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It troubled **Sheryl Oring** that Europeans, and perhaps the rest of the world, would perceive all Americans as supporters of President George W. Bush's war in Iraq.

Oring, an American artist and writer, returned home after six years of working in Germany and travelling in Europe to launch a campaign she called "I Wish to Say", which allows ordinary people to express their political views on postcards and send them to Bush or his Democratic opponent for president, Senator John Kerry.

Armed with typewriters, the New Yorker has been spending time in public places in her home town like parks and crowded street corners, inviting passers-by to sit down and dictate a message.

"After six years in Germany, I have met people who think that all Americans think alike," Oring said. "I didn't think it was true, so I want to do something that shows the diversity of Americans."

During a summer in which the Democratic and Republican parties are meeting for their carefully scripted national conventions, each seeking to present a unified front ahead of November's elections, Oring's project is showing American opinion is anything but unified.

One postcard from Lawrence F. Green, a Vietnam veteran from Seattle, said, "Dear Mr. President, ... You got us into this war and I don't believe you have a plan to get us out. Leadership takes a complete strategy to lead a nation. Quit playing politics. Know thyself. And lead with dignity."

Another from Julia Asherman of from Cambridge, Massachusetts, read, "Dear John Kerry, You suck just like Bush. Your free trade policy sucks a lot as well."

In San Francisco, Annik Prasad told Bush, "Dear Sir, I've never felt more alienated from the rest of the world."

Oring has typed more than 600 postcards since she began her campaign early this year in San Francisco and has since travelled 5,000 kilometres through a dozen states in the West and Midwest. She plans to travel later this month to southern states.

Oring was also in Boston last month for the Democratic National Convention. In New York City she has set up shop - a small portable desk, two typewriters and an American flag - at City Hall and other sites to field a range of American opinion.

"This is, in a way, a type of journalism, going to places where reporters don't go," she said.

She keeps carbon copies of all the postcards and plans to exhibit them and put them together in books as evidence of the diversity of opinion in the United States.

Her typical first question to a person who wants to send a postcard is, "If I were the president of the United States, what would you want to say to me?"

She then types the response from the person. Each session takes five to 10 minutes.

The short responses reveal the nitty gritty of their worries, concerns and priorities. They deal with war, homelessness, taxes and education, but responses, without fail, deal with politics, the war and the November 2 elections.

"Dear Mr. President," reads a card from Lashanda Cavanese of Oakland, California. "Do you remember all the faces of those innocent children that you've blown up? And if you're supposed to be president, why can't I, as a minority, get a job? You've messed up the economy. Thanks for nothing."

"Dear Mr. President, if I had a chance to tell you what I think, I would ask you to give materials to the schools. We need scissors, pencils, sharpeners, journals and glue," read the message from Barry Huang of Lightouhouse Community Charter School in Oakland, California.

"Dear Mr. President," begins another California resident's postcard, "I want to know what freedom means to you and what you would be willing to give up for it. And I want to know how much oil you drink in the morning. Sincerely, Shores Aludini San Francisco."

The cards give people a chance to vent.

"Call me gutta grimey cuz that's who I am. I was a young boy, now I'm trying to be a young man," said a respondent who signed his card Never yours, West Oakland Samurai. "Dear W. Dubya," he continued, "if you're going to declare war on terror, you must first declare war on yourself. Can you cut funding where you should (military) and not where we need it most (education)? What was the 2000 coup for? I know you're just a pawn for the illuminati but I thought you at least have a free will."

As an artist and former writer for The New York Times and International Herald Tribune, Oring said she believes her social and political work will express to the world the true feelings of Americans - and some foreigners - which often contrast with their government's policies.

Doreen Wilkinson of Yorkshire, England, said, in her card, "Mr. Bush and Mr. Blair are at opposite ends of the political spectrum. How did they possibly become such close allies? This is what I find most puzzling about the whole situation. I feel as though we're never going to get out of it, and I fear for my grandson."

And a card from Hitomi Matsuo of Tokyo said, "I am Japanese. Once you said that Japan has to send the army to Iraq. Please don't say such things. Because Japan as a peaceful constitution and Japan still works for peace in Iraq. Please don't interfere with Japan."

She has been spending her savings on her solo campaign and is hoping for grants to continue the journey across the United States.

She used a similar method in a previous project called "Writer's Block", in which she collected more than 600 typewriters made in Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. She displayed them packed by the dozens in large metal cages for shows in the United States, Germany and Romania in an examination of censorship and the importance of free speech.

Free speech is also at the centre of her current project, and "I Wish to Say" is allowing Americans to speak out about the occupant of the White House and whether it will be Bush or Kerry. dpa tn ls gj