

Presidents' Day / The Office of President

Teacher Information

Presidents' Day

George Washington's birthday (February 22) became a national holiday in the early 19th century. Then, Abraham Lincoln's birthday (February 12), although not a national holiday, began being celebrated in many states. In 1971, Congress changed the Washington's birthday holiday to Presidents' Day to be celebrated on the third Monday of February. This national holiday is meant to honor all of our presidents.

President of the United States is the chief executive officer of the federal government, leader of the executive branch, and the commander-in-chief of the armed forces. The president has the power to make treaties with other nations, with the advice and consent of two-thirds of the Senate. The president also appoints, with Senate consent, diplomatic representatives, Supreme Court judges, and many other officials.

The president and vice president are the only government officials in the United States elected by and representing the entire nation. Although the president shares power with Congress and the judiciary, he or she is the most powerful and important officeholder in the country. The president has no vote in Congress but is the single largest source of legislative proposals that become law. As the principal foreign policy maker, the president of the United States has become the world's most important leader in international affairs.

Term of Office The Constitution of the United States specifies a four-year presidential term. It originally said nothing about how many terms a president could serve, but the precedent established by George Washington limited his successors to two terms. Succession by a vice president after a president's death provided the opportunity to serve more than eight years without strictly violating the two-term rule. No president tried to serve more than eight years in office until Republican Theodore Roosevelt. After filling out three-and-a-half years of the term of President William McKinley following McKinley's assassination in 1901 and then serving four years in his own right (1905-1909), Roosevelt ran unsuccessfully in 1912 for another four years. The need for steady leadership during World War II (1939-1945) made it possible for Democrat Franklin Delano Roosevelt to break the tradition by winning four successive elections between 1932 and 1944. In a reaction against Franklin Roosevelt's extended presidency, in 1951 Congress and state legislatures approved the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution, which limits a president to two elected terms. The amendment also prohibits a person from running for election a second time if he or she has already served more than two years of a term to which someone else had been elected.

Presidential Qualifications and Salary The Constitution requires presidents to be natural-born citizens of the United States who are at least 35 years of age and have

resided in the United States for 14 years. As a tacit statement of America's commitment to democracy and equal opportunity, the Constitution gave any free white male citizen of the country the opportunity to become president. All males gained the right to become president in 1870 when the 15th Amendment to the Constitution gave African-Americans the right to vote. Women were excluded from running for the office until 1920, when the 19th Amendment to the Constitution gave them the right to vote.

The Constitution specifies that presidents receive compensation (salary and benefits) for their work, and Congress sets the specific amount. The salary of presidents cannot be increased or diminished during their term of office. Nor can the president receive additional payments from the federal government or any of the states while in office. The Constitution also disallows presidents and other federal officials from receiving any title of nobility, gift, payment, or official position from a king, prince, or foreign state. All gifts to a president from foreign governments belong to the people of the United States rather than the president.

Congress establishes presidential salaries. Originally, the president earned \$25,000, and this was doubled to \$50,000 in 1873. In 1907, Congress added an annual \$25,000 stipend for expenses connected with the office. The president's salary increased to \$75,000 in 1909 and went up again to \$100,000 in 1949. At that time the expense allowance also increased to \$90,000. In 1969, the salary advanced to \$200,000, with \$100,000 budgeted for travel and another \$50,000 for expenses. Since Congress changes the salary from time to time, the most recent salary must be researched. Because the president's official duties incur far more expenses than the expense budget can cover, agencies of the federal government often assume responsibility for presidential events. The Department of Defense, for example, pays the cost of having a military band perform at White House social functions and ceremonies.

For most of America's history, retired presidents did not receive a pension. In 1958, Congress passed the Former Presidents Act, which gave retired presidents a pension of \$25,000 per year, an office, and a staff. Congress has increased the pension several times. Former presidents now receive a pension that is based on the annual salary of a cabinet secretary, which was \$143,800 in 1998. Former presidents have historically been given a generous allowance for office and staff. Beginning with Democrat Bill Clinton, presidents (or their surviving widows or widowers) will receive funds for an office and staff for four and one-half years after they leave office.

Presidents At A Glance

#	President	Years in Office	Life Dates
1	George Washington	1789 – 1797	1732 – 1799
2	John Adams	1797 – 1801	1735 – 1826
3	Thomas Jefferson	1801 – 1809	1743 – 1826
4	James Madison	1809 – 1817	1751 – 1836
5	James Monroe	1817 – 1825	1758 – 1831
6	John Quincy Adams	1825 – 1829	1767 – 1848
7	Andrew Jackson	1829 – 1837	1767 – 1845
8	Martin Van Buren	1837 – 1841	1782 – 1862
9	William Harrison	1841	1773 – 1841
10	John Tyler	1841 – 1845	1790 – 1862
11	James Polk	1845 – 1849	1795 – 1849
12	Zachary Taylor	1849 – 1850	1784 – 1850
13	Millard Fillmore	1850 – 1853	1800 – 1874
14	Franklin Pierce	1853 – 1857	1804 – 1869
15	James Buchanan	1857 – 1861	1791 – 1868
16	Abraham Lincoln	1861 – 1865	1809 – 1865
17	Andrew Johnson	1865 – 1869	1808 – 1875
18	Ulysses S. Grant	1869 – 1877	1822 – 1885
19	Rutherford B. Hayes	1877 – 1881	1822 – 1893
20	James Garfield	1881	1831 – 1881
21	Chester Arthur	1881 – 1885	1829 – 1886
22	Grover Cleveland	1885 – 1889	1837 – 1908
23	Benjamin Harrison	1889 – 1893	1833 – 1901
24	Grover Cleveland	1893 – 1897	1837 – 1908
25	William McKinley	1897 – 1901	1843 – 1901
26	Theodore Roosevelt	1901 – 1909	1858 – 1919
27	William Howard Taft	1909 – 1913	1857 – 1930

28	Woodrow Wilson	1913 – 1921	1856 – 1924
29	Warren G. Harding	1921 – 1923	1865 – 1923
30	Calvin Coolidge	1923 – 1929	1872 – 1933
31	Herbert Hoover	1929 – 1933	1874 – 1964
32	Franklin Delano Roosevelt	1933 – 1945	1882 – 1945
33	Harry Truman	1945 – 1953	1884 – 1972
34	Dwight D. Eisenhower	1953 – 1961	1890 – 1969
35	John Kennedy	1961 – 1963	1917 – 1963
36	Lyndon Johnson	1963 – 1969	1908 – 1973
37	Richard Nixon	1969 – 1974	1913 – 1994
38	Gerald Ford	1974 – 1977	1913 -
39	Jimmy Carter	1977 – 1981	1924 -
40	Ronald Reagan	1981 – 1989	1911 -
41	George Bush	1989 – 1993	1924 -
42	Bill Clinton	1993 – 2001	1946 -
43	George W. Bush	2001 -	1946 -