

COMMENTARY

Republicans should listen to Fletcher



Vernon Jarrett

If the image department of the Republican Party is smart, it will maintain the current identity of one Arthur A. Fletcher.

Fletcher, who is chairman of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, is a political rarity. He is a long-

time black Republican who is thoroughly respected among all strata of the country's black leadership.

I can think of only one other noted black Republican, former Sen. Edward Brooke, whose personal image evoked a respect that crossed party lines as does that of Fletcher.

One would think that Republicans would sense the value of an Art Fletcher, particularly in view of the GOP's very negative

image as an obstinate monolith blocking the application of affirmative action.

However, that is not the case. Respectable sources report that there is move afoot to muzzle Fletcher's outspoken stand on the Civil Rights Act of 1991. Fletcher, who was appointed chairman of the commission in October of 1990, is for the bill, which is supported largely by Democrats and opposed vociferously by President Bush.

Not only does Fletcher support the version of the bill that passed the House recently, he also took a strong stand favoring the 1990 bill, which President Bush vetoed.

Fletcher, who runs his own consulting firm, entered politics more than 23 years ago when he served as a special assistant to the governor of Washington, later becoming a member of the city council in Pasco, Wash. The Arizona-born, Kansas-reared Fletcher is proud of having raised money to

support the NAACP's 1954 Supreme Court victory in *Brown vs. the Topeka School Board*.

Many Kansans also remember Fletcher as the lanky star of Wichita State's football team who went on to gain a flash of fame as a member of the old Baltimore Colts.

But Fletcher's name zoomed into prominence as President Nixon's appointee as assistant secretary of labor when he authored what is known as the controversial "Philadelphia plan."



Arthur Fletcher

This plan, instituted with the approval of the White House, didn't call for outright quotas by a head count, but did set up goals and timetables in the awarding of contracts to minorities.

Fletcher's Philadelphia plan was later sanctioned by the courts. The substance of that decision was that the burden of proof for racial discrimination was left to the employer rather than the employee. That decision was overturned by the new, more conservative Supreme Court in 1989.

One of the main provisions of the 1991 Civil Rights Bill is to reverse the 1989 decision.

So now we have Art Fletcher, lifelong Republican, endorsing a bill opposed by a Republican president.

And even worse, says Fletcher, America is being drenched by a negativism from the language and vehemence of those who oppose the bill. Thank the Lord for at least one Republican of the guts of Art Fletcher.

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