Margaret (Peggy) Goldwater (1909–1985)

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Margaret Goldwater advocated for birth control and reproductive rights in the United States during the twentieth century. She 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 and abortions. Goldwater, with guidance from birth control activist Margaret Sanger, helped establish the second birth control clinic in Arizona, the Mother's Health Clinic in Phoenix. She conducted large fundraising events and authored articles in local newspapers on the need for contraceptives and family planning. Her advocacy helped launch the rights movement and expand women's reproductive health care options in Arizona, and 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. In 1937, she married Barry Goldwater, future senator from Arizona, who became the last remaining state Comstock Laws. Goldwater later described how her experience making the topic of reproduction more acceptable to wider society had an emotional, physically, and financially care for. Sanger had been active in the birth control movement since the early 1900s. In the United States, Sanger worked to repeal the Comstock Act, which made it illegally 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 legal in the US. However, many states retained their Comstock Laws in violation of the Court's decision. 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 clinic in Tucson, Arizona, two years prior. Under the guidance of Sanger, Goldwater and others opened the Mother's Health Clinic in Phoenix on Seventh and Adams Streets on 1 October 1937. The clinic provided women with information about contraception and prenatal care. Physicians volunteered to fit women with free or reduced cost dia grammes and supplied contraceptive spermicide. 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 was largely thought to be obscene and inappropriate to discuss publically or outside of a marriage during the 1930s. Goldwater described feeling bold, daring, and often embarrassed about opening a birth control 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 Planned Parenthood of Arizona until 1977. She helped publicize Planned Parenthood, which helped Arizona become one of the few states to have a private funding and volunteers because they could not receive government funding. Large public events also helped support the movement.

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 directors, and benefactors and chairmen.

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 Arizona become more accepting of reproductive rights. Among Goldwater's most successful events was the April 1967 San Francisco Chinese Opera Company. In addition to large galas, Goldwater attracted wealthy donors by hosting dinners and pre-ball cocktail parties at her home for many years. According to Planned Parenthood archives, without financial support from wealthy donors, birth control 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 1963 Goldwater's husband was elected to the US Senate as the Republican 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. 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 for their daughter in Virginia. Goldwater supported her daughter's decision to have an abortion and helped her throughout the process. Goldwater continued her support for abortion and reproductive rights throughout her life.

As a US Senator from 1953 to 1987, Goldwater's husband had the ability to address both the public and 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 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, for which he argued that issues of abortion 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 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 and sought to improve women's access to reproductive health resources like birth control and abortion 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 is necessary for the successful advancement of the human race. Goldwater described how science had advanced to the point of being able to prevent conception, and that it was a human right to choose whether or not to have children. She believed that every birth was important and children should only be born to those who are able and willing to care for it. Such discussions, once too obscure to print, made the topic of reproduction more acceptable to wider audiences. Through these discussions, the wealthy
and influential Phoenix families, birth control 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[23] for her contribution to the birth control movement[23] 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[23] and the birth control movement[23]. 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.

Sources

16. Box 102, (n.d.).
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Subject

Topic

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