

When Portland gay entrepreneur Steve Jones left his 14-year, high-salaried executive position at Norm Thomson earlier this year, he thought he had plenty of time to ponder his future. With the political season in full force, he just couldn't keep his mind off of the Bush administration and his extreme distaste for its policies and Dubya's behavior.

During a layover at Dulles airport in Washington, D.C., he was struck by a vision of the president's face on toilet paper. A couple of giggles and a few seconds later, "Wipe Your Tush with Bush" popped into his head, and the latest political gag gift was born. Out came the wireless laptop, and within 10 minutes Jones had a Web site and a new business.

With his wit, passion and marketing background, Jones set out to develop a business model that would help the environment, contribute to U.S. regime change, express his thoughts about the White House on paper and encourage political dialogue through humor.

Jones immediately began researching environmentally friendly printers that were willing to print Bush's face on toilet paper. Then he hired a friend to design the image. "He came up with some wonderful illustrations," Jones said of his creative director, "that capture the true essence of Junior—the cockiness, the arrogance, the 'screw you, I can do whatever I want' expression on his face."

Within weeks, the first prototypes rolled off the presses. Wipe Your Tush with Bush toilet paper is made of recycled content and uses soy-based ink. It features an effigy of Bush in Crawford Ranchwear with a tree-shaped toothpick hanging from "that smirk."

The label warns consumers, "Proceeds from

WIPED OUT

Anti-Bush toilet paper nixed by patent office

by Michael E Barrett

the sale of the product will contribute to regime change and restoring the planet!" And it guarantees "complete satisfaction with your presidential administration. If at any time you are unsatisfied with your president, simply vote him out of office in November."

Jones hit the pavement in Portland, San Francisco, Chicago and other U.S. cities to stock the shelves of gift shops and other businesses with his new product. A toilet paper launch party was held in New York, and stores were reordering rolls as often as twice a week. Despite the hectic travel schedule, Jones was having fun, and his business was off to a strong start.

With his Web site up and running and toilet paper flying off the shelves across the country, he still wanted his toilet paper rolls to bear the words "patent pending." That wish would not be granted, however.

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office failed to see the humor in the product when Jones' application crossed the desk of examining attorney Karen K. Bush. She refused registration of Wipe Your Tush with Bush because "the proposed mark consists of or comprises matter which may disparage or bring into contempt or disrepute the president of the United States, George W. Bush." She further stated, "A reasonable person of ordinary sensibilities would consider this reference offensive or objectionable."

According to Jones, this interpretation of

U.S. code affords President Bush protection from the said disparagement that regular citizens do not enjoy. The patent office's argument continued, "Because of the intense media coverage focusing on George Bush...the use of the term BUSH in the proposed mark...clearly would be construed by the public as a reference to George W. Bush."

"I was discouraged at first," Jones said about the rejection. "Starting a business and doing everything on your own involves

a lot of work and risk. To face rejection by my federal government was certainly troubling...[and] I was confronted with the realization that I am not a 'reasonable person of ordinary sensibilities,' because I find the term 'Wipe Your Tush with Bush' personally inspiring, not disparaging. It gives me hope. In fact, it's why I get up in the morning."

Maintaining his sense of humor, Jones laughs off the rejection. "It's the humor that draws the customer in. The thought of wiping your tush with Bush—it makes people laugh."

Though humor is his weapon, political change is his motivation. "It sounds cliché and trite," he says, "but I want to wake up every day motivated and inspired to have an impact on what's going on in my country and make a significant contribution."



Wipe Your Tush with Bush founder Steve Jones (left, with canine CEO Atticus) was refused a patent for his toilet paper because it "comprises matter which may disparage or bring into contempt or disrepute the president of the United States"

A percentage of profits will go to progressive organizations and environmental groups. So far, Jones has been able to make contributions to MoveOn.org, John Kerry for President, the Oregon Food Bank and the American Foundation for AIDS Research. He is quick to remind consumers, "The more I sell, the more I can donate—at least 10 percent of pre-tax profits." ■

WIPE YOUR TUSH WITH BUSH can be found in Portland stores such as Greg's on Hawthorne and Balloons on Broadway. The product is also available for purchase at www.wipeyourtushwithbush.com.

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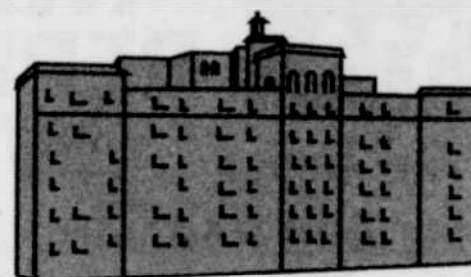
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