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Fletcher gives conference speech from hospital bed

Compiled from staff and news service reports

President Bush's choice to head the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, Art Fletcher, was admitted to a Yakima hospital Friday complaining of chest pain. But he vowed the incident would not sway him from accepting the position.

Unable to attend a minority and women's small business conference where he was scheduled to deliver the keynote address, Fletcher arranged to videotape a 25-minute speech from his hospital bed.

In the speech, which was shown later at the conference reception, Fletcher stressed the importance of women and minorities in American business, and also stressed he would not be deterred from assuming the commission's helm.

"Let me make it very clear that my difficulties at this stage of the game are not going to cause me to decide that I don't want to be the chairman of the Civil Rights Commission, not one bit," he said.

"Over the last 22 years I've had an opportunity to see what will work and what doesn't work and I've got a pretty good idea of what needs to be done . . . This little difficulty I'm suffering for the moment is not going to deter me for one minute."

Fletcher is expected to spend at least part of the weekend at St. Elizabeth Medical Center, where



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he is listed in satisfactory condition, suffering from angina.

Angina is chest pain associated with the heart, but not a heart attack, said Karl Sanford, a nursing supervisor for St. Elizabeth.

Test results would not be available before today, he said.

"We are trying to rule out damage to the heart muscle," Sanford said.

Fletcher, 64, arrived Thursday afternoon from Washington, D.C., to participate in the Yakima conference.

Bonnie Galloway of the U.S. Small Business Administration, a sponsor of the conference, said Fletcher may be suffering from fatigue because of travel.

In the past two weeks he has traveled from Washington, D.C., to appearances in California, Minnesota and Washington state, Galloway said.

Fletcher had a particularly busy day Thursday, when he flew across the country to Yakima, held a news conference and attended a reception. He attended a breakfast meeting early Friday morning and then complained of chest pain and was taken to the hospital, Galloway said.

Fletcher suffered a heart attack six years ago, said Juan Huey-Ray, also a conference organizer. Fletcher intends to return home as scheduled Monday, Huey-Ray said.

He became the first black ever elected to public office in Washington when he was chosen a Pasco City Council member in 1967. He was an unsuccessful candidate for lieutenant governor of

Washington in 1968.

He later served as assistant secretary of labor to President Nixon, deputy assistant for urban affairs for President Ford and as an adviser to President Reagan.

He is currently president of Arthur A. Fletcher & Associates Inc., a minority-owned consulting firm in Washington, D.C.

Fletcher has said Bush, a long-time friend, intends to name him to head the Civil Rights Commission. The appointment is apparently awaiting completion of an FBI background check, and also the outcome of a debate between Congress and the White House on whether the commission should survive beyond its expiration date at the end of this month.

Also, the White House has not yet accepted the resignation of William B. Allen, the current head of the commission.

Fletcher is already traveling around the country, pushing his agenda of eliminating racial and gender barriers in the workplace to make the United States more competitive economically.

"Rather than wait to get named, I have suited up and started playing," Fletcher said during a Thursday news conference.

He said Thursday that he expects to be seated by the end of the year.

The commission investigates civil rights violations and performs studies on civil rights issues. In recent years it has come under attack for partisanship, especially for abandoning a commitment to timetables and goals in the nation's hiring of women and minorities.