

6-1-1992

Margaret Chase Smith's 1950 Declaration of Conscience Speech

Dennis L. Morrison
San Jacinto College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal>



Part of the [Political History Commons](#), [United States History Commons](#), and the [Women's History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Morrison, Dennis L.. "Margaret Chase Smith's 1950 Declaration of Conscience Speech." *Maine History* 32, 1 (1992): 2-25. <https://digitalcommons.library.umaine.edu/mainehistoryjournal/vol32/iss1/2>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@UMaine. It has been accepted for inclusion in Maine History by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@UMaine. For more information, please contact um.library.technical.services@maine.edu.

DENNIS L. MORRISON

MARGARET CHASE SMITH'S 1950 DECLARATION OF CONSCIENCE SPEECH

In 1948 Margaret Chase Smith of Maine became the first woman elected to the Senate entirely on her own merit. She went on to enjoy a long and distinguished career in Congress. The highlight of this career was Smith's 1950 speech against Joe McCarthy, known as her "Declaration of Conscience." In the following article, Dennis Morrison analyzes the speech and traces its origins to Smith's early life in Maine.

On June 1, 1950, Margaret Chase Smith, a first-term Republican senator from Maine, committed what appeared to be political suicide with a speech assailing Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, a Republican from Wisconsin, for his vehement and unsubstantiated attacks on individuals with supposed communist leanings. Without naming him personally, she criticized McCarthy's unfounded and reckless charges. Although contemporary political commentators found partisan reasons for this challenge, Smith's distinct private background and public political career support the theory that her reaction to McCarthy was based solely on her subjective assessment of the situation. The speech, written and delivered by Smith, who had but one year of tenure and was the Senate's only woman, became known as the "Declaration of Conscience" address.

Just four months before Smith's address, McCarthy had given a speech in West Virginia to a women's Republican club where he claimed that numerous communists worked for the State Department. Within days, his charges had made national headlines. Like other Senate members, Smith was struck by the



Margaret Chase Smith confers with two unidentified aides while in the House of Representatives in 1947. Smith's voting record in the House reflected the independent spirit that would lead to her famous "Declaration of Conscience" speech in 1950.

Photographs in this article, unless otherwise noted, were supplied by the Margaret Chase Smith Library, Skowhegan, courtesy Gregory P. Gallant.

public reaction to McCarthy's charges, and her initial concern mirrored that of the public. The Alger Hiss case had previously alerted her to the danger of communist infiltration in the State Department, and she believed that "Joe was onto something disturbing and frightening." After witnessing McCarthy's repeated allegations on the Senate floor, Smith asked the Wisconsin Senator to show her the damning evidence supporting such charges. Although the documents appeared authentic, she did not clearly see how they proved McCarthy's charges. Neither a lawyer or a college graduate, she assumed that her lack of academic training prevented her from recognizing their relevance.¹

The more Smith investigated, however, the more she became convinced that McCarthy did not actually possess the evidence he claimed. She began to believe his accusations were nothing more than a tactic to gain notoriety for himself at the expense of innocent people. Senate immunity allowed McCarthy

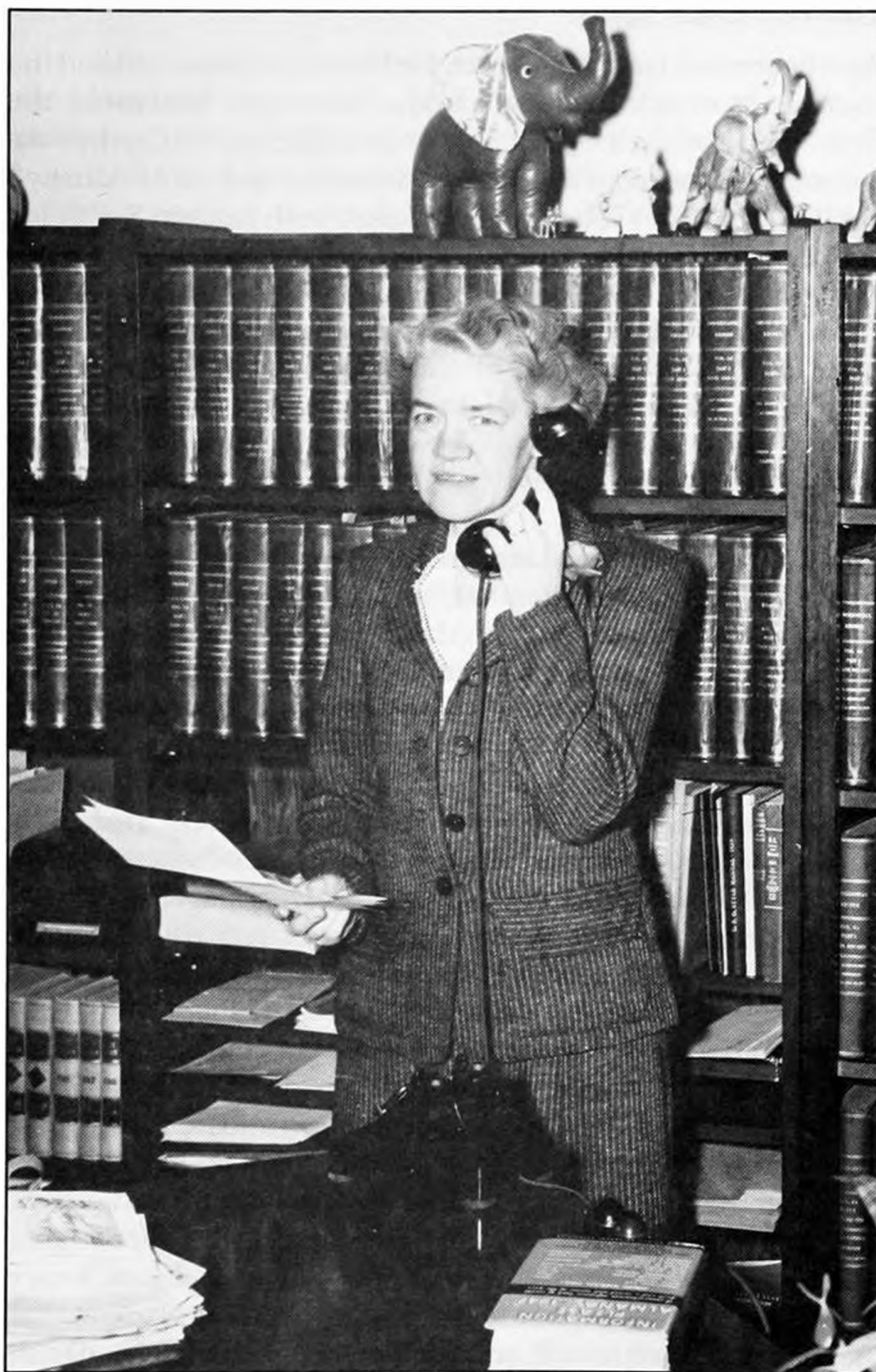
MARGARET CHASE SMITH

to level any charge from the Senate floor without fear of legal reprisal. Smith did not feel it was her place to oppose McCarthy because she was a first-term senator, a member of McCarthy's own party, and the Senate's only woman. Rather, it was the Democrats' responsibility. What she had not expected was the political cowardice and cynicism among senators of both parties; few were willing to risk the political danger to their career that opposing McCarthy would bring.²

Senator Smith's "Declaration of Conscience" address was her first major floor presentation in the Senate. Rising unannounced, she spoke while standing only three feet away from a white-faced, motionless, and unsmiling McCarthy. Smith started her address by criticizing her own party for creating an environment of fear in the Senate. Senators, she believed, abused their immunity when they attacked individuals with unfair or dishonest innuendoes. Smith stated, "It is high time that we remembered that the Constitution, as amended, speaks not only of freedom of speech but also of trial by accusation." Victory was meaningless if won by smear tactics; she did not "want to see the Republican party ride to political victory on the Four Horsemen of Calumny – Fear, Ignorance, Bigotry and Smear." Smith then turned to the Democrats and criticized the opposing party for allowing such an atmosphere of intolerance to continue. All eyes in the press gallery remained focused on McCarthy during the fifteen-minute speech. Smith recalled that she remained in the Senate following her address in anticipation of a McCarthy attack or rebuttal. He, however, quickly left the floor following the speech.³

Many newspapers did not carry the story of Smith's address, especially those in the South. While the story made the front page of the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Houston Post* failed to mention the speech. On an international level, the *London Times* noted the address but left it out of the headlines. Among those that did carry the story, the reaction was mixed.⁴

According to the *Washington Post*, Smith was a Republican, but she was an American first. The paper coined a new word – stateswomanship – for Smith's actions. *Time* magazine reported



Senator Smith's "Declaration of Conscience," delivered on June 1, 1950, received mixed review from the nation's press.

MARGARET CHASE SMITH

that the senator from Maine weighed her conscience and had the courage to attack her own party. They also lambasted the Democrats for their unwillingness to challenge McCarthy's actions. The *New York Times* lauded Smith's attack on McCarthy.⁵

The *New York Times* and *Newsweek* both praised Smith for her concern over the use of immunity in the Senate. In April 1950, Harold Ickes, former secretary of the interior under President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, had written an article in the *New Republic* attacking McCarthy's abuse of Senate immunity. After Smith's address, Ickes declared that had women not been previously given the right to vote, Senator Smith alone would have earned it for all women with her "Declaration of Conscience" speech.⁶

Other newspapers and magazines offered a negative response to Smith's statements. The *Chicago Daily Tribune*, which had rebuked Senator Smith in the past, criticized her speech in an editorial and a political cartoon. The *Saturday Evening Post*, which had previously published a glowing report on Smith following her successful 1948 senatorial election, responded to her speech by calling her part of the "soft underbelly of the Republican Party." The *Brooklyn Tablet*, a New York City Catholic weekly that considered McCarthy a Catholic anti-communist hero, was critical of the speech, and *Life* magazine blasted Smith for being naive about politics.⁷

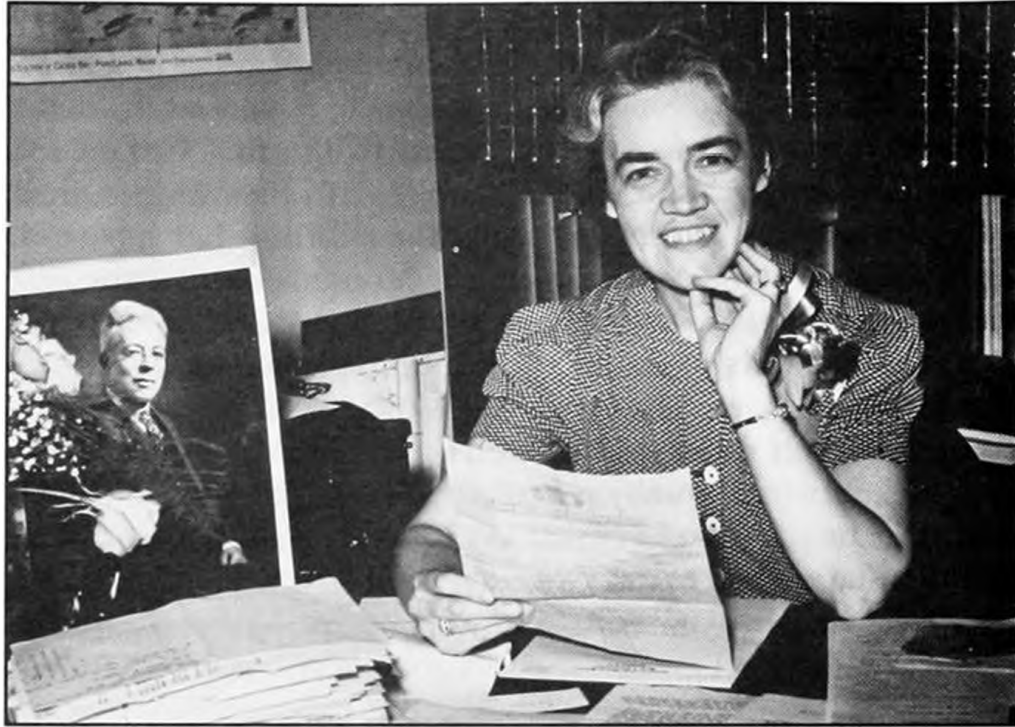
Smith knew she had not been alone in her misgivings about McCarthy. Minnesota Democratic Senator Hubert Humphrey agreed with her assessment of McCarthy but confided, "Heaven forbid Margaret, it would be political suicide [to criticize him]." Unsuccessful in her attempt to enlist Democratic support against the Wisconsin senator, Smith decided to act by herself. She reasoned that the situation had become quite dangerous: McCarthy was "calling everyone a communist who didn't agree with him." Smith's legislative assistant, William C. Lewis, weary of hearing Smith complain about McCarthy, reminded her that she had often repeated an old New England adage: Don't criticize unless you have an alternative. Outraged by McCarthy's attacks, Smith denounced the hearings, despite the implications for her career and her party.⁸

MARGARET CHASE SMITH

Acknowledged as an independent-minded individual, Senator Margaret Chase Smith, at first glance, appeared to fit the stereotyped mold of congresswomen in the first half of the twentieth century. She, like a handful of other women, had gained a seat left vacant following the death of her husband. From 1916, when Jeanette Rankin of Montana became the first woman member of Congress, until 1954, forty-seven women had become members of the House of Representatives. Over one third of these women had entered Congress following elections to replace their deceased husbands. On both sides of the aisle, party leaders had usually relied on these widows to hold such seats for the party and provide unquestioned support for whatever legislation had been favored by their late husbands. Smith, however, had broken with tradition by voting her own conscience. Her background helps to explain this independent spirit.⁹

Smith's roots were not those of the upper class. Born in 1897, Margaret Chase grew up in the town of Skowhegan, Maine. She worked outside of the home to help support her family, laboring as a dime-store clerk and a telephone switchboard operator. Chase taught school for a while despite her lack of a college education, and for nine years worked for Skowhegan's daily newspaper, the *Independent-Reporter*. These jobs demonstrated Smith's perseverance and desire to rise in the business world.¹⁰ She left the newspaper's employ in 1927 to become the office manager of a Skowhegan woolen mill with a salary of fifty dollars per week, a considerable sum at the time. Her business success did not go unnoticed. She became a member of the State Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs and eventually rose to its presidency in 1930. Thus, Chase had accumulated considerable business and public experience before marriage.¹¹

Her husband, Clyde Smith, was a professional politician who won all of his forty-eight election attempts. At age twenty-one in 1897, he became the youngest man in Maine ever elected to the state legislature. Elected as a sheriff at twenty-eight, he later became a selectman. He was chair of the Maine State Highway Commission and fifty-four years old in 1930 when he



Top photo: Senator Smith in June 1940, shortly after she succeed her husband in office. Bottom photo: Senator Smith accompanies Eleanor Roosevelt and A.G. Robinson to the Belasco Theater in 1944 to view an art exhibit of military commanders and war heroes. Voting frequently against her own party, Smith supported much of the New Deal and Fair Deal legislation.



married thirty-three year old Margaret Chase. They had met years before when Chase performed clerical services for the town of Skowhegan. Their relationship developed over a long period. When later asked about their courtship, Margaret Smith claimed that they “spent most of their time campaigning.”¹²

In 1936 Clyde Smith decided to run for a seat in the United States House of Representatives. Having no children, Margaret was able to spend much of her time working with her husband as his campaign director. Her newspaper and business background facilitated the campaigning, since her name was known throughout the state. With his wife’s assistance, Smith scored a decisive victory. Although Clyde had originally intended not to hire Margaret to serve on his congressional staff, thousands of voters made their position known — they had voted just as strongly for Margaret Smith as they had for Clyde Smith. Congressman Smith put his wife on the payroll.¹³

The tremendous strain of professional politics, however, began to show on Clyde Smith. After surviving a heart attack in 1937, he was reelected in 1938. During the first week in April of 1940, while running again, he suffered a second heart attack. On April 7, Congressman Smith released a plan to his constituents calling for Margaret to take his place in the event his health prevented him from assuming office. That evening, Clyde Smith suffered a third and fatal heart attack.¹⁴

State governors appoint a successor following a senator’s death, but a new election is required to fill the unexpired term if a representative dies. In the seven months following her husband’s death, Margaret Smith persevered through four elections: a primary; a runoff; an election to fill the unexpired term; and the regular fall election of 1940. Electioneering experience gained from working with her husband and the sympathy vote factored in her decisive victories, but Smith’s no-nonsense work ethic gave the grieving widow the energy necessary to complete this rigorous schedule.¹⁵

When the United States entered World War II about a year into her first term in Congress, Smith worked hard to raise the status of women in the Armed Services, earning the unofficial

MARGARET CHASE SMITH

title “Mother of the WAVES.”¹⁶ Serving in Congress during the war, Smith consistently voted her conscience. Although her independent actions may not have placed her in the good graces of the GOP hierarchy, her constituents appreciated her efforts, overwhelmingly reelecting her in 1942, 1944, and 1946. Her voting record reflected an independent attitude, with one out of three votes cast against the majority of her party. Despite her Republican label, Smith supported much of Roosevelt’s legislation and expressed admiration for the Democratic president’s achievements in raising the nation from the Depression. She made front-page national headlines in the *New York Times* by being the lone Republican House member to vote for Truman’s budget in 1947.¹⁷

The political turning point in Smith’s life came later that same year when Maine Senator Wallace White declined to run for reelection in 1948 and Smith decided to run for the vacant position. At the time, winning the Maine Republican primary amounted to winning the Senate seat itself. By her own admission, Margaret Smith was a moderate, which made her far too liberal for the Republican hierarchy of Maine. The party regulars felt they had to stop her immediately. Frank Graham, in *Margaret Chase Smith: Woman of Courage*, claimed the Republican leaders offered her the state’s governorship as bait to sway her away from the Senate seat, assuming that Smith might be more manageable in the Blaine House. Smith dismissed this allegation, however, noting that she had to work for every political benefit she received: “I was never given anything political in my life.”¹⁸

Representative Smith faced a difficult decision in running for the vacated Senate position. Maine law required her to withdraw from her House seat if she ran for the Senate. If she lost the Senate race, her political career might be finished. Also, a woman had never previously won a Senate seat entirely on her own. An undaunted Margaret Chase Smith decided to cast her hat in the ring.¹⁹

Smith’s major opponents were Governor Horace A. Hildreth and ex-Governor Sumner Sewall, neither of whom had ever lost



Representative Smith visits with U.S. sailors in Italy. Although Smith neither smoked nor drank, her opponents in the 1948 senatorial race attempted to impugn her morals by circulating this picture. Her written responses to such smear tactics helped her win the race, and these incidents were on her mind when she later denounced Senator McCarthy.

an election. Rich and well-educated, these two men operated within the Republican political machine in Maine, a state long considered impossible to win without machine support. A third opposing candidate was the Reverend Albion Beverage, an isolationist-minded minister. Beverage reminded voters that Smith had favored the draft, as he hoped to gain the vote of many women who expressed a common postwar desire to keep their sons out of foreign wars. A hard-fought campaign was in the offing; Smith's male opponents did not want to see the first woman senator elected on her own come from Maine. Nor did they want to be remembered as the men she defeated in the process.¹⁹

Smith ran on her exemplary congressional career, warning the voters against trading "a record for a promise." Her campaign war chest, which grew almost exclusively from indi-

MARGARET CHASE SMITH

vidual donations of ten dollars or less, reflected her independent spirit. She refused to be indebted to anyone other than the people of Maine. Her opponents used professional campaign tactics and spent over \$750,000 on the primary. Smith, shunning a paid campaign manager, spent \$18,000 on the primary and general election combined. Although there were several joint debates, she devoted most of her time to campaigning in small towns. While campaigning in the Maine countryside, Smith fell and broke her arm. She received national publicity for her determination to continue on the campaign trail despite the accident.²¹

Dirty campaign tactics characterized the 1948 Maine senatorial election, and Smith faced charges that she maintained communist ties. Her morals came into question when a photograph of her with a group of sailors sitting at a table littered with empty beer bottles received wide distribution. Smith neither smoked nor drank — at this table or elsewhere — but Maine had once been a Prohibition stronghold, and the implications of the picture, taken during a Congressional visit to U.S. service personnel stationed in Italy, were potentially damaging. Unlike many politicians who believed that responding to a smear lent legitimacy to the charge, Smith circulated a systematic and thorough reply in writing to each attack against her.

Smith's well-publicized responses to smears leant force to a clamor for clean politics in Maine and resulted in a last-minute swing to Smith. Smith continually reminded voters that she was a "can-do candidate, with a can-did record," a position that garnered wide popular support. Her record and her reputation for honesty led a constituent to remark that "Margaret is as straight as a yard of pump water." Interestingly, unwarranted smears in the 1948 campaign were "at the back of her mind" when she subsequently attacked McCarthy."²²

Smith appealed to the electorate by claiming that she always served the people of Maine well, despite her lack of wealth and formal education. Maine voters knew her as one of their own, realizing that her honest, straightforward, common-sense values meant more than the facile promises offered by her opponents.



On the campaign trail, Senator Smith constantly reminded her constituents that she was a "can-do candidate, with a can-did record," a slogan that suggests both her drive to do well by the people of Maine and her reputation for honesty.

Despite a lower turnout than projected, Smith won an outright majority against all three male opponents, gaining 51 percent of the ballots.

Stunned political experts called Smith's triumph the "most impressive elective victory since women were granted suffrage."²³ Margaret Chase Smith entered the Senate in 1949 as the first woman elected entirely on her own merits. Six other women had become senators prior to Smith, but all of them were appointees or hand-picked candidates of local political machines. Undoubtedly Smith's written replies to the smears leveled against her significantly helped in winning the election.²⁴

Incoming senators do not usually attract national media attention, but the publicity surrounding her swearing-in ceremony almost equaled President Truman's inauguration. The recipient of many "Woman of the Year" awards, Smith issued a press statement indicating an interest in having a woman chosen by the Republicans for the vice-presidential nomination in 1952. In a radio interview, she revealed her sense of humor when Bob Trout asked what she would do if she "woke up some morning and found herself in the White House." "I'd go straight to Mrs.

Truman and apologize,” Smith quickly replied, “Then I’d go home.”²⁵

The senator from Maine wryly stated that she cost the taxpayers less than any of the other ninety-five senators as she could not utilize the male-only recreational facilities used by the other senators. Her fiscal conservatism would not allow her to request special considerations in such matters. Nevertheless, when compelled to use public restrooms on the floor below the Senate building because the Senate restrooms were for men, Smith often made a point of “powdering her nose” on the Senate steps, as if to focus public attention on the Senate’s inconsistent treatment of female members.²⁶

Sensitivity towards mistreatment played a principal role in Senator Smith’s personal decision to challenge McCarthy and his tactics in April 1950. Newsman Ed Hart had previously spoken with Smith’s assistant, William Lewis, about the need for someone to challenge the Wisconsin senator. When Lewis later informed Hart of Smith’s intentions, the newsman suggested they confer with Washington columnist Walter Lippmann who, Hart implied, had similar misgivings about McCarthy. On May 23, 1950, Smith met with Lippmann and outlined her plan. Although Lippmann responded in a positive manner, he did not offer wording for a speech.²⁷

The actual “Declaration of Conscience” contained two separate sections. The first, the main text of the speech, was followed by a brief second section containing five numbered paragraphs. Smith and Lewis prepared the short section of the address following her meeting with Lippmann. She asked her friend, Republican Senator George D. Aiken of Vermont, for his support. Aiken expressed his approval of the short section and discussed with Smith the names of various senators who might support the statement. They hoped, however, to keep the speech a secret, fearing that Republican Senate leaders such as Robert Taft of Ohio or McCarthy himself might block the presentation.²⁸

Smith and Aiken chose five other Republican senators from the northern tier of states: Charles Toby of New Hampshire,

Irving Ives of New York, Edward Thye of Minnesota, Robert Hendrickson of New Jersey, and Wayne Morse of Oregon. All responded with endorsements after being contacted by telephone. With the exception of Senator Morse, each would later waver in their support of Smith's statement. Smith, who more than most appreciated the extent of McCarthy's power, never condemned this lack of resolve.²⁹

Although Smith had the senators' support for her short statement, none of the others saw the text of the main speech prior to its delivery on the Senate floor. Each expressed relief that someone had come forward to challenge McCarthy. Smith recalled, however, that none wanted to take the lead. Since they had not read the main text of the speech, they were unaware of the magnitude of her challenge.³⁰

Over the Memorial Day weekend, Smith delivered three unrelated speeches to her constituents in Maine. Riding in her car with Lewis and other supporters between speeches, Smith repeatedly commented on the need to challenge McCarthy. At home on May 29, Smith outlined her position and Lewis worked her statements into a speech. She did not allow anyone to proofread the speech. Still, Smith was surprised that by June 1 the news of her intended address had not leaked to the press. A well-publicized section of the speech contained the phrase, "The four Horsemen of Calumny — Fear, Ignorance, Bigotry, and Smear." Smith's original note cards indicate that smear was a last minute substitution for intolerance. The shorter section of the speech signed by the other senators contained the word intolerance because Smith did not have time to make the change.³¹

On the way to the Senate floor, Smith happened to board the underground tram with Senator McCarthy. After exchanging greetings, he stated that she had the look of someone about to make a speech. Smith replied that she would, in fact, be making a presentation. The address would be about him and he would not like the references. McCarthy reminded her ominously that he controlled the Wisconsin electoral votes, a veiled threat to Smith's possible vice-presidential aspirations.³²

MARGARET CHASE SMITH

Following the address, the Senate did not rise up in indignation against McCarthy as Smith might have hoped. Although many Senate members privately congratulated Smith for her courage, only two additional senators came forth to support her address. One, New Jersey Senator H. Alexander Smith, later recalled that the Republican senators had wanted to convert McCarthy rather than attack him. He noted that Smith had performed an excellent service in her Declaration of Conscience speech, but that she had made a tactical error in criticizing too severely. This rather protectionist attitude toward McCarthy might have been one reason for the Senate's ambivalence toward Smith's speech. Moreover, in the male dominated Senate culture, Smith stood out as a woman attacking one of the men.³³

Smith's timing was indeed unfortunate in that she flew to Europe on Senate business with the United Nations on the following day. The trip had been planned long before her decision to make the address, but without her presence it was difficult for her sympathizers to muster the support necessary to seriously challenge McCarthy. Before the month ended, an additional setback occurred when hostilities broke out in Korea, which many viewed as a vindication of McCarthy's charges.³⁴

At this juncture, the Republicans appeared less concerned about the accuracy of McCarthy's claims than they were about whether his claims hindered or helped the party against the Democrats. The *Christian Science Monitor* reported that the Republicans had not yet decided whether McCarthy's actions had produced positive or negative results for the GOP. *The New York Times* concluded that Republicans would wait and see if McCarthyism held election benefits for their party before publicly chastising the Wisconsin senator. Smith's speech brought McCarthy's action to the forefront of public opinion before her party had decided how to handle him.³⁵

Some Republicans viewed McCarthy as a positive force for their party. McCarthy's themes were not novel. Harold E. Stassen, during his run for the Republican presidential nomination following World War II, demanded the elimination of the communist party in the United States. Other Republicans had

used the issue as well, some claiming that Truman was “soft” on communists. Coerced into prescribing mandatory loyalty tests for many government workers, the Democratic president later suffered through a series of smears. McCarthyism embarrassed the Democratic administration and produced benefits for the opposing party. Thus, by May 1950, many politicians viewed McCarthy in a positive light and hoped to join his bandwagon for their own political purposes.

Numerous Republicans admitted the reprehensible nature of McCarthy’s later actions, but such attacks had wounded the Democrats and seemed to enhance GOP prospects for 1952. The 1948 photographs of Truman holding the *Chicago Tribune* claiming Dewey’s victory still rankled many Republicans, who felt victory slip from their grasp. A Republican political boss summed up the attitude of many of his fellow party members toward McCarthy’s apparent lack of political morals when he asked, “Are we going to try to win an election, or aren’t we?”⁴¹

Marquis Childs, a contemporary political analyst at the *Washington Post*, claimed that Smith’s speech signaled a rebellion by the liberal wing of the Republican party against the conservative Senate. Cabell Phillips, in the *New York Times*, noted that Senator Smith and her group represented rebel Republican types who did not have any influence in the Senate and wanted to attain a higher position “in a hurry.” Childs further claimed that liberal Republican senators feared McCarthy’s rising power and used Smith to assail him, hoping that America would look askance if McCarthy ruthlessly counterattacked a woman.⁴²

Childs and Phillips incorrectly analyzed Smith’s efforts. Since the others who signed the Declaration endorsed only the second section of the speech, not the main text, Senator Smith’s supporters did not represent an organized assault. The actions of the Republican senators could not be correctly characterized as organized because only Smith, Lewis, and Lippmann knew of the Declaration’s existence. The party hierarchy admired Smith for her integrity, but they looked on her as an independent, rather than the leader of a group or faction. As to the charge that she used her gender as a political tool, Smith recalled that at no

MARGARET CHASE SMITH

time in her discussions with Lewis, Lippmann, or the other senators did her gender enter into the conversation. Bernard Baruch noted, however, "if a man had made the Declaration of Conscience, he would be the next President of the United States."³⁸

McCarthy's immediate reaction to the speech remains somewhat unclear. Elmer Davis's June 1, 1950, ABC radio program claimed McCarthy's office declined to comment on Smith's actions. A biography of Smith claimed McCarthy referred to her and her co-signers as "Snow White and the Six Dwarfs." The *Christian Science Monitor* reported that McCarthy did not reply to Smith's speech. McCarthy claimed he would pursue his attacks on communism, and that no group in the Senate would be able to stop him. The *Houston Chronicle* claimed McCarthy completely sidestepped the blast from Smith and quoted McCarthy as saying he would make a new speech addressing Smith's charges. In typical fashion, McCarthy announced he would withhold details of the speech until a later date.³⁹

Although McCarthy did not initially have an opinion as to why Smith spoke out against him, his Washington office manager, Ray Kiermas, offered a rather bizarre theory for the Maine senator's address. Kiermas claimed the speech was an act of personal revenge. He claimed to have seen personal letters from Smith to McCarthy that contained "curiously vague references." When working together in Senate committees, Kiermas surmised, Smith had misinterpreted McCarthy's collegial interest and flattery. Before his marriage in 1953, McCarthy had enjoyed a reputation as a charmer. According to Kiermas, "Mrs. Smith, fifty-three and a widow, may have taken Joe's flattery too seriously." The highly unlikely theory was obviously biased in favor of Kiermas' friend and employer.⁴⁰

Smith called Kiermas' allegations "so ridiculous they were not worth recognizing." She stated that she met McCarthy socially on one occasion, a dinner party given by her friend, May Craig. Smith summed up her reaction when she recalled: "I wouldn't say he was unattractive, but I couldn't see anything to get very excited about when I talked to him." She added: "I was



In reprisal for her "Declaration of Conscience," McCarthy replaced Smith on the 1951 Investigations Sub-Committee with first-term Senator Richard M. Nixon of California. Later, Nixon solicited Smith's support as a fellow moderate Republican in his bid for the presidency.

not looking for anyone to be charmed by, and I certainly did not find him charming at the dinner party I attended...and I found him otherwise at the Senate chamber."⁴¹

McCarthy did not wait long to launch a campaign of revenge on the Maine senator. In January 1951, he removed Smith from the Permanent Committee that he chaired due to his seniority in the Senate. This unprecedented action held further insult for Smith, since the press received the information from McCarthy's office before he sent word to her. She was replaced by another communist hunter, Californian Richard M. Nixon,

who possessed, McCarthy claimed, superior investigate experience, having served on the House Un-American Activities Committee. Smith countered that she had been serving on investigating committees in the House for four years before either senator's election.⁴²

Disclaiming the interpretations of her motives made by others, Smith indicated that her speech lacked any partisan purpose. The senator had known she was being considered as a possible vice-presidential candidate for the 1952 ticket. Smith claimed that she never wanted to be a candidate, even though the prominent Republican Claire Booth Luce had a nominating speech prepared for the National Convention for her. Considering McCarthy's popularity at that time, Smith's speech would not have furthered her political aspirations.⁴³

On August 25, 1953, Lee Mortimer reported in Walter Winchell's national column that McCarthy "will fight back...especially in Maine where la [sic] Smith is up for reelection in 1954." The Wisconsin senator began his search for a likely candidate to defeat Smith in the Republican primary. At a Portland press conference, he asked if there "was anyone stronger politically with the people of Maine than Senator Smith." One member of the audience informed McCarthy that the only one stronger was "Almighty God." McCarthy wound up choosing Robert L. Jones, a former staffer of the defeated Senator Owen Brewster. In spite of impressive nationwide financial support mustered by McCarthy, and an endorsement for Jones by Joseph R. Kennedy, Sr., Smith defeated Jones by a five-to-one margin.⁴⁴

An additional result of the Maine primary, held in mid-June, was the Senate's awareness that McCarthy had not defeated the one senator who had openly challenged him on the Senate floor. This defeat sent a signal through the Senate chambers that a reign of fear was coming to an end. Senate members were less apprehensive about a McCarthy challenge to their elected positions. The "Army-McCarthy" hearings have historically been cited as the key to the Wisconsin senator's downfall, but this overlooks the impact of the Maine Republican primary as an



Senator Margaret Chase Smith.

MARGARET CHASE SMITH

additional factor behind the Senate's change-of-heart toward him.⁴⁵

Smith's speech was not only a declaration of conscience, but also a public affirmation of her values. She had entered a different world through her elections to the House and Senate, yet she retained and used her ingrained and innate values and common sense in these positions. In McCarthy's methods and tactics, she had sensed a violation of those values. She recalled "seeing person after person ruined by everything but fact...I just couldn't take it anymore."⁴⁶

Smith originally tried to enlist the support of Democrats in her opposition to McCarthy. Following their refusal, she continued to try to prevent what she felt would be "one of the greatest tragedies of the times."⁴⁷ Smith realized that defiance of McCarthy and the Republican party might prove to be a dangerous political decision, but she believed she had to challenge the victory-at-all-cost philosophy of her party. She reasoned that if McCarthy continued unchecked, the democratic process might be endangered. Smith feared the consequences of her speech, but she feared the results of her silence more. She recalled "it was a pretty hard thing to do...I shall always remember what a feeling I had about it."⁴⁸ Despite organized and powerful opposition, the Declaration of Conscience speech stands today as one individual's courageous of speaking out for a principle.

NOTES

¹Margaret Chase Smith, "Margaret Chase Smith Interview," videocassette produced by Dennis L. Morrison, January 10, 1990, Margaret Chase Smith Library Center, Skowhegan, Maine [hereafter cited as Smith, videocassette]; Smith, *Declaration of Conscience*, edited by William C. Lewis, Jr. (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, 1972), p. 7; Smith to Dennis L. Morrison, September 27, 1988, personal files of the author.

²David M. Oshinsky, *A Conspiracy So Immense: The World of Joe McCarthy* (New York: Free Press, 1983), p. 164; Smith, *Declaration*, pp. 7, 9-10; Smith to Morrison, September 27, 1988.

³Barton J. Bernstein and Allen J. Matusow, editors, *The Truman Administration* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), p. 412; Cabell Phillips, *The*

Truman Presidency: The History of a Triumphant Succession (New York: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 387-88; *Houston Chronicle*, June 2, 1950; Smith, videocassette; William S. White, "Seven GOP Senators Decry 'Smear' Tactics of McCarthy," *New York Times*, June 2, 1950; Smith, *Declaration*, p. 18; Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena A. Hickok, *Ladies of Courage* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1954), p. 180; Frank Graham, Jr., *Margaret Chase Smith: Woman of Courage* (New York: John Day Company, 1964), pp. 75-76.

⁴*Times* (London), June 3, 1950; *Houston Post*, June 2, 3, 1950.

⁵"The Congress: A Woman's Conscience," *Time*, June 12, 1950; Alfred Friendly, "7 Senate Republicans Assail 'Smearing,' Exploiting Fear!" *Washington Post*, June 2, 1950; White, "Seven Senators Decry 'Smear' Tactics."

⁶Harold L. Ickes, "Fallen Senator," *New Republic*, April 24, 1950, p. 14; Ickes, "And a Woman Shall Lead," *ibid.*, June 19, 1950, p. 16; *New York Times* June 3, 1950; "Women: Lady from Maine," *Newsweek*, June 12, 1950, pp. 24-26.

⁷Donald F. Crosby, *God, Church, and Flag: Senator Joseph R. McCarthy and the Catholic Church, 1950-1957* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), p. 3; Josephine Ripley, "The Surprising Mrs. Smith," *Christian Science Monitor*, November 11, 1950; Smith, *Declaration*, p. 19.

⁸Smith, videocassette; Oshinsky, *Conspiracy*, p. 164; Smith, *Declaration*, p. 7; Smith to Morrison, September 27, 1988.

⁹Smith, videocassette; Roosevelt and Hickok, *Ladies*, pp. 148-50.

¹⁰"Margaret (Madeline) Chase Smith," *Current Biography*, 1962, p. 394; Graham, *Woman of Courage*, pp. 21-22.

¹¹Graham, *Woman of Courage*, pp. 26-27.

¹²"Margaret Chase Smith," *Current Biography*, 1945, p. 559; Maine Broadcasting System, *Margaret Chase Smith: A Woman of Conscience*, December 11, 1987, videocassette, Margaret Chase Smith Library Center, Skowhegan, Maine.

¹³Smith, *Declaration*, p. 65; Graham, *Woman of Conscience*, pp. 26, 28.

¹⁴"Margaret Chase Smith," *Current Biography*, 1945, p. 559; Graham, *Woman of Conscience*, pp. 28-29.

¹⁵Graham, *Woman of Conscience*, p. 33.

¹⁶"Margaret Chase Smith," *Current Biography*, 1945, pp. 559-60, "Margaret (Madeline) Chase Smith," *Current Biography*, 1962, p. 394.

¹⁷*New York Times*, February 21, 1947; "Margaret Chase Smith," *Current Biography*, 1945, p. 560; Smith, videocassette.

¹⁸*New York Times*, September 14, 1948; *Current Biography*, 1962, p. 395; Smith, *Declaration*, p. 111; Smith to Morrison, September 27, 1988; Graham, *Woman of Conscience*, p. 48.

¹⁹Beverly Smith, "Senator from the Five and Ten," *Saturday Evening Post*, September 1948, pp. 36-37; Graham, *Woman of Conscience*, p. 50.

²⁰"Ballot Box Autopsy," *Newsweek*, September 27, 1948, p. 19; *New York Times*, June 22, 1948; Smith, "Senator from the Five and Ten," pp. 36-37; Graham, *Woman of Conscience*, pp. 50-51.

MARGARET CHASE SMITH

²¹"Maine: A Yard of Pump Water," *Time*, July 5, 1948, p. 21; Smith, videocassette, *New York Times*, February 14, 1948; "Ballot Box Autopsy," p. 19; Graham, *Woman of Conscience*, p. 54.

²²"The Lady from Maine," *New Republic*, July 5, 1948, p. 8; Doris Greenberg, "Well-Wishers Fill Mrs. Smith's Home," *New York Times*, September 14, 1948, p. 21; Smith, videocassette; Smith, *Declaration of Conscience*, p. 105; "Maine: A Yard of Pump Water," p. 21; Smith, "Senator from the Five and Ten," pp. 36-37.

²³*New York Times*, September 6, 1947; June 20, 1948; Roosevelt and Hickok, *Ladies of Courage*, pp. 185-304.

²⁴Eleanor Flexner, *Century of Struggle: The Women's Rights Movement in the United States* (revised edition, Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1959), p. 339; Roosevelt and Hickok, *Ladies of Courage*, p. 178.

²⁵Ethel Klein, *Gender Politics: From Consciousness to Mass Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), p. 21; Graham, *Woman of Conscience*, pp. 69-70; Roosevelt and Hickok, *Ladies of Courage*, p. 179.

²⁶Graham, *Woman of Conscience*, pp. 66-67.

²⁷Smith, videocassette; Smith, *Declaration*, pp. 10-11; Graham, *Woman of Conscience*, p. 74.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰Smith, videocassette.

³¹*Ibid.*; Smith, *Declaration*, p. 12.

³²Smith, *Declaration*, pp. 10-12; Graham, *Woman of Conscience*, p. 12.

³³Richard M. Freeland, *The Turman Doctrine and the Origins of McCarthyism: Foreign Policy, Domestic Politics, and Internal Security, 1946-1948* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), p. 348; Donald Matthews, *U.S. Senators and their World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), p. 13; H. Alexander Smith, 1962-1964, Columbia Oral History Collection, pp. 212, 247, Columbia Oral History Research Office; Smith, *Declaration*, p. 18.

³⁴Smith, videocassette.

³⁵Richard L. Stout, "Eight Republican Senators Repudiate McCarthyism," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 2, 1950, p. 1; *New York Times*, June 4, 1950, section 4.

³⁶Willard Shelton, "The McCarthy Method," *Nation* May 6, 1950, pp. 417-18; Griffith, *Politics of Fear*, p. 103.

³⁷Marquis Childs, "Don't Rock the Boat," *Washington Post*, June 3, 1950, p. 9; Cabell Phillips, "G.O.P. Progressives Want Dynamic Conservatism," *New York Times* June 11, 1950, section 4, p. 7.

³⁸Smith, videocassette; Oshinsky, *Conspiracy*, p. 163; Smith, *Declaration*, p. 1.

³⁹"Excerpt from Broadcast of Elmer Davis: ABC — 1, June 1950," TD., Special Collections, Margaret Chase Smith Library Center; *Christian Science Monitor*, June 3, 1950; William S. White, "McCarthy Defiant of Senate Critics,"

New York Times, June 3, 1950.

⁴⁰Thomas C. Reeves, *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy* (New York: Stein and Day, 1982), pp. 112-13, 297.

⁴¹Smith, videocassette.

⁴²Smith, *Declaration*, pp. 21-23, 42-43; Maine Broadcasting System, *Margaret Chase Smith*.

⁴³William Lewis, "Margaret Chase Smith for Vice President," 1955 TD., Margaret Chase Smith Library Center; Smith, videocassette; Smith, *Declaration*, p. 19; Margaret Chase Smith to Dennis L. Morrison, September 27, 1988; Margaret Chase Smith, "Attempts at National Office," 1955, TD., Margaret Chase Smith Library Center; Margaret Chase Smith, interview by the author, January 8-11, 1990.

⁴⁴Smith, *Declaration*, pp. 51-53; *Milwaukee Journal*, December 20, 1953, reprint, Margaret Chase Smith Library Center; Smith, videocassette; Smith, *Declaration*, pp. 52, 54.

⁴⁵Smith, videocassette; Smith, *Declaration*, pp. 56-57.

⁴⁶*Current Biography*, 1962, p. 394; "Libel and Slander to Limitation of Actions," *Texas Jur III* 50 3d ed. (San Francisco: Bancroft-Whitney, 1986), pp. 137-39; Smith, videocassette; Margaret Chase Smith, *My Creed, This I Believe, Declaration of Conscience*, Margaret Chase Smith Library, n.d.; Smith, *Declaration*, pp. 110-11; "Lady from Maine," p. 8.

⁴⁷Smith, *Declaration*, pp. 8-9; Margaret Chase Smith to Dennis L. Morrison, September 27, 1988.

⁴⁸Smith, videocassette.

Dennis L. Morrison received his B.A. from Queens College of the City University of New York and an M.A. from the University of Houston at Clear Lake. Presently, he is a doctoral candidate at the University of Houston and is employed at San Jacinto College South in Houston, teaching history and geography.