

Special Award Recipient

Sarah Weddington

Growing up in West Texas, Sarah Weddington rode horses and developed an independent spirit. Her father was a Methodist preacher, and, as customary, the family was assigned to a succession of towns like Munday, Canyon, Vernon, Abilene, and Lubbock. With each move she had to make new friends; she developed an outgoing personality and a sense of self-confidence. Dr. Weddington served in positions of leadership during junior high and high school. She was academically talented and skipped two grades before starting McMurry College in Abilene when she was 16 years old. Soon she was active in school organizations and eventually was elected an officer of the student body.

She graduated from the University of Texas School of Law in 1967. Then for two years, she was assistant reporter for the American Bar Foundation Special Committee on the Reevaluation of Ethical Standards, which wrote the Code of Professional Responsibility ultimately adopted by the American Bar Association and most state bar groups. After beginning private practice, she was certified by the State Bar of Texas as a family law specialist.

In 1972, Dr. Weddington became the first woman from Austin elected to the Texas House of Representatives. As a state representative from 1973-1977, she led efforts on a broad spectrum of issues. Of special significance for women, she helped to reform the Texas rape statutes, to pass an equal credit bill, to pass a pregnancy leave bill for teachers, and to block all anti-abortion legislation. She was instrumental in changing Texas law to provide equal consideration for mothers and fathers in custody disputes.

Dr. Weddington, at age 27, achieved national prominence in 1973 when the United States Supreme Court announced her victory in *Roe v. Wade*. She is believed to be the youngest person ever to win a case in the Supreme Court. She detailed this experience in her book, *A Question of Choice*. In 2003, she was featured in *TIME* magazine's special issue, "80 Days That Changed the World," for the *Roe v. Wade* decision.

In 1977, President Jimmy Carter appointed Dr. Weddington to be General Counsel of the United States Department of Agriculture. She was the first woman to hold that position and supervised over 200 attorneys. From 1978 to 1981, she served as Assistant to the President of the United States. From her office

above the Oval Office in the White House, she directed the Administration's work on women's issues and appointments—including federal judicial appointments—and organized a series of information sessions for top state and national leaders. She was co-chair of the American delegation to the 1980 United Nations Conference on Women in Copenhagen. As director of the Texas Office of State-Federal Relations from 1983 to 1985, she was the state's chief representative in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Weddington writes and travels extensively, speaking on the development of leadership skills, with a special focus on women's contributions. In 2004, she served as the keynote speaker in China for the U.S.-China Conference on Women and Leadership, and she maintains a busy travel schedule to other countries, including recent trips to Argentina, Cambodia, Myanmar, South Korea, and Thailand.

Dr. Weddington has been a distinguished lecturer and an adjunct professor at Texas Women's University (TWU). In 2001, she organized and participated in the Sarah Weddington Centennial Leadership Conference at TWU. As an adjunct professor at the University of Texas-Austin, she is shaping a new generation of leaders through her classes "Gender-Based Discrimination" and "Leadership in America." A founding member of the Foundation for Women's Resources, she has been integral in all of its leadership activities, as well as the creation of its Women's Museum in Dallas, where she is featured in the "Unforgettable Women" exhibit.

In 2000, *Texas Lawyer* named Dr. Weddington as "one of the Most Influential Lawyers of the 20th Century." In 1996, she was profiled in *The Fifty Most Influential Women in American Law* by Dawn Bradley Berry. In 2004, Dr. Weddington spoke to approximately 1 million people on the Washington, D.C. Mall as a featured speaker for the March for Women's Lives. She continues her contribution to the law through various American Bar Association activities, including her current service on the council of the ABA's Section of Individual Rights and Responsibilities.



2008 Margaret Brent Awards