



# THE STOUFFER REPORT

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## **This Thanksgiving, Remember What the Holiday Truly Means**

We have come upon the time of year that allows us to briefly put on hold our daily worries and gain perspective on what means the most to each of us. As we gather with our loved ones for the Thanksgiving holiday, our stress levels subside and we can focus on those things that make us who we are – our friends, family and faith. With the tradition of Thanksgiving a founding institution in our national heritage, the holiday is also a part of who we are as Americans.

What we celebrate as Thanksgiving is traditionally tied to a three-day feast hosted by the Pilgrims after their first harvest in 1621. After a long winter that claimed many lives in the Pilgrims' first year at Plymouth Colony, they nevertheless held a celebration to give thanks for God's blessings. The colonists invited Native Americans from the surrounding areas and enjoyed a menu of wild fowl, venison, seafood, squash and corn, among other dishes.

The Pilgrims held a day of thanksgiving again in 1623. After that, a tradition began in Plymouth, other New England colonies and New Netherland of setting aside a day to give thanks for the autumn harvest. Although this tradition was not held every year, it persisted throughout the rest of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and became a foundation of a maturing colonial landscape.

During the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress appointed one or more Thanksgiving days each year except for 1777. In that year, revolutionary commander George Washington declared the holiday in December as a victory celebration for the defeat of the British at Saratoga. Washington again issued proclamations of the Thanksgiving holiday in 1789 and 1795, this time as the president of a young nation.

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However, it was not until another war, one with an equally important effect on the development of our nation, that Thanksgiving Day was proclaimed a national holiday. Influenced by a series of appeals by Sarah Josepha Hale, Abraham Lincoln issued the proclamation on Oct. 3, 1863, citing “the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies” amid a “civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity.”

In his signature eloquence, Lincoln also praised the work of U.S. farmers and laborers during wartime, stating that “needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense, have not arrested the plough, the shuttle, or the ship.”

As we rub our stuffed bellies and flip through football games on Thanksgiving Day, I urge you all to maintain focus on what this day truly means. Those who came before us did not have much, yet they knew to give thanks for what they did have. We are much better off now, so please give thanks to He who is responsible.

If you have questions or comments about this issue or any other issue, please call toll free (866) 768-3987 or by email at [bstouffer@senate.mo.gov](mailto:bstouffer@senate.mo.gov).

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