

Thanksgiving: Fact Sheet

Updated November 19, 2025

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R44279

Introduction

Thanksgiving is a federal holiday observed on the fourth Thursday in November.

In 1789, President George Washington declared November 26 a National Day of Thanksgiving. Subsequent Presidents issued Thanksgiving proclamations, but the dates of the commemoration changed. In 1863, President Abraham Lincoln issued a proclamation establishing the last Thursday of November as Thanksgiving.

In October 1941, Congress passed H.J. Res. 41, which declared the last Thursday in November a legal holiday. In December 1941, the resolution was amended to establish the holiday as the fourth Thursday, taking into account years when November has five Thursdays.

This guide is designed to assist congressional offices with work related to Thanksgiving. It provides links to sample congressional speeches, presidential proclamations, and cultural and historical resources.

CRS Report

CRS Report R41990, *Federal Holidays: Evolution and Current Practices*, by Jacob R. Straus

Selected Congressional Speeches

Members of Congress often make floor statements, issue press releases, and enter Extensions of Remarks into the *Congressional Record* to recognize federal holidays. The following are some examples that may be of assistance in preparing such statements:

- Senator John Cornyn, “The First Thanksgiving Before Plymouth Rock,” column on Senator Cornyn’s website (November 25, 2024)
- Representative Mike Quigley, “Happy Thanksgiving,” column on Representative Quigley’s website (November 23, 2023)
- Representative Tom Cole, “A Season of Thankfulness,” column on Representative Cole’s website (November 21, 2022)
- Representative Steve Cohen, “Congressman Cohen Wishes All a Safe Thanksgiving,” press release on Representative Cohen’s website (November 24, 2021)
- Senator Shelley Moore Capito, “Thanksgiving,” remarks in the Senate, *Congressional Record* (November 18, 2020)

Presidential Proclamations

One of the uses of a presidential proclamation is to honor a group or call attention to certain issues or events. Proclamations commemorating Thanksgiving include the following:

- Presidential Proclamations—President Donald J. Trump (2025-)¹
- Presidential Proclamations—President Joseph R. Biden, Jr. (2021-2025)
- Presidential Proclamations—President Donald J. Trump (2017-2021)²

¹ Link provides access to proclamations made by President Trump during both of his terms, where available.

² Link provides access to proclamations made by President Trump during both of his terms, where available.

- Presidential Proclamations—President Barack H. Obama (2009-2017)
- Presidential Proclamations—President George W. Bush (2001-2009)

Earlier presidential proclamations are available through the Government Publishing Office (GPO) website at govinfo.gov.

Thanksgiving Day Resources

Numerous government resources provide information on the history and culture of the holiday. Some of these include the following:

- Thanksgiving Primary Source Set, Teacher’s Guide, Library of Congress
- Thanksgiving Day, Department of State
- Thanksgiving, National Archives News, National Archives and Records Administration
- Congress Establishes Thanksgiving, National Archives and Records Administration, Center for Legislative Archives
- Thanksgiving in North America: From Local Harvests to National Holiday, Smithsonian Institution
- Lincoln and Thanksgiving, National Park Service.

Author Information

Audrey Celeste Crane-Hirsch
Reference Librarian

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.