

## How George Washington Angered Lawmakers over Thanksgiving

In September 1789, the government of the United States was only a few months old. George Washington was president – the nation's first. Congress was new, too. Some of the early (1)\_\_\_\_\_ came to the president with a question: Would he call for a national Thanksgiving?

One aim was to help (2)\_\_\_\_\_ the young country, which was made of the 13 former (3)\_\_\_\_\_. Calling a national Thanksgiving would be a way to bring Americans together.

But other lawmakers strongly (4)\_\_\_\_\_ to the idea. (5)\_\_\_\_\_ had two main concerns.

First, some saw Thanksgiving as a religious holiday. They noted the president could not use the power of the federal government to (6)\_\_\_\_\_ Americans to follow -- or not follow -- a religious tradition.

Second, (7)\_\_\_\_\_ of the measure believed the president did not have the right to call a national Thanksgiving. That power (8)\_\_\_\_\_ to the leader of each state, they said.

In the end, Washington did (9)\_\_\_\_\_ call for a national Thanksgiving. It was the country's first presidential (10)\_\_\_\_\_. In it, he called for a national "day of public thanksgiving and (11)\_\_\_\_\_."

He also tried to satisfy opponents of the idea.

Melanie Kirkpatrick is the writer of "Thanksgiving: The Holiday at the Heart of the American Experience." She explains that Washington sent copies of his proclamation to the leader of each of the 13 states. He asked them to call a national Thanksgiving on the day he had (12)\_\_\_\_\_.

The president was very well respected, Kirkpatrick notes. And so the state leaders all agreed.

In the years that followed, some presidents (13)\_\_\_\_\_ their own proclamations for a day of thanksgiving; many others did not.

Finally, in 1941, lawmakers in Congress made the (14)\_\_\_\_\_ Thursday in November a legal holiday.

This Thanksgiving, millions of Americans will (15)\_\_\_\_\_ to eat a meal and express their thanks. Their gatherings may (16)\_\_\_\_\_ George Washington's first Thanksgiving proclamation. In it, the first president made a point of declaring that people of all religions should celebrate Thanksgiving.

That idea is still important. Almost everyone in the country, including immigrants, (17)\_\_\_\_\_ the holiday in some way.

Kirkpatrick says that for new Americans, the day can be a (18)\_\_\_\_\_ of passage. In her words, "The idea is that once you celebrate Thanksgiving, you know you are (19)\_\_\_\_\_ participating in a national festival that (20)\_\_\_\_\_ your position as an American."

I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.



belonged cements chosen colonies Critics echo formally fourth gather issued  
lawmakers objected observes opponents prayer proclamation rite truly unify urge

-----Key-----

### How George Washington Angered Lawmakers over Thanksgiving

In September 1789, the government of the United States was only a few months old. George Washington was president – the nation's first. Congress was new, too. Some of the early lawmakers came to the president with a question: Would he call for a national Thanksgiving?

One aim was to help unify the young country, which was made of the 13 former colonies. Calling a national Thanksgiving would be a way to bring Americans together.

But other lawmakers strongly objected to the idea. Critics had two main concerns.

First, some saw Thanksgiving as a religious holiday. They noted the president could not use the power of the federal government to urge Americans to follow -- or not follow -- a religious tradition.

Second, opponents of the measure believed the president did not have the right to call a national Thanksgiving. That power belonged to the leader of each state, they said.

In the end, Washington did formally call for a national Thanksgiving. It was the country's first presidential proclamation. In it, he called for a national "day of public thanksgiving and prayer."

He also tried to satisfy opponents of the idea.

Melanie Kirkpatrick is the writer of "Thanksgiving: The Holiday at the Heart of the American Experience." She explains that Washington sent copies of his proclamation to the leader of each of the 13 states. He asked them to call a national Thanksgiving on the day he had chosen.

The president was very well respected, Kirkpatrick notes. And so the state leaders all agreed.

In the years that followed, some presidents issued their own proclamations for a day of thanksgiving; many others did not.

Finally, in 1941, lawmakers in Congress made the fourth Thursday in November a legal holiday.

This Thanksgiving, millions of Americans will gather to eat a meal and express their thanks. Their gatherings may echo George Washington's first Thanksgiving proclamation. In it, the first president made a point of declaring that people of all religions should celebrate Thanksgiving.

That idea is still important. Almost everyone in the country, including immigrants, observes the holiday in some way.

Kirkpatrick says that for new Americans, the day can be a rite of passage. In her words, "The idea is that once you celebrate Thanksgiving, you know you are truly participating in a national festival that cements your position as an American."

I'm Kelly Jean Kelly.

