

# Elizabeth Warren: the Wellstone legacy is reborn

Compare the following two quotes:

*I don't represent the big oil companies, the big pharmaceuticals, or the big insurance industry. They already have great representation in Washington. It's the rest of the people that need representation.*

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*Citibank and Goldman Sachs and all those other guys on Wall Street, they've got plenty of folks in the U.S. Senate willing to work on their side. We need someone one on our side willing to work for America's families.*

Words that could easily have been spoken by the same politician or two cut from the same cloth.

The first was a regular component of the stump speech of former Minnesota Sen. Paul Wellstone. The second is from recent speeches by Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren.

It has been years since the left in this country has seen a progressive champion like Warren — twelve, to be exact. Wellstone died in a plane crash in 2002, just days before his likely re-election to a third term.

Like Warren, Wellstone was a frequent target of speculation about presidential ambitions — not his own, but those harbored on his behalf by grass-roots activists hungry for a clear, credible voice willing to carry their message. There have been others — the Rev. Jesse Jackson comes to mind — but none had Wellstone's sincerity or true believer credentials.

Not until Elizabeth Warren came along.

When Wellstone died, a shroud descended over the left in this country that no policy debate or national trauma seemed capable of lifting. While embraced by liberals, not even President Obama ever seemed fully imbued with the progressive zeal craved by the left.

With the rise of the tea party and the pall of obstructionism and inaction that came with it, it seemed nothing could revive the "happy warrior" spirit that Wellstone brought to every cause he championed.

Happy may not fit Warren's warrior style, but her

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zeal is unquestioned. For the first time in over a decade, the left has found a perfect fit for Wellstone's mantle.

Progressives have wandered in the wilderness for so long, it is hard to blame them for investing so much hope in Warren, who, like Wellstone, resolutely declares that she is not a candidate for president. I suspect that, like Wellstone, she is sincere and finds the whole debate distracting.

But I also suspect that she, like Wellstone, doesn't care how she gets publicity for her causes. She's simply glad people are paying attention, finally.

It's also not difficult to see why she scares the bejesus out of the GOP: because people are listening.

Elizabeth Warren, like Paul Wellstone (both college professors), does not care about her political future. She cares about her political present and that sets her free to speak her mind. In so doing, she has found a voice that expresses the pent-up frustrations of millions.

Paul Wellstone, whose career in grass-roots organizing began in protesting the family farm foreclosures of the 1980s, told his students "Never separate the lives you live from the words you speak."

One gets that sense from Warren, that every battle with Wall Street on behalf of the little guy is a blow for her janitor father — the same way Wellstone devoted his political life to the interests of working people like his mother, a school cafeteria worker.

Elizabeth Warren is swimming against a strong political current, but that is always how changes in attitudes start. She understands that. Paul Wellstone understood it, too — and was making an important difference in changing attitudes against the poor and overlooked when he met his tragic end.

Warren has picked up the Wellstone baton and with it given his legacy a rebirth.

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