

Issues & Ideas

Strategic Advice

By Gregg Sangillo

■ Despite raw feelings over the Iraq war, Warren Rudman says, the United States has “a lot of untapped goodwill” around the world.

■ The former senator warns that the Medicare cost crisis will hit the country in just a few years.

■ John McCain and Barack Obama, should either become president, have the most potential to unify the country, Rudman says.

Since retiring from the Senate in 1992, New Hampshire Republican Warren Rudman has hardly slowed down. He has served on a slew of commissions, practiced law, worked on political campaigns, co-founded a deficit-reduction group, and chaired President Clinton’s Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board. In his new position, he’s teaming up with former National Security Adviser Sandy Berger as co-chairman of Stonebridge International, a strategic consulting firm that advises multinational businesses and other organizations. Rudman sat down with *National Journal* on December 3 to field questions on a range of topics. What follows is an edited version of that conversation.

■ **NJ: If you have a chance to advise the next president, what approach would you recommend taking to recover America’s respect and popularity in the world?**

■ Rudman: I think by actions more than by words. We have a lot of untapped goodwill; much of it has been I will not say lost but certainly put aside because of the attitude around the world about our action in Iraq, whatever you think about it. If you look at America and what it’s done, going all the way back to World War II and the Marshall Plan, and all the things we do to help people around the world, we’ve done a lot of very wonderful things to help people, at considerable cost to the American people. I think we have to show again that we are interested in becoming a world player in other things and that we are not people who are just interested in pre-emptive strikes, which I happen to think is a serious error in American foreign policy. I think that with the right president and the right secretary of State, we can recover that. And the reason I think we can is because as I’ve traveled around the world, my

sense is that people generally like us. They don’t like our government very well lately, but they do like us. They like our culture.

■ **NJ: What do you think of the Homeland Security Department in its current form? In the Hart-Rudman report (by the U.S. Commission on National Security/21st Century, co-chaired by Rudman and former Sen. Gary Hart, D-Colo.), the diagram for the homeland-security agency looked positively streamlined compared with what we have.**

■ Rudman: You just answered your own question, because I would have asked if you had that chart available. The Department of Homeland Security is a colossal mess, as far as I’m concerned. It is too big. They have subverted the independent missions and the cultures of the agencies, save one. They couldn’t do that to the Coast Guard, because the Coast Guard has a long and rich tradition and has too many friends in Congress. The Coast Guard has continued to do extraordinary work. FEMA is almost, in my view, destroyed as an agency. They’re rebuilding it now. There was no coordination between agencies. And I really think, come the new administration, they ought to take another look at DHS and see if they want to maybe make some changes.

■ **NJ: What should the next step be?**

■ Rudman: The next step ought to be to reorganize it into a leaner agency in which the independence—if you can put Humpty Dumpty back together again, I’m not sure—but the independence and the culture of the individual groups ought to stay where they were.

■ **NJ: Should we get our troops out of Iraq?**

■ Rudman: I think right now there’s no



reason in the world that, come next year, the Iraqi forces cannot take over more and more of the country and we can start a gradual reduction, probably leave a corps to protect our own facilities over the next year and a half or two. But I am totally against permanent bases in Iraq.

■ **NJ: On federal spending, perhaps you've seen the polls showing that Democrats are now trusted more on fiscal matters than Republicans.**

■ Rudman: Not surprising, looking at the history. I said to someone the other day that it reminds me of the Eddie Murphy movie *Trading Places*. The Democrats have become Republicans, and the Republicans have become Democrats.

■ **NJ: Do you think that Republicans can reverse that?**

■ Rudman: I'm a very strong supporter and great friend, and was national chairman in 2000, of John McCain. And John McCain has been right where he ought to be on these fiscal issues.

■ **NJ: Is fiscal responsibility more than just a campaign issue?**

■ Rudman: It doesn't seem to be yet. And yet it is, absolutely, with trillions of dollars of unfunded debt. The light at the end of the tunnel is an oncoming train. This Medicare crisis is going to hit us long before Social Security. It's only a few years away.

■ **NJ: You've talked before about the role of money in politics and the need for candidates to spend more of their time raising money. Aren't you involved in an effort on this issue?**

■ Rudman: Yes. We have an education campaign. We have a lot of colleagues in Congress who agree with us. And I have sadly and reluctantly come to the conclusion that federal campaigns ought to be publicly financed. I was a long way away from that 10 years ago, but I've seen what's happened. I think anybody who has been in Congress for a while has come to the realization—although they may not want to say it publicly for various reasons—that something has to change. And this whole presidential thing has to change.

■ **NJ: What do you mean by that?**

■ Rudman: The way the primaries are being run, how front-loaded they are. The way the money is being spent.



■ **Mad Money**
 "I have sadly and reluctantly come to the conclusion that federal campaigns ought to be publicly financed."
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■ **NJ: How do you clean up the primary mess?**

■ Rudman: The Iowa caucus and New Hampshire primary really have served a valuable purpose. You really can get to the character of candidates. They can refuse to meet with the press. But they go to town meetings, and don't think that those people aren't as smart as we all are, because they are. And they're following issues, and they're not afraid to ask tough, confrontational questions. I remember we did 111 or 112 town meetings with John McCain in 2000. It was a regular free-for-all. And that will never happen if you get rid of these states as being the early states. You'll have homogenized, heavy-money campaigns, with lots of television, not much retail politics. So I think that whatever they do, they ought to preserve New Hampshire and Iowa for that reason, and then probably go to a series of regional primaries.

■ **NJ: What did you think of the CNN/YouTube debate?**

■ Rudman: I didn't like it. I think in many ways it was demeaning. When somebody holds up the Bible and says, "Do you believe every word in here?" I mean, what's going on? Can we talk about things that are really important to the country?

■ **NJ: Isn't that the same as the people in New Hampshire asking direct questions to candidates?**

■ Rudman: It's not the same. There's

something different about somebody sitting in their own home, in the basement, surrounded by electronic gear, talking to a blinking light, and somebody standing up in Littleton, New Hampshire, in front of all their neighbors and making a total ass of themselves. There is a difference. I've been there.

■ **NJ: A lot of consulting firms are doing globally what Stonebridge's model seems to be doing. Besides making matches in these countries, are you putting together investment deals?**

■ Rudman: It's being contemplated, but it's not active at this point. What we really do is help our clients—in finance, pharmaceuticals, aviation, retail, chemical, and other industries—that are very anxious to do business in countries where you really have to know the culture and the road map in order to get to do it.

■ **NJ: Do they come to Stonebridge to do a risk assessment?**

■ Rudman: Yeah, a lot of risk assessment, and then kind of a how to do it. How you help them build widgets in India, for example. We have a lot of people overseas who are very good at that. You really have to start at the bottom of the bureaucracy to make it happen.

■ **NJ: You wrote in your book (*Combat: Twelve Years in the U.S. Senate*) about your frustration over partisanship and how that led to your decision to leave the Senate. How do you compare then with today's situation?**

■ Rudman: It's worse today. I saw the genesis of what we're seeing now, and that was the heightening of partisanship, personal nastiness, and a lack of ability to work together than I had initially seen in the early '80s, when people were much more apt to work across the aisle with each other. I think the campaigns themselves have led to even more nastiness and a lack of civility. I don't think you can run a country forever with that kind of legislative atmosphere. I'm hopeful that a new president, depending on who that president is, can unify the country better than we've seen. I would say that those who look to have the most potential [to unify] as you look at them a year before the election are John McCain and Barack Obama.

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