

Educator challenged the status quo at an early age, helped found SF Womenâ??s Building and now active in California Senior Legislature

Description

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Anne Warren was never shy. In high school, she shocked school administrators at a public meeting. The integration they were proud to proclaim in her hometownâ??s sole public high school did not exist. As a young Black woman, she described deeply divided racial and economic divisions.

â??The kids who gathered in the front hall were all White, athletes, and their families had money. The back hall kids were White and poor and didnâ??t belong to any school group. The Black kids gathered in the auditorium.â?•



Anne Warren has challenged inequities from high school on. (All photos by Colin Campbell)

It wasnâ??t the first time she encountered the racial divide, and it wasnâ??t to be the last time she fought for marginalized groups.

At 84 years and retired, Warren chairs the Legislative Committee of the California Senior Legislature, which supports about 10 bills a year with roughly half passed. Itâ??s an absorbing job: eliciting issues from the public, interest groups and legislatures, identifying solutions, then crafting legislation and finding legislators to introduce, co-author and carry the bill.

One of their successes was the creation of â??Silver Alert,â?• for missing elderly or the developmentally or cognitively impaired. Though seniors go missing every day, the system has rarely been used and a CSL committee is investigating.

Teaching and management

Before the pandemic, CSL met twice a year in Sacramento; now all their work is done on Zoom. â??There was an excitement to meeting in the Capitol each year. It was important for the new members,â?• she said. â??That isnâ??t possible on Zoom.â?•

But itâ??s still exciting for Warren, and there are so many issues to be addressed.

Warren spent most of her career in teaching, with bachelorâ??s and masterâ??s degrees in education from Ball State University in Muncie but dabbled in corporate work on occasion. She taught in Oakland and San Francisco, where her management skills led to a job in the Department of Buildings and Grounds. She became director, a job she held until her retirement in 2001.



Warren volunteers at the Rafiki Coalition for Health and Wellness on Cesar Chavez Street.



Informational brochures at the Rafiki Coalition, which offers education and advocacy to San Franciscoâ??s Black and marginalized communities and provides free holistic health and wellness services such as movement classes, health screenings, acupuncture, chiropractic and massage services and transitional housing and case management services for people living with HIV/AIDS and trauma resiliency.

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Warren was born and spent her early years in Muncie, Indiana. An only child â?? â??my mother was the oldest of nine and that was enough for herâ?• â?? she describes her young self as â??outspoken and observant.â?• Involvement in a leadership training program from the YWCA and several yearsâ?? experience as a columnist for the Muncie high school newspaper contributed to the self-confidence that has stood her so well.

That self-confidence shaped her decisions and grounded her determination.

She spent her freshman year at Indiana University in Bloomington, where she worked in the cafeteria. While wiping down the tables, she overheard some White students, using the n-word, disparaging Black students who came to the cafeteria. On another occasion, she and her friends ordered cokes to go from a dime store soda fountain and started to sit down, only to be told by the waitress, Warren recalled, â??You canâ??t sit here.â?•

â??Then we donâ??t want the cokes,â?• she said she replied.â?• She left Bloomington after that year.

Those memories are still with Warren as she spends her days trying to recalibrate the scales of justice. And sometimes itâ??s personal.

Easing end of life

One of the bills CLS promoted would have had a direct effect on a friend of hers in rural northern California who has cancer. It would have increased the availability of vans taking patients from rural areas to hospitals, such as Stanford and the University of California, that could provide the care she needs. Her friend was driving to a friendâ??s house in Modesto, the only rural area in the state with specially outfitted vans to those hospitals. But the bill failed. It tried to direct money from the Green Tax

to finance transport in other parts of the state, â??but the Green Tax had been overspent,â?• said Warren.

A more successful push occurred in 2019, when CSL provided research and support for the End of Life Option Act.

Warrenâ??s focus on issues affecting seniors was gradual. After earning her degree in education, she moved to Washington D.C ., where she took a job teaching sixth graders. Though she enjoyed the children and the job, the corporate world beckoned. When she heard that IBM was hiring, she packed up and moved to California. She didnâ??t get the job so turned back to education, working with fifth and sixth graders in the Oakland public schools.

Three years later, still intrigued by the salary and other possibilities offered by working in corporate America, she again applied at IBM and this time was hired. After another three years, she took a job with Crocker Bank. Cash machines/ATMs were just coming into use and Warren was assigned to the division working on user interface. The best part of that job? â??Getting together with my teammates after work.â?•

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So it was back to the classroom, first in Oakland and then San Francisco. When the latter discovered her management skills, she was transferred to the Department of Buildings and Grounds. She rose quickly to director, a job she held until her retirement in 2001.

Breaking barriers

But Warrenâ??s energy was not confined to the workplace. The second wave of the Womenâ??s Movement was taking off and Warren became involved in creating the San Francisco Womenâ??s Building, a center for Bay Area organizing activities. She also joined the San Francisco chapter of Black Women Organized for Political Action, responding to barriers â?? from employment to lending and health â?? encountered by Black residents.



Warren in a conference room at the Rafiki Coalition used for music and wellness activities.

Before 1974 and the passage of the federal Equal Credit Opportunity Act, women, particularly Black and minority women, had difficulty securing credit in their own name. They experienced extreme difficulty financing homes, cars and other major purchases. Fortunately for Warren, her realtor helped her find a private second for the down payment on her home in San Franciscoâ??s Miraloma district.

Others were not so fortunate. So, Warren joined the now-defunct San Francisco Womenâ??s Feminist Credit Union, loaning funds to women denied credit.

While early retirement has given Warren more time to focus on her activism, itâ??s also brought travel â?? around the U.S. and Canada, France and Italy, Spain, Belgium, London, Brazil, Cuba, Senegal, Mozambique, Nigeria, Australia, New Zealand and Fiji. More recently, sheâ??s planned trips to Portugal and thinks sheâ??s ready for East Africa.

Though she devotes countless hours a week to the legislative process, Warren challenges herself in other ways. â??Every year I challenge myself to learn something new. Last year, she worked with the cityâ??s COVID contact tracing division and was excited to learn â??we were using the same Salesforce application that allowed the city to stop AIDS.â?•

Sheâ??s not sure what her community mission will be this year, but she knows sheâ??s going to spend time getting ready for the next years of her life: updating her Trust and upgrading the downstairs in her house to be either a caregiverâ??s living space or a space for her when she can no longer use the stairs.

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