
Symposium

Expert Opinion

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Counting Our Blessings

Things to be thankful for.

An NRO Symposium

With a lot going wrong in Washington and in the world, this Thanksgiving seems like a much-needed time to count one's blessings, perhaps especially for those on the right. We asked some friends of *National Review Online*: Politically and culturally, what are you most grateful for this Thanksgiving?

MONA CHAREN

This is my favorite holiday of the year. Counting one's blessings is the key to mental and spiritual health.

I don't think it's just wishful thinking to notice that the electorate is recoiling from the "change" President Government is presiding over.

The first inkling was unexpected. Back in May, a Gallup poll found that, for the first time in 15 years, a majority of Americans called themselves "pro-life." In August, town-hall meetings became gauntlets for Democrats. Tea parties erupted nationwide.

Then there was the September poll showing that majorities believe the government is trying to do too many things that would better be left to businesses and individuals. In October, only 43 percent of voters said they would vote to reelect President Obama if the election were held today. More recently, Republicans moved ahead of Democrats in the "generic ballot question," with 48 percent of likely voters preferring Republicans in 2010 versus 44 percent for Democrats. Among independent voters, the preference for Republicans has jumped 22 points in six months.

Polls have consistently shown that Americans do not support the health-care overhaul making its way through the Congress.

The November election results in New Jersey and Virginia, combined with Obama's approval rating dropping below 50 percent for the first time, suggest that the Democratic party's popularity is brittle.

One of the Gallup polls showed that most voters believed back in January that Obama would govern as a moderate. As they discover his liberalism, disillusionment is setting in.

Let us give thanks.

— *Mona Charen is a nationally syndicated columnist.*

MONICA CROWLEY

As we count our personal blessings this Thanksgiving, we should also count our political and cultural

blessings, because we have more of them this year than anticipated. Twelve months ago, conservatives were lamenting painful presidential and congressional losses. We were told that the Democratic party was poised to enjoy permanent majority status, that the conservative movement was on its last legs, and that the Republican party was a desiccated relic, a regional party that couldn't win outside the South.

What a difference a year — along with a radical, far-left presidential and congressional agenda — make. By pushing big spending, big government, and high-tax anti-growth policies, the Democrats made a bad economic situation worse and handed conservatives an opportunity to reembrace our core principles of limited government and individual freedom.

Remarkably quickly, we rose from the ashes, in the form of the tea-party grassroots rebellion, early-American-style town-hall agitation, and statewide Republican victories in Virginia, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania (note to the Left: the latter two are north of the Mason-Dixon line).

We're seeing this reflected in the culture, too. New polls show that 40 percent of Americans consider themselves "conservative"; and majorities are now pro-life, pro-gun, anti-gay marriage, and opposed to nationalized health care and big-time government intrusion in the economy.

I'm grateful that the tide is turning, and I'm even more grateful that it's because of Americans' willingness to fight for the constitutional precepts of self-governance and self-sufficiency. Something tells me the founders are thankful too.

— *Monica Crowley is a nationally syndicated radio host, a panelist on The McLaughlin Group, and a Fox News contributor.*

DAVID GELERNTER

I'm grateful for Barack Obama. He is a perfect walking, talking embodiment of today's establishment just as surely as Robert McNamara was 40 years ago. Obama is a warning in plain language, and we are lucky he has come in time.

He speaks well, looks good, and is smart; he is even black and from Harvard — a royal flush! He hopes to be a citizen of the world, not a patriot. He is a connoisseur of all fine religions. He is Internet Man who puts his faith in global chatter, not in fighting for the things he loves. He believes in a world peopled by endless copies of himself.

He is the perfect thing for jarring us awake. We ignore our schools and colleges even as they graduate new classes of Obamoids year after year. Each year there is less Americanism and more globalism among our leading citizens, less knowledge and more sophistication. Among children, less interest in Thanksgiving and a small band of fierce Christians hanging onto a new world by their fingertips, more interest in Black Friday, the perfect post-Christian feast. Take Obama as the gift he is; look to your schools!

— *David Gelernter is a professor of computer science at Yale, a contributing editor of The Weekly Standard, and author of the recently published Judaism: A Way of Being.*

LUCIANNE GOLDBERG

This Thanksgiving, more than ever, I am deeply grateful for the large, strong, loving heart of the average American. That heart beats within those who love this country enough to die for it.

It is also a tolerant, forgiving, and gracious heart. But there are limits to how far it can be assaulted. It has a voice and we are beginning to hear it speak. At first it was a murmur, then a rumble, then — as the tea parties assembled and the buses and trains and automobiles began to roll toward the hundreds of town halls and open parks and street corners — it became a shout.

As we pause, heads bowed, to give thanks for all we have and all we are, let's remember to enjoy it, for it may be the last quiet moment we will have for some time.

People ask their leaders and each other, "What can I do?" Here's the answer. Take your big strong heart and big loud voice . . . and scream!

For this we shall all be eternally grateful.

— *Lucianne Goldberg publishes lucianne.com.*

PETE HEGSETH

This Thanksgiving, stark cultural contrast provides the prism through which I'm thankful for our country's blessings and public servants. During six years in the Army, I've witnessed the most patriotic, courageous, and intelligent Americans our country has to offer. From wartime generals to war-tested fire-team leaders, our warriors alone are reason enough to give thanks. They make the extraordinary seem ordinary.

I recently started a master's degree program at Harvard University. While my classmates are impressive and well-intentioned, with gleaming résumés and do-good spirits, I can paraphrase the late William F. Buckley Jr. and say that I'd rather be led by the first 2,000 names in the U.S. military database than by 2,000 master's candidates from Harvard.

The ethos of selfless and meaningful service is nowhere demonstrated better than in the U.S. military. Our current servicemen and our veterans represent the best of our country's past and future, and we mustn't lose sight of how blessed we are to have them flung across the globe in the cause of freedom. We must also never forget those who sacrificed their Thanksgivings for ours.

— *Capt. Pete Hegseth, who served in Iraq with the 101st Airborne Division from 2005 to 2006, is chairman of [Vets for Freedom](http://VetsforFreedom.org).*

HERBERT LONDON

Despite the lugubrious scenario constituted by possible health-care legislation, government overreach into the private sector, and presidential blunders on every important matter of foreign policy, I consider myself blessed to be an American.

Traveling the country I find Americans the most resilient people on earth, united in their guardedly optimistic belief in the future and firm in their conviction that their nation is exceptional, notwithstanding fashionable claims to the contrary.

I am thankful for those Americans who defy the Second Law of Thermodynamics by acting as if entropy should be defied. They get up each morning, prepare themselves to meet the day, and keep the engines of industry moving. These are our unsung heroes. We don't erect statues of these people and they aren't recognized by our elites, but they represent the backbone of the nation.

I am also thankful for national openness, for the encouragement to innovate. America may be suffering from cultural degradation, but it also fosters ideas — what Julian Simon called the “ultimate resource.” It will ultimately be our economic salvation.

So on this Thanksgiving I count my blessings and thank God that I am here in the United States.

— *Herbert London is president of the Hudson Institute.*

CLAUDIA ROSETT

I’m grateful for the world’s finest military, defending the world’s greatest democracy, in which each of us is still free to choose how to answer questions like this. It may save us yet.

— *Claudia Rosett is a journalist-in-residence with the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, heads its Investigative Reporting Project, and writes a weekly column on foreign affairs for Forbes.com.*

ABIGAIL THERNSTROM

Yes, a lot is going wrong in Washington these days, but much is going right, as well.

Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes once described the Constitution as “the greatest instrument ever designed to prevent things from being done.” It still is — and that is the first blessing we should count. The Democrats want much; they will get relatively little.

The president’s poll numbers have slipped below the 50 percent mark, and this too is good news — but not simply because it’s clear he can’t fool all the people all the time. Americans are judging him as their president; race seems to have become irrelevant. White guilt is fading. In an attack on Rep. Artur Davis (D., Ala.), Jesse Jackson recently said, “You can’t vote against health care and call yourself a black man.” Even on the left, it didn’t go over well. Playing the race card is Jackson’s only skill; it has earned him fame and fortune. He’s now the spokesman of a faded era.

In this season of giving thanks, we should never forget how far we have come down the road of racial progress, and in how short a time. Jazz pianist Oscar Peterson once recalled that, a half century ago, a white man traveled regularly from Georgia to Montreal to hear him play. Having noticed the man in the audience repeatedly, Peterson decided to greet him personally. He held out his hand, but his devoted fan from Georgia could not shake the hand of a Negro.

Centuries of racial insanity — and of white psyches so warped as to be beyond comprehension — are behind us.

— *Abigail Thernstrom is the author, most recently, of Voting Rights — and Wrongs: The Elusive Quest for Racially Fair Elections. She is an adjunct scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and vice chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights.*