

Jackson May Run if Clinton Won't 'Stand Firm'

By Thomas B. Edsall
Washington Post Staff Writer

Two-time presidential candidate Jesse L. Jackson yesterday said he is likely to enter the 1996 campaign if President Clinton fails to stand firm behind the principle of affirmative action and other key elements of the liberal agenda.

"We will not stand idly by and watch the gains of the last 30 years be lost," Jackson told reporters at a news conference called to highlight the support of liberal women's groups for affirmative action. Jackson was clearly angered by Clinton's decision to review all federal policies on the issue: "This isn't time to be picking a panel; we need bold leadership."

Among those joining Jackson were leaders of the National Organization for Women, the Feminist Majority Foundation and the National Committee on Pay Equity.

Jackson described his warning that he could challenge the president as "therapy," suggesting that he would not run if Clinton takes an aggressive

stand in support of affirmative action, jobs programs, education and other liberal initiatives.

In an interview, Jackson noted with disdain that after House Speaker Newt Gingrich's mother quoted him describing Hillary Rodham Clinton as a "bitch," they "got a tour of the White House." But "if civil rights and social justice and gender equality are under attack, that gets a review. It leaves us vulnerable."

"They [Republicans] just attack and we [Democrats under Clinton's leadership] seem to be analyzing and reviewing, rather than asserting," Jackson said.

Jackson said he has three options, the first of which is to support Clinton, if "he will stand firm on convictions, with clarity on the validity of our concerns." But he said he also could challenge Clinton in the Democratic primaries or run as an independent candidate in the general election. "I hope the first option will come alive," he said, but "we have seen more retreat than assertion."

In recent months, Jackson has sig-

naled a growing interest in running as an independent or third-party candidate in the general election, a step that would ensure at least the partial splitting of Democratic constituencies. The growing conservatism in "both parties," he said, has resulted in "an amazing level of kinship on welfare reform, affirmative action, balanced budget, raising the military budget."

Jackson argued during the news conference that beneficiaries of affirmative action—women, blacks, Hispanics, the disabled—make up a majority of the American electorate, a stand that received strong support from the leaders of the women's groups.

Katherine Spillar, national coordinator for the Feminist Majority Foundation, argued that opponents of affirmative action are pointedly avoiding reference to the potential setbacks to women "because they know affirmative action for women is popular—and they dare not wake a sleeping giant that is a majority of the American electorate."