

# Chisholm stresses education

By LETA PARKS  
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A crowd of more than 250 greeted one of America's most outspoken leaders in civil rights for minorities and women with three standing ovations Thursday at Western Piedmont Community College in Morganton.

Shirley Chisholm, the first black woman to be elected to the U.S. Congress, told the audience that educational opportunities must be provided to persons of all races to help America prepare to meet the work demands of the 21st century.

"For black Americans, the one avenue that enables them to really get ahold of the American dream is to get an education," said Chisholm as she talked about the future of education, particularly for minorities.

"There's absolutely no room left for an unskilled man, an unskilled woman," she said.

Black parents must convince their children of this by telling them, "If you don't take advantage of the opportunities you have, you're finished," she said.

A recent visit to Germany and Japan left the former politician feeling "deeply troubled," she told the audience.

During the visit, she saw how those countries were technologically and industrially advanced compared to the United States.

To keep the U.S. competitive with other countries and prepare the nation for the 21st century,



Photo by Mark Hannan

Shirley Chisholm addresses crowd at WPCC.

# Chisholm urges equal opportunity

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educational opportunities must be provided to all its citizens, Chisholm said.

"Our greatest hope is not in the technology of Star Wars, but in the education of the coming generation," she said. Star Wars is the name of space defense system being developed by the U.S.

Chisholm pointed to population trends in the majority of large cities in the country which indicate the majority of people in those cities in the next 20 years will be of other races besides Caucasian.

"These persons are going to need necessary curriculum to enable them to keep the economy moving," she said.

But even with a college degree, minorities do not necessarily have the opportunity usually associated with education, Chisholm said.

"Why is it that in these beautiful United States of America we have to resort to things like affirmative action?" she asked. "You have the degree, you have the education and yet we've had to come up with affirmative action," she added.

She answered her question by saying, "because we wouldn't do what was right."

One way to help more people get a chance at an education is to have counseling services for minorities and for whites in rural areas, Chisholm said.

These counseling services should start during a student's freshman year in high school, "not a semester before they apply to college," she told the audience.

Educators must not take a traditional attitude toward the way they do things, she said. "We must be innovative and creative to meet changing demands."

One such innovation she suggested is cooperation between colleges and high schools to help ease the transition to higher education, she said, adding, "It makes good sense."

Burke County high schools are currently cooperating with WPCC by having high school students take

courses at the college.

Active recruiting by colleges "must include outreach to students who would otherwise ignore college as an alternative," she said.

In their efforts to recruit these students, "colleges must engage in aggressive casework," Chisholm said.

This work should be done not by people who already have other duties such as teaching or administration, but by people who do it as a full-time job, said Chisholm.

"America is not a melting pot. America is a salad bowl," she told the audience. "Universities and colleges must be reflective of the salad bowl that makes up our nation."

In order to attract students from all segments of society, schools should put notices in minority newspapers as well as major newspapers, she told the audience.

Today's colleges and universities must help overcome two trends that are currently taking place in the United States, according to Chisholm.

One trend is a tendency in Washington to ignore the needs of the poor, she said. "A callousness has developed toward those who were not born with the proverbial spoon in their mouths."

Another trend facing all students who want to go to college is rising costs of education which are impacting even middle class families, she said.

Educators "must ease the burden on middle income families, but also must protect chances for lower income people who have historically been excluded from educational opportunities," she said.

In order to accomplish this goal, "ingenuity and creativity will have to come into play," said Chisholm.

During a question and answer session after the speech, she suggested a huge retreat in which 1,000 educators, from administrators to teachers, could meet to work out changes for the educational system.

"Many educators with wonderful ideas are scared to death," she said. "They are afraid of losing their jobs if they say anything about making changes."

Through a retreat like this, "I know we can come up with meaningful changes for education in this country," said the speaker.

One solution to the problem of making education available to everyone is the community colleges

throughout the nation, Chisholm said.

Community Colleges are "one of the nations most exciting and valuable institutions," she said, adding that more than half of the nation's freshmen attend community colleges.

Community colleges have opened doors to blacks, Hispanics, the poor and older Americans, she told the group.

"If we did not have community colleges, what would happen to all these people?" she asked.

Educational opportunities through community colleges "help older Americans get a second chance at dignity," she said.

"Nobody should have to sit at home in a rocking chair because of chronological age."

Although community colleges are an avenue of increased opportunity, they "must accept the notion that there is absolutely no need to apologize for demanding excellence," she told the audience.

"It's not a failure to dream and not succeed," she added. "It's a failure to not dream at all."

Chisholm was asked by an audience member to explain the resurgence of racism in the United States. Burke County has felt the effect of the resurgence as a Ku Klux Klan group marched through Morganton and Valdese on Sunday.

She attributed racist activities such as neo-Nazi and Ku Klux Klan activities to the Reagan administration's ignoring them.

"Other presidents sent out the National Guard when they saw these things happening, but Reagan never did a thing about it," she said.

She also blamed the U.S. Justice Department, saying "it wasn't involved because Ed Meece was too busy with his own problems."

"People do it (racist activities) because they know there will be no punishment," she said.

Chisholm's appearance Thursday was part of Western Piedmont's 25th anniversary celebration.

The WPCC Moore Auditorium could not hold the crowd, and the overflow was taken to another room to watch the speech on television.

Those who got a seat in the auditorium responded during the speech several times with claps and cheers, giving Chisholm standing ovations when she walked into the room, when she was introduced and when she had completed her speech.