

## Elizabeth Warren Ruffling Feathers early in clubby Senate

By Alexander Bolton in The Hill

A freshman senator is causing a stir. Outspoken and impatient of the upper chamber's clubby atmosphere, this career academic is driven by intellectual self-confidence and a willingness to be abrasive. The result is bipartisan offense and admiration.

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### A FEW FEATHERS SHORT OF A HEADDRESS

Such an outline might depict Sen. Ted Cruz (Texas), the staunchly conservative freshman Republican, who is loathed by opponents and critics, loved by his base and makes his colleagues wary, to put it mildly. But it also describes Sen. Elizabeth Warren (Mass.), a firmly liberal Democrat who in her first six months on Capitol Hill has displayed elbows just as sharp as those of her fellow freshman across the aisle.

Warren clashed last month with Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.), chairman of

the powerful Senate Finance Committee, over the nomination of Michael Froman to serve as U.S. Trade Representative.

Even though Froman sailed through the Finance Committee, Warren criticized him on the chamber floor after he declined to give her information about trade negotiations.

Froman's backers say he would have been approved sooner if not for Warren's opposition. Baucus made his displeasure known after the vote. "He went up to her after the vote and it looks like they had a pretty heated exchange," said a source who witnessed the conversation last month. "He looked mad. It looked like she failed to warn him and he called her out on it."

Warren crossed swords with other colleagues more recently over student loan legislation.

During a Democratic caucus luncheon earlier this month, she slammed a bipartisan proposal to peg student lending rates to the 10-year Treasury note that Sen. Joe Manchin (D-W.Va.) presented to the private meeting. "Elizabeth came out very strong against Manchin," said a Democratic senator who requested anonymity to discuss the exchange. "She said, 'They're already making money off the backs of students, and this adds another \$1 billion.'"

Manchin later downplayed the exchange.

"I love her," he told reporters the next day, calling her a "dear friend." "We've never had one cross word since she's been here, and we agree 90 percent of the time."

Warren ultimately lost that battle. This past week, Democratic leaders agreed to a compromise based largely on Manchin's plan to peg lending rates to fluctuating 10-year Treasury note rates.

Warren spoke out against the compromise Thursday, just hours after Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) had endorsed it in a press conference.

"Now the U.S. Senate is offering its own teaser rate loan program," she said on the Senate floor. "A great deal for students this year and next, but every kid who borrows after that gets slammed."

“That’s not the business the United States government should be in,” she said. “I understand that compromise isn’t always pretty, but there’s no compromise in this bill.”

Warren rained on the victory that Reid had declared that same afternoon. He had said, “They’ve done a wonderful job, Democrats and Republicans. I admire what they’ve done. Is it what I want? I’d rather to have something a little different, but I’m going to take this because that’s what we do. We’re legislators. We compromise.”

The task fell to Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) to take the floor to rebut Warren while she was still within earshot. He argued that she was failing to take into account the political realities of the divided Congress.

“Here’s the reality: We’re talking about this issue with a divided Congress. We’re talking about this issue where the House of Representatives is controlled by the other party and doesn’t see this issue at all the same way,” he said.

Durbin said he agreed with Warren that the federal government should earn less money in profits from student loans, but “this global change that she’s spoken of and referred to is one that she and I could probably agree on in a hurry, but it’s not going to happen.”

Warren came to the Senate seven months ago with a strong sense of destiny. She asked for the Kennedy desk on the Senate floor, the famous perch once occupied by former President John F. Kennedy and former Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), one of the chamber’s most coveted pieces of furniture.

When Reid gave it to her, it caused some grumbling on the Democratic side of the aisle.

“People were saying, ‘I can’t believe she has the Kennedy desk after only being here a few months. John Kerry had to wait for years to get that desk,’” said a senior Democratic aide, who noted that former Sen. Kerry (D-Mass.) was the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee by the time he got to sit at Kennedy’s desk.

Peter Ubertaccio, a political science professor at Stonehill College in Easton, Massachusetts, said Warren has the delicate task of trying not to overshadow senior colleagues who are not as well known.

“She is trying to balance some very difficult things as a junior senator who has some star power. She is trying not to completely overshadow other colleagues while advancing some issues for which she’s become well known,” he said.

Warren declined to comment for this article other than to offer an off-the-cuff joke revealing that sometimes her family wonders why she puts up with the petty squabbles and gridlock of Washington.

“My son doesn’t know what I’m doing in Washington,” she quipped.

Most other freshmen senators have kept a low profile as they try to ingratiate themselves with senior colleagues and learn arcane procedural rules. Not Warren.

She’s been emboldened by a national prominence that outshines colleagues who have served several terms.

Warren topped Hillary Clinton in a straw poll of attendees at the Take Back the American Dream conference held last month in Washington. A majority of the attendees also said they wanted to see a female president after 2016.

Warren does not have to worry about chatting up reporters from major newspapers or cable news producers to get attention, as some of her colleagues do. Instead, she often blows by members of the press with the excuse that she’s on her way to a meeting or too busy. This has miffed some reporters, who wonder if she’s already grooming herself for a White House bid.

The comparison with Cruz, who has also shown little patience for venerating senior colleagues, is plain.

Both lawmakers were academic stars and use a lecturing tone when explaining nuances of policy or the Constitution.

It prompted a rebuke from Sen. Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.), a four-term veteran and senior member of the Judiciary Committee, to whom Cruz gave a mini lecture on the Bill of Rights earlier this year. “I’m not a sixth grader. Senator, I’ve been on this committee for 20 years. I was a mayor for nine years,” Feinstein responded.

Warren had a similar exchange with Sen. Lamar Alexander (R-Tenn.), a

former member of the GOP leadership and the senior Republican on the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee.

On March 14, after a HELP Committee hearing on the minimum wage,

Warren approached Alexander on Republican side of the dais to follow up on his questioning of witness who called for a higher wage floor.

She told Alexander, who objected to indexing the minimum wage to inflation, that in the case of restaurants, "it's really not a big deal to have increases in inflation because restaurants can just raise their prices," according to a witness who heard the conversation and provided a first-hand account.

Alexander responded: "It doesn't work that way."

Warren said: "It's just simple math and you don't seem to understand the math."

Alexander asked: "Have you ever run a restaurant?"

Warren replied: "I don't need to have, it's just math."

A Warren aide who was not present at the hearing said the witness could not have an accurate verbatim memory of a conversation that took place four months ago.

Warren also has fans and friends on both sides of the aisle.

While some Republicans complain about her professorial demeanor, which they say contains more than a hint of arrogance, they acknowledge she can also be warm and personable.

"She's a very nice person and very friendly but she is very professorially arrogant," said a senior GOP aide.

Sen. Jay Rockefeller (D-W.Va.), one of the elder statesmen of the Senate Democrats' liberal faction, said colleagues view Warren "with reverence."

Rockefeller said he thoroughly enjoys having Warner as a colleague because she is "monumental in her intensity" and "she drives hard."

Warren asked Sen. Bob Corker (Tenn.) to serve as her Republican mentor as part of an informal program to foster bipartisan relations. They have had dinner together a few times, according to Corker, and worked together to introduce legislation to set up reform of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac —

the Jumpstart GSE Reform Act.

Earlier this month, she and Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) teamed up with colleagues to introduce a bill to break up the nation's biggest banks through legislation that would rebuild a firewall between commercial and investment banking.

"I don't pay a lot of attention to the image that people come here with," Corker said. "I pay more attention to what appears to be their interest in particular problem areas and try to figure out a way to provide issues to get something done."