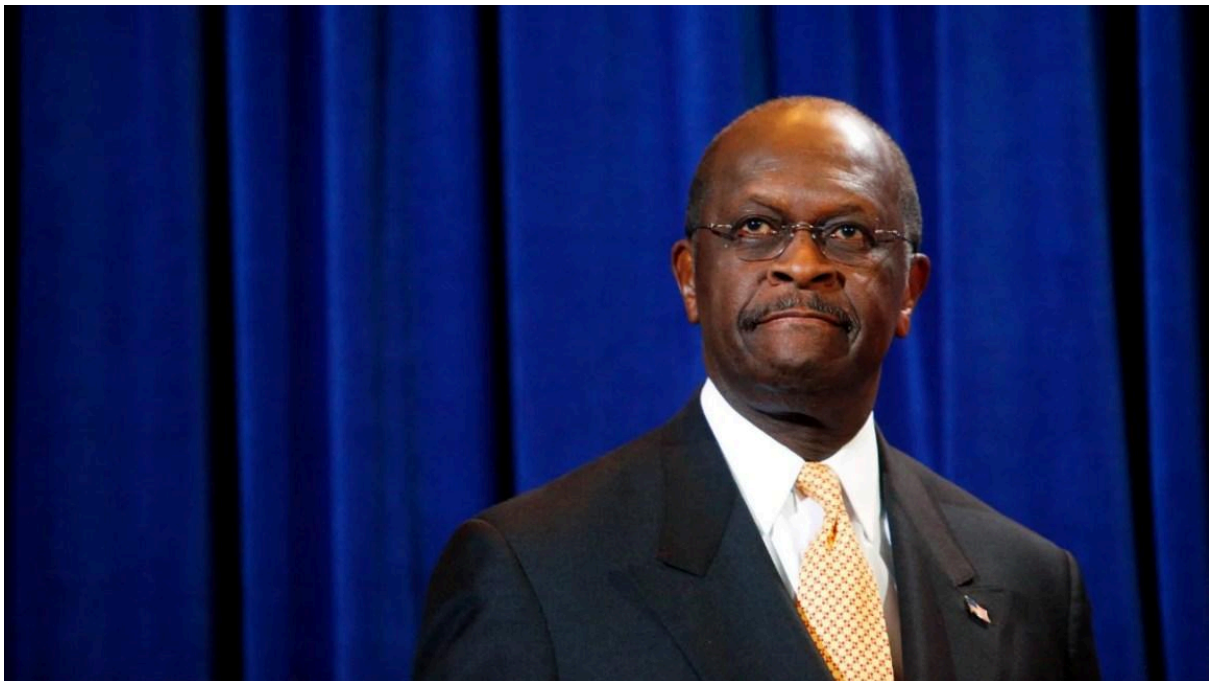


Why Herman Cain's Death Hasn't Changed People's Perspective on COVID-19



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Former Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain died on July 30, a month after he was diagnosed with COVID-19. Getty Images

- Experts note that the death of former Republican presidential candidate Herman Cain has had little impact on people's views on the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Experts say part of the reason is the entrenched views on the virus from those who agreed with Cain's political stances.
- They also note that misinformation about the pandemic is also fueling people's refusal to change their perspective.

When actor Tom Hanks and his wife, Rita Wilson, reported they had been infected with the novel coronavirus in early March, the importance many people attached to the pandemic immediately shifted.

The two have since recovered, yet they remain public faces of how people should behave during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"There's really only three things we can do in order to get to tomorrow: Wear a mask, social distance, wash our hands," Hanks recently said at a press conference. "Those things are so simple, so easy, if anybody cannot find it in themselves to practice those three very basic things — I just think shame on you."

But others continued to think that not wearing a mask is not only a sign of personal freedom, but also something that should be celebrated.

Herman Cain, a 2012 Republican presidential candidate, posted a photo of himself sitting closely with other people not wearing masks at a campaign rally for President Donald Trump on June 20 in an indoor arena in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Nine days later, Cain tested positive for the virus. The 74-year-old died from COVID-19 on July 30 after spending most of the month in an Atlanta-area hospital.

However, it's becoming clear that Cain's death won't have a historical impact on people's view of the virus like Hanks' infection did, or how actor Rock Hudson's death from AIDS in 1985 changed how people saw that health crisis.

Dr. William Schaffner, a professor of infectious diseases at Vanderbilt University in Tennessee, says despite Cain's popularity with conservatives, his death "kind of came and went."

He said Cain's death seemed to have little impact on people who were already resistant to wearing a mask, physical distancing, or gathering in large groups.

"So there was no lesson there," Schaffner told [name removed]. "People mourned his passing quickly but drew no lessons from the hazard he had exposed himself to. I just found that sobering and saddening."

The lesson, however, wasn't lost on everyone.

Stacy Harris, a publisher and executive editor, supported Cain during his 2012 presidential run, but she said she can't defend "his recent irresponsibility in any way."

“Cain’s death only reinforced my resolve to do whatever is in my power to remain coronavirus-free and to wear a mask out of consideration for others,” Harris told [name removed].

The impact of misinformation

One problem in combatting the coronavirus is the misinformation about the disease.

After Cain’s death, many people speculated his death was related to colon cancer, which he had in 2006, and not COVID-19. His staff, however, did confirm his death was related to the novel coronavirus.

Tina Willis, a Florida personal injury attorney, says she’s seen no change whatsoever among her Republican friends before or after Cain’s death. She also noticed little coverage of the death by the conservative news outlet Fox News.

Willis is critical of Fox News for failing to report what she considers the true impact of COVID-19 on people’s health and lives.

“People are dead because of their reporting, and they should be ashamed as should every single Republican lawmaker,” Willis told [name removed]. “Trump voters do not understand reality and many of them, or their family members, will die as a result.”

The view from conservatives

David E. Johnson's public relations firm, Strategic Vision, works with Republican and conservative candidates.

He described Cain as "a rock star for conservatives," but he says his death is not the game changer that many thought it would be in regards to COVID-19.

"Conservatives believe the government does not have the right to impose the restrictions they are imposing. Rather, conservatives believe it is up to the individual to make a decision on whether to wear a mask, social distance, or even close down," Johnson told [name removed]. "Rather than change that outlook on COVID-19, Herman Cain's death has reinforced that view and many are using his own words to justify their belief in this."

Jamie Miller, the former executive director for the Republican Party of Florida, says as the pandemic continues, more people will know someone who has been sickened by the virus or even died from it.

Those who personally knew Cain are among those people.

"When someone famous or to whom someone feels an emotional connection dies, they feel personally impacted. People's views of Herman Cain are no different," he said. "For those who knew, followed, or respected his business or political careers, there is a sense of true loss."

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