



Political Warfare's Sweetest Weapon

BY PUJA MURGAI

If you think cupcakes are so 2011, think again.

Don't be fooled by the fact that cupcakes have become so established that even Hill veterans understand their attraction.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid denied his staff Georgetown Cupcakes in January and offered them to reporters instead. "My caucus likes me a lot, so they gave me a great big box of cupcakes," Reid explained. "And I said, 'What could I do with these?' ... My staff is far too fat anyway."

After Reid handed out the baked goods, he told the press: "The proper time to break out the cupcakes is when [Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell] and his team show up."

McConnell arrived moments later to find the press holding cupcakes. He joked: "I understand you've been bribed? Have you? I have no gifts to offer you, so I expect the worst possible treatment in return."

No, cupcakes are still in the moment. D.C. bakeries keep winning competitions, and lobbyists continue to turn out with the baked goods. Cupcakes are still trending on the Hill and in legislatures throughout the nation.

Washington-based The Sweet Lobby was the winner of the Food Network's "Cupcake Wars" in February. The boutique bakery, which sells itself as "the ultimate advocate for your sweet tooth," beat out three other contenders to win the top prize of \$10,000.

Sticky Fingers Sweets and Eats in Columbia Heights, a vegan bakery, has appeared on "Cupcake Wars" three times and won twice, most recently in January on "Cupcake Wars All-Stars." And one of its co-founders, Doron Peterson, recently published her first cookbook, "Sticky Fingers' Sweets: 100 Super-Secret Vegan Recipes."

For those who need an after-hours fix, Sprinkles Cupcakes, owned by "Cupcake Wars" judge Candace Nelson, has launched the first of its kind cupcake ATM in Beverly Hills, and CNN reports that "New York, Washington and Chicago locations are next in line" for the machines.

Cupcakes are also still popular lobbying tools. In February, the Iowa Federation of College Republicans brought cupcakes to the state Capitol in Des Moines. Students handed them out to lawmakers who showed a valid photo ID, signaling support for a proposal by Secretary of State

Matt Schultz to require Iowans to show a government- or university-issued photo ID in order to vote.

Colin Tadlock, vice president of the federation, said, "I realize handing out cupcakes is not the same thing as voting, but we're trying to relate it to that." He added, however, that it was "not at all similar to the UC Berkeley event" last fall when members of the Berkeley College Republicans held an Increase Diversity Bake Sale with racially adjusted pricing to show their opposition to a bill that would have allowed California public universities to consider race, ethnicity and gender in student admissions. (Incidentally, that event sold out of all of its 300 cupcakes.)

Cupcakes were a bit of a sticky issue for the Florida Legislature, too. In February, the House and Senate took up proposals to prevent food stamps from being used to buy salty and sweet snacks. Democratic state Rep. Mark Pafford introduced an amendment to the House bill to allow recipients to buy cupcakes or cake for a child's birthday. Pafford said, "It's just an exception for a child to celebrate a birthday by having a cake or a cupcake." The so-called cupcake amendment was rejected.

The Republican presidential race has helped fuel the boom for Georgetown Cupcake, the bake shop of choice for Sasha Obama's 10th birthday last year. The bakery had an influx of orders for Super Tuesday. Their "election-themed fondant available for their cupcakes ... [was] quite popular," according to a representative. Customers had ordered "Republican' elephant cupcakes for" Super Tuesday, and the bakery offered "election cupcakes at their shops."

Cupcake sales have also helped Georgetown Cupcake keep tabs on elections. In November 2008, the bakery "kept score of how many Democratic cupcakes (donkeys) vs. Republican/GOP (elephants) they sold," and the shop says it will "definitely be doing cupcake polling again" this year "to see if they can predict the presidential race."



PHOTOS BY JAY WESTCOTT — POLITICO

Vegan cupcakes (above, top) from Sticky Fingers Sweets and Eats in Columbia Heights must be pretty good: The bakery is a two-time winner on Food Network's "Cupcake Wars."



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