



photo: Shoaf

INTERVIEW WITH

Margaret Chase Smith

United States Senator

produced by Howard Langer

FOLKWAYS RECORDS/NY

HQ
1236.5
U5
S655
1958
MUS LP

Margaret Chase Smith

Descriptive notes are inside pocket

Rosenhouse

This is Howard Langer speaking to you from Room 326 of the Senate Office Building, Washington, D. C.

This is the office of Senator Margaret Chase Smith, currently the only woman member of the United States Senate. She has gray hair, sparkling blue eyes, a charming smile. The Senator--who is sitting directly behind her desk--is wearing a very becoming red dress, and has a double strand of pearls around her neck.

At one side of her office is a huge wall map in full color. It's about 12 feet high--16 feet wide. The map traces some of the Senator's major trips around the world as a representative of the United States Government. The map is to the Senator's left.

To her right, huge bookshelves line the wall. Above the shelves are several dozen figurines of elephants. (Mrs. Smith, of course, is a Republican.) On the shelves are many scrap books containing newspaper clippings, photographs, and speeches. Some of them date back to 1916.

Margaret Chase Smith was born around the turn of the century in Skowhegan, Maine. She was graduated from Skowhegan High School, taught for awhile, became a newspaper reporter.

In 1930, she married State Senator Clyde Smith. When he was elected to Congress in 1936, Mrs. Smith went along to Washington as his secretary. In 1940, she was elected to the House of Representatives to fill the vacancy created by his death. Eight years later, she won election to the United States Senate, where she has been ever since.

Margaret Chase Smith is the only woman in history to serve in both houses of Congress.

INTERVIEW OF SENATOR MARGARET CHASE SMITH

BY MR. LANGER

MR. LANGER

Senator Smith, how does it feel being the only woman member of what has been described as "the most exclusive gentlemen's club in the world?"

SENATOR SMITH

Actually, just about the same as when I was a member of the House of Representatives, except that the Senate has only about one-fifth of the membership of the House and consequently I get to know my colleagues in the Senate much better. They have been very kind and courteous to me; but they have not given me one single advantage because I am a woman, nor have I asked for any favors because I am a woman, and to the contrary, I get less in special facilities and services than the other 95. For example, they have a swimming pool from which I am barred; they have a gym from which I am barred; they get free haircuts and free care of their hair and I have to pay for the care of my hair. There

are many other similar free services and facilities that they get and I don't because I am a woman. But I like it this way, because I don't want those free facilities which the tax payers have to pay for. I like it this way because it establishes beyond the slightest doubt that I am the most economical member of the Senate; I cost the taxpayers less than any of the other 95 men Senators.

SIDE I, Band 2

MR. LANGER

Let me ask you this, Senator: There are now more eligible women voters than there are men voters. I would like to know what changes you think will come about in politics because of this, if any.

SENATOR SMITH

I doubt if that factor will make any great changes in politics. It surely does not mean that automatically more women will be elected to public office just because women voters outnumber men voters. Women do not vote upon the basis of sex, instead they vote on the basis of qualification. They will not vote for a woman candidate unless they feel she is qualified and that is the way it should be: to vote for the best qualified person, whether that person be a woman or a man. Of course, if more qualified women run for public office, we will have more women ultimately holding public office.

MR. LANGER

Do you think we will have a woman President in the foreseeable future?

SENATOR SMITH

I don't think that a woman will be elected in the near future, but I do think that it is entirely possible that a woman will be elected Vice-President in the foreseeable future and the Vice-President is but a heartbeat away from being President.

MR. LANGER

You say that in the foreseeable future there might be a Vice-President. Do you know of any American women who might fit the job?

SENATOR SMITH

Yes, indeed. I know several, but I am not going to single them out for individual identification, because it would not be fair to other women who are just as qualified and whom I might overlook.

MR. LANGER

Would you ever consider running for either President or Vice-President?

SENATOR SMITH

No, I wouldn't.

MR. LANGER

You would not go so far as Sherman did and say "If nominated I won't run; if elected I won't serve."

SENATOR SMITH

No, and probably for the simple reason that I know I haven't a ghost of a chance.

SIDE I, Band 3

MR. LANGER

What kind of a working day do you have?

SENATOR SMITH

I have a long working day. I arise at 6:45 in the morning, prepare my breakfast and read the morning paper, drive to the office and get to my desk about 8:00. From 8 to 10 I attend to my mail and matters on my desk and I talk to the Departments, I confer with my staff and I see constituents calling at the office. From 10 to 12 I am in committee sessions, I go to the Appropriations Committee, or Armed Services Committee or the Government Operations Committee. At 12:00 I go to the Senate Chamber for the opening of the day's session. At 12:15 I have my lunch. At 1:00 I return to the Senate Chamber or to my office. If there are committee meetings in the afternoon, I go back to them around 2:00 or 2:30 and remain there until called back to the Senate Chamber for a roll call or a quorum call or roll call vote. Usually at 4:30 or 5:00 I return to my office to sign my mail and study other matters on my desk. More often than not I don't leave my desk and my office until around 8:00 in the evening. I drive home, prepare my dinner and finish between 9:00 and 9:30. Perhaps then I watch television for half-an-hour, followed by a look at some files that I have brought home with me and I go to bed about 11:00 and go to sleep on the newscast.

MR. LANGER

I see. How many months of the year do you follow this schedule?

SENATOR SMITH

We open sessions in January, as everybody knows, and the adjournment is uncertain. I have seen Congress adjourn as early as the 1st of August; usually it is the last of August or some time into September. I have stayed here around the year. At the end of the sessions -- whenever it is in the Fall -- I stay in my office for a week or ten days to clean up the unfinished business that I have permitted to go by during the last busy days of the session. Then I go back to my own state of Maine -- my home in Skowhegan, Maine -- and start out on a very carefully planned tour of the state. I do this every Fall, feeling that I can best represent the people who elect me to the Senate by seeing them every year. Many people do it in election time -- I do it every Fall. I talk -- go into schools and talk to school groups; I go into church groups and talk to Grange groups; I go into service clubs. I do as little talking as I can, because I like to get the questions from the people with whom I am talking, because that gives me their thinking and their feeling, and thereby I keep very close (to their thinking). Now that takes me -- Maine is a very large state in area, small in

population, but it takes a good deal of travelling and it takes me from six to eight weeks to do that.

SIDE I, Band 4

MR. LANGER

Now you talk about keeping up with what people are thinking back home. Do you get much mail from back home?

SENATOR SMITH

Yes, I get quite a good deal of mail. I think the mail runs around 200 first class letters a day in the office. Now, some of those are not from Maine, because I get quite a good many letters from outside.

MR. LANGER

What do most of these letters consist of?

SENATOR SMITH

There is no set pattern. The bulk does not fall into any one category, unless it is the category of requests of constituents for me to assist them on personal matters which often require me contacting one of the Government Agencies or Departments in their behalf.

MR. LANGER

Is there very much influence put on you through the mail by constituents for bills -- outside of private bills? I mean, some issue might come up like school construction or some other bill...

SENATOR SMITH

The mail from Maine does not come from organized mail writers, or letter writers. My mail doesn't seem to be an organized pressure mail. The people write thoughtfully. If the people in Maine want something or want to know something, they sit down and write or telephone me. So I have very little of what I would call pressure mail from my own state of Maine. It must be remembered that people seldom write in favor of anything. Most everybody writes if they are opposed. So we have to remember that the mail that is coming in is not entirely representative of the thinking.

SIDE II, Band 1

MR. LANGER

Well, how do you decide your vote on a particular bill? You probably vote for several hundred bills a year and naturally you can't sit down and research every one of them and read every single bill. How do you decide your vote on a bill?

SENATOR SMITH

Well, I think there are ten to fifteen or twenty thousand bills introduced every year, or every two years anyway. My mail helps, you can't discount mail that comes in. If people are interested enough to write, you pay some attention to it. Usually I wait until the committee reports the bill to the Senate floor before

I give it a lot of study, because so many bills are discussed and never reach a vote. After the committee I am thinking about it all the time, if it is one of the big issues. After the report from the Committee comes in, I read that and give it some study and see how the provisions would affect my own state and then nationally. We have to think about it both ways, of course. Many times information that I get, for instance on defense bills, comes in executive session and there is some information that those who were writing don't have; if they did have, they would feel differently about the issue. So, over-all, it really is a combination of things that causes me to vote; I try to vote my convictions.

MR. LANGER

Does the President -- I say the President because he is a Republican and you are -- does he have any special legislative representatives? I mean, if he has some bill he feels is very vital, does he put any kind of pressure on or make any effort to sway votes sometimes?

SENATOR SMITH

Once in a great while someone calls from the White House and says the President is interested. I don't get much of the pressure. We have lobbyists come in, of course. There are two kinds of lobbyists, there are those who are really pressure people and there are the others who know the subject and have known it for a lifetime and in a short time can give it to me and I like to listen to them. No, I think I get very little of the pressure type of call on legislation.

MR. LANGER

Do you have any special philosophy that you follow in coming to a -- you vote your convictions, of course -- is there any kind of yardstick or rules that you think of in your own mind when you are considering a bill?

SENATOR SMITH

I don't know that I could go into that without giving it some thought. I, of course, have a philosophy that I try to follow. I like to vote in a way that I think I would like to have someone vote if I was the constituent back home. Now there is the golden rule, I guess, that I try to follow and try very hard.

SIDE II, Band 2

MR. LANGER

Do you think that women should play a more active role in politics? I mean an active role -- not just vote, but I mean go out and join a local political club and campaign and so on?

SENATOR SMITH

Very definitely. All women cannot go to Congress and cannot go to the Legislature. But women can serve on local committees, community committees, church and hospital groups. Women are the house cleaners. If politics is to be cleaned up, what more natural people do it than women? In the home, women are the legislators who make the rules for the home and the family. The executives who enforce the rules of the home and the family, the judges who interpret the rules

of the home and the family. Thus homemakers are naturals for Government makers. We have had too much government in the homes and we should reverse that trend by putting more of the home in the Government and who can better do this than the woman?

SIDE II, Band 3

MR. LANGER

Is there any piece of legislation now being neglected which you would like to see become law?

SENATOR SMITH

There are many pieces of legislature which I feel are neglected, but I would not want to single any of them out. I am not a feminist, and while I would like to see the Equal Rights Amendment adopted, I have felt that it was more effective psychologically for men Senators to take the lead on this particular issue. In addition to that, I have felt that if women are to get equal rights, then they must be willing to give up special feminine privileges. Like men, women are people too.

SIDE II, Band 4

MR. LANGER

Let me ask you this. What subjects do you feel are most important for youngsters to study today in so complex a world?

SENATOR SMITH

First and foremost -- science. There should be science appreciation courses taught in the elementary grades to get our young people interested in science and to make them realize what science does for their lives and to let them know what science can do -- that science can actually be fun. Science should not be forced upon any student, for if he does not like it, he will never be a good scientist, but we haven't given our young people a chance to like science. Second importance is to be given to courses that develop powers of logic and reasoning. Third, I think every youngster should learn at least one or two foreign languages.

MR. LANGER

Now, how about courses like government and civics?

SENATOR SMITH

I think they are vital. I think they are very important, and I -- from my mail and my talks with the young people -- I gather that there is much more interest and information given to them and by them than there ever has been.

SIDE II, Band 5

MR. LANGER

Finally, do you have any special advice or message to American youth?

SENATOR SMITH

Yes, sir. I would advise them to develop self-

reliance and not to lean upon anyone as a mental crutch. I would advise them to follow the guidance of their parents, but to avoid being a drain on their parents. I would advise them to look upon school as a great opportunity, upon learning as fun and to get the very most that the schools offer them.

MR. LANGER

Thank you very much, Senator Margaret Chase Smith.

TEACHING GUIDE SECTION

Journalism classes:

The material here is a natural for a magazine profile story. Write such a story for any one of the following publications: Time, The Reporter, Saturday Evening Post, Ladies Home Journal, New York Times Magazine, and The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.

In each case, the story should conform to the style of the magazine, including social or political slant, if any.

For a spot news story, one good lead is the Senator's call upon women to help clean up politics.

English classes:

Recording can be used to stimulate interest in a study of biography.

In addition to such obvious political personalities as Senator Smith, Eleanor Roosevelt, Clare Boothe Luce, and Madame Chiang Kai-shek, look into the careers of women in other fields. Examples: Clara Barton, Madame Curie, Jane Addams, Dolly Madison, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, the Bronte sisters, Grandma Moses, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and Frances Perkins.

History and Social Studies classes:

The 19th Amendment -- giving women the right to vote -- became law in 1920. Trace the events leading up to its adoption.

What American women do you think would make good Presidents? Why?

Senator Smith discusses the proposed amendment which would grant equal rights to women (not just voting rights). Ask your Congressman for a copy of this amendment. Discuss all the ramifications of the amendment. Are you for it or against it? Why? Senator Smith points out that her constituents "seldom write in favor of a bill. Most everybody writes if they are opposed." Why do you think this is so?

Make a listing of the good and bad points in lobbying. Suppose all lobbying was outlawed. What would be the result?

Volunteer to work for your local political club during the next election campaign. Write a term paper on what you have learned about politics.

Bibliography

An excellent book for background on the role of women in politics is Ladies of Courage, by Eleanor Roosevelt and Lorena A. Hickok. (Putnam's, 1954). Among those whose lives and careers are mentioned: Helen Gahagan Douglas, Former Governor Nellie Tayloe Ross (Wyo.), former Governor Miriam A. Ferguson (Tex.), Alice K. Leopold, Georgia Lusk, Pearl Wanamaker, Jeanette Rankin, Ivy Baker Priest, Anna Rosenberg, Perle Mesta, and -- of course -- Eleanor Roosevelt, Margaret Chase Smith, Clare Boothe Luce, and Frances Perkins, among many, many others.

Howard Langer is Managing Editor of Scholastic Teacher magazine. Formerly associated with the National Citizens Commission for the Public Schools and the Bridgeport (Conn.) Herald, he has produced the Folkways recordings Interview with William O. Douglas (FC-7350), and Interview with Robert M. Hutchins ().