

## Funny Food for Thought

How do you take a complex issue such as antibiotic resistance (i.e., cases where once reliable antibiotics are suddenly ineffective in treating human illness), clearly link this growing problem to factory farming, *and* make it funny? The Global Resource Action Center for the Environment found a way. To see for yourself take the red pill—if you dare—and enter “The Meatrix” at [www.themeatrix.com](http://www.themeatrix.com). ■

## Take This Test...

*You may be surprised*

In any given campaign where the opponent is “industry,” many nonprofits tend to believe that the public possesses a negative—or at least skeptical—view towards the opponent’s claims. So let’s take five of the largest industries in America and see how favorably or unfavorably they were viewed by a representative group of adults (which is precisely what RoperASW did in a June 2002 poll.) Those industries are listed below with a box next to each. Can you put them in order, from 1 (most favorable) to 5 (least favorable)?

The answers appear at the bottom of this page, along with the percentage of survey respondents who gave each industry a moderately-to-highly favorable score. You may find those percentages to be even more eye-opening. ■

- Tobacco
- Long Distance Phone
- Oil
- Agriculture/Farming
- Automotive

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*Newsletter edited by Carolyn Ramsay.*



**a goodman**

GOOD IDEAS FOR GOOD CAUSES

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Answers to Test: 1. Agriculture/Farming (77%) 2. Automotive (74%) 3. Long Distance (59%) 4. Oil (43%) 5. Tobacco (29%)



## Joke Gift or Public Education Campaign?

“It was one of those ideas,” says Zach Levy, “that happens in a second.” Last April, Levy’s girlfriend gave him a deck of cards featuring fifty-two Iraqis from the Bush administration’s most wanted list (the commercial version of the pack carried by American soldiers.) It was intended as a joke gift, and Levy, a 29-year old freelance filmmaker with a native New Yorker’s sense of humor, was suitably amused. What made him laugh out loud, though, was the thought that instantly popped into his head.

**Each box of “Bush Cards” contains 52 good reasons not to vote for W in '04. With over 30,000 decks in circulation and many more on the way, you have to wonder if this is something more than a novelty item.**

At a bar in Manhattan a few weeks later, Levy spelled out his idea for his friends Ryan Deussing and Benjamin Dailey: a deck of cards that would mock members and cronies of the current *American* regime. He estimated it would take \$10,000 to produce and test market a first run of Bush Cards. “We wrote down three objectives on a napkin,” Levy recalls. “Number one was to have fun. Number two, make a difference. And number three,” which would be particularly critical for three young filmmakers in a weak economy, “make back our money.”



► The first challenge for Levy and his partners was deciding who should be included in the deck. After the easy calls—Cheney, Ashcroft, Rumsfeld, et. al.—the three had long discussions on the propriety of including family members such as Laura and the twins (the final verdict was no), brother Jeb (yes) and old cronies such as Kenneth Lay (too good to pass up). “A lot of the decisions were just bureaucratic,” says Levy, “just like Paul Wolfowitz choosing weapons of mass destruction as the reason to go to war.”

Once they had fifty-two names in hand, the partners set about the task of finding a suitable picture for each card along with embarrassing quotes, career lowlights, and other notorious factoids. Vice President Cheney’s career was captured entirely by numbers, from his 2000 Halliburton income (\$36 million) to the length of his tenure as President during Bush’s colonoscopy (135 minutes.) Colin Powell’s now-infamous assertion at the UN, “My colleagues, every statement I make today is backed up by sources, solid sources” was a natural for his card. Jeb Bush’s card features a single sentence—a quote from his then-presidential candidate brother: “Jeb has assured me we have Florida.”

## Joke Gift or Public Education Campaign?

With government websites and calls to federal agencies yielding free photographs for nearly all the cards, the threesome kept out-of-pocket costs to a minimum. A manufacturer in Kingsport, Tennessee, gave Levy the best bid on an initial printing, and in July the first shipment of fifty cartons

(containing 3,000 decks) arrived. The partners played their own version of Tetris, stacking the cartons in every available space in Levy’s already cramped apartment. Now all they had to do was figure out how to market the decks with essentially no advertising budget.

“Tell as many people as we can,” recalls Levy. “That was the plan.” The partners

set up a web site ([www.bushcards.com](http://www.bushcards.com)) to offer decks at \$5 each plus \$2.95 shipping and handling, and used email to spread the word. Almost immediately, the site was receiving 50 orders per day. They also went door to door in their neighborhoods selling packs to local diners, gift shops, and book-



But I’m spending 12-13 hours a day doing playing cards.” Levy insists he’s still having fun, and the partners appear to be considerably past the “make back our money” objective.

And as to making a difference? “I know we have,” says Levy, “but I think we can do more.” Surprisingly, while Levy and his partners have heard from satisfied buyers, the media, and even some who were *not* amused, they have not heard from the most likely of potential allies: progressive nonprofits with an equally dim view of the current administration. “I’ve been trying to contact MoveOn.org,” says Levy. “This would be perfect for them. It’s information people will keep in their hands for a long time.”

Riffle through a deck of Bush Cards, and you may also begin wondering why a nonprofit didn’t come up with this idea in the first place. Bush Cards give people something they can actually use, while sneaking in information that is educational, entertaining, and possibly even motivating. In that sense, they are a public education campaign that the *public* is happily paying for. And even if these cards end up preaching primarily to the choir, it never hurts to have your team truly fired up when the big deal goes down next November. ■

stores. The owner of the Victory Café in Brooklyn bought a dozen decks from Deussing and sold them all before Ryan had returned to his apartment.

Sending decks to reporters helped generate stories in *The New Yorker*, *Newsweek*, *The New York Times*, and on CNN Headline News, and this free media stoked sales through the summer and fall. When I interviewed Levy in November, he happily reported that he was selling as many as 1,700 packs per day and had total sales exceeding 30,000. “I wasn’t in this business three months ago,” he said a bit wearily, “and I still want to make films.

### Deal Yourself In

During our interview, Levy expressed interest in wholesaling decks of Bush Cards to progressive nonprofits to help them generate revenue through sales or attract new supporters with a unique membership premium. Levy also indicated the possibility of customizing decks around certain issues, “and we could use our marketing muscle to get the word out there,” he added. Interested parties should contact him directly via email, [zach@bushcards.com](mailto:zach@bushcards.com).