



How Long Can the Left Put Up With A 'Draft Warren' Movement?

By David Weigel

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In December, I stopped by the MoveOn/Democracy for America/Ready for Warren draft campaign launch in Des Moines, and saw around 100 progressives brainstorm ways to get Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren to run for president. On Super Bowl Sunday, I sat in on a next-stage meeting, one of 209 happening around the country, in Washington. Twenty progressives showed up. This past weekend, the *Washington Post's* Robert Costa walked into a house party for Warrenphilia in Ames, Iowa, one of the state's largest college towns—a place where 250 progressives had gathered to watch Vermont Senator Bernie Sanders give a December speech. Covering that speech, I'd noticed MoveOn one-sheets on a table, advertising the Draft Warren cause.

Thirteen people showed up to the house party that Costa covered. The headline, "Democrats suffering from Clinton fatigue say they're ready for Warren," could be written from any room. It sounds a lot like what I've covered—skewing old, lots of praise for Warren, bitterness about Clinton tamped down by people who worry that the energy will curdle if it's negative. Not much has changed since *six months ago*, when Ready for Warren emerged at Netroots Nation in Detroit, and reporters wrote basically the same stories. The October Bloomberg Politics/Des Moines Register poll of Iowa, for example, found Clinton up 43 points on Warren in a hypothetical 2016 caucus. January's edition of the poll found a flurry of Warren activity closing the gap to...40 points.

The willingness of reporters to cover a fresh angle on the Clinton restoration—an escape from the *I, Claudius* infighting of Clintonworld itself—does not indicate that Draft Warren is working. In *Salon*, Joan Walsh has opened herself up to friendly progressive fire by asking what the Warrenphiles are even doing. Making news, obviously. The Working Families Party had told the *New York Times* that it was joining the Draft Warren effort. That made national news; a search for coverage of the Draft campaign finds it to be the most-covered WFP story since last summer.

What happened last summer? The WFP narrowly denied a nomination to 2014 Andrew Cuomo challenger Zephyr Teachout. It stiffed a candidate who *was* running; it was all-in for a candidate who wasn't.

"I'd love to see a campaign that popularizes Warren's 'eight point plan to build the middle class' and encourages all Democratic candidates—including Clinton—to back it," wrote Walsh. "Building a movement around a single political leader rather than around issues seems like a recipe for disappointment, especially when that leader has made it so clear she's not looking to run for president."

Less clear: Whether Warren can be the challenger the whole left wants. On foreign policy, she has hewed closely to the Democratic Party mainstream. In a column from last year, after constituents finally got Warren to talk about the Gaza-Israel conflict, Glenn Greenwald surmised that she "sounds like [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu." Warren, whose first foreign trip as a senator took her to Israel last year, has stayed far away of the debate on Netanyahu's speech to Congress. The surreal result is that the only national politician trekking through Iowa taking on Hillary Clinton's foreign policy from "the left" is Kentucky Senator Rand Paul.

"I think the issue with Warren, to me, is somewhat different," said Jonathan Tasini, an activist and writer who challenged Clinton from the left in her 2006 re-election to the U.S. Senate. "It's distracting from building campaigns on issues and a better progressive movement. It actually has a bit of the 2007 love with Obama—people willing to not ask questions about what someone believes in and, then, surprise, they get a president who they are 'disappointed' with. I'm not sure what Warren's world view is on foreign policy—on Israel/Middle East, for example—that is that different than a pretty conventional wisdom position."

The Bernie Sanders network, which spends a lot of time answering questions about Warren, is sanguine about the draft movement. "If they're going to hold a lot of people in place for a while in free parking," said Sanders adviser Tad Devine to MSNBC, "and then Bernie can go collect the rent later, that's fine with me."

There's plenty of precedent for that. In 1968, when Senator Robert F. Kennedy dithered about challenging President Lyndon Johnson, Eugene McCarthy rushed into the gap. In 2004, when progressives lacked an obvious champion, Vermont Governor Howard Dean transformed from a Cato Institute-approved fiscal hawk to an anti-war icon. Dean's campaign spawned countless progressive organizations, activists, and writers, from Zephyr Teachout to Democracy in America.

But Dean did not have to put up with the dashed expectations that, say, Bernie Sanders would. If Warren has not been constantly lying to supporters and reporters—a safe bet—the Draft campaign will end without a candidate. Sanders et al will enter the race as also-rans. The Draft Warren campaign is not wrong at all about presidential politics; there is no replacement for the energy of an insurgent bid. All it lacks right now is a candidate, and an insurgency.