

THE MORNING CALL

Betrayed wives' message? Don't hurt political chances

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Last week, in one of the most stunning self-inflicted wounds seen since a blue dress got stuffed into a bag instead of sent to the cleaners, New York governor, and once -probable presidential candidate Eliot Spitzer resigned amid allegations he was a regular customer of a high-priced prostitution ring.

Stepping onto the political playing field is not a game for the faint of heart. It is a rough and tumble team sport; when you decide to play you risk much more than yourself. In today's 24/7 media frenzy, running for or serving in political office also involves your friends, associates, and most of all, your family. The higher and more powerful the elected office, the more this holds true. The glow of reflected glory that shines on those close to the winners of power turns to an unwanted spotlight if the star falls from grace.

Watching Silda Spitzer stand by her husband before the cameras twice was painful to see. He appeared composed; she looked destroyed but strangely determined. No doubt, Mrs. Spitzer's years as a successful corporate attorney stood her in good stead before the judge and jury that is today's public. According to some media reports, it was Mrs. Spitzer who urged her husband not to quit, even in the face of a threatened impeachment.

I doubt there's a woman in America who watched that spectacle without saying, "I wouldn't stand with him, I'd kill him." But, when your life is wrapped up in someone else's success, when you've given up your own career, as Silda Wall Spitzer and Hillary Rodham Clinton did, the instinct to protect what you have must be overwhelming.

In the two days between the story breaking and the resignation, the Spitzer troops circled the wagons. These are the times when you find out who your friends are, and how much your spouse is willing to take to keep the relationship together.

His close friend, financial contributor and jogging buddy George Fox was mum on the subject of the governor's decision to resign. One can only imagine the sense of betrayal when Fox discovered it was his name that Spitzer used to register at the Mayflower Hotel for his St. Valentine's eve tryst.

The Spitzer story could not have been worse timing for the Clinton campaign because it reminded everyone how another strong, smart woman stood by her man while he shook his finger at the American people and denied ever having "sexual relations with that woman." Hillary was noticeably absent when months later Bill Clinton admitted that he was a philandering liar. Many news reports of the Spitzer story have included parallel accounts of the Clinton-Lewinsky affair.

Anyone who remembers the Lewinsky scandal will never forget the picture of a devastated

Clinton family walking across the White House lawn, with Chelsea in the middle of her parents, holding their hands, literally and figuratively keeping them together. For months afterward, the anger on Hillary Clinton's face seethed just below the pasted-on smile and the practiced remarks.

Fast forward 10 years. Under the pressure of a tough primary fight, Clinton decided to get down and personal in January of this year on the Tyra Banks television show. Asked how she got through those days following her husband's admission of infidelity, she said you really shouldn't make decisions in the heat of those moments. You have to think about it. She went on to say that you have to be true to yourself. You have to do what is right for you.

What was right for then-First Lady Clinton seems to be right for First Lady Spitzer, at least for the moment: Take one for the team.

So what is the message we are sending to our daughters? How should they interpret the smoke signals rising from the ridge of feminism? All those eager young women who swarmed over Harrisburg last week proudly wearing their Hillary for President buttons, what of them? Is the expectation that they should stand by their man or keep the family together, no matter how much they have been betrayed and humiliated?

Or, is the message to hang on to the power at all costs, because remember girls, if you swallow your pride and subjugate every instinct you have, when the dust clears you just may get to run for president.

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