

THIS FIGHT IS OUR FIGHT

The Battle to
Save America's
Middle Class

ELIZABETH WARREN

Bestselling Author of *A Fighting Chance*





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*To the people of Massachusetts,
who sent me into this fight*

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Prologue

“I’ll get the popcorn.”

I yelled up the stairs to let Bruce know I was coming. I also had the beer and my laptop.

He had the television on, with the second season of *Ballers* lined up. Our son had hooked us on it the year before, and we’d been saving the shows until tonight—Election Night.

It was November 8, 2016. The polls were about to close in Massachusetts, and we were about to start our Election Night ritual: clicking back and forth between news reports and binge-watching something really fun on television. I had my laptop so I could check on the local races, and my phone so, assuming the night went well, I could make some congratulatory calls.

Yeah, until I won my Senate race in 2012 I’d have guessed that a senator would watch election returns like a pro: a big group of people in a war room somewhere, multiple television screens on the walls, phones ringing, people rushing in with last-minute information. Lots of coffee cups and pizza boxes strewn over desks. Someone making pithy remarks about what it means that with 2 percent of Illinois reporting, Duckworth

has a four-point lead, and turnout in the Seventh Precinct is high, and so on. In fact, I think I've seen that scene in the movies.

But not Bruce and me, not tonight. I wasn't on the ballot this year, so I wouldn't be huddling with a campaign team. Besides, by this point, there wasn't anything else I could do to affect the election's outcome. And with so much on the line, I knew that watching the numbers drift in over the next few hours would be agony.

For so many of these races, I'd been out there with the candidates—cheered them on, given speeches standing next to them, frozen and sweated and stepped in muck right along with them. Hillary Clinton's race, of course, was the night's biggest, but I would be chewing my fingernails watching the Senate races as well. There was Catherine Cortez Masto, a former attorney general in Nevada whom I'd worked with while fighting the banks during the housing crisis eight years ago. Katie McGinty, a former environmental policy official in Pennsylvania who was trying to unseat a Republican who seemed to be funded by an endless supply of Wall Street money. Russ Feingold, the former senator from Wisconsin who had been in the trenches with me as we'd fought to save families from predatory lenders fifteen years earlier and was making a strong push to get his old seat back. Maggie Hassan, the governor from just across the border in New Hampshire, where I had gone time after time to help out. Jason Kander, a progressive Democrat in Missouri who was running uphill hard. Tammy Duckworth, a vet in Illinois who had lost both legs in Iraq and, no surprise, turned out to be a fierce campaigner. Kamala Harris, the California AG I'd gone into battle with shoulder to shoulder many times. And so many more. For months, these candidates had put it all on the line. Faces, names, stories—they all crowded in that night, and I was anxious and hopeful and fearful for every one of them.

No, I didn't want to watch the numbers trickle in with a big group. I just wanted to be at home with Bruce. That night we did what we always did—toggled back and forth between a television show and the election results. Sitting on the couch eating popcorn, drinking beer, and hoping for the best.

Ballers was terrific. The 2016 election, not so much.

The first sign of trouble was how quickly several Senate races were called for Republicans. Indiana. Florida. Suddenly candidates we thought would win were struggling—Russ in Wisconsin and Katie in Pennsylvania. And then it looked like Hillary was in trouble, too.

It was like watching a train wreck in slow motion. One car hurtled off the tracks, then another crumpled, then fires and explosions and bodies flying everywhere.

As I watched the White House slip away and the Democratic losses mount, I knew that a lot of people would spend weeks analyzing what had gone wrong, how this moment had come to pass. There would be lots of pundits. (“I always knew . . .”) Lots of partisans. (“Of course this loss happened because they . . .”) Lots of political types certain that they could have done it all much, much better.

Sure, there would be endless autopsies of the 2016 campaigns, but as that long night wore on, I found myself thinking less about the political winds and more about how the fallout from this election would deliver one more body blow to so many working families. The television showed crowds of candidates and supporters celebrating or grieving, but what haunted me was the thought that for tens of millions of Americans, life was about to get a whole lot tougher.

LONG BEFORE I ever came within a hundred miles of politics, I had been a teacher and a researcher. I had spent years tracking what was happening to America’s middle class, what was happening to working families and families that wanted to be working families. It was a great and terrible story.

The tale of America coming out of the Great Depression and not only surviving but actually transforming itself into an economic giant is the stuff of legend. But the part that gives me goose bumps is what we did with all that wealth: over several generations, our country built the greatest middle class the world had ever known.

We built it ourselves, using our own hard work and the tools of government to open up more opportunities for millions of people. We used it all—tax policy, investments in public education, new infrastructure, support for research, rules that protected consumers and investors, antitrust laws—to promote and expand our middle class. The spectacular, shoot-off-the-fireworks fact is that we succeeded. Income growth was widespread, and the people who did most of the work—the 90 percent of America—also got most of the gains. In the 1960s and 1970s, I was one of the lucky beneficiaries of everything America was building, and to this day, I am grateful to the bottom of my soul.

But now, in a new century and a different time, that great middle class is on the ropes. All across the country, people are worried—worried and angry.

They are angry because they bust their tails and their income barely budes. Angry because their budget is stretched to the breaking point by housing and health care. Angry because the cost of sending their kid to day care or college is out of sight.

People are angry because trade deals seem to be building jobs and opportunities for workers in other parts of the world, while leaving abandoned factories here at home. Angry because young people are getting destroyed by student loans, working people are deep in debt, and seniors can't make their Social Security checks cover their basic living expenses. Angry because we can't even count on the fundamentals—roads, bridges, safe water, reliable power—from our government. Angry because we're afraid that our children's chances for a better life won't be as good as our own.

People are angry, and they are *right* to be angry. Because this hard-won, ruggedly built, infinitely precious democracy of ours has been hijacked.

Today this country works great for those at the top. It works great for every corporation rich enough to hire an army of lobbyists and lawyers. It works great for every billionaire who pays taxes at lower rates than the hired help. It works great for everyone with the money to buy favors in

Washington. Government works great for them, but for everyone else, this country is no longer working very well.

This is the most dangerous kind of corruption. No, it's not old-school bribery with envelopes full of cash. This much smoother, slicker, and better-dressed form of corruption is perverting our government and making sure that day after day, decision after decision, the rich and powerful are always taken care of. This corruption is turning government into a tool of those who have already gathered wealth and influence. This corruption is hollowing out America's middle class and tearing down our democracy.

In 2016, into this tangle of worry and anger, came a showman who made big promises. A man who swore he would drain the swamp, then surrounded himself with the lobbyists and billionaires who run the swamp and feed off government favors. A man who talked the talk of populism but offered the very worst of trickle-down economics. A man who said he knew how the corrupt system worked because he had worked it for himself many times. A man who vowed to make America great again and followed up with attacks on immigrants, minorities, and women. A man who was always on the hunt for his next big con.

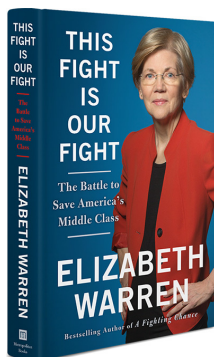
In the months ahead, it would become clear that this man was even more divisive and dishonest than his presidential campaign revealed. But on election night, I stared at the television as it sank in that this man was about to become the next president of the United States.

The election results kept rolling in, and I knew that plenty of people would be eager to describe the special appeal of Donald Trump and explain all the reasons why he won. But we need more than an explanation of just one election; we also need to understand how and why our country has gone so thoroughly wrong. We need a plan to put us back on track—and then we need to get to work and make it happen.

We need to live our values, to be the kind of nation that invests in opportunity, not just for some of us, but for all of us. We need to take our democracy back from those who would pervert it for their own benefit. We need to build the America of our best dreams.

Sitting on the couch with Bruce, I watched Donald Trump say that his presidency would be “a beautiful thing.” No, I thought, it won’t be anything like beautiful. Worse, the man who would soon move into the White House had the capacity to bear down on a middle class that was already on the ropes and deliver the knockout punch.

If ever there was a time to fight, this was it.



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