



WORLD MOURNS DEATH OF FORMER PRESIDENT REAGAN

June 7, 2004

Family members and government officials finalized plans Monday for a week-long series of tributes and services in honor of Ronald Reagan, the 40th president of the United States who died Saturday from Alzheimer's-related complications at the age of 93.

President George W. Bush declared Friday, June 11, a national day of mourning and ordered all non-essential government offices closed on that day in honor of the former president. The New York Stock Exchange and Nasdaq also said they would close Friday in observance of the day of mourning.

"I call on the American people to assemble on that day in their respective places of worship, there to pay homage to the memory of President Reagan," President Bush said in a statement. "I invite the people of the world who share our grief to join us in this solemn observance."

President Bush further ordered U.S. flags to be flown at half-staff for 30 days at all U.S. buildings and installations around the world.

President Reagan's chief of staff, Joanne Drake, said Sunday that "Mrs. Reagan and her family are deeply touched by the outpouring of sympathy from across the country and around the world. ... As you can understand, the family is in deep mourning over the loss of a husband, a father, a grandfather ... and their hero."

The Reagan family held a private memorial service at the Reagan presidential library Monday morning after which the former president's body will lie in repose for public viewing until 6 p.m. Pacific time Tuesday evening.

Political leaders react

A spokesman for the Reagan family said that national and world leaders, including former presidents George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Gerald Ford as well as former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Rev. Billy Graham, had called former first lady Nancy Reagan to offer condolences.

Most political leaders and public figures throughout the world paid tribute to the former president on Sunday and Monday, though some Latin American and Middle Eastern leaders were critical of his administration's foreign policy.

"There is not the least doubt that President Reagan did Nicaragua much harm, caused many deaths. He may not have had much time or inclination to regret the damage he did, but regardless of that we ask God to take pity on his soul," said Miguel D'Escoto, former foreign minister in Nicaragua's revolutionary Sandinista government.

In the mid-1980s the Reagan government, fearful that Nicaragua's left-wing Sandinista government would destabilize the region, provided secret funding to armed opposition parties, or Contras, in the region. This became known as the 'Iran-Contra' affair, as the source of the funding was secret sales of military equipment to Iran.

In an editorial published Monday in The New York Times, former Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev called Reagan "an extraordinary man who in his long life saw moments of triumph, who had his ups and downs and experienced the happiness of true love."

Gorbachev honored Mr. Reagan for his willingness to engage in dialogue with Soviet leaders after calling that country an "evil empire" during his first term in office.

"True, Reagan was a man of the right. But, while adhering to his convictions, with which one could agree or disagree, he was not dogmatic; he was looking for negotiations and cooperation," Gorbachev wrote. "And this was the most important thing to me: he had the trust of the American people."

A Nation mourns

On Wednesday morning members of the family will accompany the body as it is flown to Andrews Air Force base in Maryland, where a funeral procession will convey it to the U.S. Capitol building in Washington.

Once in Washington, D.C., President Reagan's casket will be carried up Constitution Avenue in a horse-drawn caisson, passing the monuments on the National Mall and the South Lawn of the White House.

A state funeral, the first since that of former President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1973, will be held at the Capitol Wednesday evening, after which President Reagan's body will lie in state for public viewing in the Capitol Rotunda building until Friday morning.

On Friday a funeral service will be held in Washington's National Cathedral where John Danforth, the newly appointed ambassador to the United Nations and an Episcopal minister, will officiate. Danforth is a former Republican senator from Missouri.

Following Friday's funeral service the former president's body will be flown to California for burial in a plot overlooking the Pacific Ocean at the Reagan Presidential Library.

President Reagan himself reportedly chose his own place of burial and planned many of the details of his funeral arrangements.

-- *Online NewsHour*