

2026 MCS Library Essay Question:

In 1963, Senator Margaret Chase Smith, the highest ranking Republican on the Senate Space and Aeronautics Sciences Committee, wrote an article entitled “Why Spend More on Space?” Drawing off of President John F. Kennedy’s 1961 declaration to put a person on the moon by the end of the decade, Smith noted “while this is extremely ambitious, it is only the beginning.” The Senator then stated “the United States needs to lead in space for several reasons.” She argued for the “basic responsibility for the broadening of our understanding of the universe,” the “immediate benefits from the application of satellites” and other “technological advances and stimulus to our economy,” and the protection of the free world from the “potentially hazardous consequences...were a hostile power to surpass us in the race in space.” She ended the article saying “the space program will stretch the abilities and minds of our people” and offer an “opportunity for unparalleled progress in the future.”



On October 6, 2025, ABC News reported that Bill Nye, television personality and CEO of the Planetary Society, had joined colleagues, space advocates, and legislators on Capitol Hill to make a case against the Trump administration’s proposed 24% cut to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) budget. Nye made clear, “We’re not talking about delays in scientific exploration, we’re talking about the end of it” further arguing “While we’re [the United States] checking out, our competitors are checking in.”

As demonstrated, over time perspectives from various presidential administrations can change but the arguments for funding a program such as NASA has remained relatively consistent. Given the current state of budget cuts and defunding, what is a governmental service or program you feel is essential and needs to be protected? Keep in mind the governmental role of providing order and security, offering public or civic amenities, and protecting individual rights. Defend your stance using specific historical and/or contemporary examples in support of your argument. Citations should be in MLA or Chicago format.

Prizes:

- First Place - \$1000
- Second Place - \$500
- Third Place - \$250
- Five Honorable Mention Prizes - \$50

Contest Rules:

- It is open to **Maine high school seniors only**.
- Essays must be typed, double-spaced, and **no longer than 2000 words**.
- Best essays provide cited evidence and argumentation, and support opinions with historical context.

Submission Instructions:

- Entrants need to provide the following information:
 - A Reliable Email
 - Mailing Address (School or Home)
 - Phone Number
 - Name of School
- Essays are due **April 3, 2026**. Prizes will be announced by May 5, 2026.
- Electronic submissions can be emailed to john.m.taylor@maine.edu or hard copies should be **UNSTAPLED** and mailed to the following address:

**Margaret Chase Smith Library
Attn: John Taylor
56 Norridgewock Ave
Skowhegan, ME 04976**

You can sample past prize-winning entries at: <http://www.mcslibrary.org/awards>.

For further information email John Taylor at john.m.taylor@maine.edu.