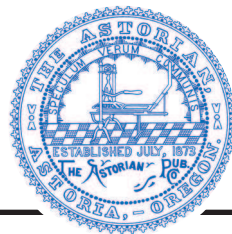


# OPINION



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PRO-CON

## Is Warren a viable presidential candidate?



Justin Wan/Sioux City Journal

Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts speaks at a Saturday campaign event at Orpheum Theatre in Sioux City, Iowa.

### PRO: Warren definitely viable, but many other Democrats are hankering to take on Trump

**W**ASHINGTON — While the campaign for president seems to be endless, the recent and very public entry of Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren into the 2020 election marks a beginning.

Democrats are likely to have a large primary field in their effort to defeat incumbent President Donald Trump and Warren is the first, but certainly not the last, qualified and politically viable candidate to run.

Viability is a word that pundits, strategists and activists use to narrow down large fields of candidates.

However, you may remember that Trump's first campaign was, almost universally, considered not viable, so you need to understand that viability is ultimately determined by voters.

Several questions should be asked and answered when considering viability.

Is the candidate well-known? Is the candidate experienced working on specific issues crucial to voters? Will she or he be able to raise the money needed to compete? Can they connect to primary voters and to the wider general electorate?

I'd say viability, while not dependent on satisfying all of these criteria, certainly depends on satisfying most of them.

Warren is professionally accomplished as a law professor and scholar, experienced as an advocate for working-class Americans in her work on fairness in banking, and has served with distinction as a United States senator.

And she has become well-known through her outspoken advocacy, is beloved by primary voters in the progressive wing of the Democratic Party and is even a frequent target of Trump's ire and ridicule.

Interestingly, she is also a former Republican, adding to her potential cross-over general election appeal.

Warren's protections, especially in banking, allows her to deliver a genuine and expert narrative on the damaging economic divide that voters everywhere feel and are yearning to solve and she delivers this message in an engaging way when

she campaigns or speaks publicly.

A result of her popularity is that Warren was in the top 10 for fundraising in 2018, despite not having a particularly competitive re-election. That suggests she has the basic campaign finance viability needed to compete.

All this adds up to make Warren a clearly viable, if we must use that term, candidate for president.

Now, while Warren is the first viable candidate to enter the race, even though a few others missing some of those key criteria have already entered, she will not be the last. Serious consideration will need to be given to other candidates as well.

Assumed candidacies include former Vice President Joe Biden as well as Sens. Bernie Sanders, Sherrod Brown, Kamala Harris, Cory Booker, Jeff Merkley, Amy Klobuchar and Kirsten Gillibrand.

There are many other well-known Democrats considering as well, including the popular Beto O'Rourke of Texas, who narrowly lost his initial try for the U.S. Senate last year.

The list includes other elected officials such as Colorado Gov. John Hickenlooper and former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg.

Others expressing interest include former Attorney General Eric Holder, entrepreneur Andrew Yang and another dozen potential candidates.

While not delving into every candidate, a few short examples of viable candidates would be Biden, who has already won twice nationwide; Sanders, whose primary challenge of Hillary Clinton was remarkably strong and wide in its support; and Brown, who has won tough contests in battleground Ohio as a progressive while championing working-class issues including trade.

The campaign for 2020 will be exciting and an important decision will need to be made. Voters are fortunate to have what seems to be a strong, inspiring, diverse, progressive, and yes, viable field of candidates to choose from and Warren definitely fits that bill.

*Don Kusler is national director of Americans for Democratic Action, a progressive advocacy organization.*



**Don Kusler**

### CON: She stumbled in starting gate and may not recover

**D**ALLAS — What if you entered a presidential race and no one really cared?

That was the ho-hum reaction to Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren's New Year's Eve announcement that she was forming a presidential exploratory committee.

She's the first Democrat to take the step and so the media widely covered it, but she will have a lot of competition. Is she an odds-on favorite? Probably not.

First, politicians, like athletes in a long-distance race, can peak too soon and find themselves fading as competitors pass them by. That may be one of Warren's problems.

Four years ago she was the darling of the Democratic Party's small but growing progressive wing. Dissatisfied with Hillary Clinton, progressives urged Warren to enter the 2016 presidential race.

However, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, a strong Clinton supporter, reportedly offered Warren a Senate leadership position if she'd stay out of the race. Warren accepted, disappointing her supporters at the time.

But Vermont senator and self-described democratic socialist Bernie Sanders made no such promise. He challenged Clinton and championed a very progressive message, drawing huge crowds of energized, young supporters, and giving Clinton a real run for her money.

The result is Sanders became the de facto head of the progressives and Warren became yesterday's news. Now she's almost no one's first choice.

Recent polls show Joe Biden, Beto O'Rourke and Sanders as the three top Democratic presidential contenders. Economic forecaster and publisher Kiplinger puts Warren in eighth place. And a recent poll published by The Hill has her in low single digits.

In other words, she's gone from top to flop — or close to it. The election is two years off so Warren may be able to regain her mojo, but beer soirees and dubious ancestry claims haven't helped.

Which brings us to the second point: genuineness.

Warren is considered a little cold and aloof — a criticism both she and Clinton

share — so she's trying to prove she's "one of us."

When Democrats run in deep red states, they often appear in a political ad shooting a gun. It's an effort to identify with red-state voters.

Warren's in a blue state, so the former Harvard professor decided to host an Instagram Live chat drinking a bottle of beer. It was painful to watch.

People who have never handled a gun look awkward — and staged — when they try. That's how Warren looked with her beer bottle, asking her off-camera husband if he wanted one.

Professor Warren may be a frequent beer drinker — her favorite is Michelob Ultra, which alone may cost her some votes — but Harvard professors would appear more natural holding a glass of pinot noir.

Progressives are drawn to Sanders because he seems genuine; Warren's efforts to appear genuine only make her appear less

so.

Third, her claim to be part Native American, which has been largely dismissed and widely ridiculed, may not be her only exaggeration.

For better or worse, every serious presidential candidate becomes the target of opposition research, examining every detail of a candidate's background.

Warren was once a Republican. Will researchers discover actions or statements that contradict her claims to progressivism?

If she handles future revelations as poorly as she has her Native American claim, she may be done for.

Elizabeth Warren is a successful, intelligent woman who worked her way up from a lower-middle-class childhood. She has a good narrative.

But presidential campaigns are about energizing voters and attracting hundreds of millions of dollars in campaign contributions. If a candidate can't do those things, then he or she needs to bow out early.

Warren has time to prove she can do both and take the lead. But for now she seems to be chasing the progressive movement rather than leading it.

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**Merrill Matthews**