



THE STOUFFER REPORT

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Thanksgiving Provides us the Opportunity to Give Thanks for All Our Blessings

The holiday season has again snuck up on us, and we are entering the season when we can put some of our petty worries aside and think about the things that mean the most. As we gather with our friends and family and give thanks for all we have been provided, we can gain perspective on what this great American holiday truly means to all of us.

When the Pilgrims set foot on Plymouth Rock on Dec. 11, 1620, they were met with the elation of religious freedom, but also with the harsh reality of the winter season. They soon learned they were ill-equipped to survive, and the results were devastating. Only 55 of the 102 members of the Plymouth colony survived the first winter, but in a remarkable act of faith, when the ship's crew sailed back to England the following spring, the 55 pilgrims decided to stay.

Fortunately, the local Native Americans befriended the New World settlers and taught them how to live off the land and survive the harsh winter. The Pilgrims were prepared when the next cold season rolled around, and for that, they were thankful to the Lord. To celebrate, the Pilgrims invited the Native Americans to a feast of gratitude for the bountiful season. In the following years, a tradition began in Plymouth, other New England colonies and New Netherland of setting aside a day to give thanks for the autumn harvest.

During the Revolutionary War, the tradition continued when the Continental Congress appointed one or more Thanksgiving days each year except for 1777. In that year, revolutionary commander George Washington declared the holiday 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 president of a nation in its infancy.

However, it was not until another major American war 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.”

Although the food is something to look forward to, Thanksgiving is not just turkey and mashed potatoes. With our loved ones, we can relay the instances of kindness that have made us smile over the year and the faith that got us through the more difficult times. And we can thank the good Lord for giving us one another, our health and our good fortune. For it is clear that those who came before us, facing much tougher circumstances, had the perspective to give thanks for what they did have.

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

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