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## Once Upon a Time: The History of Republican Support for International Family Planning and Contraception (Part I)

A long time ago, in a political galaxy far, far away, Republican presidents and members of Congress joined with their Democratic counterparts in bipartisan solidarity. Together, in the mid-1960s and early 1970s, they created the [Title X](#) domestic family planning program and launched the international family planning program at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) that has provided modern contraceptive services to millions of women and couples at home and abroad over the last 50 years.

Today, no Republican presidential primary candidate who supports women's reproductive rights and bodily autonomy — including their ability to plan the number, timing and spacing of their children and have the access to family planning and other reproductive health services to do so — can hope to become the party's standard bearer in any future election. Similarly, as best as can be determined, there are no supportive Republicans left in the House of Representatives prepared to vote for bilateral funding for international family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) programs of the U.S. government, much less more progressive policies like a permanent repeal of the Global Gag Rule (GGR) or a robust, unfettered U.S. contribution to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). In the Senate, only two Republican women are willing to join with Democratic allies to protect and advance a pro-international sexual and reproductive health and rights legislative agenda. Fortunately, both currently occupy positions on the critical Appropriations Committee.

This edition of the Washington Memo is a deviation from our usual practice of providing an analysis of current events. Instead, it provides a perspective on the history of the evolution of Republican support of U.S. involvement in international FP/RH and a governmental role in providing contraceptives, a history long forgotten — or never fully known — by many in and outside of the United States. Such a retrospective is very timely with the high likelihood that the *Roe v. Wade* decision will be overturned by the end of the month by the conservative majority on the Supreme Court, composed of justices put on the bench by Republican presidents, ending the constitutional right to abortion recognized by *Roe*.

If *Roe* falls, despite Justice Samuel Alito's protestations to the contrary in his leaked draft majority opinion, other historical decisions may be compromised, such as the underpinnings of a constitutional right to privacy asserted in the *Griswold v. Connecticut* decision in 1965 which allowed married couples to use contraceptives. *Griswold* served as the basis for the 1972 ruling in *Eisenstadt v. Baird*, allowing contraceptives for unmarried couples, and established a right to contraceptives for young people in *Carey v. Population Services International* in 1977. It is quite remarkable to think how recently the right to use birth control was legally recognized. These three Supreme Court decisions all played a role in the evolution of the U.S. government's involvement in the provision of contraceptives. And they may all be in jeopardy, along with the right to personal privacy itself, including but not limited to, privacy in matters of sex and reproduction.

The analysis will be divided into two sections: one focused on the actions of Republican presidents while in office and the second on the decline in Republican support in Congress for international FP/RH funding and policy.

## Republican Presidents on Birth Control: Eisenhower to Ford

Despite the adamant and vocal opposition of the Catholic Church to the use of taxpayer dollars for family planning programs, a consensus had begun to develop in the post-World War II era among the American public and policymakers that the United States and other high-income nations should begin to assist low-income countries with coping with rapid population growth by providing funding for family planning.

### Dwight D. Eisenhower

One of the most important catalysts for the initiation of U.S. government involvement in family planning programs was President Eisenhower's creation of the Draper Committee, formally known as The President's Committee to Study the United States Military Assistance Program, and the release of its recommendation in 1959. Despite its mandate to consider the proper balance between military and economic development assistance in the nascent U.S. government foreign aid program, the committee — referred to by the name of its chairman William Draper, Jr., an investment banker and retired Army general and later one of PAI's founders — deviated from its central mission to recommend, "That in order to meet more effectively the problems of economic development, the United States ... [should] assist those countries with which it is cooperating in economic aid programs, on request, in the formulation of their plans designed to deal with the problem of rapid population growth..."

President Eisenhower rejected that recommendation of the committee, not because he disagreed that rapid population growth was a significant impediment to economic progress, but rather, the controversial nature of birth control. He did not want to further divide the country on the eve of the 1960 presidential election featuring a Catholic as the Democratic nominee. But after leaving office, Eisenhower and Truman, the two living former presidents in 1964, agreed to serve as [co-chairmen](#) of the honorary sponsors council of Planned Parenthood-World Population. In 1968, Eisenhower was quoted: "Once, as President, I thought and said that birth control was not the business of our Federal Government. The facts changed my mind..."

### Republicans in Congress during the Kennedy and Johnson administrations

After his election, President John F. Kennedy defied expectations in December 1962 by authorizing U.S. support for a United Nations resolution to provide birth control assistance whenever a country requested. But it was not until the Johnson administration that the decision to fund some modest bilateral family planning projects overseas was made, beginning in 1965. That breakthrough was bolstered by the passage of an amendment to the 1966 foreign aid authorization bill giving USAID specific authority to use foreign currencies as part of the Food for Peace program to provide family planning services and codifying the first statutory definition of a "voluntary family planning program."

This was the beginning of Congress taking the lead on birth control at home and abroad with active collaboration between a cadre of Republicans and Democrats. Many Republican legislators became active champions over multiple Congresses, including Senators Mark Hatfield (R-OR) and Charles Percy (R-IL), who were later elevated to the chairmanships of the Appropriations and Foreign Relations Committees, respectively; Congressman and later Sen. Robert Taft, Jr. (R-OH); and Sen. Bob Packwood (R-OR). Another key player in drafting and sponsoring legislation to promote family planning in the United States and abroad was a two-term Republican Congressman from Texas named George H.W. Bush.

In 1967, Congress authorized foreign aid funds for overseas family planning and added a new Title X, Programs Relating to Population Growth, to the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961, the permanent statute governing foreign aid programs, and earmarked \$35 million for fiscal year (FY) 1968. Of the original cosponsors of the Senate bill to create the new title, 12 were Democrats along with six Republicans. Congress subsequently earmarked \$50 million in FY 1969 for population assistance, and the funding amounts appropriated continued to escalate from there.

### Richard M. Nixon

Shortly after his inauguration in 1969, President Nixon formally transmitted to Congress the first

presidential message on population. The statement dealt primarily with population growth in the United States but did include brief but direct references to foreign policy and assistance programs, calling the increase in people “a world problem no one can ignore.” More significantly, he stated that, “I have asked the Secretary of State and the Administrator of [USAID] to give population and family planning high priority for attention, personnel, research and funding among our several aid programs.”

One of the other key recommendations of the presidential message was Nixon’s initiation of the Commission on Population Growth and the American Future in 1970. Congressional family planning champions were not prepared to wait for the findings and recommendations of what became commonly known as the Rockefeller Commission after its chairman John D. Rockefeller, III. By the end of 1970, Congress had enacted the Family Planning Services and Population Research Act of 1970 ([Public Law 91-572](#)) which the Title X domestic family planning program, establishing the legal framework and authorizing \$382 million over three years for family planning services and research in the United States — the equivalent of \$2.8 billion today in inflation-adjusted dollars. Representative Bush was joined by original sponsors Sen. Joseph Tydings (D-MD) and Rep. James Scheuer (D-NY). The bill, previously approved by the Senate, passed the House of Representatives by the whopping bipartisan margin of 298 to 32 in December 1970.

The watershed event at the beginning of President Nixon’s short-lived second term was the Supreme Court’s decision to legalize abortion in *Roe v. Wade* on January 22, 1973. This precipitated the beginning of the linkage between family planning programs and domestic abortion politics and the emergence of a more aggressive crop of Republican opponents in Congress. The *Roe* decision prompted Sen. Jesse Helms (R-NC) to sponsor and pass later that year the amendment that bears his name — and persists to this day — that restricts the use of U.S. foreign assistance funds to provide or promote “abortion as a method of family planning.”

### **Gerald R. Ford**

While the *Roe* decision started to signal a change in sentiment, President Ford’s brief tenure in the White House was not particularly noteworthy other than the occurrence of the World Population Conference in Bucharest in the fall of 1974. The official U.S. delegation to the conference that included General Draper was instrumental in the adoption of the World Population Plan of Action by 135 nations — solid and supportive on international family planning, but not much else.

With the enshrinement of opposition to abortion, including public funding, and a call for the appointment of judges “who respect traditional family values and the sanctity of human life,” in the 1980 Republican party platform — along with election of Ronald Reagan — the shift in the attitude on contraception of Republican policymakers accelerated.

**Stay tuned for Part II — a retrospective look at international FP/RH funding and policy during the Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush, George W. Bush and Donald Trump presidencies — coming soon.**