

# THE HILL

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## CAPITAL LIVING

### What were they thinking?

By Betsy Rothstein

More than 500 members of Congress did not show up at former President Gerald Ford's funeral ceremony in the Capitol rotunda last Saturday.

**Senate Democratic Press Secretary:**

"My bet is a lot of them had some super New Year's Eve plans, like staying home and watching 'Dick Clark's Rockin' New Year's,' and didn't want to cut into the party time."

**Jack Quinn, lobbyist, president, Cassidy & Associates, former New York House Republican lawmaker:**

"I've experienced death in my family on Christmas Day some years ago. It's a very difficult time, and I think members of the Congress were probably involved with their own families out of town, not in Washington. It's a really difficult time to make travel changes. The second thing is President Ford has not served in the House or Senate for a long time. There are a lot of new members. There has been a huge turnover in the Congress. There were probably dozens and dozens of former members who served with the former president who were there. I watched a lot of it on TV — very popular guy."

**C. Stewart Verdery, lobbyist, Monumental Policy Group:**

"Unless they were at the Rose Bowl watching the president's beloved Wolverines, these members owe the former president an appropriate tribute — how about

unveiling a new statue at the entrance of the Ford House Building?"

**Jessica Cutler, a.k.a. Washingtonienne; former aide to outgoing Sen. Mike DeWine (R-Ohio):**

"Who knew that Ford was still alive?"

**Omarosa Manigault-Stallworth, former White House aide and former "Apprentice" star :**

"They should have all issued a joint press release that said, 'We all had a pressing issue that kept us from attending.' Impertinence."

**House Republican Press Secretary:**

"You can't plan for a national tragedy like this, so I guess they couldn't break their plans. He was a great president for the time. I can't explain why no one from Congress showed up."

**Jonathan Grella, vice president of public affairs, Edelman Public Relations and former House Majority Leader Tom DeLay's (R-Texas) former press secretary:**

"Members' natural gravitational pull is toward home, especially during the holidays, plus lingering post-election lethargy explains a good portion of the less-than-stellar showing. Also, fairly or unfairly, President Ford has not enjoyed the same enthusiastic and emotional support that President Reagan earned during and since his presidency. People, including mem-



bers, grew attached to Reagan because of his personality, his politics and his strong leadership over two full terms. Timing is everything, they say. Reagan was the right man at the right time, while Ford's fortuitous ascension eventually fell victim to circumstances beyond his control. I'm confident that members and history will long appreciate Gerald Ford's willingness to answer the call of a nation in need."

**Samantha von Sperling, Manhattan-based etiquette and image consultant:**

"Diplomatic protocol seems scarce on the Hill. It was in poor taste that 500 lawmakers did not attend President Ford's memorial services at the Capitol. For those lawmakers who were in office during President Ford's administration, it was not only in poor taste but [showed] bad form and utter lack of respect."

**Jeff Gannon, political commentator, author and former White House correspondent:**

"That so many elected representatives of the American people would fail to honor a man who so honorably served his nation in times of war, peace, prosperity and crisis says a lot about the character of those 'public servants,' and none of it good."

*To recommend an idea for "What were they thinking?" please contact Capital Living by phoning Betsy Rothstein at 202-628-8516 or send an e-mail to Betsyr@thehill.com.*