

Thousands to attend American space legend John Glenn's memorial

December 17 2016

Thousands were expected to gather Saturday in Ohio for a memorial service to pay tribute to American space legend John Glenn, who died last week at the age of 95.

The gathering in the home state of the first American to orbit Earth caps two days of public events commemorating Glenn, who NASA called "a true American hero."

Glenn was also the first senior citizen to venture into space, and became a symbol of America's pioneering spirit and strength, drawing admirers from all walks of life over a long career in the US military, in the space program, and in the US Senate.

The public memorial was to be held on the campus of Ohio State University in the state capital Columbus, where the former astronaut taught during the latter part of his life at the college of public affairs which bears his name.

Vice President Joe Biden and NASA Administrator Charles Bolden were among those scheduled to speak at the service, along with Glenn's adult children David and Lyn.

Glenn's body lay in state Friday at the Ohio Statehouse rotunda as US Marines stood guard—an honor usually bestowed upon high-ranking government officials. The viewing was a solemn and quiet ceremony, as a line of mourners filed past Glenn's flag-draped coffin.

Among those attending the viewing was Ohio Governor John Kasich.

The Marine honor guard was to accompany the coffin Saturday as it travelled in a hearse from the statehouse to the memorial service at an auditorium on the university campus.

The former astronaut will be buried in April at Arlington National Cemetery, just outside the capital Washington, according to officials at Ohio State.

'Inspiring generations'

Glenn died surrounded by family at a Columbus hospital on December 8. The former veteran of two wars had been in declining health and was hospitalized more than a week earlier.

He was among the first military pilots chosen to be US astronauts in 1959, the "Original Seven" whose saga was recounted in the classic movie "The Right Stuff."

In 1962, he became the first American to orbit Earth, one year after Russia's Yuri Gagarin became the first person ever do so.

After his 23-year career in the US military and [space program](#), Glenn entered the US Senate as a Democrat, and made two unsuccessful tries for the party's presidential nomination.

In 1998, he made history again when he returned to space at the age of 77, becoming the oldest astronaut ever.

In 2012, President Barack Obama awarded Glenn the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the country's highest civilian honor.

"John always had the right stuff, inspiring generations of scientists, engineers and astronauts who will take us to Mars and beyond—not just to visit, but to stay," said Obama upon news of Glenn's passing.

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