

## Worthy Women's Scholarship Finalist Essay - Second Place

By Angel Suttle

Some books do more than tell a story; they ignite something within you. For me, that book was "Unbought and Unbossed", the autobiography of Shirley Chisholm, the first Black woman elected to Congress and the first to seek the presidential nomination of a major political party. I read it at a pivotal moment when I was redefining my path; transitioning from a career in media to sustainability, advocacy, and policy. Chisholm's story did more than inspire me; it challenged me to stand firmly in my convictions, embrace leadership unapologetically, and never wait for permission to create change.

Chisholm's journey was not one of privilege or ease. She was a woman who refused to be limited by society's expectations, breaking barriers in politics at a time when neither her race nor her gender made space for her at the table. As a single mother, entrepreneur, and advocate working in industries where I am often the only woman of color, her words resonated deeply. She spoke about the loneliness of leadership, the fight against systemic barriers, and the relentless belief that change is possible...even when the odds are stacked against you.

One of Chisholm's most famous quotes, "If they don't give you a seat at the table, bring a folding chair," has become a guiding principle in my own journey. Whether advocating for supplier diversity in the clean energy sector, leading initiatives for empowerment, or stepping into policy spaces with Hoosier Women Forward, I have learned that waiting for an invitation is not an option. Like Chisholm, I've had to create my own opportunities, command accountability from those in power, and use my voice to challenge the status quo.

Her fearless approach to public service also shaped the way I see my role as a community leader and mentor. Launching "Take A Girl to Work Day" through The Women's Fund, I understand how vital it is for young women, especially those from underrepresented communities, to see examples of bold, unapologetic leadership. I remember keynoting on stage at that event, my own middle school-aged daughter looking up at me, as I spoke to a room full of young girls about dreaming big. In that moment, I felt the weight of imposter syndrome; I was being celebrated for my success, yet behind the scenes, I was struggling financially due to the economic downturn in my industry. But then, I thought of Shirley. She, too, had faced obstacles, moments of doubt, and times when the world doubted her; but she kept going.

"Unbought and Unbossed" reinforced leadership isn't about circumstances, but courage. It catalyzed the fight for equity, whether in policy, sustainability, or business, isn't for the timid. Chisholm's legacy reminds me that I don't need to fit into anyone's mold to lead; I am worthy and

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remain unyielding in my purpose, unafraid to take risks, and unwilling to compromise on my values.

Because of Shirley Chisholm, I walk boldly in every room I enter...not asking for a seat, but knowing I belong.