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Father of Affirmative Action Wants to Clear The Air

By Paul Cobb

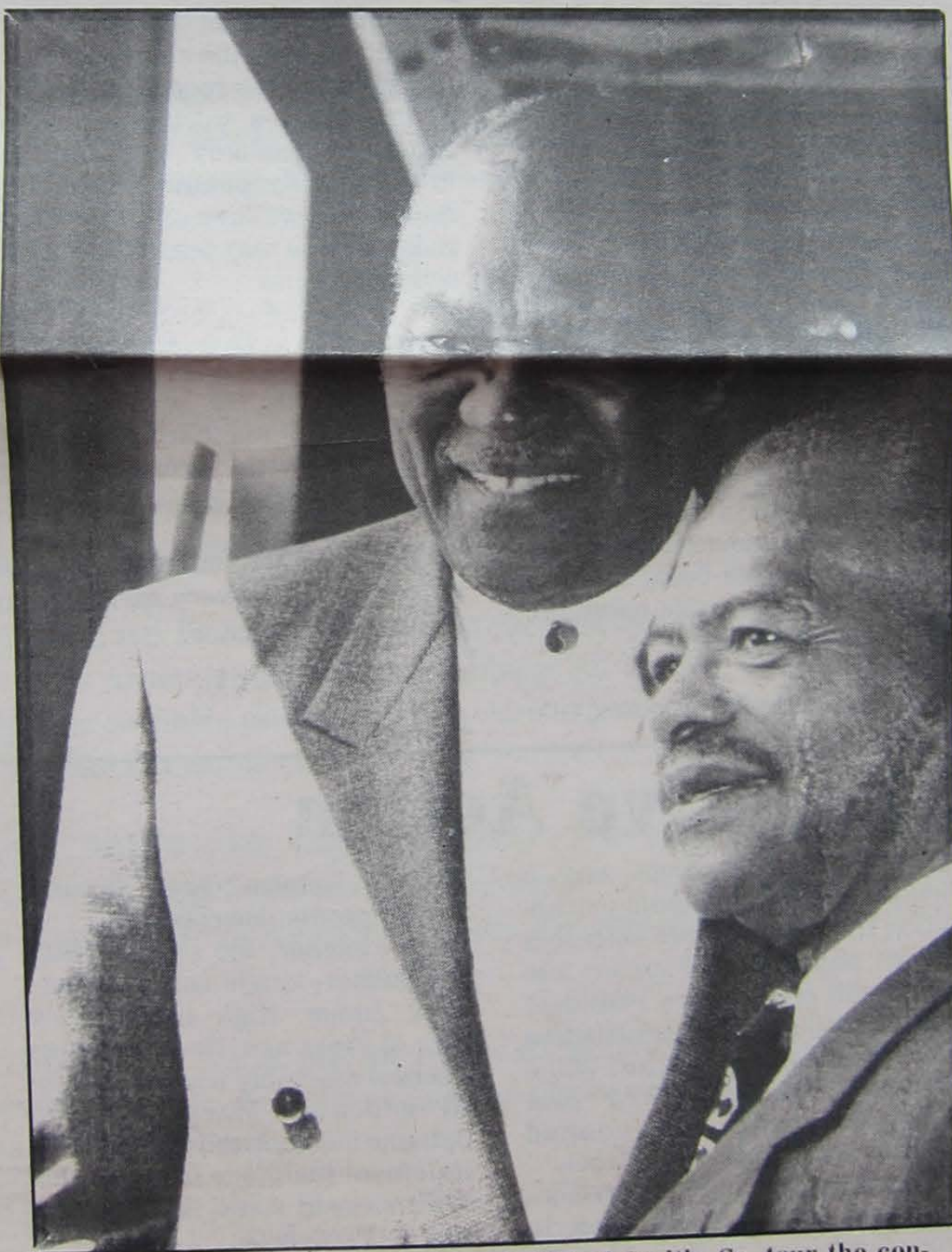
The Environmental Protection Agency's plans to tighten the rules regulating air quality could wind up choking off the dollars earmarked for cities and community development programs.

That is the thesis being advocated by Art Fletcher known as the Father of the Affirmative Action Enforcement movement. He developed the Philadelphia Plan which was credited as the model for opening building trades and construction jobs for minorities and women.

EPA now threatens new rules which could render neighborhood ventures illegal and unbankable.

In a visit to Allen Temple Baptist's remodeled Credit Union in East Oakland Fletcher told Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr., that under the guise of helping inner city residents, EPA now threatens new rules which could render neighborhood ventures illegal and unbankable.

When Dr. Smith showed Fletcher his church's plans to revitalize the east Oakland community, Fletcher warned Smith that innovative NAACP/Home Savings partnership slated to develop strip shopping centers was the type of initiative project that could be in jeopardy if the new EPA regulations are implemented.



Art Fletcher (left) and Rev. Dr. J. Alfred Smith, Sr. tour the construction site of Allen Temple Credit Union in East Oakland.

Fletcher accepted Smith's invitation to worship at Allen Temple today and share his insights with the congregation at the 8 a.m. worship services.

Since the inception of the Com-

munity Reinvestment Act in 1977, banks nationwide have made commitments totalling \$160 billion due to the vigorous protests of corporate applications and other forms of advocacy by church-

ches, civil rights groups and community coalitions.

As part of its acquisition of Security Pacific Bank, Bank of America pledged \$10.8 billion in revitalization commitments over a three year period. And in the competition to acquire Great Western Bank, Washington Mutual, Inc., has committed to direct \$75 billion to projects similar to those planned by the NAACP, Allen Temple and many other minority developments.

Fletcher has put together an impressive coalition which fears the proposed EPA regulations will have a disproportionate economic impact on urban areas causing banks and investors to shy away from commitments to help revitalize the inner cities.

"We're talking jobs and a bridge for those who want to transition from welfare rolls to a decent paycheck"

A consortium of organizations which includes the National Black Chamber of Commerce, Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, Pan-Asian Chamber of Commerce, National Newspaper Publishers Association, National Indian Business Association and the National Conference of Black Mayors met with Treasury Department and Comptroller of Currency officials last week

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Open Letter to the President

June 1997

The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton
President, United States of America
The White House
Washington, D.C.

Mr. President

As an active advocate for urban and small business affairs, former public servant and concerned citizen, I join the more than 220 members of Congress, 75 mayors and 27 governors in opposing the proposed EPA change to ambient air quality standards. The primary basis for my opposition to this proposed change is the potential economic impact on urban reinvestment and revitalization that is currently underway. I urge you to direct EPA administrator Browner to abandon this hasty measure in favor of prudence through proper, objective due diligence.

My discussion and research in the investment community concluded that approximately ten billion dollars worth of urban investment capital are in jeopardy as the result of proposed EPA rules. As a result of the efforts of community groups and other entities interested in urban revitalization, banks and other national financial institutions have put together a multi-billion dollar pool of assets designed to be a revitalization tool for the urban landscape. It is my strong contention that the very viable and effective programs designed to curb urban flight, reform welfare, improve education, and promote strong economies will be stalled as a result of the proposed National Ambient Air Quality Standard change. The unintended victims are numerous.

As a former public policy maker and implementer with many years in the civil rights arena, and 30 years as a supporter of affirmative action enforcement, I have witnessed a broad range of regulations and policies at the federal, state and local levels, some of which have forever changed the face of America's workforce and entrepreneurial ranks. Most were good policies. But I have also witnessed some dismal policy initiatives. The EPA's proposed changes to the air quality standards falls in the latter category. With one careless stroke of the pen, EPA could eradicate the fragile and tenuous progress being made in cities around the nation to move into an era of sustainable economic and environmental development as well as self-sufficiency.

Based on this experience, I am convinced that the proposed rule

change would turn such job-creating activity as small manufacturing concerns, dry cleaners and beauty salons into illegal - and, therefore, un-bankable - enterprises. The result will be a withdrawal of available funding because the uncertainty created by the proposed ambient air quality rules introduce a specter of future government action which would terminate or severely compromise the borrower's ability to repay.

I applaud the diligent efforts of EPA to make our air cleaner and our environment safer. I am the father of five children, and strongly support clean air. However, objective scientists have concluded that the current standards are beginning to prove effective. We should give the existing standards a chance to have full impact before adding costly, more stringent requirements.

The fragile partnerships being formed in the urban centers with local government, churches, activists and banking industry are relying on being able to reasonably predict the future. These rules will introduce so much uncertainty that certain local reform movements underway could experience a still-birth. For example, the success of the welfare reform movement underway around the country will be largely dependent upon the ability of local governments and businesses to take up the slack. The record shows that the small business sector hires 80% of the nation's workforce and is the powerful engine that drives America's economy. More than 90% of those small businesses operate in major metropolitan areas. They will have to provide jobs to adults moving off welfare and to their teenage children who are already at risk, but who may learn through work experience the value and skill of self-sufficiency.

Our leaders must act like men and women of thought, and think like men and women of action. The EPA proposal presently at hand is not consistent with this responsibility. EPA should reaffirm the existing ozone (smog) standard to allow time to assess the impact of current pollution control programs before imposing more stringent requirements. EPA must do this for the sake of the unintended victims.

I thank you for your attention, and respectfully request an opportunity to discuss this very serious matter with you and your staff at your earliest convenience.

Respectfully,

Arthur A. Fletcher

Father of Affirmative Action

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where they sounded the warning if "this clean air bill goes into effect banks will be inclined to reprogram billions of dollars to the suburbs or overseas."

The Fletcher led coalition's arguments have helped reveal divisions even within President Bill Clinton's Cabinet on this matter. Alicia Munnell, a member of the White House Council of Economic Advisors said the EPA understates by "orders of magnitude" the costs of the new regulations to the economy. Fletcher will also present the coalition's concerns to the National Conference of Mayors meeting in San Francisco this week.

"We're talking jobs and a bridge for those who want to transition from the welfare rolls to a decent paychecks" Fletcher told Dr. Smith credit union President Joseph Villa and construction workers Brian Johnson and Willie Packnett as he walked past blighted and abandoned storefronts on East 14th Street.

Alameda County Supervisors Mary King and Scott Haggerty representatives to Bay Area Air Quality Management District Board said that 95% of the counties nationwide are in compliance with the present standards and an increase in the proposed National Ambient Air Quality Standards will "have drastic effect upon our local economy that already is suffering under the impact of

Welfare Reform, base closures and corporate downsizing."

Art Fletcher, the son of a Buffalo Soldier, taught school at Burbank Junior High in Berkeley over 40 years ago. He remembers a school assembly where the famed educator Mary McCloud Bethune mesmerized him with the statement that "one of you in this audience will some day give advice to Presidents." Little did he know at the time it would be him.

Fletcher advised Presidents Nixon, Ford, Reagan and Bush and again seeks to give advice to Clinton this week on how to clear the air and make it possible for welfare recipients to transfer to jobs.

Fletcher will tell Clinton to stop, listen and think before enacting

the proposed EPA regulations.

"Stop the EPA regulations juggernaut," says Fletcher.

"Listen, as the law requires, on how to involve communities," Fletcher said, citing Clinton's Advisory Commission on Air Quality.

"Think of ways to allow existing standards to have their full impact." Fletcher says he will remind Clinton that the EPA's own Scientific Committee has differences of opinion on the regulations.

"What the EPA is proposing is the equivalent of 'trust us' and it will be worked out later."

"Our inner city neighborhoods have been victims of mistrust many times before, and we need more than bureaucratic apologies for urban neglect," Fletcher said.