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Arthur A. Fletcher, the father of affirmative action, sat down for an interview at the International House at Washburn University.

Affirmative action pioneer to speak

By J. R. Mendoza
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The former Topekan known as the "father of affirmative action" said he feels confident the U.S. Supreme Court won't strike down the national policy.

"I'm very optimistic. I am not that concerned," said Arthur A. "Art" Fletcher, a 1950 Washburn University graduate who was honored in 1995 by the National Caucus and Center on Black Aged Inc. as the father of the affirmative action enforcement movement.

"Affirmative action has proven its validity in the last 33 years," he said.

The Supreme Court will hear arguments today about whether the University of Michigan law school and undergraduate college should be allowed to use race as a factor in admissions.

Fletcher, 78, who is in Topeka to speak on Wednesday at Washburn, spearheaded creation of the nation's first affirmative action policies while serving from 1969-1971 as assistant secretary of labor for the Nixon administration.

Fletcher said the court will evaluate

the progress that has resulted from affirmative action and write a decision that will recognize the progress that has been made.

"I'm optimistic that when the dust clears, and with America in a crisis over human capital, there's no way they (the court) are going to cancel affirmative action outright," he said. "That's not going to happen. The court understands how critical quality human capital is."

Fletcher said he expected court members to "cement in place" the progress that has been made and analyze areas in which more progress is needed.

"They've had every opportunity you can think of to kill it over the last 30 years and they haven't done it," he said of affirmative action.

Fletcher will speak in "an evening with Art Fletcher" at 7 p.m. Wednesday in the Bradbury Thompson Center at Washburn University. The event is free and open to the public. For more information, call (785) 231-1010, ext. 1556.

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