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Margaret Chase Smith's 1972 Election: The Fall of an Institutional Giant

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Abstract

Margaret Chase Smith was the first woman to serve in both houses of Congress and was well-known by her constituents in Maine as a principled, integrous public servant. In 1972, after 24 years in the Senate, Margaret Chase Smith lost her first ever election to democratic challenger, William Hathaway. An examination of the primary source documents available at the Margaret Chase Smith Library in Skowhegan, Maine, as well as local and national newspaper coverage, finds three main reasons that Smith suffered defeat: Smith was unwilling to let go of her traditional way of campaigning, she was berated by a press that she had antagonized throughout her career, and the state of national politics caused a coalition of out-of-state forces to rise up against her.

Margaret Chase Smith's 1972 Election: The Fall of an Institutional Giant

Margaret Chase Smith of Maine was the first woman to be a member of both houses of Congress. Throughout her career in the Senate from 1949-1973, she developed a reputation as a dedicated and principled public servant. In her 1972 senatorial race, Senator Smith faced a strong democratic challenger in William Hathaway and consequently lost the election to him. This result came as a shock to many who were well acquainted with Smith's record and reputation. Smith's loss in 1972 necessitates a closer examination that has yet to be undertaken to identify the factors that contributed to her decline in popularity in Maine. A careful examination of primary documents dealing with Smith's campaign, her relationship with the press, press clippings, and letters between Smith and constituents located at the Margaret Chase Smith Library in her hometown of Skowhegan finds three factors to be the most influential: Smith's old-fashioned campaigning methods, the press' attack on her age and frailty, and a coalition of out-of-state Democrats and Republicans who united against Smith due to the state of national politics.

Smith's final campaign for her Senate seat in 1972 has received little attention, which is surprising since it is a reminder of the importance of a candidate staying relevant and accessible to voters. This race is interesting because even though the majority of Maine saw her as an honorable figure who made great personal sacrifices for the good of the public, she lost to her less experienced democratic opponent, who received 223,971

votes to her 196,846.¹ The story of Smith's 1972 campaign is one that has been repeated throughout American political history. The primary documents surrounding the 1972 election paint the picture of a woman who tirelessly served her constituents and believed that her previously effective methods would continue to carry her to another term. Instead, Smith found that a younger generation with more voting power due to the passage of the 26th Amendment in 1971, which lowered the voting age from 21 to 18, had evolving priorities and perspectives that she was not aware of.² While Smith was greatly respected by Mainers emotionally, in many cases this was not enough to earn their vote in 1972. She was unwilling to change the way that she campaigned because her low-cost, hands-off campaigning was something that she believed made her stand apart from the career politicians.³ Because of the way she campaigned, the younger generation was not able to learn enough about her to be confident in casting its vote for her.

Campaign Methods

Smith fit the mold of a Maine politician perfectly, which explained her many years as the Senator from Maine. She chose to run simple campaigns where she employed little staff and asked volunteers to help her mail pamphlets out instead of contributing money. These extremely cheap campaigns showed the people of Maine that she was a servant of her constituency and unwilling to compromise her values or be

¹ Max Wiesenthal, "Sen. Smith: Maine Changed, She Didn't," 9 November 1972, *The Washington Post*, retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/148252450/6AD05995565A4C12PQ/7?accountid=12085>.

² "Nixon Hails Youth Vote as 26th Amendment Is Certified at the White House," *The New York Times*, 6 July 1971, retrieved from <https://search.proquest.com/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/119208097/E313FC82A4444BD0PQ/1?accountid=12085>.

³ MCS to Mrs. Arthur Davis, 29 January 1973, Elections 72 Correspondence, MCSL.

bought out by any political forces. As Bill Kovach noted, “calmly assessing the opposition, Mrs. Smith chose to ignore it and relied instead on an image of independence and tenacity that fits the traditional concept the people of Maine have of themselves.”⁴ Because her campaign plan had always been successful up to that point, even when it appeared that she was weakened by these methods, she refused to change course. The result was a Senator Smith who appeared old and out of touch with the new voters in Maine.

Smith’s competitiveness appears to be what caused her to enter the 1972 election. She delayed in announcing her run, and many Mainers suspected that she would resign from the Senate that year. Angus King, Hathaway’s campaign manager, stated in an interview that Smith admitted to him that until her primary challenger, the wealthy Bob Monks, announced his candidacy she had not planned on running; she only ran because he irritated her.⁵ She admitted in a letter to her friend Barbara Joy, “even though I had thought I would not run again, I could not do other than that which I did.”⁶ She ended up doing so only because she “never dodged a fight” and “Monks and Hathaway talked so loudly of taking over the state.”⁷ These sources suggest that Smith had realized that her ability to properly serve her constituents was waning, but when faced with challengers whom she felt would not represent Maine as well, she had no choice but to run to protect

⁴ Bill Kovach, “Mrs. Smith Facing Major Democratic Challenge: Hathaway, a Popular Member of House, Seeking to End Her Senate Career,” *The New York Times*, 21 June 1972, retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/119516186/6AD05995565A4C12PQ/15?accountid=12085>.

⁵ Dobbs-King Interview, DVD D651 m King, Angus, Margaret Chase Smith Library.

⁶ MCS to Barbara Joy, 24 November 1972, Elections 72, Correspondence, MCSL.

⁷ Ibid.

her hard work. Knowledge of this attitude helps to explain why she held to her principles so strongly throughout the 1972 campaign.

Smith's record of public service was her main selling point throughout all her campaigns. She had an outstanding and impressive attendance record; she did not miss a single vote for thirteen years and when she did it was only because she required hip surgery. She set a record of 2,941 consecutive votes on the Senate floor.⁸ Smith felt deeply that she had been elected by the people to represent them on the Senate floor and therefore after she was elected, she spent little time in the state of Maine. This trend did not end in campaign season; in all her campaigns, Smith traveled home only on the weekends and never missed votes for campaign events.⁹ Even when she did campaign, Smith confined herself to attending rallies and dinners thanking longtime supporters for their vote. She also refused to discuss many of the issues that Hathaway brought up, an interesting tactic considering she fancied herself the expert on the needs of the people because of her seniority.¹⁰ Because of this, Smith's campaigning tactics relied more on her existing reputation in Maine.

This campaign approach meant that Smith would not do much to establish a new reputation and recognition among young people who were not already familiar with her.

⁸ Berkeley Rice, "Is the Great Lady From Maine Out of Touch?" *The New York Times*, 11 June 1972, retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/06/11/archives/is-the-great-lady-from-maine-out-of-touch-great-lady-from-maine.html>.

⁹ Max Wiesenthal, "Sen. Smith Faces Test in Primary," *The Washington Post*, 18 June 1972, retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/148313147/6AD05995565A4C12PQ/1?accountid=12085>.

¹⁰ Bill Kovach, "Generation Gap emerges in Maine's G.O.P. Primary," *The New York Times*, 20 June 1972, Press Reports, MCSL.

One example of this tactic backfiring with young people comes in a letter from Mrs.

Stephen Golding, a 3 days-married legal secretary. She wrote:

you have absolutely know [sic] idea how furious I got when I read that you had said that there was no need of you trying to campaign against Bill Hathaway because everyone knew your record. For that reason alone I would not vote for you if my life depended on it. The statement sounded as though you thought you were the greatest thing around.¹¹

The sentiment expressed in this letter was rare in documentary sources, but one can imagine that there were young people who shared Mrs. Golding's opinion who did not write her a letter expressing that sentiment.

Though there was a clear move by young people away from Smith, most of the letters written to Smith were written by people close to her own age who supported her in her reelection campaign. Though Mrs. Golding perceived Smith as arrogant for assuming everyone would be familiar with her public record, most young people simply were not aware of her reputation and therefore did not possess the sentimental connection to Smith that their parents had. When she did not emphasize her record throughout the campaign, young people did not do independent research to find it. An editorial in *The Portsmouth Herald* spoke about Smith's "typical arrogance" concerning her record turning off young voters. The editorial opinion was that her staunch individualism was not an attractive quality to young people because it was not evident what she had done to help the people of Maine.¹²

Smith's strategy of relying on her reputation clearly did not endear her to the media, which appreciated exclusive interviews and common appearances that could be

¹¹ Mrs. Golding to MCS, 19 October 1972, Elections 72 Correspondence, MCSL.

¹² "Sen. Smith's Typical Arrogance Urges the election of Hathaway," *The Portsmouth Herald*, 12 October, 1972, Scrapbook, vol. 360, 61, MCSL.

covered and would increase readership. An editorial by H.T. Moody, which eventually endorsed Smith, first covered some of the reasons her campaign was suffering:

“Compared to the very visible and very likable Mr. Hathaway, Sen. Smith seems aloof and cold to her electorate, uninterested in them and unresponsive. She appears to be an old lady who has cloistered herself away from her voters and even the world.”¹³ Moody’s interpretation of Smith’s actions is confusing because Smith was known throughout her career as someone who was extremely receptive to contact from her community. She prided herself on always answering mail the day it came in and responding personally. She fielded the phone calls that came into her congressional office whenever she was available instead of delegating that task to a staffer.¹⁴ Nevertheless, Moody was not alone in this opinion. The press corps reported often on Smith’s seeming out of touch with the state. Moody notes some of the factors that may have caused Smith to look out of touch: “Sen. Smith is also fiercely independent in an age when greater value seems to be placed on cooperation and compromise. She also persists in being concerned with national policy in a time when citizens increasingly expect their federal delegates to use their office to advance the state interests”.¹⁵

Smith received negative press coverage about her age throughout her campaign, though Hathaway attempted to steer his campaign away from such negative attacks since Smith was so well-loved. These attacks in themselves did hurt Smith, but the way she responded to them only escalated the coverage and the damage to her campaign. Angus

¹³ H. T. Moody, “The Editor’s Piano,” *The Star Herald*, Press Reports, MCSL.

¹⁴ Maine U.S. Senate Debate (72), retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5U3sDOnt2cg>.

¹⁵ Moody, “Editor’s Piano”.

King noted that they put the idea in people's heads that she was getting old and that idea gained traction, and then when she campaigned just as she always had, using a limited number of stops and little financial resources, people interpreted it as meaning she really was "over the hill".¹⁶ In this case Smith saw holding fast to her traditional campaign tactics as admirably not bowing to modern political pressures and did not realize that her stand might hurt her optics.

Smith did seem to be aware of the importance of connecting with youth, as evidenced by her correspondence with the University of Maine Republicans. She writes, "your letter and resolution are proof that I do relate to, and communicate with, the young people of your generation. To be sure, there are some of my votes of which you may disapprove... but your letter and your resolution indicate strongly that I do have credibility with you..."¹⁷ Perhaps Smith took too much comfort in the support of the politically involved youth of her own party. Winning the passionate support of the youth of one's own party is not as crucial as courting the swing vote in Maine, a state that is uniquely moderate.¹⁸ Smith should have realized that the letter from the University of Maine Republicans was the only one of its kind and not indicative of the opinions of Maine's youth overall.

Another aspect of Smith's traditional campaigning was her refusal of donations. In a staggering comparison to Smith's primary opponent, who spent \$375,000, and Bill

¹⁶ Dobbs-King Interview.

¹⁷ MCS to University of Maine Republicans, 27 September 1971, Elections 72, Correspondence, MCSL.

¹⁸ Maine Public Opinion Survey, 1,000 Maine interviews, May 1971, MCSL.

Hathaway, who spent \$200,000, Smith spent a combined \$14,500.¹⁹ An examination of Smith's financial disclosures housed at the Margaret Chase Smith Library reveals that Smith received only one donation from the National Republican Senatorial Committee in the primaries and did not use all of it.²⁰ Surprisingly, Smith spent two times more in the primary than she did in the general election. In the general election she spent only \$4,130.12 and all these funds were spent on postage and travel; Smith refused to buy ads.²¹ The only marketing she ever did for her campaigns was mailed pamphlets and bumper stickers. Hathaway, on the other hand, spent a lot of money on TV spots.²²

Smith was very proud of her refusal of donations and was not willing to give up her principles simply because Hathaway was a big spender. Smith sent countless letters to voters who donated to her campaign returning the money they had sent and articulating why she would not accept it.²³ Her commitment to this sentiment even as the race began to slip away from her is admirable. It is clear this is one place in which Smith would not budge, even though she conceded that accepting donations may have allowed her the competitive edge she needed to win.²⁴ She said that she had always run "on [her] own

¹⁹ MCS to Collette Anderson, September 23, 1973, Elections 72, Correspondence, MCSL.

²⁰ Primary Election Campaign Report, Elections 72, Contributions and Expenses 1 of 6, MCSL.

²¹ General Election Campaign Report, Elections 72, Contributions and Expenses 2 of 6, MSCL.

²² Max Wiesenthal, "Sen. Smith: Maine Changed, She Didn't," *The Washington Post*, 9 November 1972, retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/docview/148252450/6AD05995565A4C12PQ/7?accountid=12085>.

²³ General Election Campaign Report, Elections 72, Contributions and Expenses 3-6, MCSL.

²⁴ MCS to Doctor Landry, 28 April 1977, Elections 72, Correspondence, MCSL.

two feet and would continue to do so.”²⁵ In a response to condolences from Mrs. Arthur Davis, Smith wrote after reminding her how much Hathaway spent, “I am unhappy to have lost but pleased that I did not compromise my principles in my last campaign.”²⁶

A Hostile Press

Though Smith’s commitment to her principles and her confidence in her abilities are commendable and easy to acknowledge in hindsight, Smith faced an unusually hostile press during her 1972 campaign. Throughout her career, Smith was known for not catering to the press, but she clearly respected their role in democracy and the freedom of speech. In the years following Smith’s “Declaration of Conscience”, she faced powerful enemies from all sides in her local election but emerged the victor. 1972 seemed different, though, as a portion of the press banded together in opposition to her final run. Smith’s response to the hostile press corps only fueled its efforts against her. Though she received editorial support from many papers, Smith felt that she was unfairly attacked by a large portion of the press.²⁷

The greatest offender in Smith’s mind was the *Bangor Daily News*. She wrote to a supporter, Doctor John Landry, that the *Bangor Daily News* “did what it could to defeat [her] in 1972.” She alleged that the paper bought the *Somerset Reporter* and “imported a man from out of state to be its new editor and in the closing days he had an editorial

²⁵ William Caldwell, “People Wanted Change,” MCSL.

²⁶ MCS to Mrs. Arthur Davis, 29 January 1973, Elections 72, Correspondence, MCSL.

²⁷ MCS to Jo Ripley, 20 December 1972, Elections 72, Washington D.C. Post-Election Correspondence 4 of 4, MCSL.

calling for my defeat.”²⁸ Smith also kept on file letters from constituents reporting that the *Bangor Daily News* had been hostile to their attempts to get their editorials supporting Smith published. Mrs. Joan Janeski was one such case. She wrote a letter in support of Smith to the *Daily News* that was not published, and she told Smith that she was sure others had also sent in letters. No letters supporting Smith appeared, but one did appear supporting Hathaway the day before the election. Janeski wrote that this situation “made [her] aware of the true intent of the *Bangor News*.”²⁹

Richard K. Warren heard that Smith spoke to the *Sunday Telegram* about the *Bangor Daily News*’ agenda against her and responded with a letter to Smith. Smith blamed the *Daily News* for the *Somerset Reporter*’s editorial, and Warren wrote that this was certainly not the case. The *Daily News* chose not to endorse either candidate and allowed local editors to choose whom they would endorse. He named several newspapers owned by the *Daily News* that did endorse Smith and reiterated that the *Daily News* did not support either candidate.³⁰ Warren’s defense does make Smith’s claims look unfounded and there is no proving that the *Bangor Daily News* deliberately blocked letters to the editor from being printed. Warren made it clear that there was no statewide coalition of newspapers that attempted to keep her from victory.

Smith also had a notoriously bad relationship with Donald Larrabee, the *Bangor Daily News*’ Washington Correspondent, throughout the course of her 1972 election. Though he covered her favorably many times in her career, he thought similarly to the

²⁸ MCS to Doctor Landry, MCSL.

²⁹ Joan S. Janeski to MCS, 1 December 1972, Elections 72, Correspondence, MCSL.

³⁰ Richard K. Warren to MCS, 9 February 1973, Press Relationships, Bangor Daily News, MCSL.

growing group of ‘Mainers’ who felt Smith had simply aged past the ability to do her job properly. Larrabee was careful to remain objective in his representation of Smith, writing one article that explained the views of each candidate, then offering questions that he felt needed answers. “These are questions to be asked. Is this good for the country or for Maine? What about those who, at 70, have cover through the system but neither the mental nor physical stamina to exercise it wisely? Does there come a time when new thinking is needed?”³¹ Larrabee certainly felt that new blood would be to the benefit of the people of Maine, but his writing was not antagonistic and was extremely factual. In a story in the *Maine Sunday Telegram*, Larrabee covered Hathaway breaking silence on Smith’s age. In this piece he noted that Hathaway did not directly attack Smith but called for a maximum age limit across the board, also remarking that the seniority system that Smith often used to justify running for another term was outdated.³²

Even with the disapproval couched in nuance, Smith took the negative coverage incredibly personally, with her assistant Bill Lewis writing to a supporter:

While the election is hard to take, an even greater shock and hurt has been the false, malicious and degrading pieces that Don Larrabee has not only written against Senator Smith but inspired and fed to others....Don’s style has been a la Lee Mortimer and he is apparently piqued because the Senator has not given him a bitter, weeping, nostalgic interview.³³

Larrabee responded to a Smith supporter that echoed this sentiment with a letter detailing the way that he covered her positively for twenty-five years and how much he admired

³¹ Donald Larrabee, “To Smith and hate bas...” *Maine Sunday Telegram*, 10 September 1972, Scrapbook, MCSL.

³² Donald Larrabee, “Hathaway to Make Sen. Smith’s Age, Seniority an Issue,” *Maine Sunday Telegram*, 17 September 1972, Hathaway, Press Reports, MCSL.

³³ MCS to Jo Ripley, 20 December 1972, Elections 72, Washington D.C. Post-Election Correspondence 4 of 4, MCSL.

her for her service. He did point out, however, that what he reported about Smith's post-election reclusiveness was not untrue. Smith did refuse interviews with anyone, giving the excuse that she was busy clearing out her office for her successor. Larrabee interpreted Smith's actions as indicative of her deep disappointment and expressed to the supporter that he wished she knew to quit when she was ahead. Larrabee said that wise senators would announce their retirement and be heralded as heroes of public service and celebrated by the rest of the chamber. Smith missed her chance to do this even though: "She must know that it was a mistake to run once more. She was out of touch with the state. The elections results reflect this."³⁴

The most painful blow for Smith was an editorial in her hometown newspaper, the *Somerset Reporter*, where she worked for eight years when she was younger.³⁵ The editorial, entitled "Time for a Change," claimed:

At 74, Mrs. Smith can no longer possibly have the stamina necessary to keep pace with the grueling daily schedule demanded of an effective U.S. Senator....Perfect attendance and seniority are not enough to meet Maine's representative needs today. We need an energetic Senator willing to fight for our state to provide more jobs and clean industry.³⁶

Angus King believes the Skowhegan local paper's endorsement of Hathaway gave him momentum because the headlines were all about the fact that even Smith's hometown was not behind her.³⁷ The sentiment of the editorial was not shared by the entire town. Ray McLaughlin wrote an editorial saying, "to single out Senator Smith as the only

³⁴ Donald Larrabee to Lydia MacDonald, 6 January 1972, Larrabee-Smith Correspondence, MCSL.

³⁵ MCS to Jean Carrigan, Elections 72, Correspondence, MCSL.

³⁶ "Time for a Change," *Somerset Reporter*, 2 November 1972, Hathaway, Press Reports, MCSL.

³⁷ Dobbs-King Interview, MCSL.

candidate the paper wanted to see defeated leaves the impression that this editorial was written with malice aforethought.”³⁸ McLaughlin complained that the paper did not take into account the adverse effect the editorial would have not only on Smith’s reputation, but also the town of Skowhegan.³⁹

Jim Brunelle, with the *Portland Press Herald*, wrote that a friend of his “was especially aggrieved that, with the vast ideological gulf existing between Sen. Margaret Chase Smith and Rep. William D. Hathaway, newsmen might have found something more substantive to fasten upon than Mrs. Smith’s advancing age.”⁴⁰ Brunelle acknowledged that the press did cover this issue more than the other substantial issues, but he also blamed Smith’s response to the coverage for her failed campaign. He believed she gave the age topic too much airtime by bringing it up jokingly at her own rallies. He did, however, admit that she truly was “robust and vigorous as ever.”⁴¹

One puzzling fiasco that occurred during the 1972 campaign was a mix-up with invitations to a public debate from William Farrington. Smith alleged that Farrington had made previous arrangements with Hathaway to appear in a debate because Hathaway accepted the invitation to debate six days before Smith even received an invitation. On July 25, Hathaway accepted the invitation, though Smith’s invitation was not dated until July 26 and not delivered until July 31. Mr. Farrington claimed that both invitations had

³⁸ Ray McLaughlin, “Sentinel Readers Express Views,” *Waterville Sentinel*, 24 November 1972, Elections 72, Correspondence, MCSL.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Jim Brunelle, “A small look at the new senator,” *Portland Press Herald*, 17 November 1972, Elections 72, Press Reports, MCSL.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

been made simultaneously, though from the evidence Smith presented, it was clear that this was patently false. Smith used this example of dishonesty as reason to be wary to accept the terms of the debate. She wrote to Mr. Farrington that she would accept a debate with all the same terms that she had agreed on in previous elections, and those terms alone.⁴² Smith eventually did get a debate on her terms, but this incident only fed into Smith's theory that the local news outlets had an agenda against her.

The press did not become less antagonistic after the election. One of the pieces that infuriated Smith the most was written by Willard Edwards for the *Chicago Tribune*, entitled "Beaten Mrs. Smith Silent, Unseen." In the article, Edwards portrayed Smith as hiding from the press as well as her colleagues and being deeply injured by the betrayal of Mainers. He identified the weaknesses of Smith's campaign as her aloof attitude, her advanced age, and targeting from Ralph Nader's report.⁴³

The 1972 election certainly soured Smith to the press, though she never fostered an excellent relationship with them. In Ralph Nader's questionnaire, Smith wrote that she did not give the media special treatment or attention just because they were instrumental in reaching the base. She said "News media are just as sensitive to criticism as is any person or group – at times, perhaps more so. You never win an argument with a printing press, radio microphone or TV camera for each always gets the last word in an

⁴² MCS to William Farrington, 31 July 1972, Elections 72, Correspondence, MCSL.

⁴³ Willard Edwards, "Beaten Mrs. Smith, Silent, Unseen," *The Chicago Tribune*, 9 December 1972, Elections 72, Press Reports, MCSL.

argument.”⁴⁴ When asked the ways she would like to see the press improved, Smith wrote:

Give more balance of positive news as compared to the predominant reporting of negative news – and less personalized versions and editorializing in news columns and resorting to faceless anonymous ‘reliable’ or ‘informed’ individuals not willing to be identified on otherwise libelous statements and reporters hiding their identity (or non-existence) behind the reporter’s right to refuse to identify his informant.⁴⁵

An Outsider Coalition

Smith, in her letters responding to constituents’ condolences, often touched on a theory that some outsider coalition had banded together to maliciously sabotage her final campaign. She often likened the situation to the political persecution she faced after her “Declaration of Conscience”, although the saboteurs seemed in this case to have more firm political footing for their attacks. In the heat of Richard Nixon’s reelection campaign and the fight over the Vietnam War, Smith’s conservatism left her open to a collection of fair and unfair criticism from national political figures.

The outsider whom Smith felt had the most influence on her last campaign was Ralph Nader, who compiled *Who Runs Congress*, a scandalous pamphlet which Nader claimed was meant to spur on a special session of Congress that would address the widespread corruption and incompetence covered in the report. Nader sent out a 633-question questionnaire to each member of Congress as well as sending investigators to do interviews and gather information on each member of Congress. At first, Smith did not even agree to cooperate until other members of Congress did. She did eventually sit down and fill out the entire questionnaire and claims she complied with the interview process

⁴⁴ Ralph Nader Congress Questionnaire, Question 387, Nader-Smith Correspondence, MCSL.

⁴⁵ Ralph Nader Congress Questionnaire, Question 388, Nader-Smith Correspondence, MCSL.

until they asked Bill Lewis a “smutty question.”⁴⁶ She then felt that she knew the true intentions of Nader’s report and refused to cooperate further. In response to the negative coverage Smith received in the report, Lewis mentioned that there were other Congressmen that did not even agree to fill out the questionnaire and Smith should not be victimized for not fully complying to Nader’s demands.⁴⁷

The official report, which came out on October 21st, only a little over two weeks before election day in Maine, was not kind to Smith. Though it highlighted her achievements early in her career, including her “Declaration of Conscience” in the 1950s, as courageous, the profile had nothing flattering to say about Smith’s recent accomplishments, even though her record and reputation had remained consistent. The profile particularly targeted Smith’s close relationship with her advisor and assistant, Bill Lewis. Smith relied heavily on Lewis to keep her office running, and he often handled press interviews for her, which diminished her image as a powerful and independent woman.⁴⁸ Nader’s profilers wrote about Lewis: “[He] is as close to being a surrogate senator as one can be...Lewis is treated with all the courtesy, honor, and respect accorded with the Senator herself. He is universally recognized as her alter ego without whom no major decision has been made for almost a quarter of a century.”⁴⁹ To be fair, Nader was certainly not the only writer to point this out; an editorial in the *Washington*

⁴⁶ Senator Smith’s Comments on Nader Profile on Her, Nader Smith Correspondence, MCSL.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ralph Nader, “Margaret Chase Smith,” *Citizen’s Look at Congress*, 1-2, Nader-Smith Correspondence, MCSL.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 1-2.

Sunday Star indicates that many were distrustful of Lewis' close involvement in Smith's campaign and office work.⁵⁰

The profile also highlighted some of Smith's more embarrassing blunders. One example was the "Colby Affair," which generated press attention when Smith addressed a group of students at Colby College defending President Nixon's actions in Cambodia. She passed a question about the opinions of her constituents of the war onto Lewis, which was unusual to the students, who were used to hearing about how Smith read all her own mail. They were also surprised that she was a ranking member on the Armed Services Committee and did not seem to have a good understanding of the situation. More embarrassingly, Smith denied to a student that President Nixon had sent troops to Laos, at which point a student stood up and explained that he had been wounded in Laos and lost half his platoon there. Smith was mortified by the affair and did not handle it well, claiming that the students conspired against her in order to embarrass her publicly.⁵¹

The conclusion of Nader's profile is entitled "A Declaration of Conscience—or of Contradictions?"⁵² It states:

The lady from Maine is a mass of contradictions....she is suspicious and wary of the press and claims that it is economically wise not to send questionnaires and newsletters to her constituents. Nor does she make an attempt to communicate with her constituents on an even more personal basis as she does not return to the state very often.... She has...retreated to a dull anonymity.⁵³

⁵⁰ *Washington Sunday Star*, 1 October 71, Scrapbook vol. 360, 45, MCSL.

⁵¹ Nader, "Margaret Chase Smith," 12.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 20.

In a similar unkind tone, the profilers questioned whether Smith's "Declaration of Conscience" was truly an indication of her true character and value or the one anomaly in an otherwise uneventful and unspectacular career.⁵⁴ Given the harsh attacks not only on her career but also on her character, it is no surprise that Smith took great offense to this coverage.

Nader's work did not receive rave reviews. It was popular among the masses because it boasted of stories of congressional corruption and scandal, but the scholarly work was shoddy, hasty, and riddled with typos and errors, most likely because Nader rushed its production so that it would come out in time for the elections.⁵⁵ *The New York Times'* coverage of the report's release admitted that the rush "presumably assist[ed] those incumbents who get a generally favorable report and penaliz[ed] those on whom the individual Nader authors look with less favor."⁵⁶ Smith interpreted the timing as a direct and intentional attack on her campaign, but more likely Nader realized he would make the greatest profit and perhaps progress if the book came out before the elections. Smith believed that Nader was the largest cause behind her loss, although many people wrote to her assuring her that the good people of Maine were far too rational to believe any of Nader's falsehoods, including Sam Bouchard of the Senate Republican Conference, who wrote, "since Maine people are sensible, realistic, and more

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁵⁵ "Nader's Bird Watchers," 16 October 1972, Nader-Smith Correspondence, Press Reports, MCSL.

⁵⁶ John D. Morris, "Nader Profiles Give Data for Evaluating Congress," *The New York Times*, 22 October 1972, retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/1972/10/22/archives/nader-profiles-give-data-for-evaluating-congress-nader-releases.html>.

sophisticated than these writers think, I really doubt they will make much of a profit in Maine.”⁵⁷

Despite the confidence of some of her supporters, Smith felt obligated to respond to Nader’s profile. She pointed out situations where she was unfairly targeted by Nader’s “raiders,” as they asked her to disclose her financial records but no other Senators and they delved into her committee attendance history to make the case that she had a poor attendance record.⁵⁸ She also revealed that she had been willing to agree to an interview with Mr. Nader himself, but he refused to do so. He was also supposed to send her a copy of the profile when it was done and before it was released, which Smith claimed he did not do. She concluded her statement:

I have extended more cooperation to Mr. Nader’s so-called Congress Project than most members of Congress have. But I have no intention of submitting to political blackmail whatever form it comes in. If the choice is either to subserviently submit to political blackmail or risk a political smear designed to engineer my defeat for reelection, I have no hesitancy but to take the risk of an outsider coming into Maine to tell the people of Maine how to vote under the guise of a loaded profile designed to cause my defeat.⁵⁹

As alluded to in the above statement, Smith truly believed that she was defeated by a coalition of outside forces. She wrote in a letter to Collette Anderson that she “felt that there was serious injustice done to [her] – principally Ralph Nader’s lies... [her] defeat was engineered by non-Maine forces.... They made an all-out effort to purge me from the Senate just as Senator Joseph McCarthy attempted in 1954.”⁶⁰ To another

⁵⁷ Sam Bouchard to MCS, 26 October 1972, Nader-Smith Correspondence, MCSL.

⁵⁸ Senator Smith’s Comments on Nader Profile on Her, Nader Smith Correspondence, MCSL.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ MCS to Collette Anderson, 23 September 1973, Elections 72, Correspondence, MCSL.

supporter who wrote to her about Ralph Nader's report, Smith quipped, "To me it smacks too much of the McCarthyism that I fought back in the fifties."⁶¹

Another one of the other outside forces that Smith believed caused her great harm was the National Committee for an Effective Congress (NCEC). The NCEC was a committee that pledged to take well-meaning voters' money and provide services that would favor the underdogs and root out corruption in politics. They were ardent supporters of Smith in her fight against Joe McCarthy in the 1950s, which is why Smith was so confused when they decided to support Hathaway for the 1972 election and released literature characterizing her as "hawkish and conservative," as well as casting doubts on her health.⁶² Smith was now being targeted by extreme liberals, as opposed to the extreme conservatives who had joined forces opposing her in the 1950s. The NCEC was Hathaway's greatest campaign contributor and spread false information concerning Smith's age, health, and record in the Senate.⁶³

Walter B. Smalley pointed out in his coverage of the issue that out-of-state unions contributed heavily to Hathaway, though this factor was never emphasized by Smith herself as a reason for her loss.⁶⁴ He then discussed the out-of-state newspapers that ran negative stories which appeared to contain misrepresentations and falsehoods about Smith's character and reputation, the most notable being a *New York Times* story that attacked her age and called her out of touch with the state of Maine while refusing to

⁶¹ MCS to Mrs. Dowling, 18 October 1972, Nader-Smith Correspondence, MCSL.

⁶² Walter B. Smalley, "Outsiders Drive to Defeat Senator Smith," 2, Elections 72, MCSL.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

comment on the fact that Hathaway did not even have a residence in Maine.⁶⁵ The *Washington Post* also wrote negatively about Smith's age, saying that it was "top secret," though this was clearly not the case as Smith's age was one of the most important issues of her campaign.⁶⁶

What Smith identified as a conspiracy against her by outside sources was more likely the reaction to her position on the issues that some Mainers were less likely to pay attention to. Throughout her campaign, Smith refused to discuss the issues and instead relied on her record to speak for her service to Maine and her ability to stand up against partisan bullies. Unfortunately, the events surrounding the 1972 and even the preceding 1966 election weakened Smith's position in Washington and with the voters in Maine.⁶⁷ She became one of the leading players in the argument over the United States' development of an anti-ballistic-missile (ABM) system. While Nixon pushed for its development, Smith took a position that puzzled many of her colleagues by siding with the liberals in opposition to the ABM system.⁶⁸ However, she did not oppose it with the typical rationale. Smith pushed for the United States to instead pour money into an offensive weapon that would prove a deterrent against Russian attack instead of a defense.⁶⁹ This issue did not hurt Smith's standing in Maine, as her mail was running more anti than pro-ABM. It did complicate her situation in Washington, however,

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁶⁷ Eric R. Crouse, *An American Stand: Senator Margaret Chase Smith and the Communist Menace, 1948-1972* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2010), 102-114.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 96.

because it caused her to come up against Senator Albert Gore Sr. in a way that hurt her in 1972.

More influential in the 1972 election was Smith's position on Vietnam. For the first time since the early 1900s, her constituency in Maine was leaning toward a Democratic majority in 1964. Even in this shifting political climate, Smith was still able to handily defeat her opponent in this election and interpreted that to mean that her position on Vietnam was broadly accepted.⁷⁰ From the election of President Richard Nixon onward, Smith defended military action in Vietnam in order to keep Communism under control and expressed frustration that what she found to be moderate and rational views caused the left to view her as inhumane and uncaring.⁷¹

Albert Gore Sr. and the Council for a Livable World joined the NCEC in their attacks on Smith. Gore, who had cooperated and worked with Smith during his time in the Senate, claimed that he could not support her due to her increasing conservatism, her support of the Vietnam War, and Hathaway's strong opposition to the ABM system. Smalley wrote that this rationale did not make logical sense, as Hathaway had indicated that he supported sending more troops to Vietnam after a visit to Asia. He also noted that Smith was truly at the forefront of opposition to the ABM system, but Gore seemed to ignore this fact and overemphasize Hathaway's influence.⁷² Hathaway and his campaign

⁷⁰ Ibid., 114.

⁷¹ Ibid., 132.

⁷² Smalley, "Outsiders Drive," 2-3.

allowed others to attack Smith's record on Vietnam instead of speaking on it themselves because Hathaway had supported the war under President Lyndon Johnson.⁷³

Smith's independent streak which endeared her to most Mainers was not seen as such an admirable trait by members of the Senate. Her vote was unpredictable, and she showed allegiance to only her principles, not her party platform. One columnist wrote, "It's long been my opinion that Mrs. Smith has a certain apartness from her colleagues which does not make for camaraderie."⁷⁴ But contrary to her record of standing apart from other politicians, Smith had shown strong support of the Nixon presidency, a stand that did not increase her odds in 1972. In *The New York Times*, John Finney wrote:

"Among conservative as well as liberal and moderate Republican Senators, there is a commonly expressed feeling of critical detachment, at times verging on bitterness, about the Nixon White House. They contend that Mr. Nixon concentrated on a lopsided re-election victory at the expense of support for Republican Congressional candidates."⁷⁵

Nixon wrote Smith twice surrounding the election, once before to ask for her continued support when she was reelected, which he strongly believed would happen.⁷⁶ He then wrote her to console her after her loss, hardly mentioning the election and hoping she would continue to consider him a dear friend.⁷⁷ Smith's stand with Nixon hurt her with some of the more moderate voters in Maine, one of whom wrote her to say he could not

⁷³ Dobbs-King Interview.

⁷⁴ Holmes Alexander, "GOP Wastes Asset by Ignoring Maggie Smith," *Richmond News Leader*, 14 August 1972, Press Reports, MCSL.

⁷⁵ John W. Finney, "Recalcitrant Republicans likely to compound Nixon's problems with Senate," *The New York Times*, 14 December 1972, Press Reports, MCSL.

⁷⁶ Richard Nixon to MCS, 17 October 1972, Campaign, Senate, MCSL.

⁷⁷ Richard Nixon to MCS, 17 November 1972, Campaign, Senate, MCSL.

vote for Smith because of her support of Nixon and the Vietnam War. Since he also could not justify voting for Hathaway, he simply abstained.⁷⁸

Conclusion

Margaret Chase Smith had been so well-loved by Maine and so confident in the continued support of her voters that she overlooked and dismissed some key issues that caused her to lose credibility with her constituents in 1972. Smith was unwilling to change her campaign style because of her rigid principles and its success in the past, and this caused her to look out of touch with many of Maine's people. Her unstable relationship with the press caused reporters to engage in some unfair attacks about her age and frailty, and her response to these attacks only increased their damage. Finally, Smith was weakened by a coalition of outsiders whom she believed unfairly targeted her but were most likely simply responding to her stances and involvement in important national political issues, like the Vietnam War or the ABM system.

WPOR AM&FM, a radio station based in Portland, responded to the election's results with this moving farewell to Smith: "We are sure William Hathaway will do an admirable job of filling Mrs. Smith's Senate seat, but no one will ever take her place. For the years of service, for the unique personal style, for the unswerving devotion to what she believes—we thank Margaret Chase Smith."⁷⁹ Even with the strategic mistakes that she made in her final campaign, Smith was recognized as a formidable force in Maine and respected for her service to the community. She did not leave her office disgracefully

⁷⁸ Charles Brann to MCS, 7 July 1972, Elections 72, Correspondence, MCSL.

⁷⁹ Editorial WPOR AM&FM, 8 November 1972, Elections 72, Correspondence, MCSL.

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and entered a rewarding private life at her home in Skowhegan until she passed away in 1995.

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