



Sen. Elizabeth Warren

# SEN. ELIZ

## *Look*

**E**lizabeth Warren – that’s Sen. Warren of Massachusetts now – has a dual connection to the University of Houston. She is both a graduate and a former faculty member, earning a degree in speech pathology and audiology in 1970 and teaching in the UH law school from 1978-83.

Born in Oklahoma City in 1949, Warren won a debate scholarship to George Washington University at the age of 16. She left after two years to marry her high-school boyfriend, who became a NASA engineer. They moved to Houston; she enrolled at UH and taught elementary school after graduation. After relocating to New Jersey, Warren earned a law degree at Rutgers in 1976. Following a divorce and eventual remarriage, she held teaching positions at UT, UH, Michigan, the University of Pennsylvania and Harvard.

She developed a growing reputation as a keen academic and passionate advocate in the field of consumer affairs. In 2008, she led the panel implementing the Emergency Economic Stabilization Act. A high profile supporter of the newly created Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Warren was initially considered a strong choice to become its director, but her appointment was successfully opposed by conservative adversaries. Some might say Warren had the last laugh, however, by defeating her incumbent Republican opponent and joining the U.S. Senate earlier this year.

**Q: What are your strongest memories of your undergraduate days at UH? Were you involved with any extracurricular activities? Do any particular classes or professors stand out?**

**A:** Dr. Genevieve Arnold’s class on the diagnostics of learning disorders stands out for me. It affected my understanding of how people think and still influences my work today. The speech pathology clinic also stands out because it gave me

extraordinary hands-on experience under the careful guidance of truly dedicated clinical instructors.

**Q: How did “Oklahoma’s top high-school debater” come to choose speech pathology as a major?**

**A:** At first, I wanted to be a teacher, but then I decided I wanted to work with children with disabilities. So I earned my degree in speech pathology and audiology, which

meant that I would be able to work with children who had brain injuries or other serious learning problems. After I got out of school, I taught special needs children in a public school.

**Q: So, after earning your bachelor’s degree here, you returned nearly a decade later – as a law school professor. Had the university changed much during that time? Or, perhaps, you were looking at it through different eyes?**

# ZABETH WARREN

## s Back at Her Cougar Roots



*'I knew I wanted to keep talking about what's happening to America's middle class families, and this was the best opportunity to do that.'*

— SEN. ELIZABETH WARREN

**A:** Standing up and teaching in front of a class of 100 is certainly different from sitting in a third row seat as a student. But one thing stayed the same – there were plenty of people at UH who wanted to help. John Mixon really took me under his wing and taught me how to teach a law class. Each teaching award I received later on was thanks to his guidance.

**Q:** What had you missed (if anything) about living in Houston?

**A:** Oh, that's an easy one - Ninfa's, the original one on Navigation.

**Q:** Can you trace your shift to an interest in the law? Was it always there and bubbled up? Or was it something new? Did it surprise you?

**A:** I'd never thought about going to law school while I was growing up. But I really loved it. I saw my legal education as a great tool that I could use to do something and make an impact.



**Q:** You've credited the senior law school professors at UH – John Mixon, in particular – for “teaching me how to teach.” What did they teach you? That is, what is the key to teaching law effectively?

**A:** One of the keys of teaching is figuring out what students know and what they don't, and then focusing on that. It's also about setting very clear goals for each class. That means making sure the objectives are clear, but leaving enough room to be creative. John was amazing. He would take me out to lunch and very gently help me see my own classes from new perspectives. I remain in his debt.

**Q:** Do you recall the last time you visited UH campus? What was your impression?

**A:** I was there a few years ago, and it was beautiful. It's really grown a lot.

**Q:** With John Kerry's departure from the Senate, you became the most junior senior senator' in its history. Briefly – what are Elizabeth Warren's legislative priorities?

**A:** Right now my priorities are focused on many of the same things I've been working on for years – fighting for a level playing field for working families, and holding Wall Street accountable. I'm here in Washington to work my heart out for the people who sent me here.

**Q:** Exploring a hypothetical scenario, if you had been named director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, you might not have gone on to become senator. For you, is one of those positions preferable to the other?

**A:** For me, the campaign for Senate was a chance to continue to work on the issues I care about. I knew I wanted to keep talking about what's happening to America's middle class families, and this was the best opportunity to do that.

**Q:** In your speech at the Democratic Convention, you said: “People feel like the system is rigged against them. And here's the painful part: They're right.” How would you characterize the state of “consumer finance” today? If you could wave a magic wand and change one thing in the consumer finance arena right now, what would that be?

**A:** I would make sure people don't get cheated by tricks and traps buried in consumer loan contracts. We've made a lot of progress but there's still more work to do to make sure consumers have the information they need to make the decisions that are best for them. ■

— Eric Gerber

Upper right photo:  
Warren graduates from Rutgers School of Law