Military metaphors are often used in the context of public policymaking 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 institutionally incapable of strategic policymaking.

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
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.
584 pp. Oxynx. $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.

Educating a New Majority: Transforming America’s Educational System for Diversity
Richard O. Hope G’67, G’70 and Laura Benion, 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, 1900-1915
By James Gifford G’94
176 pp. Univ. of Massachusetts Press. $13.95

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 festivalgoers can expect from their visits. Editions on Mid-Atlantic and North-Central U.S. festivals will follow.