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The Kicker

AUGUST 30 [MONDAY]

A Heinz-Free Event

By Benjamin Ryan

8/30, Midtown Sheraton, 8AM

Starting at 8 am on Monday, August 30, New York delegates were treated to speeches from Gov. George Pataki and from the little known U.S. Senate candidate Howard Mills while the group feasted upon traditional breakfast buffet fare in the Midtown Sheraton Hotel and Towers' Imperial Ballroom.

One thing they were not treated to was ketchup with their hash browns and eggs.

While an assortment of mini jams was placed on each banquet roundtable, the condiment once proclaimed by the Reagan Administration to count as a vegetable in school lunches was kept out of sight. Those who were courageous enough to inquire could get a waiter to fetch them a single-serving bottle of—gasp—Heinz.

(Senator John Kerry's wife, Theresa Heinz Kerry, is the chairman of the Howard Heinz Endowment and inherited her many millions from her late husband, Senator John Heinz III.)

"Don't ask for ketchup, it's Heinz!" said one delegate to another when he'd discovered this ultimate irony. When approached, the delegate said he preferred to remain anonymous about his Theresa-phobic statement.

After finishing her ketchup-free breakfast, Shirley Jensen, a delegate from Orange County, New York, said she didn't miss the condiment, since she only consumes it atop hamburgers.

"I use Heinz ketchup anyway," she said, "because they're a good contributor to the Republican party."

According to a release on the H.J. Heinz Company's web site, over the past seven years, the company's political action committee has contributed \$96,000 to Republican candidates and \$54,000 to Democrats, numbers which the company says "largely [reflects] the party affiliation of the candidates representing the states where we have facilities." The PAC is funded by voluntary employee donations.

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The Big Apple Does It All

"Heinz Ketchup is a non-partisan condiment that simply stands for great taste. It's enjoyed by Republicans, Democrats and Independents," asserted Heinz spokesperson Debbie Foster in the same release. "Heinz has been the favorite of Americans across the political spectrum for 135 years, and we have no intention of engaging in a political food fight."

The release further stressed a distance from John Kerry and his wife, neither of whom, it said, "holds a significant percentage of H.J. Heinz Company shares."

Edward Kane, the director of catering for the Sheraton, denied that the New York State Republicans had requested the ketchup moratorium, pointing to a trio of mini-bottles that were hidden behind the buffet as evidence that it was available by request.

Pat Ellis, from Smithtown, New York, whose husband is a delegate, said she didn't notice a lack of ketchup either, but that "of course" she uses Heinz in her everyday Republican life. "Because Heinz is a name brand of ketchup," she explained.

Well, what about Hunt's?

"I really actually don't like Hunt's ketchup," she confessed.

So taste trumps politics?

"That's it, I guess."

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