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'DIRECTLY TO THE PEOPLE'

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BY MARLENE CIMONS
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WASHINGTON—When Rep. Shirley Chisholm (D-N.Y.) addressed a convention of the National Welfare Rights Organization last July 31, one man in the audience asked her which Democrat she would support for the presidency.

"Me," she said, and everyone laughed.

Rep. Chisholm laughed with them, until the letters and telephone calls began to come into her Capitol Hill office that week. "Within three days I had received more than 200 letters asking me to run," she said. "That's when I began to take it seriously."

Today, Rep. Chisholm, who in 1968 became the first black woman elected to Congress, is taking it very seriously. She will officially announce her candidacy for the Democratic nomination on New Year's Day—if she has raised \$300,000 or more—and plans to enter primary contests in at least four states.

Two Strikes

"I know I have two strikes against me," she said in an interview. "I'm black, and I'm a woman. My campaign and support would have to be a grass roots movement. The American people will have to help raise the money so I could make a showing in the primaries indicative of change in this country."

"I know I will get no corporate backing—from the banks or business interests—or the support of big labor. They consider me a threat to their interests. For the most part, they are the chief beneficiaries of the system. I need—and want—the support of the most important segment of America: the people."

At this time, she wants to enter the primaries in Florida, Wisconsin, North Carolina, Tennessee and California, and says that there are "loosely structured" Chisholm-for-President organizations in 25 states.

"I would like to run a highly visible campaign," she said. "I'm not going to kiss babies or depend on the Madison Avenue boys with their cameras or the political bosses. I am going to rallies, churches, playgrounds and homes. I'm going directly to the people."

She hopes her candidacy will attract the support of young persons, women, blacks, Spanish speaking, and Indians—as broad a coalition as possible. If she



Shirley Chisholm

blacks and Puerto Ricans. An ardent fighter for women's rights, she is a founder of the National Women's Political Caucus and a member of its policy council. She is unalterably opposed to the war in Vietnam (she votes against every Defense Department appropriation); and has been a chief proponent of legislation supporting day care centers.

'Long Overdue'

Yet, she sometime joins sides with Southern conservatives in voting against so-called "reform" bills. But her reasoning is different: She claims the bills don't go far enough. "Draft reform is long overdue," she said, "but I

is elected President, she says she will make them visible at all levels of government.

"I would be running on a gamut of issues," she said. "Women's rights. The war. The fulfillment of the American dream for blacks. All the concerns of the people who make up this coalition. And my administration would be reflective of this. It would not be a white, male-dominated administration."

Rep. Chisholm, slim and energetic, always impeccably dressed, represents an area in Brooklyn that is, for the most part, low income, and made up of

voted against the President's bill because I considered it cosmetic surgery."

Soon after her first election, she earned a reputation here as a congresswoman of spunk, unafraid to speak her mind or challenge the staid traditions or the House. She shocked the senior congressmen by refusing an assignment to the Agriculture Committee—calling it irrelevant to the needs of her constituency—thereby ignoring one of the oldest unofficial rules of Congress: freshmen members are seen and not heard.

She has been called impractical and idealistic.

"I've gotten used to

hearing that," she said. "But someone has to start the ball rolling in a direction where it's never been. I am not for the status quo. I am not for tradition. I am a catalyst for change."

"They call me a dreamer or a kook. But these labels never deter me from my innermost belief that this system can still be made to work for everybody."

Rep. Chisholm is also realistic. She knows many people consider her candidacy symbolic and she recognizes that, although she doesn't have a strong shot at the nomination, she will be in an extremely effective bargaining position at the Democratic National Convention if she

gathers enough strength in the primaries.

"That's what politics is all about," she said. "But I'm not running with that in mind. I'm running to be President. I want to know if America is ready to accept the challenge of a black person, a woman, in this position. All my energy is geared in this way."

She is counting on the backing of the 13 members of the House black caucus. Two of them—William L. Clay (D-Mo) and Ronald V. Dellums (D-Calif.)—already have publicly announced their support. Rep. Dellums, in fact, will launch a statewide campaign for her in California.

"I think at this moment, she symbolizes the greatest potential to pull together the oppressed forces in America," Rep. Dellums said. "She is capable of bringing about fun-

damental human change."

Rep. Dellums, one of the more militant members of Congress, intends to speak in her behalf all across the country, concentrating in his home state.