

Who Makes The Grade?

Many political groups are speaking for our generation, but just how are they doing? Here's a report card.

By Elizabeth Lee, Editor on Fellowship

You've seen them at your campus' activities table. You've seen them on the news and in magazines. They're the ones who talk about getting involved and making a difference.

But before you sign up, take a look at this report card for six general-interest campus political groups who want our time and money. Not just a random A+ here or a C- there, but somewhat-scientifically determined grades for each of them, based on accessibility, level of activity, organization, membership, representation and funding source. If you want Washington to listen to you — if you're looking for a departure from your parents' politics — then take a look at who makes the grade. Here are profiles of the groups that are serious and the groups that are into lip service when it comes to making a difference.

For a complete explanation of each group's grade, see the chart on the next page.

Lead...or Leave

Focus: Deficit reduction, job creation, education spending

Founded: 1992

Membership: 100 campuses. They claim 450,000 members, but they count inquiries and student-body membership (through student governments) in this figure.

Funding: Individual donations, corporate sponsorship and membership contributions. No dues.

You've got to hand it to these people. They have nerve. Who else, in the 1992 elections, would ask Congressional candidates to take this deficit-reduction pledge: halve the deficit by 1996, or leave office?

Naturally, they didn't find too many takers for their pledge — only 101 candidates signed up, and of those, only 18 were elected. And don't hold your

breath waiting for the elected candidates to make good on this promise.

But at least they're doing something.

Lead...or Leave is the gatecrasher of American politics. Loud and pushy, the members prefer demonstrations and media stunts over niceties like letter-writing campaigns and round-table meetings.

They've organized deficit "teach-ins" at scattered universities, which brought government leaders and students together to discuss the debt. And with the sponsorship of Scholastic, Inc., they've also circulated educational materials about the deficit to 6,000 high schools.

But they're best known for things like demonstrating at the American Association of Retired Persons headquarters last February (against costly entitlement programs) and their July march on Washington to "dis the deficit."

And on Oct. 20, 1993, Lead...or Leave took their message — "don't balance the budget on the backs of young people" — to Virginia universities, helping organize simultaneous rallies to protest state cuts in higher education. The rally at Virginia Tech drew 4,500 people, according to university police.

Recently, in keeping with their ballsy approach with national leaders, the founders of Lead...or Leave and a small group of reporters and Washington administrative staffers developed what founder Rob Nelson calls "The Plan" — a strategy to, by the year 2000, eliminate deficit spending, spend an additional \$100 billion on areas like education, job training and repairing the infrastructure, and not raise income taxes. Nelson, a 29-year-old graduate of Principia College in Illinois and Tufts U. in Massachusetts, insists that this strategy — which has yet to be released

— is possible if our leaders make cuts in defense and entitlement funding.

In addition, Nelson says that by February, members should receive a list of specific policies favoring young people (such as using the Social Security fund surplus to finance low-interest loans for students). Members can present those policies they agree with to their local Congressional members for perusal.

Whatever Lead...or Leave's faults may be, timidity isn't one of them. But until they produce these proposals, they can't be credited with looking toward solutions.

Furthermore, although they claim to be nonpartisan, Nelson says that Lead...or Leave receives a large share of donations from Democratic individuals and institutions. And, in their first year, they took thousands of dollars from independent presidential candidate Ross Perot. (Although some magazine articles have cited the number as at least \$42,000, Nelson insists that it is only \$12,000.)

What you'll be doing if you join:

Organizing demonstrations. Pulling media stunts and awareness events. If they deliver on their policy list, you can give your representatives and senators something to chew on.

Grade: C+ Lead...or Leave is active

and energetic on the national front, but they're still better at staging media events than working toward solutions.

For more information on Lead...or Leave, call (202) 857-0808 or 1-800-99CHANG. E-mail address: lol@ua.mit.edu

Third Millennium

Focus: "Deficit reduction, the environment and fighting urban poverty" — co-founder Jonathan Karl

Founded: July 1993

Membership: 15 national chapters, including two on campuses. They estimate 1,000 dues-paying members.

Funding: Non-politically affiliated, private donations and \$9 member dues. They're also considering taking grants from nonpartisan educational foundations.

You haven't seen them on your campus yet, and maybe you never will. But you've probably seen them in *Time*, *Newsday* or any major city newspaper. Like Lead...or Leave, publicity is their specialty.

In yet another attempt to wrest Washington's attention from our par-



ILLUSTRATION BY MARK NYSTROM, VIRGINIA TECH; PHOTO BY JOSE MERA, VIRGINIA TECH