

# Political Pragmatism

*In the U.S. Senate, tactics may win battles, but strategies win wars*

**M**ilitary metaphors are often used in the context of public policy-making in Washington. We have witnessed the War on Poverty, the War on Drugs, as well as a variety of battles over the federal budget, Medicare, and welfare. So, too, Warren Rudman has chosen a military metaphor—combat—to characterize his 12 years in the United States Senate. Beyond the obvious connections to daily life in the Senate trenches, the choice of the term “combat” highlights the tactical, rather than strategic, nature of the institution.

In four detailed case studies of the Gramm-Rudman deficit reduction legislation, the Iran-Contra affair, the Supreme Court nomination of David Souter, and the Keating Five, Rudman outlines the institutional battles that took place in the Senate. In his sobering assessment of each, he demonstrates implicitly that the Senate has become entrenched by tactical maneuvering. Tactics win battles, but strategies win wars. Rudman laments that senators have become increasingly efficient at waging tactical, often ideologically driven battles, but have become institu-

tionally incapable of strategic policy-making.

The Gramm-Rudman legislation is a tactical case in point. In 1985 Rudman (R-N.H.) joined forces with Senator Phil Gramm (R-Texas) in an effort to reduce the federal budget deficit by creating a mechanism—sequestration—wherein automatic cuts in the budget would occur if Congress and the president did not meet annual budget reduction targets. In effect, the legislation assumed that the Congress was

institutionally incapable of strategic budget planning. Rudman believed that the automatic cuts would never occur; time proved him wrong.

Standing alone, Gramm-Rudman never would have passed in either house; there simply were not enough votes to support such a drastic measure. To ensure its passage in the Senate, the legislation was linked to the raising of the debt ceiling to \$2 trillion, which was necessary to prevent government default. As a result, Gramm-Rudman passed in the Senate without a single committee hearing or opportunity to amend. According to Rudman, it was “a bad idea whose time has come.” Today the debt ceiling stands at \$5 trillion. Without Gramm-Rudman and successive efforts, one can only imagine how large the national debt would be.

The Iran-Contra and Keating Five episodes illuminate the oversight functions of the Senate, the first with regard to the executive branch and the second over its own members. Rudman’s account of the Iran-Contra hearings underscores the tensions that exist between the two branches of government, but also the partisan battles that exist within and between the two houses of Congress. The Keating Five hearings held by the Senate Ethics Committee also highlight the internecine battles within the chamber. Rudman argues convincingly that Senators John Glenn (D-Ohio) and John McCain (R-Ariz.) should have been dropped from the investigation, but for partisan reasons were held hostage by the committee. He questions whether justice was served in the Keating Five investigations, but concludes: “Perhaps there was a rough justice. We put the truth before the American people. As a result, the two senators who deserved no punishment continued to serve, and the three who deserved punishment [Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), Don Reigle (D-Mich.), and Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.)] chose not to seek re-election. To that extent, the system worked.”

Finally, the chronicle of Rudman shepherding his best friend, David Souter, through the Senate confirmation process identifies one of the impor-

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## Combat: Twelve Years in the U.S. Senate

By Warren B. Rudman '52  
275 pp. Random House. \$27.50



tant legacies of this United States senator, but also sheds light on his reasons for leaving the institution after two terms. He rightly chastises the media for their feeding frenzy as well as the extreme elements of the left and right, not only in the Souter nomination, but in other nomination battles, too.

In the end, Rudman grew weary of ideologues—in Congress, in special interest groups, and in the media. In an institution that operates on compromise and consensus building, pragmatism is a virtue. Rudman, along with a significant number of senators retiring in 1996—Bill Cohen (R-Maine), Alan Simpson (R-Wyo.), Nancy Kassebaum (R-Kan.), Sam Nunn (D-Ga.), and Bill Bradley (D-N.J.)—share that virtue. Due to growing ideological vices that have infiltrated the institution, Rudman concludes, “Good people are going to keep leaving Congress—or won’t go there in the first place—and they are likely to be replaced by zealots, ambitious multimillionaires, and other dubious characters who are unlikely to advance the public interest.”

Sadly, I agree.

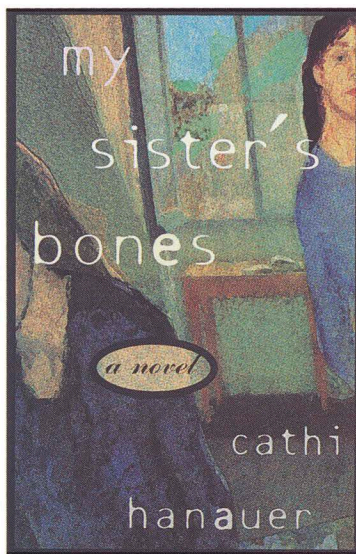
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### Other Alumni Books

#### **Goodbye My Little Ones: The True Story of a Murderous Mother and Five Innocent Victims**

*By Todd Lighty G’95, et al.*  
384 pp. *Onyx*. \$5.99

Waneta Hoyt’s first baby died. Then her second. Then her third. Nobody, including her husband, suspected Hoyt—or stopped her from having more babies. Then her fourth baby died. Then her fifth. A famed medical expert declared they all had died of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) and then used them to support his theory that SIDS ran in families. But Onondaga County (New York) District Attorney William Fitzpatrick didn’t believe it, and set out to prove how a medical study could unwittingly hide murder.



#### **My Sister's Bones**

*By Cathi Hanauer '84*  
272 pp. *Delacorte*. \$21.95

Sixteen-year-old Billie Weinstein sees her older sister, Cassie, come home from her first semester of college looking dangerously thin. Billie realizes Cassie is suffering from anorexia nervosa, yet her parents refuse to accept it. As Billie is thrust into the role of Cassie’s confidante, she is forced to make choices that will change forever the way she looks at the world.

#### **Crash's Law: Poems**

*By Karen Volkman G’92*  
80 pp. *W.W. Norton*. \$18.95

Winner of the 1995 National Poetry Series, *Crash's Law* is a preternaturally elegant and intelligent work, marked by the poet’s fierce attention to, and subversion of, a world at once mysterious and utterly real. These poems map out the painful territory in which all kinds of love, memories, mysteries, and moments of despair engage us and then evanesce.

#### **City Lights: Urban-Suburban Life in the Global Society**

*By E. Barbara Phillips G’69, G’75, et al.*  
592 pp. *Oxford University Press*. \$39.95

The second edition of this successful urban studies text has been fully updated to highlight issues facing cities in an ever-changing global society. Skillfully blending perspectives from the social sciences with insights from the visual arts and humanities, this lively and imaginative book provides a comprehensive introduction to cities and how they work.

#### **Educating a New Majority: Transforming America's Educational System for Diversity**

*Richard O. Hope G’67, G’70*  
and *Laura Rendon, editors*

528 pp. *Jossey-Bass Publishers*. \$34.95

*Educating a New Majority* provides a comprehensive assessment of how well our educational system—from kindergarten through college—serves disadvantaged minority students and offers a wealth of ideas for strengthening the entire education pipeline. In 20 original chapters by the best educational policy experts throughout the K-16 system, the book presents a holistic, highly coordinated, system-wide approach to improving the education of all students.

#### **Dayneford's Library: American Homosexual Writing, 1900-1913**

*By James Gifford G’94*  
176 pp. *Univ. of Massachusetts Press*. \$15.95

This path-breaking book uncovers a multiplicity of images of homosexuality in long overlooked works of early 20th-century American literature. Gifford closely examines these writings, drawing on a cross-section of traditional and nontraditional texts to establish the meanings of homosexuality as then understood by homosexuals.

#### **Festival Fever: The Ultimate Guide to Musical Celebrations in the Northeast**

*By James R. Campbell '80*  
864 pp. *FestPress*. \$49.95

A columnist for *The Performing Songwriter* and *Acoustic Musician* magazines, James R. Campbell visited more than 300 top festivals in 18 states over a period of two years to provide a detailed perspective on what festival-goers can expect from their visits. Editions on Mid-Atlantic and North-Central U.S. festivals will follow.

