

POLITICO

Byrd may lie in state

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Sen. Robert Byrd may join Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy among historic figures who have lain in state in the Capitol Rotunda — an honor bestowed upon only 28 other Americans over the past 160 years.

Senate leaders are likely to make a request for Byrd to lie in state, aides said Monday, but they are still awaiting approval from Byrd's family to go ahead with a formal resolution that would allow Byrd's casket to rest under the dome for a public viewing.

With a career that spanned nearly 58 years and ranked him as the longest-serving member in congressional history, Byrd has likely earned the consideration.

In 2006, Gerald Ford was the most recent political figure to lie in state in the Capitol, and he was preceded by Ronald Reagan, whose casket was visited by thousands over three days in June 2004. The caskets are draped with an American flag, and rest upon the same wooden catafalque — a raised platform — constructed for Lincoln's state funeral.

Presidents James Garfield, William McKinley, Warren G. Harding, William Howard Taft, Herbert Hoover, Dwight Eisenhower and Lyndon B. Johnson were also honored in the political hallowed space.

In 1852, Henry Clay was the first to be honored in the Rotunda after serving five consecutive terms in the House, including service as speaker.

Other big names bestowed the honor include Spanish-American War hero Adm. George Dewey and architect Pierre Charles L'Enfant.

Three nonpolitical figures have lain in honor, which is different from lying in state: civil rights activist Rosa Parks and the U.S. Capitol Police officers, Jacob Joseph Chestnut and John Michael Gibson, who were killed during an attack on the Capitol in 1998.

Typically, a concurrent resolution from both the Senate and the House must be passed granting permission for the Rotunda space to be used, but the process is usually given top priority, according to the Office of the House Historian.

Less than four days after Reagan died on June 5, 2004, both the Senate and the House cleared a resolution, and the former president lay in state June 9-11.

The House is expected to introduce a separate resolution honoring Byrd's service in Congress, and

flags at both the Capitol and White House flew at half-mast today.

In the past, Congress has sometimes granted the honor without issuing a resolution, with authority being granted solely by the House speaker and Senate majority leader. The option is usually used when Congress is out of session or unavailable to vote on the use of the Rotunda.