

Speaker promotes Bush's faith-based agenda

■ Affirmative-action leader tells how communities can tap into a new government program to provide social services.

By ELIZABETH PEZZULLO
THE FREE LANCE-STAR

A lecture by Arthur A. Fletcher in Caroline County resembled the rousing locker-room pep talks he heard when playing football for the

Baltimore Colts and Los Angeles Rams.

But this time, he was the one working hard to rally the team.

Standing before a crowd of about 200 residents and clergy, Fletcher motivated the group to find ways to take full advantage of President Bush's faith-based initiatives.

"I want to do my level best to help young people know what it

takes to make it all the way inside" the system, Fletcher said.

Considered the father of affirmative action, Fletcher, 77, had a receptive audience Saturday at the county's community center in Bowling Green. The Caroline County Sunday School Union, a 17-church group with more than 5,000 members, invited him to speak.

Casually dressed, with the

microphone dangling from his hand, Fletcher began the four-hour workshop recounting the constant racism he faced during his career.

"When I was first with the government, they didn't think I could read or write, and wanted me to use someone else's brain," said Fletcher, who is black. "But I didn't."

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churches to back Bush initiative

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The crowd erupted into applause.

Sandwiched in between these stories, Fletcher delivered the message that prosperity starts with education at the grass-roots level.

"Put the ties together to improve life," he implored.

Fletcher also expressed his own views when he urged the crowd to "use strategies devised by the Jews and Mormons."

"How can the Jews get billions sent to Israel, but we can't get a nickel back for our people?" Fletcher asked.

"You've got to own the wealth," he said. "That's what it's all about."

Fletcher served under Gen. George Patton during World War II, before becoming a pro football player.

A lifelong Republican, Fletcher was appointed assistant secretary of labor in 1969, and has worked in various capacities for four U.S. presidents.

He was instrumental in broadening the affirmative-action enforcement movement, which paved the way for reforms in jobs, education and business opportunities for minorities.

In the 1970s, Fletcher was executive director of the United Negro College Fund, where he co-coined the oft-repeated phrase "A mind is

'I want to do my level best to help young people know what it takes to make it.'

Arthur Fletcher

Affirmative-action proponent

a terrible thing to waste."

During his tenure there, Fletcher helped raise \$11.2 million in a little more than a year for the fund.

Fletcher also served as chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights in 1990.

Last year, President Bush signed an executive order establishing the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives within the White House.

The office encourages interaction between the government and churches and other faith-based organizations. Specifically, the initiative encourages faith-based groups to compete for federal grant money to provide social services to the community.