

## Grassley's long war with the Pentagon

Outgunned, he hammers at wasteful spending

By JOHN HYDE

Of The Register's Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Charles Grassley's war on military waste has now lasted just about as long as America's involvement in World War II.

That war ended 40 years ago with a tremendous bang. But for Grassley, the conservative Iowa Republican elected to the U.S. Senate in 1980, there is no end in sight.

The war on waste has had its spectacular episodes, such as Grassley's effort — in the midst of President Reagan's re-election campaign — to have the U.S. attorney general held in contempt of Congress.

And it has generated its share of splashy headlines, as Grassley exposed such absurdities as the Air Force coffee pot that cost \$7,622 and a couple of common duckbill pliers purchased by the military for \$1,496.

Mostly, however, Grassley's war is fought in the trenches — at subcommittee meetings attended by a handful of reporters and even fewer senators, in speeches and articles where he argues the need for institutional change, through complicated amendments that seek to force change on an obdurate Pentagon.

It is time-consuming, tedious and frequently lonely work. "It's a very deep subject to get involved in and to get to the bottom of," says Grassley. "Regardless of how hard you work, you only kind of scratch the surface. People, congressmen, don't desire to work that hard, to get that deeply involved and to understand it."

Grassley is often overmatched — the Pentagon alone has some 19,400 auditors and investigators, the senator has two — and he admits being frustrated by his lack of progress. But if Grassley has a signal trait, it is doggedness. To the delight of his allies and the consternation of his foes, he shows no sign of giving up.

"I think he'll win if he perseveres," says famed Pentagon whistleblower A. Ernest Fitzgerald. "All bureaucracies depend on their critics getting tired or for the issue to become unfashionable.... Constancy of purpose pays off."

Grassley is not shy about his reason for continuing the fight. "All that's at stake," he says, "is a bankrupt nation and an eroding national defense."

Grassley's attack on military waste grew out of his lifelong career as a fiscal tightwad. Within months after arriving in the Senate, he began talking about an across-the-board freeze in federal spending, including the military.

From that standpoint, Grassley's efforts have been colossally unsuccessful. Military spending, which stood at \$180 billion in 1981, will exceed \$292 billion this year. The seven-year price tag of President Reagan's defense buildup, even with cuts made by Congress, will be almost \$2 trillion by the end of 1986.

As Grassley himself pointed out

GRASSLEY

Please turn to Page 4A