

Name: _____ Class: _____

Shirley Chisholm's Presidential Announcement Speech Transcript

By Shirley Chisholm
1972

Shirley Chisholm (1924-2005) was an American politician, educator, and author. She was the first black woman elected to the United States Congress in 1968 and the first woman and black person to run for the Democratic Party's presidential nomination in 1972. As you read, take notes on why Chisholm thinks she would be a good choice for the Democratic nomination.

[1] **Announcer:** On January 25th, 1972, representative Shirley Chisholm of New York City announced her candidacy for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1972. In 1968, representative Chisholm became the first African American woman elected to the US Congress. Up next, we bring you the 14 minute announcement courtesy of the New York City municipal archives.



"Shirley Chisholm" by Thomas J. O'Halloran, U.S. News & World Reports is in the public domain.

Chisholm: I stand before you today as a candidate for the Democratic nomination for the presidency of the United States of America. I am not the candidate of black America, although I am black and proud. I am not the candidate of the women's movement of this country, although I am a woman and I'm equally proud of that. I am not the candidate of any political policies or fatcats¹ or special interests. I stand here now, without endorsements from many big name politicians or celebrities or any other kind of prop, I do not intend to offer you the tired clichés that have too long been an accepted part of our political life. I am the candidate of the people of America. Fellow Americans, we have looked in vain to the Nixon administration for the courage, the spirit, the character, and the words to lift us, to bring out the best in us, to rekindle in each of us the faith of the American dream. Yet all that we have received in return is just another smooth exercise in political manipulation, deceit and deception, callousness and indifference to our individual problems, and the disgusting playing of divisive politics, pitting the young against the old, labor against management, North against South, blacks against whites. The abiding concern of this administration has been one of political expediency² rather than the needs of man's nature. The president has broken his promises to us, and has therefore lost his claim to our trust and confidence in him. I cannot believe — [applause] I cannot believe that this administration would ever have been elected four years ago if we had known then what we know today. What we are entering — we are entering a new era, in which we must, as Americans, demand stature and size from our national leadership — leadership which is fresh, leadership which is open, and leadership which is receptive to the problems of all Americans. I have faith in the American people. I believe that we are smart enough to correct our mistakes. I believe that we are intelligent enough to recognize the talent, energy, and dedication that all Americans, including women and minorities, have to offer. I know from my travels to the cities and the small towns of America that we have vast potential which can and must be put to constructive use in getting this great nation together. I know that millions of Americans from all walks of life agree with me, that leadership does not mean putting the air to the ground,³ to follow public opinion, but to have the vision of what is necessary, and the courage to make it possible. Americans all over are demanding a new sensibility, a new philosophy of government from Washington. Instead of sending spies to snoop on participants at Earth Day, I would welcome the efforts of concerned citizens of all ages to stop the abuse of our environment. Instead of watching a football game on television while young people beg for the attention of their president concerning our actions abroad, I would encourage them to speak out, organize for peaceful change, and vote in November. Instead of blocking efforts to control the huge amounts of money given political candidates by the rich and the powerful, I would provide certain limits on such amounts, and encourage all the people of this nation to contribute small sums to the candidates of their choice. Instead of calculating the political costs, this or that policy, and [inaudible] in favor of this or that group, depending on whether that group voted for me in 1968, I would remind all Americans at this hour of the words of Abraham Lincoln, "a house divided cannot stand." We Americans are all fellow countrymen. One day confronting the judgment of history in our country, we are all God's children, and the will of each of us is as precious as the will of the most powerful general or corporate millionaire. And my presence before you now symbolizes a new era in American political history. I've always earnestly believed the great potential of America. Our constitutional democracy will soon celebrate its 200th anniversary, effective testimony to the longevity⁴ of our cherished Constitution and its unique Bill of Rights which continuously give to the world an inspirational message of freedom and liberty. [inaudible] I do not believe that in 1972 the great majority of Americans will continue to harbor such narrow and petty prejudices. I am convinced that the American people are in a mood to discard the politics and political personalities of the past. I believe that they will show in 1972, and thereafter, that they intend to make independent judgments on the merits of a particular candidate, based on that candidate's intelligence, character, physical ability, competence, integrity, and honesty. It is, I feel, the duty of responsible leaders in this country to encourage and maximize, not to dismiss and minimize, such judgement [...] Our will can create a new America in 1972, one where there's freedom

from violence and war at home and abroad. Where there's freedom from poverty and discrimination. Where there exists at least a feeling that we are making progress and ensuring for everyone medical care and employment and decent housing. Where we more decisively clean up our streets, our water, and our air. We work together, black and white, to rebuild our neighborhoods and to make our city twice as attractive and efficient and, fundamentally, where we live in the confidence that every man and every woman in America has at long last the opportunity to become all that he was created of being such as his ability. In conclusion, all of you who share this vision, from New York to California, from Wisconsin to Florida, our brothers and sisters on the road to national unity and a new America. [applause] Those of you who were locked outside of the convention hall in 1968, those of you who can now vote for the first time, those of you who agree with me that the institutions of this country belong to all of the people who inhabit it, those of you who have been neglected, left out, ignored, forgotten, or shunned aside for whatever reason, give me your help at this hour. Join me in an effort to reshape our society and regain control of our destiny as we go down the Chisholm trail of 1972. [applause]

Reporter: You represent a trend for more women and specifically black women to get involved with politics and go after elected office in this country.

Chisholm: Yes I specifically recommend, do I recommend a trend for more women and specifically black women to enter in to politics...

[5] **Reporter:** Elected office.

Chisholm: Elected office. Yes I definitely am feeling and recognizing that as a result of over 20 years in political life, only emerging 8 years ago publicly, there is a great need for more women in the political arena. I happen to believe that there's certain aspects of legislation that probably would be given much more attention if we had more women's voices in the halls of the legislatures on the city, state, and national level. And I will — legislation that pertains to daycare centers, education, social services, mental services — the kind of legislation that has to do with the conservation and preservation of the most important resources that any nation has, and that is its human resources.

Reporter: Congresswoman, did you feel your candidacy will hurt the presidential candidacy of Mayor Lindsey?

Chisholm: Well, Mayor Lindsey will be getting votes from the same area that I anticipate getting votes, and I dare say that my candidacy might not only hurt Mayor Lindsey, it might hurt a few others who have the same political [inaudible] [...] close to \$44,000 from the American people. I want to say in terms of my projection of \$300,000 which was made earlier, that the benefits that are being planned and will be conducted in February, March, and April, will net me, I'm quite sure, way above that amount. So I am going to be optimistic now that I've made my announcement today, to be able to get some sizeable contributions, may I say, that just this past week, I received two contributions from individuals in America, two contributions of \$5,000 each, and that is very encouraging. [...] I just want to say this, and it's very important for all Americans to recognize: the United States Constitution stipulates⁵ that anyone that is 35 years of age or over and is a natural born citizen can run for the presidency. All of who meet that criteria, the people will make that decision.

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1. a term referring to a wealthy political donor
 2. **Expediency** (*noun*): the quality of being convenient and practical despite possibly being immoral
 3. "Putting air to the ground" is a phrase that refers to involving a weapon launched from an aircraft.
 4. long life
 5. **Stipulate** (*verb*): to demand or specify something, typically as part of an agreement

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement best expresses the central idea of Shirley Chisholm’s speech?
 - A. Chisholm believed that women and women of color had previously been excluded from politics, not because of their lack of support, but because of the lack of funding they received.
 - B. Chisholm ran for the Democratic nomination to give specifically women, and women of color, a voice in American politics.
 - C. Chisholm believed that the white male Democratic nominations for the presidency weren’t representing the needs of all Americans.
 - D. Chisholm ran for the Democratic nomination because she believed she could change American politics for the better and bring a divided nation together.

2. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. “The abiding concern of this administration has been one of political expediency rather than the needs of man's nature. The president has broken his promises to us, and has therefore lost his claim to our trust and confidence in him.” (Paragraph 2)
 - B. “I know that millions of Americans from all walks of life agree with me, that leadership does not mean putting the air to the ground, to follow public opinion, but to have the vision of what is necessary, and the courage to make it possible.” (Paragraph 2)
 - C. “I happen to believe that there’s certain aspects of legislation that probably would be given much more attention if we had more women’s voices in the halls of the legislatures on the city, state, and national level.” (Paragraph 6)
 - D. “the United States Constitution stipulates that anyone that is 35 years of age or over and is a natural born citizen can run for the presidency. All of who meet that criteria, the people will make that decision.” (Paragraph 8)

3. What is Shirley Chisholm’s overall purpose in her speech?
 - A. to discredit the other candidates running for the Democratic nomination
 - B. to persuade people that she is the right choice for the Democratic nomination
 - C. to convince people that she has overwhelming support for the Democratic nomination
 - D. to pressure people to vote for her for the Democratic nomination

4. How does paragraph 6 contribute to Chisholm’s discussion of politics?
 - A. It emphasizes how the nation could benefit from more women in politics.
 - B. It explains why women struggle to reach positions of power in politics.
 - C. It shows why women, specifically black women, should support Chisholm’s campaign.
 - D. It highlights the obstacles that black women face in politics.

5. What is the relationship between unity in America and the success of the nation? Cite evidence from the text in your response.
