



MISSOURI SENATE

JEFFERSON CITY

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**A Weekly Column for the
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Holiday Traditions

JEFFERSON CITY – Thanksgiving is one of my favorite holidays, and not just because I like to eat. I really enjoy the history of our national holiday and all of the traditions that have grown from that first Day of Thanks back in 1621. Our modern celebration revolves around the family – gathering together at Grandma’s house, where the aroma of roasted turkey and baked pies fill the air, watching the Thanksgiving Day parade, maybe a little football, and then sitting down together as a family to give thanks for our blessings. Then we retire to the living room for the traditional post-meal nap!

It’s a much different observance today than the original Thanksgiving between the Plymouth colonists and the Wampanoag Indians in 1621. The autumn harvest feast had actually been a tradition among Native American groups throughout the Americas for centuries before the Europeans arrived. The Wampanoag Indians shared this tradition with the Plymouth colonists.

In 1621, Edward Winslow observed in his “A Journal of the Pilgrims at Plymouth,” that *“Our harvest being gotten in, our governor sent four men on fowling, that so we might after a special manner rejoice together after we had gathered the fruit of our labors. They four in one day killed as much fowl as, with a little help beside, served the company almost a week. At which time, among other recreations, we exercised our arms, many of the Indians coming amongst us, and among the rest their greatest king Massasoit, with some ninety men, whom for three days we entertained and feasted, and they went out and killed five deer, which they brought to the plantation and bestowed upon our governor, and upon the captain, and others. And although it not always be so plentiful as it was at this time with us, yet be the goodness of God, we are so far from want that we often wish you partakers of our plenty.”*

During the American Revolution, the Continental Congress suggested a yearly day of national thanksgiving. New York State adopted Thanksgiving Day as an annual custom in 1817, and by the middle of the 19th century many other states had done the same. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln declared the final Thursday in November as a national day of thanksgiving. Congress finally made Thanksgiving Day an official national holiday in 1941.

I know this has been a difficult year for a lot of families because of the struggling economy, but I hope everyone still takes the time to give thanks for the blessings they do have – life, health, and family.

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.