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Fletcher Makes Political History

SEATTLE (AP) — Arthur Fletcher—former professional football player, shoe shine boy and ice man who calls himself the “product of the ghetto”—Tuesday made political history in Washington’s primary election.

The 6-foot-4, 43-year-old Fletcher, now a city councilman and advisor to presidential candidate Richard M. Nixon, became the first Negro in Washington to win a bid for high state office.

He out-raced hydroplane driver Bill Muncey of Seattle to win the Republican nomination for lieutenant governor. And he said he did it by promoting “action politics for the whites, blacks, Indians and pinks.”

Along the way he also has gained national attention for suggestions to trusting problems of depressed neighborhoods through self-help programs.

He was invited to explain to the Republican National Convention last July how he scraped up \$5,000 to buy stocks to open a neighborhood-owned

gasoline station in Pasco’s Negro neighborhood.

He calls for applying a “foreign aid program to our own depressed neighborhoods, which are nothing but underdeveloped countries within our country.”

This includes, he said Wednesday, “sending low-cost loans and people with skills and knowhow to help them get into the world market.”

Fletcher spent most of his youth in Kansas as the son of an Army enlisted man who

earned \$50 per month.

He believes his ideas for “not promising pie-in-the-sky programs, but rather implementing action plans” are being strongly considered by Nixon.

“This is the new politics,” he said. “Talking to the problem of implementation is what the people in the ghetto want to know.”

Fletcher said he considers himself a “practical militant,” forging the gap between the white and black communities.

In a state where there are fewer than 100,000 Negroes, Fletcher considers his nomination the fruits of “what can be done from a practical point of view.”

He added that “my campaign should free the white community of fears of the Negro.” And he said his was an “individual achievement — not a group achievement — but one which can give other Negroes hope.”

“I want everything that can be done from a practical point of view,” he said. “They used to say that if a Negro got himself qualified, he could enter the mainstream of society. That wasn’t true. I was a college graduate and when I left professional football I returned to Kansas to a job carrying ice.”

His nomination, he said, “speaks well for the system. It has a lot of holes in it, but it proves change can come.”