.uscp.gov/media-center/press-releases/inaugural-ceremonies-map-and-guidelines>.

A significant portion of American political leadership typically attends presidential inauguration events. Due to safety and security concerns, the inauguration ceremony and surrounding events are designated a National Special Security Event (NSSE). NSSEs are high-profile, and usually public, events that require significant security because of the attendance of U.S. and foreign dignitaries and the event’s public or official nature. The United States Secret Service (USSS) is designated as the primary federal entity responsible for NSSE security.

The USSS, however, is not the only law enforcement or first responder agency that has inauguration security responsibilities. For example in 2017, the United States Capitol Police, the Metropolitan DC Police Department, the U.S. Park Police, the Transportation Security Administration, National Guard units, and other law enforcement and first responder entities assisted the USSS

by providing security as well as logistical and operational support for the swearing-in ceremony and other inaugural events.

In addition to the swearing-in ceremony, the JCCIC historically hosts an inaugural luncheon in National Statuary Hall. Following the swearing-in ceremony and luncheon, the Presidential Inaugural Committee (PIC) and the Joint Task Force-National Capital Region (JTF-NCR) inauguration team traditionally organize an inaugural parade and numerous inaugural balls. The status and schedule of these events is undetermined at this time; all would require special security operations.

Inauguration Security Operations

Even though attendance may be reduced on January 20, 2021, security of the inauguration will still be paramount. 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, according to USSS, is to develop and implement a seamless security plan that will create a safe and secure environment for the public, event participants, Secret Service protectees, and other dignitaries.

Inauguration security operational plans include the use of security fencing, barricades, special access accreditation badges, K-9 teams, and other security technologies. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) pre-positions Domestic Emergency Support Teams, Urban Search and Rescue Teams, national Emergency Response Teams, Nuclear Incident Response Teams, and the Strategic National Stockpile and Mobile Emergency Response System assets as part of their preparedness efforts. Specific teams and groupings of teams are designed based on the event's unique characteristics, coordination with other federal entities, state and local jurisdictions, available local resources, and mutual aid agreements.

For the 2017 inauguration, the USSS Office of Protective Operations/Dignitary Protective Division and the USSS Washington Field Office convened an initial planning meeting with federal, state, and local law enforcement entities as the security perimeter typically includes the vicinity around downtown Washington, DC, and the National Mall. Even though crowd sizes for the 2021 inauguration may be reduced, securing the inauguration remains a regional effort and the same entities convened for security planning for the 2017 inauguration will likely be convened for the 2021 event, including:

- U.S. Capitol Police (USCP);
- Metropolitan Police Department, Washington, DC (MPD);
- U.S. Park Police (USPP);
- Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI);
- Virginia State Police;
- Maryland State Police;

- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Police (WMATA);
- Federal Protective Service (FPS);
- Arlington, VA Police Department;
- Alexandria, VA Police Department;
- Prince George's County, MD Police Department;
- Montgomery County, MD Police Department; and
- U.S. Military District of Washington.

Inauguration Security Funding

Agencies involved in inauguration security often do not receive specific account-level appropriations for inauguration security operations. Instead, inauguration security costs are often included in regular fiscal year planning and budget requests. In recent years, however, Congress has appropriated additional funds to reimburse some local governments and federal agencies for inauguration-related expenses and has provided specific appropriations to the USSS for unanticipated costs related to security operations for NSSEs, which could be used for inauguration-related activities.

One area where Congress has provided specific appropriations to reimburse a local jurisdiction is the District of Columbia. For example, for the 2017 inauguration, Congress appropriated \$19.99 million for emergency planning and security costs in the District of Columbia (P.L. 114-223, §127, 130 Stat. 913). To date, Congress has appropriated \$13 million to the District of Columbia for costs associated with the 2021 inauguration (P.L. 116-159, Div. A, §131, 134 Stat. 716).

Historically, limited appropriations for NSSEs as well as the absence of account-level inauguration security operations appropriations potentially constrains the ability of the USSS or Congress to examine the costs associated with inaugurations generally, and inauguration security operations specifically.

For more information on the Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies (JCCIC), see CRS Report R42603, *Joint Congressional Committee on Inaugural Ceremonies: History, Membership, and Inaugural Activities*, by Jacob R. Straus. For more information on inauguration tickets, see CRS In Focus IF11688, *Inaugural Tickets: Past Practices and Considerations for 2021*, by Jacob R. Straus. For a history of past inauguration security-related issues, see CRS Report R42867, *Inauguration Security: Operations, Appropriations, and Issues for Congress*, by Shawn Reese, Jacob R. Straus, and Christina Miracle Finch.

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