

# 1961 in the United States

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Events from the year **1961 in the United States**.

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## Incumbents

### Federal Government

- President: Dwight D. Eisenhower (R-Kansas/New York) (until January 20), John F. Kennedy (D-Massachusetts) (starting January 20)
- Vice President: Richard Nixon (R-California) (until January 20), Lyndon B. Johnson (D-Texas) (starting January 20)
- Chief Justice: Earl Warren (California)
- Speaker of the House of Representatives: Sam Rayburn (D-Texas) (until November 16), *vacant* (starting November 16)
- Senate Majority Leader: Lyndon B. Johnson (D-Texas) (until January 3), Mike Mansfield (D-Montana) (starting January 3)
- Congress: 86th (until January 3), 87th (starting January 3)

## Governors and Lieutenant Governors

### Governors

- Governor of Alabama: John M. Patterson (Democratic)
- Governor of Alaska: William A. Egan (Democratic)
- Governor of Arizona: Paul Fannin (Republican)
- Governor of Arkansas: Orval Faubus (Democratic)
- Governor of California: Pat Brown (Democratic)
- Governor of Colorado: Stephen L. R. McNichols (Democratic)
- Governor of Connecticut: Abraham A. Ribicoff (Democratic) (until January 21), John N. Dempsey (Democratic) (starting January 21)
- Governor of Delaware: David P. Buckson (Republican) (until January 17), Elbert N. Carvel (Democratic) (starting January 17)
- Governor of Florida: LeRoy Collins (Democratic) (until January 3), C. Farris Bryant (Democratic) (starting January 3)
- Governor of Georgia: Ernest Vandiver (Democratic)
- Governor of Hawaii: William F. Quinn (Republican)
- Governor of Idaho: Robert E. Smylie (Republican)
- Governor of Illinois: William G. Stratton (Democratic) (until January 9), Otto Kerner, Jr. (Republican) (starting January 9)
- Governor of Indiana: Harold W. Handley (Republican) (until January 9), Matthew E. Welsh (Democratic) (starting January 9)
- Governor of Iowa: Herschel C. Loveless (Democratic) (until January 12), Norman A. Erbe (Republican) (starting January 12)
- Governor of Kansas: George Docking (Democratic) (until January 9), John Anderson, Jr. (Republican) (starting January 9)
- Governor of Kentucky: Bert T. Combs (Democratic)
- Governor of Louisiana: Jimmie H. Davis (Democratic)
- Governor of Maine: John H. Reed (Republican)
- Governor of Maryland: J. Millard Tawes (Democratic)
- Governor of Massachusetts: Foster Furcolo (Democratic) (until January 5), John A. Volpe (Republican) (starting January 5)
- Governor of Michigan: G. Mennen Williams (Democratic) (until January 1), John Swainson (Democratic) (starting January 1)
- Governor of Minnesota: Orville L. Freeman (Democratic) (until January 2), Elmer L. Andersen (Republican) (starting January 2)
- Governor of Mississippi: Ross R. Barnett (Democratic)
- Governor of Missouri: James T. Blair, Jr. (Democratic) (until January 9), John M. Dalton (Democratic) (starting January 9)
- Governor of Montana: J. Hugo Aronson (Republican) (until January 2), Donald Grant Nutter (Republican) (starting January 2)
- Governor of Nebraska: Dwight W. Burney (Republican) (until January 5), Frank B. Morrison (Democratic) (starting January 5)
- Governor of Nevada: Grant Sawyer (Democratic)
- Governor of New Hampshire: Wesley Powell (Republican)
- Governor of New Jersey: Robert B. Meyner (Democratic)
- Governor of New Mexico: John Burroughs (Democratic) (until January 1), Edwin L. Mechem (Republican) (starting January 1)
- Governor of New York: Nelson Rockefeller (Republican)
- Governor of North Carolina: Luther H. Hodges (Democratic) (until January 5), Terry Sanford (Democratic) (starting January 5)
- Governor of North Dakota: John E. Davis (Republican) (until January 4), William L. Guy (Democratic) (starting January 4)
- Governor of Ohio: Michael DiSalle (Democratic)
- Governor of Oklahoma: J. Howard Edmondson (Democratic)
- Governor of Oregon: Mark Hatfield (Republican)
- Governor of Pennsylvania: David L. Lawrence (Democratic)
- Governor of Rhode Island: Christopher Del Sesto (Republican) (until January 3), John A. Notte, Jr. (Democratic) (starting January 3)
- Governor of South Carolina: Ernest Hollings (Democratic)
- Governor of South Dakota: Ralph Herseth (Democratic) (until January 3), Archie M. Gubbrud (Republican) (starting January 3)
- Governor of Tennessee: Buford Ellington (Democratic)
- Governor of Texas: Price Daniel (Democratic)
- Governor of Utah: George Dewey Clyde (Republican)
- Governor of Vermont: Robert T. Stafford (Republican) (until January 5), F. Ray Keyser, Jr. (Republican) (starting January 5)
- Governor of Virginia: James Lindsay Almond, Jr. (Democratic)
- Governor of Washington: Albert D. Rosellini (Democratic)
- Governor of West Virginia: Cecil H. Underwood (Republican) (until January 16), William Wallace Barron (Democratic) (starting January 16)
- Governor of Wisconsin: Gaylord A. Nelson (Democratic)

- Governor of Wyoming: John J. Hickey (Democratic) (until January 2), Jack R. Gage (Democratic) (starting January 2)

## Lieutenant Governors

- Lieutenant Governor of Alabama: Albert B. Boutwell (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Alaska: Hugh Wade (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Arkansas: Nathan Green Gordon (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of California: Glenn Malcolm Anderson (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Colorado: Robert Lee Knous (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Connecticut: John N. Dempsey (Democratic) (until January 21), Anthony J. Armentano (Democratic) (starting January 21)
- Lieutenant Governor of Delaware: vacant (until January 17), Eugene Lamnot (Democratic) (starting January 17)
- Lieutenant Governor of Georgia: Garland T. Byrd (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Hawaii: James Kealoha (Republican)
- Lieutenant Governor of Idaho: W. E. Drevlow (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Illinois: John William Chapman (Republican) (until January 9), Samuel H. Shapiro (Democratic) (starting January 9)
- Lieutenant Governor of Indiana: Crawford F. Parker (Republican) (until January 9), Richard O. Ristine (Democratic) (starting January 9)
- Lieutenant Governor of Iowa: Edward J. McManus (Democratic) (until January 12), W. L. Mooty (Democratic) (starting January 12)
- Lieutenant Governor of Kansas: Joseph W. Henkle, Sr. (Democratic) (until January 9), Harold H. Chase (Republican) (starting January 9)
- Lieutenant Governor of Kentucky: Wilson W. Wyatt (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Louisiana: C. C. Aycock (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts: Robert F. Murphy (Democratic) (until January 5), Edward F. McLaughlin, Jr. (Democratic) (starting January 5)
- Lieutenant Governor of Michigan: John B. Swainson (Democratic) (until January 1), T. John Lesinski (Democratic) (starting January 1)
- Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota: Karl Rolvaag (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Mississippi: Paul B. Johnson, Jr. (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Missouri: vacant (until January 9), Hilary A. Bush (Democratic) (starting January 9)
- Lieutenant Governor of Montana: Paul Cannon (Democratic) (until January 2), Tim M. Babcock (Republican) (starting January 2)
- Lieutenant Governor of Nebraska: Dwight W. Burney (Republican)
- Lieutenant Governor of Nevada: Rex Bell (Republican)
- Lieutenant Governor of New Mexico: Ed V. Mead (Democratic) (until January 1), Tom Bolack (Republican) (starting January 1)
- Lieutenant Governor of New York: Malcolm Wilson (Republican)
- Lieutenant Governor of North Carolina:
  - until January 5: Luther E. Barnhardt (Democratic)
  - January 5-August 19: Harvey Cloyd Philpott (Democratic)
  - starting August 19: vacant
- Lieutenant Governor of North Dakota: Clarence P. Dahl (Republican) (until January 4), Orville W. Hagen (Republican) (starting January 4)
- Lieutenant Governor of Ohio: John W. Donahey (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Oklahoma: George Nigh (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania: John Morgan Davis (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Rhode Island: John A. Notte, Jr. (Democratic) (until January 3), Edward P. Gallogly (Democratic) (starting January 3)
- Lieutenant Governor of South Carolina: Burnet R. Maybank, Jr. (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of South Dakota: John F. Lindley (Democratic) (until January 3), Joseph H. Bottum (Republican) (starting January 3)
- Lieutenant Governor of Tennessee: William D. Baird (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Texas: Ben Ramsey (Democratic) (until September 18), vacant (starting September 18)
- Lieutenant Governor of Vermont: Robert S. Babcock (Republican) (until January 5), Ralph A. Foote (Republican) (starting January 5)

- Lieutenant Governor of Virginia: Allie Edward Stokes Stephens (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Washington: John Cherberg (Democratic)
- Lieutenant Governor of Wisconsin: Phil Leo Nash (Democratic) (until January 2), Warren P. Knowles (Republican) (starting January 2)

## Events

### January–March

- January 3
  - President Dwight Eisenhower announces that the United States has severed diplomatic and consular relations with Cuba.
  - At the National Reactor Testing Station near Idaho Falls, Idaho, atomic reactor SL-1 explodes, killing 3 military technicians.
- January 5 – Italian sculptor Alfredo Fioravanti marches into the U.S. Consulate in Rome, and confesses that he was part of the team that forged the Etruscan terracotta warriors in the Metropolitan Museum of Art.
- January 17 – President Dwight Eisenhower gives his Farewell Address, he warns of the increasing power of a "military-industrial complex".
- January 20 – John F. Kennedy becomes the 35th President of the United States.
- January 24
  - A U.S. B-52 Stratofortress, with two nuclear bombs, crashes near Goldsboro, North Carolina.
  - Musician Bob Dylan reportedly makes his way to New York City after bumming a ride in Madison, Wisconsin. Dylan is likely on his way to visit his idol Woody Guthrie. He later finds fame in the Greenwich Village protest folk music scene.
- January 25 – In Washington, DC John F. Kennedy delivers the first live presidential news conference. In it, he announces that the Soviet Union has freed the 2 surviving crewmen of a USAF RB-47 reconnaissance plane shot down by Soviet flyers over the Barents Sea July 1, 1960 (see RB-47H shot down).
- January 26 – John F. Kennedy appoints Janet G. Travell to be his physician, the first woman to hold this appointment.
- January 30 – President John F. Kennedy delivers his first State of the Union Address.
- January 31 – Ham the Chimp, a 37-pound (17-kg) male, is rocketed into space aboard Mercury-Redstone 2, in a test of the Project Mercury capsule, designed to carry United States astronauts into space.
- February 1 – The United States launches its first test of the Minuteman I intercontinental ballistic missile.<sup>[1]</sup>
- February 14 – Discovery of the chemical element: Element 103, Lawrencium, is first synthesized in Berkeley, California.
- February 15
  - President Kennedy warns the Soviet Union to avoid interfering with the United Nations pacification of the Congo.<sup>[2]</sup>
  - A Sabena Boeing 707 crashes near Brussels, Belgium, killing 73, including the entire United States figure skating team and several coaches.
- March 1 – President of the United States John F. Kennedy establishes the Peace Corps.<sup>[3]</sup>
- March 8 – The first U.S. Polaris submarines arrive at Holy Loch.
- March 13



January 20: John F. Kennedy becomes President

- United States delegate to the United Nations Security Council Adlai Stevenson votes against Portuguese policies in Africa.
- President of the United States John F. Kennedy proposes a long-term "Alliance for Progress" between the United States and Latin America.<sup>[2]</sup>
- March 29 – The Twenty-third Amendment to the United States Constitution is ratified, allowing residents of Washington, D.C. to vote in presidential elections.
- March 30 – The Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs is signed at New York City.

## April–June

- April 17
  - The Bay of Pigs Invasion of Cuba begins; it fails by April 19.
  - The 33rd Academy Awards ceremony is held.
- April 23 – Judy Garland performs in a legendary comeback concert at Carnegie Hall in New York City.
- April 27 – President Kennedy delivers a revealing speech: *The President and the Press: Address before the American Newspaper Publishers Association*.<sup>[4]</sup>
- May 4 – U.S. Freedom Riders begin interstate bus rides to test the new U.S. Supreme Court integration decision.
- May 5 – Mercury program: Alan Shepard becomes the first American in space aboard Mercury-Redstone 3.
- May 9 – In a speech on "Television and the Public Interest" to the National Association of Broadcasters, FCC chairman Newton N. Minow describes commercial television programming as a "vast wasteland".
- May 14 – American civil rights movement: A Freedom Riders bus is fire-bombed near Anniston, Alabama and the civil rights protestors are beaten by an angry mob of Ku Klux Klan members.
- May 21 – American civil rights movement: Alabama Governor John Patterson declares martial law in an attempt to restore order after race riots break out.
- May 24 – American civil rights movement: Freedom Riders are arrested in Jackson, Mississippi for "disturbing the peace" after disembarking from their bus.
- May 25 – Apollo program: President Kennedy announces before a special joint session of Congress his goal to put a man on the Moon before the end of the decade.
- May 31 – President John F. Kennedy and Charles De Gaulle meet in Paris.
- June 4 – Vienna summit: John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev meet during 2 days in Vienna. They discuss nuclear tests, disarmament and Germany.



President Kennedy delivers his proposal to put a man on the Moon before a joint session of Congress, May 25, 1961

"I believe that this nation should commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth."

*President John F. Kennedy before a joint session of Congress, May 25, 1961*

## July–September

- July 21 – Mercury program: Gus Grissom, piloting the Mercury-Redstone 4 capsule *Liberty Bell 7*, becomes the second American to go into space (sub-orbital). Upon splashdown, the hatch prematurely opens, and the capsule sinks (it is recovered in 1999).
- July 31 – At Fenway Park in Boston, Massachusetts, the first All-Star Game tie in major league baseball history occurs, when the game is stopped in the 9th inning due to rain (the only tie until 2002 in MLB All-Star Game history).
- August – USA founds Alliance for Progress.
- August 5 – The Six Flags over Texas theme park officially opens to the public.

## October–December

- October 1 – Baseball player Roger Maris of the New York Yankees hits his 61st home run in the last game of the season, against the Boston Red Sox, beating the 34-year-old record held by Babe Ruth.
- October 27 – A standoff between Soviet and American tanks in Berlin, Germany heightens Cold War tensions.
- November – The Fantastic Four #1 comic debuts, launching the Marvel Universe and revolutionizing the American comic book industry.
- November 2 – *Kean* opens at Broadway Theater in New York City for 92 performances.
- November 6 – The U.S. government issues a stamp honoring the 100th birthday of James Naismith.
- November 9 – Neil Armstrong records a world record speed in a rocket plane of 6,587 km/h flying a X-15.
- November 17 – Michael Rockefeller, son of New York Governor, and later Vice President Nelson Rockefeller, disappears in the jungles of New Guinea.
- November 18 – U.S. President John F. Kennedy sends 18,000 military advisors to South Vietnam.
- November 20 – The funeral of longtime House Speaker Sam Rayburn is held in Washington, DC. Two former Presidents (Truman, Eisenhower) and one future one (Lyndon B. Johnson) join President Kennedy in paying their respects.
- December 5 – U.S. President John F. Kennedy gives support to the Volta Dam project in Ghana.
- December 11 – The Vietnam War officially begins, as the first American helicopters arrive in Saigon along with 400 U.S. personnel.

## Ongoing

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

## Births

- January 4 – Lee Curreri, actor and pianist
- January 7 – John Thune, United States Senator from South Dakota since 2005.
- January 29 – Mike Aldrete, baseball player and coach
- February 17 – Chris Champion, wrestler
- April 3 – Eddie Murphy, actor
- April 10 – Mark Jones, basketball player
- May 3 – David Vitter, United States Senator from Louisiana from 2005 to 2017.
- May 12 – Paul Begala, journalist and academic
- May 31 – Lea Thompson, actress and director
- May 5 – Sarah Zivale, actress and singer
- May 6 – George Clooney, actor, film director, producer, and screenwriter
- May 12
  - Lar Park Lincoln, actress
  - Jerry Trimble, actor and stuntman
- July 14 – Jackie Earle Haley, actor

- August 4 – Barack Obama, 44th and first African American President of the United States from 2009 to 2017.
- August 9 – Amy Stiller, actress, daughter of Jerry Stiller and Anne Meara and sister of Ben Stiller.
- August 25 – Billy Ray Cyrus, singer
- September 16 – Jen Tolley, voice actress
- October 26 – Dylan McDermott, actor
- November 17 – Pat Toomey, United States Senator from Pennsylvania since 2011.
- November 22 – Mariel Hemingway, actress and sister of Margaux Hemingway
- December 8 – Ann Coulter, political commentator
- December 9 – Joe Lando, actor

## Deaths

- January 9 - Emily Greene Balch, Writer, pacifist, and winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946. (born 1867)
- January 29 - John F. O'Ryan, soldier, lawyer, and politician (born 1874)
- April 24 - Walter Tewksbury, runner and hurdler (born 1876)
- June 6 - Carl Jung, journalist, psychologist, and inventor. (born 1875)
- July 2 - Ernest Hemingway, writer, journalist, and winner of the Pulitzer Prize for *The Old Man and the Sea*. (born 1899)
- 25 December — Otto Loewi, German-American pharmacologist (born 1873)
- December 28 – Edith Wilson, wife of Woodrow Wilson, First Lady of the United States, (born 1872)

## See also

- List of American films of 1961

## References

1. "The 6555th, Chapter III, Section 8, The MINUTEMAN Ballistic Missile Test Program". Retrieved 16 July 2016.
2. [1] (<http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Selected+Milestones+in+the+Presidency+of+John+F.+Kennedy.htm>)
3. "On This Day", *New York Times*, retrieved 25 August 2016
4. "Address, "The President and the Press," Before The American Newspaper Publishers Association, 27 April 1961". Retrieved 16 July 2016.

## External links

-  Media related to 1961 in the United States at Wikimedia Commons

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