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The "Right" Voice

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The Government of the Student Body seems to have come full circle in its search for an appropriate national student lobbying group.

The "Right" Voice

Controversy Breaks Through

There was a time when USSA was far from the GSB spotlight. Early in the fall of 1993, the GSB Senate voted to make an annual allocation of $1,000 for USSA membership automatic by placing the fee in the GSB operating budget. The bill meant that the ISU chapter would no longer have to make a request in front of the GSB for discretionary funds each year, as is typically the process with student organizations.

But this was too much for some senators, who were vocally opposed to ISU's membership in the first place. These opponents, most of them conservatives, sought to end ISU's membership with USSA.

In the debate that ensued, USSA was accused of breaking federal law and of being radically liberal; some said it was linked to the Communist Party.

"They took regular trips that sent people to Cuba," which is illegal, said Ed Matney, a GSB alumnus who served as a senator during the controversy. Matney said a conference delegate noticed that several booths were distributing socialist literature, and that a top official at USSA was a member of the Young Communist League.

But USSA President Tchiyuka Cornelius defended USSA, saying the charges were unfounded. He said allegations of the group's affiliation with the Communist Party were "clearly not true. Allegations were made by people who had never talked to us, who had no basis for that judgment."

True or not, however, on Sept. 29, 1993, the allegations of radicalism and other faults were sufficient to persuade the GSB Senate to pass a bill called "Just Say No To USSA," written by Matney. The bill ended ISU's affiliation with the organization.

Two bills to renew membership both failed in October, the second by a narrow vote of 18-19.

At that point, the newly formed GSB Evaluation Committee was commissioned to search for a new lobbying organization.

It was a Wednesday night in September, and the Government of the Student Body senators were hunched over their tables, some exhausted, some bored and some pumped with adrenaline. They argued. They listened. They considered weeks of debates, speeches and editorials. They argued some more.

And then they voted to end ISU's highly controversial membership in the United States Student Association, a national student lobbying group with left-wing ties.

But it wasn't enough for the senators. They all, for the most part, wanted to be a part of some student lobbying organization to provide Iowa State students with a voice for higher education issues in the nation's capital.

So the GSB Evaluation Committee was commissioned to conduct a search for the "right" student lobbying group to join.

Now, a semester later, that search seems to have come full circle. This spring, two alternate organizations—Lead ... or Leave and the National Coalition for Student Empowerment—have come and gone before the Senate. And OCC Sen. Gary Holley, the leader of the evaluation committee's search and one of the key opponents in last semester's debate, has reported that the best course of action for the GSB includes rejoining USSA.

When the committee's recommendation comes before next year's senate—and it will—the new faces of the GSB will most likely approach it as just another item of business. But for those who have been through this before, the fruits of the committee's labor may taste of bitter irony.
The Search Begins

The first group that the Senate considered is Washington-based Lead ... or Leave, founded in 1992. Information sent to the GSB describes Lead ... or Leave as "a grassroots campaign to get younger Americans back into politics, educate them about the economic crisis facing our nation, and ... fight for a progressive platform for economic change."

A bill was introduced in the Senate in February calling for membership in Lead ... or Leave, but it was banished by a technicality of parliamentary procedure, Holley said. While the Senate was considering the bill, a senator who intended to postpone the bill for a while made the "wrong" motion to postpone it indefinitely. Such a motion is usually used to remove bills permanently from the Senate agenda. The motion passed, requiring a two-thirds vote to bring the bill back up for reconsideration. A motion to reconsider fell short of acquiring a two-thirds vote, and "the Senate never actually voted on the merits of the bill itself," Holley said.

But Holley said the Senate most likely would have voted against joining Lead ... or Leave had the measure reached a vote. "It probably wouldn't have passed, anyway," because of Lead ... or Leave's political nature, he said.

Had GSB joined Lead ... or Leave, ISU would have been one of the more than 100 chapters that make up the organization. Information supplied to GSB claims that Lead ... or Leave had 450,000 members nationwide. The group's advisory board includes such famous names as Paul Tsongas, Lee Iacocca and Val Kilmer.

A Close Call With NCSE

In February, after the Lead ... or Leave effort failed, the Senate considered joining Arizona-based NCSE. A brand-new organization without a well-drawn-up platform of issues, NCSE's goals are to promote access to higher education and to, through the dispersal of information, empower and mobilize students.

The organization's Interim Executive Director, Josh Grabel, who also serves as federal relations director for the Associated Students of the University of Arizona, said seven or eight schools are paid members of NCSE. He said the group is in the process of recruiting 200 schools.

ISU was close to becoming its next recruit through the United Students of Iowa, Holley said. On Feb. 23 the Senate voted 23-6-2 to allocate $1,000 to USI for the purpose of joining NCSE. But a clause of the bill stated that the allocation would

Lead ... or Leave *

Location: Washington, D.C.
Founded: 1992

Mission: Lead ... or Leave is a non-partisan, grassroots campaign to get younger Americans back into politics, educate them about the economic crisis facing our nation, and build a political force to fight for a progressive platform for economic change.

Key Issues:

• Budget deficit reduction. During the 1992 Congressional campaign, more than 100 politicians signed a Lead ... or Leave pledge to cut in half the then-$333 billion deficit by 1996 or not seek re-election, according to an article in the Investor's Business Daily. Budget deficit reduction and the protection of Generation X's future are the issues on which Lead ... or Leave is based.

• Investing in the future. Lead ... or Leave advocates an increase in spending on education, job creation, repairing inner cities and cleaning up the environment. It calls for cuts in spending on defense, entitlements and consumption.

• Equity in economic policy. Lead ... or Leave's platform states that it wants to "reform government to continue protecting the poor but to stop shifting wealth from younger to older Americans."

Services: (Core projects for 1993-1994)

• Plug N2 Polytx, "a six-month campaign to mobilize a new generation of voters, including a Youth Leadership Summit in Washington and a national voter drive in preparation for the '94 elections."

• Debt Rock '94. A September Rock concert has been tentatively planned, the proceeds of which will be contributed as payment toward the national debt.

• Internet networking.

• Sponsoring speakers. Lead ... or Leave works to bring members of Congress and governors to college-campus lecture circuits.

* Source: "Overview of Lead ... or Leave" 1993
only be granted if the University of Iowa and the University of Northern Iowa matched the contributions.

In early March, when the U of I student assembly declined membership in NCSE, ISU was left again with no representation in a national student lobbying organization.

**USSA, With Conditions**

The process came full circle on March 23, when Holley presented to the Senate the committee's recommendations that next year's Senate rejoin USSA.

"There isn't much we can do about joining USSA this year," said Holley, who voted for the October bill that cut off ISU's ties with the Washington lobbying group. "Next year would be best to pursue the course of action."

But Holley said the GSB should only consider USSA membership if conditions are attached that would alleviate some of the concerns that caused last year's controversy. One such restriction would put strict limitations on the amount of discretionary funds that could be spent on USSA.

"While a member of the organization an inordinate amount of money was spent funding (USSA's) conferences," the committee report said. Holley said that 47.5 percent—or about $7,200—of the $15,000 discretionary fund was spent on USSA during the 1992-'93 school year.

Under the committee's recommendation, the USSA chapter would "be treated like any other student group seeking funds from GSB," the report said. "Like other student groups, the members of USSA will be expected to obtain a portion of the costs through their own fundraising activities."

But the committee's recommendation doesn't stop there. Because of USSA's political nature, some students may still be concerned that their beliefs are not being represented. To solve this dilemma, Holley said the GSB should contribute to the formation of a new Big Eight Conference Organization in addition to rejoining USSA.

Holley said having two student lobbying organizations would offer students a choice of which to support and increase the chances that each student's views are being represented.

"(The recommendation) would allow all students to feel they are part of the process," Holley said. "It's asking senators to compromise in an effort to achieve a solution that's in the best interests of everybody."

Matney isn't convinced that this will work. "I know that Gary (Holley) would have thought everything through very carefully," he said. But "it would be to every student's disadvantage" if ISU rejoined USSA. Matney said his objection to USSA stands, because students' fees are paying to fund a group with which they do not agree.

Such an argument might call to question whether it is

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**National Coalition for Student Empowerment**

**Location:** Tucson, Arizona  
**Founded:** 1993  
**Mission:** "The mission of the National Coalition for Student Empowerment is to enable students to participate fully in decisions that affect access to and the quality of education. Our goal is to encourage students to take an active role in political and administrative arenas on all levels."

**Key Issues:** Because NCSE is just getting started, the organization is placing all of its focus on recruiting and fundraising. NCSE will be a lobbying group that concentrates solely on issues relating to education, including funding, tuition and financial aid programs, Interim Executive Director Josh Grabel said.

**Services:** (to be established)  
- Information service. NCSE will hire lobbyists with close contact to the Department of Education and the Commission on National Service. Through telephone, fax and e-mail, it will provide its members with the facts that the lobbyists and key players in Washington already have.
- Leadership training programs.
- Student Service Database. This "will supply detailed information on problems encountered (by member schools), suggest possible solutions to these, and suggest contacts at schools experiencing similar difficulties or successes."

* Source: "NCSE Mission Statement" 1993
possible for all students to agree with any lobbying organization, since such groups are inherently political.

While Cornelius said he agrees that no organization exists on which everyone will agree, he said using student fees to fund groups such as USSA is not a problem.

"We don't expect or demand that everyone in the organization agree to every position," he said. "On the Supreme Court, there's usually a dissenting vote, but you don't see justices quitting the Supreme Court."

Matney agrees that no group can claim to speak for the interests of every student but said there are issues on which few students disagree. For example, he said, most students would be comfortable funding a group that lobbied Congress against tuition increases at levels above the Higher Education Price Index.

But Matney said USSA deviates from such student issues, and thus is too politically left-wing to adequately represent most students' views. When USSA claims that higher education is a right which the government has an obligation to provide, "that is overstepping its bounds," he said.

Whether next semester's senate will reach the same conclusion remains to be seen. And there is nothing to say that the committee's recommendation will be enough to reverse the decisions made last semester.

But both sides of the issue continue to be vocally bound to their convictions. In next year's GSB senate, it may make for a few long Wednesday nights.

Becky Waller

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The United States Student Association *

Location: Washington, D.C.

Founded: 1947

Mission: "USSA is the country's oldest and largest national student organization, representing millions of students ... and represents the student voice on Capitol Hill and with the White House and Department of Education. USSA advocates for student interests by tracking and lobbying on federal legislation and policy, and working in coalition with education and social justice organizations and students around the country."

Key Issues: The organization focuses on the "hot legislative issues" of the current Congress, including the following:

- Increased education funding. The Clinton administration's budget was insufficient, USSA claims. "Education funding must increase in FY '95 in order for post-secondary education to remain accessible and a realistic option for most students."

- Deficit Reduction. USSA claims that deficit-reduction legislation will affect education adversely. This places USSA against a failed amendment to lower the overall discretionary spending cap by more than $50 billion, as well as an impending Congressional Balanced Budget Amendment. If the amendment passes, the organization claims, the federal government will be faced with a task it cannot accomplish, and Congress will "have to raise taxes or cut federal spending, making education an extremely vulnerable target."

- Campus crime. USSA favors an impending bill that "triples funding for battered women's shelters and provides funding for the education of state and federal judges, prosecutors and law enforcement officers on gender and racial bias in the criminal justice system."

- Federal Gay and Lesbian Civil Rights Bill. USSA encourages the introduction of a bill that would add affectional and sexual orientation to other protected groups such as race, religion and gender, making it illegal to discriminate against lesbians, gays and bisexuals in employment, housing and programs receiving federal money.

- Reproductive Rights. USSA supports the impending "Freedom of Access to Clinic Entrances Act," which "protects women, physicians and clinic employees and will allow victims to sue for injunctive relief, money and damages."

Services:

- Grass Roots Organizing Weekends (GROW) to train students in leadership and organization.

- Recruitment and Retention of People of Color in Higher Education Project, providing materials, networking and organizing advice.

- Student to Student, a project to join students on an international level.

- Membership services, including USSA Updates and Alerts and a 24-hour Legislative Hotline.

* Source: "ACCESS 94: A Student Activist's Guide to Congress"