

Shirley Chisholm: Willing to Speak Out

By CHARLAYNE HUNTER

Mrs. Shirley Chisholm, who went to Congress as the first black woman member of the House of Representatives 16 months ago, sat forward in her office chair and succinctly assessed herself and her colleagues.

"The difference between me and most of them," she said, "is that I am not a politician, I'm a stateswoman."

"I never told anybody that I came into politics for life. Therefore I have nothing to lose for speaking out against the wrongs in the system. I am basically a fearless person, and everywhere people look to that kind of person for leadership."

In winning the seat for the 13th District, in Brooklyn, Mrs. Chisholm defeated James Farmer, former national director of the Congress of Racial Equality and now Undersecretary of Health, Education and Welfare. In speaking of Mr. Farmer the other day, she referred to him as "the national figure". Mrs. Chisholm not only has become something of a national figure herself, but is also an important figure in Democratic state and local politics.

The double role, she has learned, is a demanding one.

Mrs. Chisholm, a former member of the Assembly, led the recent party fight to designate State Senator Basil A. Paterson for Lieutenant Governor. But because she is in Washington four days a week, and spends a day with her constituents in Bedford-Stuyvesant, she said she cannot

go on the road to campaign with Mr. Paterson.

"Mrs. Chisholm reaches a lot of people," she said, "because she is in demand as a speaker, and I think Basil will get tremendous support, perhaps even more than if I were traveling with him because of the audiences I reach."

She has endorsed Howard J. Samuels in preference to Arthur J. Goldberg in the Democratic primary for Governor, even though Mr. Goldberg is running on the same ticket with Mr. Paterson. But the argument that her support for Mr. Samuels suggests a lack of enthusiasm for Mr. Paterson, who is black, "is a lot of baloney," she said.

"This is a smokescreen people are using to becloud the whole gubernatorial election in New York," she said. "The point has to be made that this year, because of new legislation, voters of this state do not have to vote for a slate in the primary, but can vote for individuals. That is why Howard Samuels can win and why Basil can win, too."

"I'm not fighting Arthur Goldberg per se. He's a fine jurist, a distinguished American, but he allowed himself to be used by the bosses, and Basil almost didn't get on his ticket, as a result."

"They kept saying to me, 'Three Jews and a black man. That just won't go over upstate.' I told them, 'O.K.', if that's your problem, take one of the Jews off."

Mrs. Chisholm's outspoken

style has been evident since she arrived in Washington. Right off she asked that her committee assignment be changed from agriculture to something more relevant to her mostly black, mostly urban constituency.

Since then she has taken sides on a variety of controversial causes: women's rights, abortion reform, ending the war in Vietnam and enfranchising 18-year-olds, all of which she favors.

Such high visibility has led to a few ticklish situations. Because there are so few blacks in Congress, black people from all over the

country deluge her with more calls than she and her small staff can possibly handle, she said.

A delicate problem arose last week when she refused to appear at a "Shirley Chisholm Day," held at her own church in Brooklyn, the Janes United Methodist Church. One reason, she said, was that church officials had used her name to solicit funds from other House members.

"It was all very embarrassing," she remarked.

Within the time span that includes student demonstra-

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tions at New Haven and the deaths at Kent State University and Jackson State College, the number of students visiting her Washington office in the Longworth Building has doubled.

"She can't say no," said Mrs. Carolyn Smith, her administrative assistant. At 31, Mrs. Smith is the oldest member of Mrs. Chisholm's Washington staff, which is largely female and also includes college "internes" (most of them white) who get credit from their schools for their work.

A small, all-white contingent from Drew University in Madison, N.J., originally scheduled for a 15-minute meeting, ended up by spending an hour as they listened to a few of Mrs. Chisholm's sharply-worded opinions.

On the war: "Many gentlemen in the House of Representatives have sons eligible to serve in Vietnam who are in reserve units. I know one who has six sons, all in the reserves. He can afford to get up and talk about escalating the war. But I'm compiling a list, and as soon as the public sees what is going on, they may start asking a few questions."

On the lack of black involvement in war protest: "Black people have so many here-and-now problems, like being concerned with getting a better apartment. It's a philosophical thing, a white man's thing."

The environment: "I agree with an 85-year-old black woman who said to me: 'Earth Day. Polluted water, polluted air. But I'm not going to get caught up in that. What we need is a campaign in America about polluted hearts.' That's what's worry-



The New York Times (by Mike Lien)

Representative Shirley Chisholm, Democrat of Brooklyn, talks to visitors from Berea College on the Capitol steps. Demands on her time are greater than she can handle—"My own constituency comes first"—but she sees many people.

ing black people."

School busing: "For years, for years, in Southern schools, black children have been passing white schools in buses to get to the little one-, two- and three-room shacks across town. Now, whites are screaming about busing.

"One the other hand, as an educator, I believe in the

neighborhood school. I can't see four-, five- and six-year-olds being exposed to bigots in other communities. It's enough for a black man and a black woman to withstand. . . ."

As one of the nine blacks in the House, Mrs. Chisholm has joined with the others on several issues, including "the campaign to make General Motors responsible" by, among other things, electing a black man to the company's board.

But mostly she goes her own way, with the help of her two major advisers, Wesley (Mac) Holder, the 71-year-old manager of her Brooklyn office who, as head of the local Democratic club, brought her into politics, and her husband, Conrad Chisholm, who has taken a leave from his job as a senior investigator with the Department of Social Services. Mr. Chisholm sometimes travels or appears for her, or, as she is fond of saying, "tells me when I've had enough."

After her House committee assignment was changed

—not to the Education and Labor Committee, to which she feels she is best suited, as a specialist in early childhood education and welfare, but to the Veterans Affairs Committee,—she has set up a research project to investigate discrimination in the veterans organizations.

She also waged a campaign against the preventive detention section of the District of Columbia crime bill, and has urged repeal of the emergency detention section as The Internal Security Act of 1950 which would confine possible spies or saboteurs in the event of invasion, declaration of war, or domestic insurrection in aid of a foreign enemy.

Addressing the House, she said:

"Although the emergency detention section has not been invoked since its enactment, its mere presence on the books is an offense, especially to Americans of color. As I said earlier in my testimony, it was not the Italians and Germans who were rounded up in 1942, under a Presiden-

tial order but the Japanese-Americans who were easily identifiable because of the color of their skin.

"Today, it is not the Ku Klux Klan or the [crime] Syndicate whose doors are being kicked in, it is the Black Panthers. Skin, skin, skin color, gentlemen, that's the criteria. It makes us special targets."

Gauging Her Effect

Despite her range of legislative interests and the zeal with which she pursues them, Mrs. Chisholm's political effectiveness is difficult to gauge.

"Two of the things she has going for her," said a political observer, "are also the two things that go against her the most—she's black and she's a woman.

"The effect this has on white politicians, particularly those who consider themselves liberal, is absolutely deadly. They don't want to be labeled bigots or ungentlemanly."

As for black politicians, particularly those in Brooklyn, a woman long active in

Brooklyn politics said:

"The same black men who supported her publicly against Farmer but who worked for him and raised money for him behind her back are the same ones trying to crush her now."

In her district in Brooklyn, the women outnumber the men on the voting rolls, and many people say it is among the women that she gets most of her support.

Mrs. Lucille Rose, assistant commissioner of operations in the city's Manpower Career and Development Agency, recalled how Representative Chisholm had invited a group — "mostly housewives" — to the Democratic state convention at Grossinger last month.

"Shirley took them in to hear some speeches," Mrs. Rose said, "and they were also able to see what a caucus was like, with people going in and out of various rooms. When we left—after Shirley fed us at her own expense—we were all in accord: we had learned something about how the political machine works."
