

'A calling I do not yet hear'



Colin Powell, with his wife, Alma, says family concerns played a role in his decision.

Powell rules out '96 presidential bid

By Dan Balz
Los Angeles Times/
Washington Post Service

WASHINGTON — Colin Powell closed one of the most extraordinary chapters in recent political history Wednesday by announcing he would not seek the presidency in 1996, saying the "passion and commitment" he had brought to 35 years of soldiering, "I do not have for political life."

The former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff also ruled out running for vice president in 1996, but declared he would continue "to speak out forcefully" on public issues and said he would do so "as a member of the Republican Party."

With his wife, Alma, at his side,

Powell stood military-straight but appeared somewhat tired as he told a crowded news conference at an Alexandria, Va., hotel that political life "requires a calling I do not yet hear." He said a decision to run for president would have required "sacrifices and changes" in his family's life "that would be difficult for us to make at this time."

Powell, 58, a commanding black executive celebrated in voter polls even more among whites than blacks, got right to the question that has teased the nation for months.

After wrestling with the presidential bid widely urged upon him, he looked "deep into my own soul," he said, and concluded he lacked the

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Republican reaction



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Newt Gingrich, on his chances of entering the race had Powell campaigned



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Bob Dole

POWELL

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kind of passionate commitment to politics that sustained his bond of trust with the public.

"For me to pretend otherwise would not be honest to myself, it would not be honest to the American people and I would break that bond of trust," he said, ruling out any second thoughts as the campaign proceeds, but leaving a future candidacy open to speculation.

"The future is the future," he said, describing his decision as a difficult one of prayerful consultation with his family, but "the right thing for me at this time."

The general's decision not to run brought a collective sigh of relief from the nation's established presidential candidates. Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole, the Republican front-runner who would have been most immediately threatened by a Powell candidacy, happily welcomed this newest Republican and his decision to forgo the candidates' wars.

"I will actively seek his advice and counsel as we work to bring our people together, broaden the appeal of our party, and move our nation forward," said Dole, who thought enough of the Powell threat to time a key endorsement for Wednesday in the New Hampshire primary by Gov. Stephen Merrill.

President Clinton, spared what poll soundings suggested might have been the political fight of his life, did not immediately comment.

House Speaker Newt Gingrich, busy pressing his congressional program to revamp the nation's budget and social priorities, hailed the general as "a tremendous human being" whose candidacy would have been formidable.

But Powell's announcement was also welcome news for the rest of the



With a clearly pleased Sen. Bob Dole looking on Wednesday, New Hampshire Gov. Steve Merrill announces his endorsement for the Kansas Republican. The endorsement comes at an opportune time for Dole, whose lead has narrowed in recent New Hampshire polls. It was unclear how it would affect Dole's campaign, but in the past support from the New Hampshire governor has been helpful in the first-in-the-nation primary.

Republican field of candidates, who now will try to compete for public attention after having been smothered for two months by a blanket of media interest in Powell's potential candidacy.

At this late date, it is unlikely that any other candidates will enter the Republican race, although Gingrich said again Wednesday that he will wait until December before making a final decision about his own candidacy.

Powell's entry, Gingrich said, would have made it "substantially less likely" that he would become a candidate, but he also noted the significance of Merrill's endorsement of

Dole. "We'll have to see what happens," he said.

The intense interest in his prospective candidacy and the disappointment expressed by many of his supporters Wednesday reflected just how much of a phenomenon Powell had become in the country's politics.

During his news conference Wednesday, Powell reflected on the support he has received and its racial implications, saying he believed it showed the country was ready for a black president.

"I think the important point is that the nation has arrived at a point in our national life where such a possibility exists, and that's the realization of a great dream, even though I may not be the one to fill it," he said.

Powell was not the first prominent potential candidate to look at what the modern American presidential campaign has become — a yearlong, mind-numbing marathon of jet flights, handshakes, sound bites and ceaseless fund-raising — and decide that it was not for him or his family. In November 1974, Walter Mondale said that he lacked the stomach for the race in words similar to the general's.

Powell praised the Republicans for their "ideas and energy," but said he continues to have disagreements with his new party over some parts of its conservative philosophy and agenda. He said he hoped to use his influence to broaden the appeal of the Republican Party, adding: "I believe I can help the party of Lincoln move once again closer to the spirit of Lincoln."

But almost with the next breath, Powell declared he could not support every Republican presidential candi-

date and refused to commit himself to endorsing the GOP nominee against President Clinton in 1996.

"I will wait and see the entire slate, see what the nation looks like, and ... vote for the person who can do the best job for the nation," Powell said.

Powell said he generally supported Republican efforts to balance the budget and reform welfare, Medicare and Medicaid, but warned the GOP not to let their drive to shrink government leave people without a safety net. "At the end of this chain there are children who may be in need and at risk," he said.

Powell's consideration of a presidential campaign had triggered a sharp debate within the party. Last week, a phalanx of conservative leaders declared their opposition to Powell and vowed to fight his candidacy if he decided to seek the presidency. As much opportunity as Powell offered to expand the party's appeal, Wednesday's decision likely spares the party a bitter primary contest next year.

During his 30-minute news conference, Powell and his wife said her previously expressed concerns about his personal safety as a candidate did not affect his decision not to run. "I think everybody has known that I have had a concern," she said, "but I want you to know that it certainly played no part in his decision."

Powell urged Americans who may be disillusioned by the political system not to give up or drop out. "Don't give up on the political process," he said. "Fix it. ... It's a great system. It just needs, I think, a little tidying up at the moment."

THE GOP FIELD

Who's in, who's out and who's still undecided on the 1996 Republican presidential race:

THEY'RE IN:

- Senate Majority Leader Bob Dole.
- Sen. Phil Gramm of Texas.
- Former education secretary and Tennessee Gov. Lamar Alexander.
- Sen. Dick Lugar of Indiana.
- Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania.
- Conservative commentator Pat Buchanan.
- Rep. Bob Dornan of California.
- Former Reagan administration official Alan Keyes.
- Publishing magnate Steve Forbes.
- Tire magnate Morry Taylor.

THEY'RE OUT:

- Retired Gen. Colin Powell.
- California Gov. Pete Wilson.
- Former Vice President Dan Quayle.
- Former defense secretary Dick Cheney.
- Former housing secretary Jack Kemp.
- Former education secretary William Bennett.
- Wisconsin Gov. Tommy Thompson.
- Massachusetts Gov. William Weld.
- Former treasury secretary and secretary of state James Baker.

QUESTION MARK:

- House Speaker Newt Gingrich. Has promised a decision by December but indicated it was unlikely he would run.

Buchanan critical of Dole's stance on abortion

By The Associated Press
MERRIMACK, N.H. — Republican Pat Buchanan criticized Bob Dole's stance on abortion Thursday, a sign that GOP divisions on the issue won't fade away now that abortion-rights supporter Colin Powell has ruled out joining the race.

Buchanan, who had been critical of Powell's views on abortion and other social issues, said he plans to focus on Dole through the remaining 100 days before New Hampshire's lead-off primary in February.

Buchanan said Dole, who opposes abortion except in cases of rape, incest or when a mother's life is in danger, has not been committed to outlawing abortion.

Dole voted to confirm Supreme Court Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer, both "pro-choice, pro-abortion" justices, Buchanan said. Their presence on the Supreme Court will ensure that legalized abortions remain "locked onto the books for many more years," he said.

"It's sad that fresh from distort-

ing the Republican position on saving Medicare, Pat Buchanan today decided to distort Senator Dole's commitment on the right to life. Senator Dole has been consistently pro life throughout his career in office," said Nelson Warfield of the Dole campaign.

Buchanan said he would appoint an anti-abortion running mate and make outlawing abortions one of his top priorities.

He also spoke out against a late-term abortion procedure that would be banned under Republican legis-

lation. The bill has been sent to a Senate committee for more hearings, a step Buchanan criticized.

Buchanan said conservatives' next step should be to hold congressional hearings on when life begins.

Before Powell took himself out of the race, conservatives were divided on whether his support for abortion rights should disqualify him as a potential GOP nominee. Some stressed Powell's support for abstinence programs and pushed him as a preferable — and electable — alternative to President Clinton.