

Thanksgiving: Fact Sheet

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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:

- Representative Eugene Vindman, "Vindman Gives Thanks to the Seventh District," press release on Representative Vindman's website (December 1, 2025)
- 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)

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

- Presidential Proclamations—President Donald J. Trump (2017-2021)[2]
- 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 Fun Facts, Census Bureau
- 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.

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