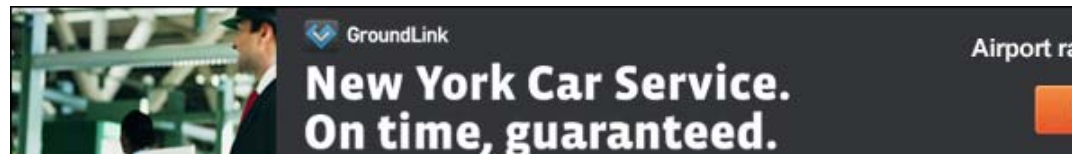


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Gloria Cain: Can her 'stand by your man' moment make a difference?

Gloria Cain will appear on Fox News Monday night to defend her husband, who has been accused of sexual harassment. Gloria Cain could change the momentum or be 'too little, too late.'

By Jennifer Skalka Tulumello, *Contributor* / November 14, 2011



Gloria Cain accompanies her husband Herman Cain as he announces his run as a Republican candidate for president in Atlanta earlier this year.

David Goldman/AP/File

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When Gloria Cain appears on Fox News Monday night, she will enter the sorority of political wives who have advocated for their husbands despite the salacious allegations against them – many of which have proved to be true.



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Ms. Cain will tell Greta Van Susteren that the Herman Cain she knows would never force himself upon a woman, according to an advance transcript. It is, it would seem, a vote of confidence that Mr. Cain urgently needs.

Candidate Cain is new to the political scene and his campaign's handling of the allegations so far has failed to quiet the media storm. A new CNN poll shows Cain slipping to third behind Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich. Ms. Cain's appearance could be the campaign's best hope to give her husband's denials more credibility and change the momentum.

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Before now, Cain's wife of 43 years has not appeared on the campaign trail except for her husband's May announcement of

his entry into the race. But with primary voters starting to cast ballots in January, it is imperative that Cain work quickly to restore trust among his supporters.

"If a woman does not get up and defend her husband in the face of allegations, defend his character, she might as well be dooming his candidacy," says Ruth Mandel, director of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers University and an expert on women and politics.

Ms. Cain did have another choice. Obviously averse to the 24/7 floodlights of modern politicking, she could have opted to remain silent. She would not have been alone in that decision.

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In recent years, Jenny Sanford and Huma Abedin have told their badly behaving lawmaker spouses to face the cameras alone. Ms. Sanford left her husband, then Gov. Mark Sanford of South Carolina, while he was still in office and after he admitted to having an affair. Ms. Abedin, a top aide to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, has stayed with her disgraced husband, Anthony Weiner, whose graphic cyber-dalliances led to his political downfall. But she didn't appear with him at the tearful – and cringe-inducing – press conference during which he outlined his indiscretions.

Gender roles, and how they have shifted from one generation to the next, could play a part in what spouses feel bound to do, say experts. Both Secretary Clinton and Elizabeth Edwards – like Ms. Cain – are Baby Boomers.

Clinton famously stood by her man when word broke during the 1992 Democratic primary contest of his relationship with Gennifer Flowers. Ms. Edwards at first stuck by John Edwards when reports surfaced during the 2008 Democratic primary race that he had strayed. Both were instrumental in keeping the public's faith in their men.

When Edwards later abandoned her husband's cause – he fathered a child with the woman he had denied seeing and is under federal investigation for funneling campaign money to – so did the American people.

"When a woman opts to 'stand by her man' after allegations of an affair surface, she is attempting to send a message to voters that she trusts her husband, that their marriage is strong, and that voters should trust him, too," says Jennifer Lawless, director of the Women & Politics Institute and associate professor of government at American University. "This might be a difficult decision, highly embarrassing and often emotional."

Mr. Cain denounces the accusations of four different women – two of whom remain anonymous – as completely false. But past instances provide meaningful context for what moments like Ms. Cain's appearance on Fox could mean.

"When a woman stands next to her husband on a podium to demonstrate continued support despite not only his infidelity but also his illegal activities, she is making a statement that transcends trust and the state of her marriage," says Professor Lawless. "She is suggesting that she is willing to stand by behavior that crosses both a moral and legal line. And she is implicitly asking voters to do the same."

Cain's polling numbers already appear to be on a downswing. The CNN poll, compiled last weekend, shows Cain at 14 percent, down 11 percentage points from October. A Politico poll also suggests that support for Cain dropped dramatically

after accuser Sharon Bialek held a news conference Nov. 6.

Democratic pollster Celinda Lake calls the intervention by Ms. Cain "too little, too late." And she thinks the drama, as it continues to percolate, will only alienate a voting public seeking an untarnished advocate in the White House – someone who isn't distracted by the "noise" in his personal life.

"They want politicians to focus on their lives," Ms. Lake says of voters.

Interestingly, though, Professor Mandel of Rutgers notes that there's an unspoken irony in the latest chapter of the Cain saga. His wife – whose voice most Americans have never heard – has enormous influence over how the former Godfather's Pizza chief's presidential bid plays out.

"She's under tremendous pressure to stand for him, to speak for him, and in critical moments like this, frankly, to perhaps save him, save his campaign," Mandel says. "That's very significant power – even if it's unwanted."

In an advance transcript of her remarks on *The Washington Post*, Ms. Cain has husband's back.

"I'm thinking he would have to have a split personality to do the things that were said," Ms. Cain says.

The interview will air at 10 p.m. Eastern time.

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