

Saying Farewell

End-of-session obsequies. A well-established ritual occurs near the end of each biennial session of Congress. Members deliver floor speeches to honor colleagues who will not be returning for the next Congress. For senior members, those remarks extend through many pages of the *Congressional Record* and in some instances are subsequently published as separate black clothbound volumes. In the session's final hours, the two party floor leaders generously praise each other, thank floor and committee staffs for their long hours and tireless effort, and then telephone the president of the United States to inquire whether he has any more business for Congress before its sine die adjournment.

Funerals and memorial services. As a relatively small and highly collegial body, the Senate actively mourns the death of an incumbent member. Today, thanks to improved health care, fewer senators die in office than was the case prior to the mid-1960s. Consequently, there is no longer much need for the elaborate system of Senate funeral rituals that had developed during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. In those earlier times, incumbent senators died at the rate of two or three per year. For senators who died while Congress was in session, the Senate adjourned the following day's proceedings in the late senator's memory, conducted funerals or memorial services in its chamber—with a large floral tribute resting on the member's vacant desk and black crepe covering the chair, sent delegations of senators to accompany the remains back home, and authorized members to wear black armbands around their left arms for thirty days. For those senators who died during an extended adjournment period, the Senate routinely conducted a collective memorial service in its chamber with appropriate prayers and musical tributes.

Today's Senate funeral and memorial practices are solidly rooted in that earlier experience. The Senate still adjourns the day's session in memory of the deceased member, sends large delegations to the funeral—with members departing from and returning to the Capitol on the same day thanks to high-speed air and ground transportation, and sets aside a portion of a day's schedule for memorial tributes. These tributes appear as part of the official record of floor proceedings and many are subsequently collected along with news obituaries and published as a Senate document. The American flag is properly flown at half-staff on the day of death and the following day for all members who die in office.