

This Day in History... December 14, 1897

Birth of Margaret C. Smith

Margaret Madeline Chase Smith was born on December 14, 1897, in Skowhegan, Maine.

Smith's great-grandfather had served in the War of 1812 and her grandfather served in the Civil War. She was the oldest of six children and began working at a local variety store when she was 12 years old. In high school, Smith was on the girls' basketball team and worked as an operator at a telephone company. It was there that she met her future husband, Clyde Smith, who was 21 years her senior.

After high school Smith worked a variety of jobs. She taught, coached a basketball team, and worked for the telephone company and a newspaper. She also joined and co-founded some women's organizations. When Smith's husband was elected to the US House of Representatives in 1936, she joined him in Washington. There she worked as his secretary, managing his office, helping to write his speeches, and more.

In 1940, Smith's husband suffered a heart attack and his health declined. He asked Margaret to run for his seat in the general election that September. Clyde died that April and a special election was held in June to fill his seat for the rest of the term. There was no challenger, so Smith won the seat, becoming the first woman from Maine to be elected to Congress. Later that year, she was elected to the first of four full two-year terms. In each election, she always received at least 60% of the vote.



Issued in 2020 for the 200th anniversary of Maine statehood.

During her eight years in the House, Smith became known as a moderate Republican. She often supported some Democratic policies, including Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal. She also voted for the Selective Service Act. During World War II, Smith served on the House Naval Affairs Committee. In this role she traveled 25,000 miles around the South Pacific visiting bases. She was also the first and only civilian woman to sail on a US Navy ship during World War II. During the war, she introduced legislation to create the WAVES (Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service). She is often considered the "Mother of the WAVES." After the war, she supported legislation that gave women permanent status in the military, sponsoring the Women's Armed Services Integration Act.

In 1948, Smith decided to run for the US Senate.

When the wife of one of her opponents questioned whether a woman would be a good senator, she replied, "Women administer the home. They set the rules, enforce them, mete out justice for

violations. Thus, like Congress, they legislate; like the Executive, they administer; like the courts, they interpret the rules. It is an ideal experience for politics." Smith won more votes than all three of her opponents combined in the primary; and went on to win 71% of the vote in the general election. With this, she became the first female senator from Maine and the first woman to serve in both houses of Congress.



Smith was one of a few government officials whose name was etched on the silicon disc that was placed on the moon.

1 each from Massachusetts, Ohio, and Washington. This was the first time a woman had her name entered into nomination at a major party's convention.

During her later years in office, Smith supported the Vietnam War and was a member of the Senate Aeronautical and Space Committee. One NASA official said that the US wouldn't have placed a man on the moon if it hadn't been for Smith. She also voted for the Civil Rights Acts of 1957, 1960, 1964, and 1968. Until 1981, she held a Senate record of 2,941 consecutive roll call votes. She lost her only election in 1972, after which she worked as a teacher at several colleges. Smith received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1989. She died on May 29, 1995.



This stamp was issued in 2007 as part of the Distinguished Americans Series.



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In the Senate, Smith became the first member of Congress to condemn Joseph McCarthy's anti-communist witch-hunt. On

June 1, 1950, she delivered her 15-minute speech, the "Declaration of Conscience." While she didn't mention McCarthy by name, she denounced "the reckless abandon in which unproved charges have been hurled from this side of the aisle." She went on to say, "I don't want to see the Republican Party ride to political victory on the four horsemen of calumny—fear, ignorance, bigotry, and smear." She later voted for McCarthy's censure in 1954.

In July 1950, Smith was made a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force Reserve. In 1960, she ran against Lucia Cormier for her seat, marking the first time two women ran against each other for the same Senate seat. Smith won that election. Then in 1964, she ran for president. Smith would receive 27 votes from delegates at the Republican nominating convention – 14 from Maine, 5 from Vermont, 3 from North Dakota, 2 from Alaska, and



Smith wore a red rose every day and campaigned for the rose to be declared the official flower of the US, which it was in 1987.

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