

BY ALEX TANZER
JULY 2, 2026

Warren and Schumer wage open fight over who controls the Democratic Party's future

Sen. Elizabeth Warren is methodically building a progressive faction inside the Senate Democratic caucus, endorsing primary challengers, raising money for state parties, and backing candidates who openly refuse to support Chuck Schumer as their leader. The Massachusetts senator's campaign-within-a-campaign has turned the 2026 primary season into a proxy war for control of a party still reeling from its 2024 losses.

Schumer, the Senate minority leader, is fighting back with the tools he knows best: fundraising muscle, establishment recruits, and allied super PAC spending. But the ground beneath him keeps shifting. His preferred candidate lost the Iowa primary. Progressive insurgents swept House primaries in his home state of New York. And a growing number of Democratic senators, some on the record, some hiding behind anonymity, are questioning whether Schumer can lead the party anywhere worth going.

The Hill reported that Warren has endorsed at least five Senate primary candidates across Maine, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, and Iowa. Three of them, Graham Platner in Maine, Lt. Gov. Juliana Stratton in Illinois, and Michigan state Sen. Mallory McMorrow, have publicly stated they will not support Schumer serving another term as Democratic leader. A fourth, Lt. Gov. Peggy Flanagan of Minnesota, has not committed to backing him.

That is not a coincidence. It is a strategy.

The battleground map

Warren has contributed \$800,000 to state Democratic parties across six Senate battleground states this cycle: Alaska, Georgia, Maine, Michigan, North Carolina, and Ohio. She endorsed New York City Mayor Zohran Mamdani during his 2025 mayoral race, a contest Schumer declined to touch publicly. Three progressive candidates backed by Mamdani then won House primaries in New York, ousting establishment incumbents Rep. Dan Goldman and Rep. Adriano Espaillat.

The Iowa primary offered the clearest head-to-head test. Warren backed Zach Wahls, who appeared alongside her and declared: "I'm not running for the United States Senate to work for Chuck Schumer." VoteVets, a super PAC described as historically aligned with Schumer, poured \$10 million into ads supporting Josh Turek. Turek won with 63 percent of the vote.

Schumer and DSCC Chair Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand issued a joint statement calling the result proof that "the Iowa Senate seat is firmly in play." They framed it as a party win. But it was also a Warren loss, and a reminder that money still talks in Democratic primaries, even when the grassroots energy runs the other way.

Maine may be the most revealing contest still ahead. Schumer recruited Gov. Janet Mills, 78, to challenge Republican Sen. Susan Collins. Warren endorsed Platner instead, telling The Hill that Maine voters "are dealing every single day with economic issues that are flattening them against the wall" and that Platner would go to Washington "to reduce costs and to help the corruption in this place."

An anonymous Democratic senator allied with Warren was blunter about Mills. "She had no grassroots energy at all. Zero," the senator told The Hill. "She's a conservative, business-oriented Democrat at a time when the energy of the party, on the ground, the grassroots side is not interested in that. They want the system shaken up."

In Michigan, the split is just as clean. Schumer supports Rep. Haley Stevens. Warren backs McMorrow. Both want the same Senate seat. Only one side is promising to keep Schumer in power.

A leader under siege from every direction

Warren's primary maneuvering is only one front in a broader erosion of Schumer's authority. Earlier this year, Newsmax reported that Democratic senators, aides, and donors were privately discussing whether Schumer should step aside after the November elections. The Senate Majority PAC, Democrats' main Senate super PAC, began 2026 with \$36 million on hand and \$12.4 million in debt. Its Republican counterpart started with \$100 million and no debt.

Schumer responded to the grumbling by saying criticism "goes with the territory" for any leader and that his "support in the caucus is deep and strong." He added that he believes he has done "a very good job" of setting up Democrats to win back the Senate in November.

But the caucus has not behaved like one that feels deeply supportive. A group of Democratic senators dubbed the "Fight Club" by the New York Post, including Warren, Sen. Chris Murphy, Sen. Bernie Sanders, and Sen. Tina Smith, demanded that Schumer and the DSCC stay neutral in primaries. The group itself was described by an insider as "one big, giant mess" plagued by "dysfunctional staff communications and infighting for credit with the Democratic base."

Schumer has also faced open revolts on the Senate floor. During a 40-day government shutdown earlier this cycle, eight Democrats broke ranks to advance a spending bill without securing the Obamacare subsidy extensions Schumer had demanded as a condition for ending the standoff. Rep. Ro Khanna called publicly for Schumer's replacement, saying: "If you can't lead the fight to stop healthcare premiums from skyrocketing for Americans, what will you fight for?"

Sen. Angus King, the Maine independent who caucuses with Democrats, offered a quieter but equally damaging assessment: "After six weeks, going on seven weeks, that path wasn't working. It wasn't going to happen."

What Warren wants, and what she says she doesn't

Warren has been careful to frame her efforts as grassroots advocacy, not a leadership bid. When asked whether she would consider running for Senate majority leader, she sidestepped: "I want to do everything that I can to help working families. We need a Democratic Party that's ready to be in the fight." A Warren spokesperson said flatly that the senator "has no interest in being the Senate Democratic leader."

Democratic strategist Steve Jarding, a former senior adviser to the Senate Democrats' campaign arm, suggested the disclaimers may not matter. If Warren's endorsed candidates win their primaries and general elections, "she

becomes a senior member of that wing of the Democratic Party," Jarding said. She would have "soul mates" in the caucus, and her power would be "elevated" regardless of title.

Warren's own framing of the progressive victories in New York reinforced that point. When asked what the Mamdani-backed House primary wins meant, she said: "It says more about the state of voters. Voters want change. They want people who have clear ideas about how to make their lives better and to know that they will fight for them."

That is a message aimed squarely at Schumer's model of Democratic politics, raise corporate money, recruit safe candidates, avoid ideological fights, and hope the math works out. An anonymous Democratic senator allied with Warren made the critique explicit, telling The Hill that "the role of money in politics is such that the Democratic leader has to suck up to all kind of corporate forces that really aren't that acceptable."

The same senator pointed to Gillibrand's advocacy for cryptocurrency deregulation as evidence of the problem. "If you watch who led the fight for crypto deregulation, it was Kirsten Gillibrand who is head of the DSCC," the senator said. "That was a terrible deregulation."

The conservative read

For Republicans, this internal Democratic war is a gift, but one that requires clear-eyed analysis, not complacency. The fight between Warren and Schumer is not about whether the Democratic Party will become more moderate or more radical. It is about which flavor of progressive politics will dominate, and how far left the party's Senate candidates will run in swing states.

Schumer's record offers little comfort to conservatives. He has lashed out at Republican-led votes on border security funding and faced questions about his own political vulnerability from the progressive wing of his party. His spokesperson's insistence that Schumer is "focused on one thing: taking back the Senate" is a tacit admission that holding his own caucus together has become a full-time job.

Warren's candidates, meanwhile, are running on platforms that would push the Senate further left on economic regulation, corporate oversight, and spending.

The question for voters in Maine, Michigan, Illinois, and Minnesota is not which Democrat will be more reasonable. It is which Democrat will be more effective at advancing an agenda most Americans outside deep-blue enclaves did not ask for.

A Schumer spokesperson said he has "expanded the map and built a real path back to the majority, a path many thought was a pipe dream just a year ago." Maybe so. But when your own caucus members are telling reporters you've been captured by corporate donors, when your endorsed candidates are losing primaries, and when your home-state establishment is getting swept by progressives, the path looks less like a strategy and more like a retreat.

Democrats are tearing themselves apart over who gets to lead them into the next fight. For the rest of the country, the more pressing question is what either faction plans to do if they win, and whether anyone in that party still speaks for the taxpayers picking up the tab.