

Margaret (Peggy) Goldwater (1909–1985) [1]

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Margaret Goldwater advocated for [birth control](#) [3] and [reproductive rights](#) [4] in the United States during the twentieth century. Goldwater was a socialite and philanthropist and was married to Barry Goldwater, US Senator from Arizona. She spent much of her life working to further the women's reproductive rights movement, which sought to expand women's legal, social, and physical access to reproductive healthcare, including [contraception](#) [5] and abortions. Goldwater, with guidance from birth control activist Margaret Sanger, helped establish the second [birth control](#) [3] clinic in Arizona, the Mother's Health Clinic in Phoenix, Arizona. She conducted large fundraising events and authored articles in local newspapers on the need for contraceptives and [family planning](#) [6]. Goldwater's advocacy helped [launch](#) [7] and sustain The Mother's Health Clinic, which became the largest provider of women's reproductive healthcare in Arizona, and it later became Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona.

Goldwater was born as Margaret Johnson on 8 July 1909 in Muncie, Indiana, to Anna Davis Johnson and Ray Prescott Johnson. Throughout her life, Goldwater went by the nickname Peggy. Goldwater's parents were both of British descent but were natives of Indiana. Goldwater's mother was a pianist, while her father was the founder and president of the Warner Gear Company that manufactured automotive parts. Her father's wealth enabled Goldwater and her family to travel significantly. The family spent their summers in Northern Michigan and Europe and their winters in Phoenix, Arizona. The family's wealth also elevated Goldwater's status as a socialite in both Phoenix and Muncie, enabling her to take part in many exclusive organizations and events that made her well known in the community. According to Goldwater's biographer Dean Smith, her wealth and prominence would later enable Goldwater to endorse and financially support causes important to her.

Goldwater attended Elmhurst School for Girls in Connersville, Indiana, and at sixteen started at Mount Vernon Junior College and Seminary in Washington, D.C., until she graduated high school. She attended the Grand Central School of Art in New York City, New York, where she studied fashion design. After graduating, Goldwater worked for the David Crystal Company in the 1920s as a fashion designer. While in New York City pursuing a career in the arts, Goldwater began volunteering at the New York Infirmary for Women and Children. Goldwater saw many infants born to mothers who were living in poverty and who did not intend to become pregnant. In a later interview, Goldwater described how that experience made her care about the [birth control](#) [3] movement and instilled in her a belief that children should not be born into the world if they are unwanted or unable to be cared for.

In the 1920s, Goldwater's father and brother fell ill with tuberculosis. Goldwater's family moved to Phoenix, Arizona, where they had previously wintered, in hopes that the hot, dry climate would cure their illness. While in Phoenix, Goldwater and her mother stopped into Goldwater and Brothers General store to shop. During that visit, Goldwater met business owner and future senator, Barry Goldwater. They began courting, though the future senator later claimed that she had showed no real interest in him. While her brother recovered, Goldwater's father died, and the Johnson family moved back to Indiana, but the courting continued. On New Year's Eve of 1933, the future senator called her in Indiana, told her he was tired of chasing her, and proposed. Goldwater said yes, so he mailed her an engagement ring. When Goldwater returned to Phoenix in September of 1934, they married. They had four children together: Joanne, Barry Jr., Michael, and Peggy (Peggy Jr.) Goldwater.

After getting married, Goldwater permanently moved to Phoenix where she became active in the community. She continued her medical volunteerism and in the 1930s she became a member of the St. Luke's Board of Visitors, a philanthropic [organization](#) [8] that worked primarily on volunteer projects with St. Luke's Sanatorium in Phoenix. The Sanatorium, later called St. Luke's Medical Center, served as a hospital for patients suffering from tuberculosis. Goldwater was also active in the Phoenix Junior League, an invitation only women's group devoted to volunteerism and fundraising for various causes. In addition to philanthropic work, she used her fashion background to design ladies' handbags that her husband sold in the family store.

On 18 February 1937, Goldwater and several other prominent Phoenix women met with [birth control](#) [3] activist Margaret Sanger to discuss the need for [family planning](#) [6] services in Arizona. Family planning was a part of the [birth control movement](#) [9] and promoted the use of [contraception](#) [5] to limit and space births based on how many children a woman could emotionally, physically, and financially care for. Sanger had been active within the [birth control movement](#) [9] since the early 1900s. In the United States, Sanger worked to repeal the Comstock Act, which made it federally illegal to distribute contraceptives, information on contraceptives, and anything of a sexual nature. While the Comstock Act worked on a federal level, several states and territories throughout the twentieth century passed Comstock Laws that acted on a state level. In 1936 the Comstock Act was federally overturned in *United States v. One Package of Japanese Pessaries* (1936), a case in US Court of Appeals in the Second Circuit in New York, New York. That decision effectively made [birth control](#) [3] legal in the US. However, many states retained their Comstock Laws in violation of the Court of Appeals ruling. The US Supreme Court decision *Griswold v. Connecticut* (1965) ruled unconstitutional the last remaining state Comstock Laws.

When Goldwater met Sanger in 1937, Sanger was visiting Phoenix after having opened up a [birth control](#) [3] clinic in Tucson, Arizona, two years prior. Under the guidance of Sanger, Goldwater and others helped open the Mother's Health Clinic in Phoenix on Seventh and Adams Streets on 1 October 1937. The clinic provided women with information about [contraception](#) [5] and prenatal care. Physicians volunteered to fit women with free or reduced cost diaphragms and supplied contraceptive [spermicide](#) [10]. At the time of the clinic's opening, there were fewer than seventy birth control clinics in the nation, and only one other clinic in Arizona, greater than one hundred miles away.

Goldwater later described how [contraception](#) [5] and sex were largely thought to be obscene and inappropriate to discuss publicly or outside of a marriage during the 1930s. Goldwater described feeling bold, daring, and often embarrassed about opening a [birth control](#) [3] clinic. However, she stated that she pushed past the embarrassment by knowing the importance of what she was doing. Goldwater oversaw the clinic as the President of the Board 1937 until it merged with the Planned Parenthood Federation of America in 1942, a merger she helped broker.

Throughout Planned Parenthood's growth across Arizona, Goldwater remained involved. She held several leadership positions throughout its expansion, including honorary chairman, member of the honorary advisory board, chairman of the board of sponsors, and benefit chairman.

Goldwater organized large-scale fundraising events to solicit money for the clinic. Historian Mary Melcher describes Goldwater as one of the most committed volunteers for Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona. Goldwater's social prominence gave her connections to other local wealthy families and helped her plan fundraising events that attracted wealthy donors. Throughout mid 1900s the clinics ran primarily on private funding and volunteers because they could not receive government funding. Large public events also helped publicize Planned Parenthood, which helped Arizonans become comfortable with topics of [contraception](#) [5] and [family planning](#) [6].

Among Goldwater's most successful events was the April 1967 "A Night of Splendor" ball that featured a performance from the San Francisco Chinese Opera Company. In addition to large galas, Goldwater attracted wealthy donors by hosting dinners and pre-ball cocktail parties at her house for many years. According to Planned Parenthood archives, without financial support from wealthy donors, [birth control](#) [3] clinics would not have survived. In 1970, US President Richard Nixon signed Title X of the Family Planning Services and Population Research Act, which sent federal funds to Planned Parenthood to support reproductive health for low income women.

In 1953 Goldwater's husband was elected to the US Senate as the Arizona representative from the Republican Party. After his election, Goldwater moved with her family to Washington, D.C. As her husband was reelected for decades, Goldwater commuted between D.C. and their home in Arizona until the late 1970s, when her health required warmer temperatures, and she moved back to Arizona permanently.

In 1956 Joanne, Goldwater's eldest daughter became pregnant while still in college at Arizona State University in Tempe, Arizona. In a later interview, Goldwater's daughter described how she was not ready to become a mother at the age of twenty and instead chose to have an [abortion](#) [11]. At the time, abortions were federally illegal. However, due to their financial security and political connections, Goldwater and her husband arranged for an illegal [abortion](#) [11] for their daughter in Virginia. Goldwater supported her daughter's decision to have an [abortion](#) [11] and helped her throughout the process. Goldwater continued her support for [abortion](#) [11] and [reproductive rights](#) [4] throughout her life.

As a US Senator from 1953 to 1987, Goldwater's husband had the ability to address both the public and other politicians about the subjects he felt strongly about. Historian Mary Melcher suggests that Goldwater's firm and passionate stance in support of the women's [reproductive rights](#) [4] movement influenced her husband's political views. During his terms in the senate, Goldwater's husband voted as a libertarian, valuing individual freedom and liberty. He supported women's [reproductive rights](#) [4], for which he argued that issues of [abortion](#) [11] should remain a private decision between a woman and her doctor, and should not be a political issue. Goldwater's husband's political connections furthered Goldwater's efforts in growing the [organization](#) [8] Planned Parenthood.

In addition to planning fundraising events for the Planned Parenthood clinics, Goldwater advocated for the reproductive rights movement, which evolved from the early nineteenth century [birth control movement](#) [9] and sought to improve women's access to reproductive health resources like [birth control](#) [3] and [abortion](#) [11] services. Several of her speeches and opinions were published in local newspapers. In one article, published in several local newspapers and in a Planned Parenthood newsletter, Goldwater described why she believed in the idea of Planned Parenthood. She explained that at a fundamental level, [contraception](#) [5] is necessary for the successful advancement of the human race. Goldwater described how science had advanced to fight off death, yet the US had not similarly worked to control birth. Goldwater stated that she believed every birth was important and children should only be born to those who are able and wanting to care for it. Such discussions, once too obscene to print, made the topic of reproduction more acceptable to wider audiences. Through those discussions among the wealthy

and influential Phoenix families, [birth control](#)^[3] clinics and Planned Parenthood became more popular and more widely accepted.

In 1967 Goldwater received the National Margaret Sanger Award from the [Planned Parenthood Federation of America](#)^[12] for her contribution to the [birth control movement](#)^[9] and for her work with Planned Parenthood of Arizona. Later, in October of 1982, Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona established the Peggy Goldwater Award for her commitment to the [organization](#)^[8] and the [birth control movement](#)^[9]. The award was given each year to someone who showed similar dedication to the [organization](#)^[8] and its mission.

Toward the end of her life, Goldwater remained in Arizona with her children and grandchildren while her husband continued his Senate career in D.C. She suffered from blood clots and circulation issues. Goldwater died on 12 December 1985 after suffering complications from surgery. In 1987 the Peggy Goldwater Endowment Fund was established by the Planned Parenthood of Central and Northern Arizona.

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Subject

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