

Consumer agency pick Cordray lost some, won some



By [Ylan Q. Mui](#) and [Brady Dennis](#), Published: July 27

Richard Cordray is no stranger to defeat.

A soft-spoken man who pads around in socks and admires the writings of Supreme Court justice Louis Brandeis, he has run for office in his native Ohio nine times in the past 20 years, losing nearly as many races as he's won.

Now, he faces an entirely different kind of vote, one that won't be decided at the polls but rather in a U.S. Senate full of political enemies. As [President Obama's nominee](#) to lead the controversial new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, Cordray faces an uphill confirmation battle over which he has little control.

Senate Republicans have vowed [to block him](#). The House recently passed a bill that would [abolish the director's position](#). Some other Obama appointments have either [languished for months](#) or never gotten a hearing.

Cordray declined to be interviewed in advance of any potential hearings. But people close to him said that his stumbles at home have taught him a perseverance that should serve him well in Washington.

“I don’t dwell a lot on my political career because I’ve seen setbacks and reverses and seen how hazardous it is to lay plans,” Cordray told the Dayton Daily News last year.

Cordray is a compromise candidate for the CFPB after fiery Harvard law professor Elizabeth Warren, the Democrats’ top pick for the position, antagonized the GOP and financial groups with her strong rhetoric. Obama has pointed to Cordray’s appeal among local Republicans.

“He’s been up and he’s been down, and he knows what’s really important in all of this,” said Luke Blocher, who managed Cordray’s 2008 campaign for attorney general. “He’ll be able to understand when a political moment is happening that isn’t really about his confirmation.”

Cordray waded into politics as a Democrat in 1990 with an early win to the state House of Representatives, but was booted out two years later. He then made ambitious bids for the U.S. Senate, House and Ohio attorney general. He lost each time.

So Cordray scaled back his plans. In 2002, he was elected treasurer of Franklin County, which includes Columbus, and began to focus on the types of consumer issues that would later define his career. He aggressively went after overdue property taxes, but created a special program to help elderly residents who were delinquent.

Four years later, Cordray won the race to become state treasurer and took on payday lending and foreclosures, which were plaguing the state long before the financial crisis hit.

Amy Hanauer, executive director of the nonprofit Policy Matters Ohio, said Cordray took an early interest in concerns her group had over tax refund loans marketed to low-income residents.

What he saw in office mirrored what he would later read in “[The Two-Income Trap](#),” a book by his future mentor Harvard law professor Elizabeth Warren that described the debt load saddling middle-class America.

Hanauer said in her conversations with Cordray about the book that she was struck by the similarities in thinking between him and Warren. “When he saw what was happening in Ohio communities . . . it gave him an understanding of how working people’s wealth was being sapped,” Hanauer said.

Warren also took note of Cordray. When he became attorney general in 2008, he became one of a handful across the country who relentlessly advocated for the creation of the new consumer bureau that she is credited with inventing and became a steadfast ally of the Obama administration.

Warren made Ohio her first stop outside of Washington after she was charged with setting up the CFPB in the fall. While there, she had a half-hour phone call with Cordray about potential collaboration between the bureau and the state.

The talk occurred just weeks before Cordray lost his reelection.

Three days later, Warren called him again. This time, she offered him a job as head of enforcement at the fledgling bureau.

Those who know Cordray said he never expected to wind up as Obama's nominee to become the bureau's inaugural director. But as the months rolled by and antipathy toward the more outspoken and high-profile Warren grew more pronounced, it became clear that the White House was searching for alternatives. Warren said she began mentioning Cordray's name to the administration shortly after he started.

Republicans have threatened to block any nominee unless the White House agrees to structural changes to the bureau that would replace the director with a five-member commission, among other things. Administration officials had hoped the Senate would hold hearings within two weeks of his nomination, but prospects look increasingly dim.

When he eventually appears before the Senate, Cordray will bear the brunt of GOP opposition not only to the bureau but to the legislation that created it. During dinner indowntown Washington a few days after his nomination, Cordray talked with Tom Miller, Iowa's attorney general, about what lies ahead.

"I think he's excited," Miller said, but added, "He's not looking forward to all the politics of the confirmation process."