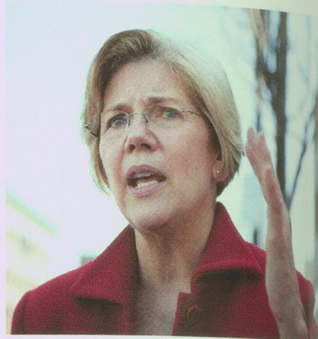


BRUCE SPRINGSTEEN MUSICIAN IN CHIEF

JUST WHEN HE THOUGHT he was out, the president pulled him back in: After making the year's most scathing populist album, *Wrecking Ball*, Bruce Springsteen vowed to steer clear of this year's campaign. Instead, the day before the election, he found himself aboard Air Force One, playing rallies with Barack Obama in three states over the course of 24 hours. In the end, for the third election in a row, America's most influential musical voice came from the Jersey Shore – which also wound up needing help from its hometown hero as Hurricane Sandy raged. That same week, in between performing

three marathon shows with the E Street Band, Springsteen headlined a telethon for Sandy victims and began planning for another benefit in December. He even let Obama put him on the phone with Chris Christie, the Jersey superfan he had long avoided – and all of a sudden, the Republican governor was praising the president to anyone who would listen. And throughout the year, Springsteen played some of the longest, and best, shows of his career, managing to embed fans' grief over the loss of saxophonist Clarence Clemons (and previously, organist Danny Federici) deep into the concert's narrative: "If you're here, and we're here," he'd say each night, "they're here."

BRIAN HIATT



ELIZABETH WARREN POPULIST WARRIOR

NO POPULIST POLITICIAN in recent memory has risen further faster than Elizabeth Warren. Only four years ago, she was a little-known Harvard professor toiling over obscure papers on bankruptcy law. Today, she is the junior senator from Massachusetts, recapturing for her party the seat that belonged to Ted Kennedy and taking up his mantle as the nation's most fiery defender of the middle class. Warren got her

Warren's heated defense of the middle class lit a fire under President Obama.

start in politics as the watchdog appointed by Congress to monitor the TARP bailout – a post she used to help create the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, the first federal agency devoted exclusively to safeguarding the middle class against the "tricks and traps" of unscrupulous banks and mortgage lenders. In her come-from-behind Senate bid, Warren not only campaigned as an unabashed populist – "For every family that has been chipped and squeezed and hammered," she declared, "we're gonna fight for a level playing field" – she also helped light a fire under President Obama, whose "you didn't build that" line was a clumsy riff on a theme first laid out by Warren. And even before she was sworn in to her new job, Warren was vowing to upend the Senate's single biggest roadblock to progressive change: "It's time," she tweeted in mid-November, "to reform the filibuster."

TIM DICKINSON

SKRILLEX THE DUBSTEP ROCK STAR

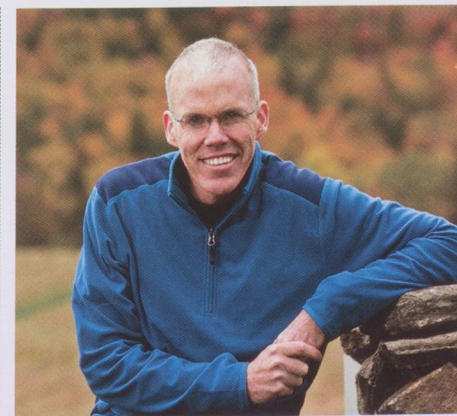
IDON'T LIKE BEING OVEREXPOSED," Skrillex remarked early this year. Oops. In 2012, the scream-star-turned-dubstep-ambassador became electronic dance music's first bona fide rock star – playing to massive crowds at festivals around the world, while the gnashing, bass-heavy sound he single-handedly suburbanized started to show up on pop records by everyone from Taylor Swift to Rihanna. He even wrangled his very own rock & roll romance with "Lights" singer Ellie Goulding, the kind of smart, cool pop diva Moby could only dream of creeping out at parties. (Sadly, they split, but their love story was one for the ages.) As if to lay claim on his corner of the rock pantheon, Skrillex teamed up with the surviving Doors for the mojo-rising funk throwdown "Breakn' a Sweat." And he just kept getting huger from there – without any radio hits. In a sense, he's a throwback to Kurt Cobain and Trent Reznor, guys who never went out of their way to kiss up to the pop world their music had subsumed – with one rave-steeped exception. "I'm not angry," Skrillex said. "I'm happy."

JON DOLAN



BILL McKIBBEN GLOBAL WARMING'S WORST NIGHTMARE

AS AMERICA'S LEADING environmental journalist, Bill McKibben knew that simply *writing* about global warming wasn't enough. His 1989 book, *The End of Nature*, sounded one of the first alarms on climate change – but Exxon and Peabody Energy kept right on churning out planet-heating pollution. So McKibben did something rare for a journalist: He decided to build a movement. Last month, in the wake of Hurricane Sandy, he launched a nationwide tour called "Do the Math" that made him the most high-profile



FROM TOP: CPI; NANCIE BATTAGLIA

climate crusader since Al Gore. Borrowing a page from the anti-apartheid playbook, McKibben is calling on universities, pension funds and churches to stop investing in the oil, gas and coal companies that profit from carbon pollution. Such institutional divestment, he says, represents "our last best chance to do something about this gathering crisis." The tour – which played to sold-out crowds in 21 cities – is rapidly gaining steam: After McKibben appeared in Boston, the Harvard student body voted in favor of divesting the university's \$30.7 billion endowment from fossil fuels. By linking hard science to grassroots action, McKibben may have found the key to making Big Oil clean up its act. "His tour," says Michael Mann, a founding father of climate science, "is single-handedly changing the public conversation about climate change – and the moral imperative of us acting, now." T.D.