



Written by [Daniel Sayani](#) on March 16, 2011

Planned Parenthood Republicans: A Decades-Long History

Trends within politics rarely occur in a vacuum. Instead, they develop within a broader ideological and historical context, which accounts for individual elected officials' political motivations to this very day. Planned Parenthood, for instance, has always enjoyed the support of a notable component of the Republican Party, especially its moderate or Rockefeller wing, comprised of influential Establishment elitists, internationalists, and environmentalists.



The seven Republicans who voted in favor of retaining federal funding for Planned Parenthood, in addition to Senators [Lisa Murkowski](#), Susan Collins, and Olympia Snowe, all hail from this tradition. Beyond their obvious support for pro-choice causes, these individuals are also characterized by a commitment to centrist policies and fiscal largesse — all indicative of their opposition to the principles of traditional, constitutional government.

Ever since its earliest days, Planned Parenthood has counted among its supporters prominent members of the Republican Party. As early as 1942, Connecticut Senator [Prescott Bush](#) (picture, above), grandfather of President George W. Bush, was a [supporter](#) of Margaret Sanger's American Birth Control League, and in 1947, served as the treasurer for the first national campaign for Planned Parenthood. The political repercussions hit hard. Prescott Bush was knocked out of an expected victory for a Senate seat in Connecticut in 1950 after syndicated columnist Drew Pearson declared that it "has been made known" that Bush was a leader in the "Birth Control Society" (the original name of Planned Parenthood was the Birth Control Federation of America). Prescott Bush won a Senate seat two years later, and his son George and daughter-in-law Barbara continued to support Planned Parenthood even after George's election to Congress from Texas. In fact, he was such an advocate for family planning that some House colleagues nicknamed him "Rubbers."

In addition, Prescott's son George H.W. also supported family planning efforts while serving as a Texas congressman. President George H.W. Bush was best known for his opposition to Ronald Reagan's supply-side economics, rooted in the free-market ideas of Hayek and Friedman, deriding the conservative Reagan as a proponent of "voodoo economics." He [wrote a constituent](#) in 1970: "I introduced legislation earlier this year which would provide federal funds for research in family planning devices and increased services to people who need them but cannot afford them. We must help our young people become aware of the fact that families can be planned and that there are benefits economically and socially to be derived from small families." ("George Bush to Mrs. Jim Hunter, Jr., Oct.



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23, 1970" [Virginia B. Whitehill Papers, DeGolyer Library, Southern Methodist University].)

Although stemming from the opposite wing of the GOP, the Goldwater family of Arizona also [supported](#) Planned Parenthood. In his final term in the U.S. Senate, Barry Goldwater adopted a pro-choice position, voting in 1983 against a constitutional amendment that would have reversed *Roe v. Wade* and returned legislative authority over abortion to the states. Back in 1937, his wife Peggy had become a founding member of Planned Parenthood of Arizona, and the couple remained active in the organization throughout Goldwater's Senate career. Though he initially rejected Planned Parenthood's position on abortion, his long association with the group would ultimately make a convert of him, also as he [personally approved of](#) his daughter Joanne's illegal abortion in 1955, as recounted in the HBO documentary *Mr. Conservative*.

When she was in her 30s, [Peggy Goldwater](#) met Margaret Sanger and became part of a small group organizing Phoenix's first birth control clinic, called the Mothers' Health Clinic. Mrs. Goldwater developed a very strong commitment to the birth control movement which continued throughout her life. When she died in 1985, the *Planned Parenthood Press* (Planned Parenthood Arizona's newsletter), lauded her for her commitment to contraceptive access and developed an award in her honor.

Yet another prominent Republican family has a history of supporting Planned Parenthood. Former Massachusetts Governor and current Presidential contender Mitt Romney has had a convoluted and revealing history on life issues, as well as in his relationship with Planned Parenthood. In 1994, when Romney first ran for public office, he was [observed attending](#) a Planned Parenthood fundraiser in Cohasset, Massachusetts, with his wife Ann, who was seen handing a check for \$150 from a joint bank account to Nicki Nichols Gamble, former president of the Massachusetts Planned Parenthood Federation.

Romney has [flip-flopped](#) egregiously on the question of abortion. In 2002, he announced that he supported a "woman's right to choose," and in 1994, said he supported *Roe v. Wade*. Later that year, according to the *Boston Herald*, he "came down more firmly in the abortion rights camp," declaring his support for the "morning after" pill and a federal bill protecting visitors to health clinics from anti-abortion violence. In a debate later that year against Ted Kennedy, Romney said that he had supported abortion rights consistently since 1970 when his mother Lenore ran as a pro-abortion rights candidate for the U.S. Senate in Michigan. He linked his support for abortion rights to the death "many years ago" of a "dear, close family relative" following a botched illegal abortion. "You will not see me wavering on that," he added.

Later in 2002, Romney claimed he would "preserve and protect" abortion rights in Massachusetts, and told activists from [NARAL Pro Choice America](#) that "you need someone like me in Washington," according to notes taken by a member of NARAL. NARAL officials interpreted this as a reference to his national political ambitions. In addition, he answered "yes" in a questionnaire from Planned Parenthood in 2002 on whether he would support "efforts to increase access to emergency contraception."

In an interview with [On The Issues](#), Romney straddled the fence, saying: "I believe from a political perspective that life begins at conception. I don't pretend to know, if you will, from a theological standpoint when life begins. I'd committed to the people of Massachusetts that *I would not change the laws one way or the other*, and I honored that commitment." (Emphasis added.)

To this day, Planned Parenthood sponsors a special interest group, Planned Parenthood Republicans for Choice, which gives the annual Barry Goldwater Award to a pro-choice Republican elected official of its



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choosing. Rep. Judy Biggert (R-Ill.) was the 2009 recipient, and now-Sen. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.) was the 2008 recipient. Rep. Bob Dold (R-Ill.), who was endorsed by the group Republican Majority for Choice and was one of seven Republicans to vote for PPFA funding, currently holds Senator Mark Kirk's former House seat in a left-leaning Chicago suburb. Interestingly, the co-chair of the organization, [Randy Moody](#), was a former chief lobbyist and executive within the ultra-liberal teachers union, the National Education Association (NEA).

Planned Parenthood Republicans for Choice has been issuing the self-contradictory [Barry Goldwater Award](#) since 1995, and almost all of the awardees come from the steady, yet dwindling presence of so-called moderates within the Republican Party, who are proponents of "centrism" and lack a genuine commitment to the principles of limited, constitutional government (which Barry Goldwater upheld throughout his entire life).

Despite his support for "reproductive rights," (the right to have an abortion) Goldwater is nonetheless remembered as a proponent of constitutional conservatism, placing him as an historical and ideological opponent of those who are ironically being honored in his name. Just as Goldwater's principal adversary was former New York Governor Nelson D. Rockefeller, those who are recipients of this award would have been Goldwater's political foes in the GOP, as they stem from the party's "moderate" (neoconservative) wing, as opposed to Goldwater's [Old Right](#), constitutionalist, free-market, individualist libertarian tradition. That Old Right tradition is espoused by many in the Tea Party today, such as pro-life Senator Rand Paul (R-Ky.), who has advocated stricter crackdowns on abortion-on-demand.

The history of the Republican Party, to a degree, is shaped by a long record of GOP icons supporting the pro-abortion, socially-liberal causes of groups including Planned Parenthood. With the unitary exception of Barry Goldwater (whose support of Planned Parenthood was motivated by a libertarian belief in governmental non-involvement in human reproduction), these Planned Parenthood Republicans are also committed to other left-wing causes, such as Mitt Romney's support of universal health care when he was Massachusetts governor, affectionately called "RomneyCare." The commitment to the inexorably-linked "seamless garment" of fiscal and social conservatism, championed by figures such as Rep. Mike Pence (R-Ind.) has not always been a paradigm at home in the Republican Party.

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