

MARKETING

Card Makers Capitalize on Capitol Folk

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On the front of the birthday card are Bill and Hillary Clinton, grinning and waving. Inside, the card says, "See . . . there are scarier things than growing old."

The political stripe of the card's buyer can only be guessed at, but this much is certain: The Clinton card is the No. 1 seller of all of the 2,600 cards regularly marketed by Chicago-based Recycled Paper Greetings Inc., the nation's fourth-largest greeting-card company.

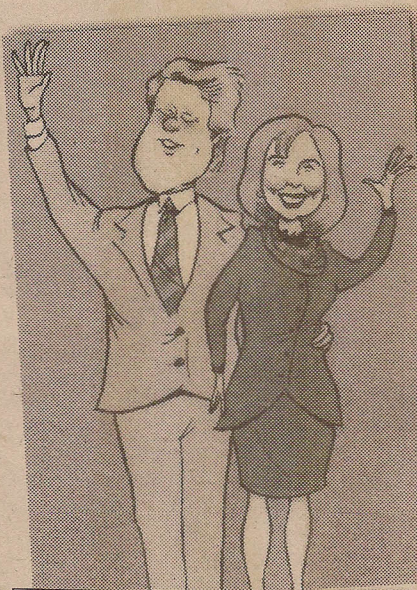
The card is part of a "Politically Incorrect" line of 70 cards by Recycled Paper Greetings that make fun of political figures. Another in the line asks: "Why are birthdays like Senator Bob Packwood?" The answer: "They sneak up and grab you when you least expect it."

Political controversy is usually the last thing a card company wants. "We stay away from political humor and try to stick with things that aren't as controversial," says a spokeswoman for industry leader Hallmark Cards Inc. in Kansas City, Mo. But Recycled Paper Greetings' political cards have sold "several million dollars at retail stores," says Alfred Hamilton, director of marketing and communications.

Recycled Paper Greetings began its "Politically Incorrect" line 13 months ago, focusing mainly on politicians but branching out to mock some other national figures as well. A card shows a cartoon of talk-show host Rush Limbaugh, who boasts, "I'm smarter than most people with half my brain tied behind my back!" The message inside reads: "For your birthday, I thought you could use an air bag for your car."

The company's gibes are bipartisan. One card has a caricature of Ross Perot dressed in a golf outfit giving advice on how the recipient can improve his "just sad" golf game. Inside, the card reads, "Thought you might appreciate a tip from a golf Perot."

But the first family is the focus of about 40% of Recycled Paper Greetings' cards. "We poke fun at the Clintons more because they are in the news more," Mr. Hamilton says.



See... there are scarier things than growing older.

Happy Birthday



THAT'S THE SOUND OF 40-YEAR-OLDS EVERYWHERE TRYING TO FASTEN THEIR JEANS.

HAPPY 40TH BIRTHDAY

Recycled Paper Greetings gets inspiration for its cards from all parts of the political spectrum

Indeed, at Political Americana, a political-merchandise store just one block from the White House, Hillary Rodham Clinton cards are the favorites. "She has taken Dan Quayle's spot, who took over Nancy Reagan's spot, as a main source for humor," says store manager Charles Evans.

Mr. Evans says his latest sales may be a positive political barometer for Bill Clinton. "In recent months, there is a real change in mood of people buying President Clinton cards," he says. "People are buying fewer cards that make fun of the president and more that are positive."

Cleveland's American Greetings Corp., the industry's second-largest company, also has a stake in the political-humor card business but "tries to be less slammy"

than Recycled Paper Greetings, says Kathy Bernetich, American Greetings' executive director for alternative cards.

American Greetings currently sells 10 to 12 political cards as part of a larger alternative line. One such card has a caricature of President Clinton saying, "Ah hear you're having another birthday . . ." with the punch line inside, ". . . and ah feel your pain."

Dennis Chupa, vice president of product management at American Greetings, says the company is waiting to see the outcome of next week's elections before it begins fashioning new political-humor cards.

Gibson Greetings Inc., the third-largest greeting card company, has about four

Please Turn to Page B6, Column 4

Greeting-Card Makers Turn to Washington For Satirical Subjects

Continued From Page B1

political cards in its 800-card humor line. "We sell most of our cards to supermarkets," explains Larry Sandman, a managing editor at Cincinnati-based Gibson. "Political-humor cards are sold at gift stores and bookstores where people expect a more intellectual humor approach. Our approach is more toward broad humor."

Recycled Paper Greetings, by contrast, can be stinging but says it has received very little public criticism over its political cards — with one notable exception. In the September issue of *Vogue* magazine, the White House commented that President Clinton had only one question about the cards: "Does this profit-making enterprise balance its disservice to the community with community service somehow?" A White House spokesman subsequently reiterated that concern.

Recycled Paper Greetings's owner Phil Friedmann responds: "We thought we were just bringing happiness to millions of Americans. C'mon folks, lighten up—you've got some real problems to deal with, and we are not one of them."

Other politicians don't appear to take the needling personally. Sen. Bob Dole says about the cards targeting him: "I've gotten a kick out of some of the cards I've seen. If I can help someone smile on their birthday, so much the better."