

# 1959 in the United States

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Events from the year **1959 in the United States**. With the admittance of Alaska and Hawaii, this is the last year in which states are added to the union.

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Dwight Eisenhower, Nikita Khrushchev and their wives at a state dinner, 1959.

## Incumbents

### Federal Government

- President: Dwight D. Eisenhower (R-Kansas/New York)
- Vice President: Richard Nixon (R-California)
- Chief Justice: Earl Warren (California)
- Speaker of the House of Representatives: Sam Rayburn (D-Texas)
- Senate Majority Leader: Lyndon B. Johnson (D-Texas)
- Congress: 85th (until January 3), 86th (starting January 3)

## Governors and Lieutenant Governors

### Governors

- Governor of Alabama: Jim Folsom (Democratic) (until January 19), John M. Patterson (Democratic) (starting January 19)
- Governor of Alaska: Waino Edward Hendrickson (Republican) (until January 3), William A. Egan (Democratic) (starting January 3)
- Governor of Arizona: Ernest McFarland (Democratic) (until January 5), Paul Fannin (Republican) (starting January 5)
- Governor of Arkansas: Orval Faubus (Democratic)
- Governor of California: Goodwin Knight (Republican) (until January 5), Pat Brown (Democratic) (starting January 5)
- Governor of Colorado: Stephen L. R. McNichols (Democratic)
- Governor of Connecticut: Abraham A. Ribicoff (Democratic)
- Governor of Delaware: J. Caleb Boggs (Republican)
- Governor of Florida: LeRoy Collins (Democratic)
- Governor of Georgia: Marvin Griffin (Democratic) (until January 13), Ernest Vandiver (Democratic) (starting January 13)
- Governor of Hawaii: William F. Quinn (Republican) (starting August 21)
- Governor of Idaho: Robert E. Smylie (Republican)
- Governor of Illinois: William G. Stratton (Democratic)
- Governor of Indiana: Harold W. Handley (Republican)
- Governor of Iowa: Herschel C. Loveless (Democratic)
- Governor of Kansas: George Docking (Democratic)
- Governor of Kentucky: Happy Chandler (Democratic) (until December 8), Bert T. Combs (Democratic) (starting December 8)
- Governor of Louisiana: Earl K. Long (Democratic)
- Governor of Maine:
  - until January 2: Edmund Muskie (Democratic)
  - January 2-January 7: Robert Haskell (Republican)
  - January 7-December 30: Clinton Clauson (Democratic)
  - starting December 30: John H. Reed (Republican)
- Governor of Maryland: Theodore R. McKeldin (Republican) (until January 14), J. Millard Tawes (Democratic) (starting January 14)
- Governor of Massachusetts: Foster Furcolo (Democratic)
- Governor of Michigan: G. Mennen Williams (Democratic)
- Governor of Minnesota: Orville L. Freeman (Democratic)
- Governor of Mississippi: James P. Coleman (Democratic)
- Governor of Missouri: James T. Blair, Jr. (Democratic)
- Governor of Montana: J. Hugo Aronson (Republican)
- Governor of Nebraska: Victor E. Anderson (Republican) (until January 8), Ralph G. Brooks (Democratic) (starting January 8)
- Governor of Nevada: Charles H. Russell (Republican) (until January 5), Grant Sawyer (Democratic) (starting January 5)
- Governor of New Hampshire: Lane Dwinell (Republican) (until January 1), Wesley Powell (Republican) (starting January 1)
- Governor of New Jersey: Robert B. Meyner (Democratic)
- Governor of New Mexico: Edwin L. Mechem (Republican) (until January 1), John Burroughs (Democratic) (starting January 1)
- Governor of New York: Nelson Rockefeller (Republican) (starting January 1)
- Governor of North Carolina: Luther H. Hodges (Democratic)
- Governor of North Dakota: John E. Davis (Republican)
- Governor of Ohio: C. William O'Neill (Republican) (until January 12), Michael DiSalle (Democratic) (starting January 12)
- Governor of Oklahoma: Raymond D. Gary (Democratic) (until January 12), J. Howard Edmondson (Democratic) (starting January 12)
- Governor of Oregon: Robert D. Holmes (Democratic) (until January 12), Mark Hatfield (Republican) (starting January 12)
- Governor of Pennsylvania: George M. Leader (Democratic) (until January 20), David L. Lawrence (Democratic) (starting January 20)
- Governor of Rhode Island: Dennis J. Roberts (Democratic) (until January 6), Christopher Del Sesto (Republican) (starting January 6)
- Governor of South Carolina: George Bell Timmerman, Jr. (Democratic) (until January 20), Ernest Hollings (Democratic) (starting January 20)
- Governor of South Dakota: Joe Foss (Republican) (until January 6), Ralph Herseth (Democratic) (starting January 6)
- Governor of Tennessee: Frank G. Clement (Democratic) (until January 19), Buford Ellington (Democratic) (starting January 19)
- Governor of Texas: Price Daniel (Democratic)
- Governor of Utah: George Dewey Clyde (Republican)

- Governor of Vermont: Joseph B. Johnson (Republican) (until January 8), Robert T. Stafford (Republican) (starting January 8)
- Governor of Virginia: James Lindsay Almond, Jr. (Democratic)
- Governor of Washington: Albert D. Rosellini (Democratic)
- Governor of West Virginia: Cecil H. Underwood (Republican)
- Governor of Wisconsin: Vernon W. Thomson (Republican) (until January 5), Gaylord A. Nelson (Democratic) (starting January 5)
- Governor of Wyoming: Milward L. Simpson (Republican) (until January 5), John J. Hickey (Democratic) (starting January 5)

## Lieutenant Governors

- Lieutenant Governor of Alabama: William G. Hardwick (Democratic) (until month and day unknown), Albert B. Boutwell (Democratic) (starting month and day unknown)
- Lieutenant Governor of Alaska: Hugh Wade (Democratic) (starting month and day unknown)
- Lieutenant Governor of Arkansas: Nathan Green Gordon (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of California: Harold J. Powers (Republican) (until January 5), Glenn Malcolm Anderson (Democratic) (starting January 5)
- Lieutenant Governor of Colorado: Frank L. Hays (Republican) (until month and day unknown), Robert Lee Knous (Democratic) (starting month and day unknown)
- Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut: Charles W. Jewett (Democratic) (until month and day unknown), John N. Dempsey (Democratic) (starting month and day unknown)
- Lieutenant Governor of Delaware: David P. Buckson (Republican)
- Lieutenant Governor of Georgia: S. Ernest Vandiver (Democratic) (until January 13), Garland T. Byrd (Democratic) (starting January 13)
- Lieutenant Governor of Hawaii: James Kealoha (Republican) (starting August 21)
- Lieutenant Governor of Idaho: J. Berkeley Larsen (Republican) (until January 5), W. E. Drevlow (Democratic) (starting January 5)
- Lieutenant Governor of Illinois: John William Chapman (Republican)
- Lieutenant Governor of Indiana: Crawford F. Parker (Republican)
- Lieutenant Governor of Iowa: William H. Nicholas (Republican) (until month and day unknown), Edward J. McManus (Democratic) (starting month and day unknown)
- Lieutenant Governor of Kansas: Joseph W. Henkle, Sr. (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky: Harry Lee Waterfield (Democratic) (until month and day unknown), Wilson W. Wyatt (political party unknown) (starting month and day unknown)
- Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana: Lether Frazar (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts: Robert F. Murphy (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Michigan: Philip A. Hart (Democratic) (until January 1), John B. Swainson (Democratic) (starting January 1)
- Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota: Karl Rolvaag (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Mississippi: Carroll Gartin (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Missouri: Edward V. Long (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Montana: Paul Cannon (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Nebraska: Dwight W. Burney (Republican)
- Lieutenant Governor of Nevada: Rex Bell (Republican)
- Lieutenant Governor of New Mexico: vacant (until January 1), Ed V. Mead (Democratic) (starting January 1)
- Lieutenant Governor of New York: Malcolm Wilson (Republican) (starting January 1)
- Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina: Luther E. Barnhardt (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of North Dakota: Francis Clyde Duffy (Republican) (until month and day unknown), Clarence P. Dahl (Republican) (starting month and day unknown)
- Lieutenant Governor of Ohio: Paul M. Herbert (Republican) (until January 12), John W. Donahey (Democratic) (starting January 12)
- Lieutenant Governor of Oklahoma: Cowboy Pink Williams (Democratic) (until January 12), George Nigh (Democratic) (starting January 12)
- Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania: Roy E. Furman (Democratic) (until January 20), John Morgan Davis (Democratic) (starting January 20)

- Lieutenant Governor of Rhode Island: Armand H. Cote (Democratic) (until January 6), John A. Notte, Jr. (Democratic) (starting January 6)
- Lieutenant Governor of South Carolina: Ernest Hollings (Democratic) (until January 20), Burnet R. Maybank, Jr. (Democratic) (starting January 20)
- Lieutenant Governor of South Dakota: L. Roy Houck (Republican) (until January 6), John F. Lindley (Democratic) (starting January 6)
- Lieutenant Governor of Tennessee: Jared Maddux (Democratic) (until January 19), William D. Baird (Democratic) (starting January 19)
- Lieutenant Governor of Texas: Ben Ramsey (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Vermont: Robert T. Stafford (Republican) (until January 8), Robert S. Babcock (Republican) (starting January 8)
- Lieutenant Governor of Virginia: Allie Edward Stokes Stephens (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Washington: John Cherberg (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Wisconsin: Warren P. Knowles (Republican) (until January 5), Philleo Nash (Democratic) (starting January 5)

## Events

### January–March

- January 2 – CBS Radio cuts four soap operas: *Backstage Wife*, *Our Gal Sunday*, *The Road of Life*, and *This is Nora Drake*.
- January 3 – Alaska is admitted as the 49th U.S. state (*see* History of Alaska).
- January 7 – The United States recognizes the new Cuban government of Fidel Castro.
- January 22 – Knox Mine Disaster: Water breaches the River Slope Mine near Pittston City, Pennsylvania in Port Griffith; 12 miners are killed.
- January 29 – Walt Disney releases his 16th animated film, *Sleeping Beauty* in Beverly Hills.
- February 3 – A chartered plane transporting musicians Buddy Holly, Ritchie Valens and The Big Bopper goes down dfg in foggy conditions near Clear Lake, Iowa, killing all 4 occupants on board, including pilot Roger Peterson. The tragedy is later termed "The Day the Music Died", popularized in Don McLean's 1972 song "American Pie".
- February 6 – At Cape Canaveral, Florida, the first successful test firing of a Titan intercontinental ballistic missile is accomplished.
- February 17 – The United States launches the Vanguard II weather satellite.
- February 29 – Lee Petty wins the first Daytona 500.
- March 1 – The USS Tuscaloosa, USS New Orleans, USS Tennessee and USS West Virginia are struck from the Naval Vessel Register.
- March 11 – *A Raisin in the Sun* by Lorraine Hansberry opens on Broadway in New York City.
- March 18 – American President Dwight D. Eisenhower signs a bill allowing for Hawaiian statehood.
- March 31 – Busch Gardens in Tampa, Florida is dedicated and opens its gates.



January 3: Alaska admitted as 49th state

### April–June

- April 6 – The 31st Academy Awards ceremony is held.

- April 9 – NASA announces its selection of the "Mercury Seven", seven military pilots to become the first U.S. astronauts.
- April 25 – The St. Lawrence Seaway linking the North American Great Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean officially opens to shipping.
- June 8 – The USS *Barbero* and United States Postal Service attempt the delivery of mail via Missile Mail.
- June 9 – The USS *George Washington* is launched as the first submarine to carry ballistic missiles.
- June 23 – Convicted Manhattan Project spy Klaus Fuchs is released after only 9 years in a British prison and allowed to emigrate to Dresden, East Germany (where he resumes a scientific career).
- June 26
  - Queen Elizabeth II and U.S. President Dwight Eisenhower open the Saint Lawrence Seaway.
  - *Darby O'Gill and the Little People*, a film based on H. T. Kavanagh's short stories, is released in the U.S. by Walt Disney, two days after its world premiere in Ireland.



April 9: NASA announces the Mercury Seven

## July–September

- July 24 – With the admission of Alaska as the 49th U.S. state earlier in the year, the 49-star flag of the United States debuts in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- July 8 – Charles Ovnand and Dale R. Buis become the first Americans killed in action in Vietnam.
- July 15 – Steel strike of 1959: Labor union strike in the U.S. steel industry.
- July 24 – At the opening of the American National Exhibition in Moscow, U.S. Vice President Richard Nixon and USSR Premier Nikita Khrushchev have a "kitchen debate."
- August 7
  - Explorers program: Launch of Explorer 6 from the Atlantic Missile Range in Cape Canaveral, Florida.
  - The Roseburg Oregon Blast kills 14 and causes \$12 million worth of damage.
- August 17
  - The 1959 Hebgen Lake earthquake in southwest Montana kills 28.
  - Miles Davis' influential jazz album *Kind of Blue* is released.
- August 21 – Hawaii is admitted as the 50th and last U.S. state (*see* History of Hawaii).



August 21: Hawaii admitted as 50th state

## October–December

- October 2 – Rod Serling's classic anthology series *The Twilight Zone* premieres on CBS.
- October 13 – Launch of Explorer 7.
- October 21 – In New York City, the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (designed by Frank Lloyd Wright) opens to the public.
- November 15 – The Clutter family of Holcomb, Kansas is brutally murdered.
- November 18 – MGM's widescreen, multimillion-dollar, Technicolor version of *Ben-Hur*, starring Charlton Heston, is released and becomes the studio's greatest hit up to that time. It is critically acclaimed and eventually wins 11 Academy Awards – a record held until 1998, when 1997's *Titanic* becomes the first film to equal the record.

- December 1 – Cold War – Antarctic Treaty: 12 countries, including the United States and the Soviet Union, sign a landmark treaty, which sets aside Antarctica as a scientific preserve and bans military activity on that continent (the first arms control agreement established during the Cold War).
- December 13 – Three years after its first telecast, MGM's *The Wizard of Oz* is shown on television for only the second time, but it gains an even larger viewing audience than its first television outing, spurring CBS to make it an annual tradition.

## Undated

- The Henney Kilowatt goes on sale in the United States, becoming the first mass-produced electric car in almost three decades.

## Ongoing

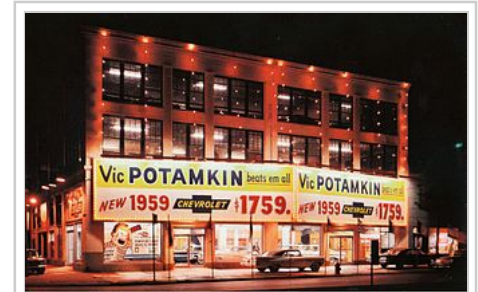
- Cold War (1945–1991)
- Space Race (1957–1975)

## Births

- January 2 – Joe Bevilacqua, radio producer and dramatist
- January 10 – Larry McReynolds, auto racing commentator
- January 27 – Keith Olbermann, television sports and political commentator
- January 28 – Megan McDonald, children's author
- January 29 – Michael Sloane, actor, director, and screenwriter
- February 4 – Pamelyn Ferdin, actress and activist
- February 14 – Renée Fleming, soprano
- February 22 – Kyle MacLachlan, actor
- March 17 – Christian Clemenson, actor
- March 22 – Matthew Modine, actor
- April 3 – David Hyde Pierce, actor
- April 15 – Thomas F. Wilson, actor, writer, musician, painter, voice-over artist, stand-up comedian and podcaster
- May 5 – Brian Williams, television journalist
- May 8 – Ronnie Lott, American football player and sportscaster
- May 17 – Jim Nantz, sportscaster
- May 19 – Nicole Brown Simpson, second wife of American football player and actor O. J. Simpson and murder victim (k. 1994)
- May 21 – Loretta Lynch, 83rd U.S. Attorney General from 2015 to 2017.
- June 6 – Paul Germain, television screenwriter and producer



October 21: The Guggenheim opens



1959: Potamkin Chevrolet, Philadelphia

- June 7 – Mike Pence, 50th Governor of Indiana since 2013, 48th Vice President of the United States
- June 10 – Eliot Spitzer, Governor of New York from 2007 to 2008
- June 11 – Magnum T.A. (Terry Allen), wrestler
- June 14 – Marcus Miller, African American jazz musician
- July 6 – Glenn Kessler, journalist
- July 7 – Ben Linder, engineer (d. 1987)
- July 14 – Susana Martinez, Governor of New Mexico from 2011
- July 23 – Carl Phillips, poet
- July 26 – Kevin Spacey, actor and director
- August 10 – Rosanna Arquette, actress
- August 14
  - Marcia Gay Harden, actress
  - Magic Johnson, African American basketball player
- August 15 – Scott Altman, astronaut
- August 17
  - Jonathan Franzen, novelist
  - David Koresh, spiritual leader of the Branch Davidian religious cult (d. 1993)
  - Brad Wellman, baseball player
- August 19 – Anthony Sowell, serial killer
- August 21 – Jim McMahon, American football player
- August 26 – Stan Van Gundy, basketball coach
- September 12 – Scott Brown, U.S. Senator from Massachusetts from 2010 to 2013
- September 15 – Mark Kirk, U.S. Senator from Illinois from 2010 to 2017
- September 22 – Saul Perlmutter, astrophysicist, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Physics in 2011
- September 23 – Jason Alexander, actor
- October 1 – Brian P. Cleary, humorist, author and poet
- October 3
  - Fred Couples, golfer
  - Greg Proops, comedian
  - Jack Wagner, actor
- October 5 – David Shannon, writer and illustrator
- October 10 – Maya Lin, designer and artist
- October 13 – Marie Osmond, country pop singer
- October 23
  - Nancy Grace, television host
  - Sam Raimi, film producer, writer and director
  - "Weird Al" Yankovic, singer, accordionist and parodist
- November 19 – Allison Janney, actress
- November 20 – Sean Young, actress
- December 2 – David Alward, 32nd Premier of New Brunswick 2010-2014
- December 21 – Florence Griffith Joyner, African American athlete (d. 1998)



- December 25 – Michael P. Anderson, astronaut (d. 2003)

## Deaths

- January 20 – Carl Switzer, actor, shot to death (born 1927)
- January 21 – Cecil B. DeMille, American film director (born 1881)
- February 3
  - Big Bopper, disc jockey, singer, and songwriter, dies in plane crash (born 1930)
  - Buddy Holly, singer-songwriter and a pioneer of rock and roll, dies in a plane crash (born 1936)
  - Richie Valens, Mexican-American singer, songwriter and guitarist, dies in plane crash (born 1941)
- February 20 – Ray McDonald, dancer, dies of barbiturate overdose at 38 (born 1920)
- February 22 – Helen Parrish, American actress, dies of cancer (born 1924)
- March 3 – Lou Costello, actor and comedian, part of Abbott & Costello team, (born 1906)
- March 4 – Maxey Long, American athlete (born 1878)
- March 16 – John Sailing, last documented Civil War vet, dies at 111
- April 9 – Frank Lloyd Wright, architect, interior designer, writer and educator (born 1867)
- April 27 – Gordon Armstrong, inventor (baby incubator)
- May 26 – Joe Kelly, TV host (Quiz Kids), dies at 57 (born 1902)
- June 16 – George Reeves, actor, shot to death (born 1914)
- June 18 – Ethel Barrymore, American actress (born 1879)
- June 25 – Charles Starkweather, spree killer (born 1938)
- July 8
  - Dale R. Buis, 1st American killed in Vietnam War (born 1921)
  - Chester M. Ovnand, 1st American killed in Vietnam War (born 1914)
- July 17 – Billie Holiday, Jazz Singer (b. 1915)
- August 16 – William "Bull" F Halsey, US vice-admiral (WW II Pacific) (born 1882)
- October 7 – Mario Lanza, opera singer, heart attack (born 1921)
- October 14 – Errol Flynn, Australian-born American actor, heart attack (born 1909)
- October 16 – George C Marshall, American army general, (born 1880)
- November 21 – Max Baer, American heavyweight boxing champ (born 1909)

## See also

- List of American films of 1959

## External links

-  Media related to 1959 in the United States at Wikimedia Commons

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Categories: 1959 in the United States

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