

The United States Capitol flag program began in 1937 as a way for Members of Congress to acknowledge important civic contributions of individuals who served their communities in a manner deserving special recognition. The program began when official flags that had flown over the east and west central fronts of the Capitol were presented to members, upon request, for presentation to constituents. Since the official flags were flown continuously and removed from service only when they were no longer suitable for display, the availability of used flags for distribution to members was naturally quite limited. However, public interest in having a flag that had flown over the Capitol grew, and the focus of the program gradually expanded to encompass the commemoration of national holidays, special events (such as the statehood of Alaska and Hawaii), and the work of groups such as schools and civic Organizations.

In response to the large number of requests, the Architect of the Capitol initiated a new program in the mid- 1950s of flying United States flags at members' request for presentation to their constituents, either to mark an important event or personal achievement or simply for the honor and privilege of obtaining a flag that had flown over the Capitol. To accommodate the growing demand for flags, auxiliary flagpoles were erected near the base of the dome on the west side of the Capitol's roof. Currently, flags are flown briefly from these special flagpoles and are returned to the member requesting them along with certificates documenting the date each flag was flown over the Capitol and the person or group to whom it is being presented.

The growth of the flag program has indeed been impressive. In 1937 there were six requests for flags from members of Congress; in 1995 there were over 134,000. The single-year record was set in 1991, when 154,224 flags were flown; the single-day record was set on July 4, 1976, with the flying of 10,471 flags.

The Architect of the Capitol is not responsible for purchasing flags for this program. Flags are purchased in accordance with competitive bidding procedures by the House Office Supply Service and Senate Stationary Room to take advantage of quantity discounts as a result of large volume purchases. The government does not provide flags free of charge; instead, flags are purchased with funds provided by the individual requesters, at prices which recover the government's expense of procuring the flags. In addition, those requesting a flag to be flown over the Capitol also pay the costs of this service, currently \$4.05 per flag.

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