



Hundreds of Americans say goodbye to a former president

By **DIANA MARRERO**, Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON - Hundreds of ordinary Americans filed through the stately Rotunda of the U.S. Capitol to say goodbye to Gerald R. Ford, a man many remembered fondly for being one of them.

"He was a common man," said Richard Reynolds, a factory worker from Bowling Green, Ohio. "He understood how we down in the trenches are living."

Reynolds, 57, drove nearly 500 miles to see the former president's flag-draped casket resting on the same pine board structure that supported President Abraham Lincoln's casket.

Ford's body, flanked by a military honor guard, will lie in state until Tuesday, when his casket will be taken by motorcade to the National Cathedral for a funeral service.

Outside, mourners lined up for several blocks at the base of the Capitol for a chance to be an eyewitness to history.

"It's something you don't get to see every day," said Paul Everts, 51, who grew up in Oxnard, Calif., and cast his first presidential ballot when he voted for Gerald Ford in 1976.

Some felt compelled to pay their respects to Ford because of some special kinship they said linked them to the nation's 38th president.

A University of Michigan alum, Dorothy Summers, 50, still clearly recalls the day 30 years ago when Ford paid a visit to students at the university, his alma matter, during a campaign stop.

"I remember being very proud of him, both of us hailing from Michigan," said Summers, who now lives in Northern Virginia.

Jules Tepper, a former grand master Mason in Washington, described the bond all Masons share. Ford was a Mason, like 14 other former U.S. presidents.

"We are builders, going back to King Solomon's temple," he said. "He built character. He built integrity. He built honesty."

Tepper was among a group of about 80 Masons who paraded through the Capitol Sunday morning.

Several Boy Scout troops also made the trek to honor Ford, a former Eagle Scout. Parents with children in strollers, older couples, and young tourists assembled under the gray skies of a chilly winter day to see Ford's casket.

No one complained about the weather as they spoke of Ford, calling him a "good, decent person" who helped restore Americans' faith in government after the Watergate scandal.

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Visitation continues

Despite a drizzling rain, the public continued to make their way to the U.S. Capitol to pay respect to former President Gerald R. Ford who died late last week.



Public visitation for Ford

Former President Gerald R. Ford lies in repose as members of the public file into the Capitol to say farewell.



Ford arrives at Capitol

The body of former President Gerald Ford arrived Saturday at the U.S. Capitol where it will lie in state until Tuesday. Gannett News Service video.



Grand Rapids, Mich., ready to honor former president

The city says there should be plenty of options for visitors who plan to pay their respects to President Ford. WZZM-TV, Grand Rapids, Mich.



Former Secret Service agent considered Ford a friend

Retired special agent Stephen Story helped protect President Ford dozens, perhaps hundreds of times during his 20-year career with the Secret Service. WZZM-TV in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Gerald Ford historical video player. WZZM-TV in Grand Rapids, Mich.



Ford family mourns in Palm Desert, Calif. KPNX-TV, Phoenix, Ariz.

"We felt maybe our government wasn't working, maybe its time was passed," said Nancy Perry, 72, of Alexandria, Va., recalling the national mood at the time. "We really needed someone to heal the nation."

Ford, she said, did just that.


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