



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Thanksgiving

JEFFERSON CITY – As we prepare to take a break from our hectic lives to gather with family for Thanksgiving, I want to share some of the history of this uniquely American holiday.

The Pilgrims actually set aside a “day of Solemn Thanksgiving and praise to God for such his Goodness and Favour” on June 29, 1621. In 1789, President George Washington issued a proclamation moving the day of thanks to November:

“Whereas both Houses of Congress have, by their joint committee, requested me ‘to recommend to the people of the United States a day of public thanksgiving and prayer, to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favors of Almighty God, especially by affording them an opportunity peaceably to establish a form of government for their safety and happiness.’ Now, therefore, do I recommend and assign Thursday, the twenty-sixth day of November next, to be devoted to the people of these States to the service of that great and glorious Being who is the beneficent author of all the good that was, that is, or that will be.”

Most presidents issued similar proclamations until 1939, when Franklin Roosevelt moved the holiday to November 23rd. Despite a public outcry, the holiday was observed on the 23rd until Missouri’s Harry Truman moved it back to the fourth Thursday in November:

“Now, therefore, I, Harry S Truman, President of the United States of America, having in mind the joint congressional resolution of December 26, 1941, which made the fourth Thursday in November a legal holiday, do hereby proclaim Thursday, November 24, 1949, as Thanksgiving Day, and I urge all citizens to observe the day with reverence. Let us, on the

appointed day, in our homes and in our accustomed places of worship, give thanks to Almighty God for the blessings which have signalized our lot as a Nation, and let us ask for the gift of wisdom in our striving for a better world.”

The Missouri Historical Society says Governor Thomas Reynolds issued the state’s first Thanksgiving proclamation in 1843, but Thanksgiving did not become an official annual state holiday until 1855. Between 1843 and 1855, some governors issued holiday proclamations while others did not.

As we rub our stuffed bellies and flip through football games on Thanksgiving Day, I urge everyone to remain focused 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.

Let us focus on the blessings of life and liberty, of family and friends, and of the privilege we have of living in this land of plenty.

If you have any questions or comments about this or any other issue, give my Capitol office a call at (573) 751-7852, send me an email at wes.shoemyer@senate.mo.gov, or drop a line to Room 434, State Capitol, 201 West Capitol Ave., Jefferson City, MO 65101.