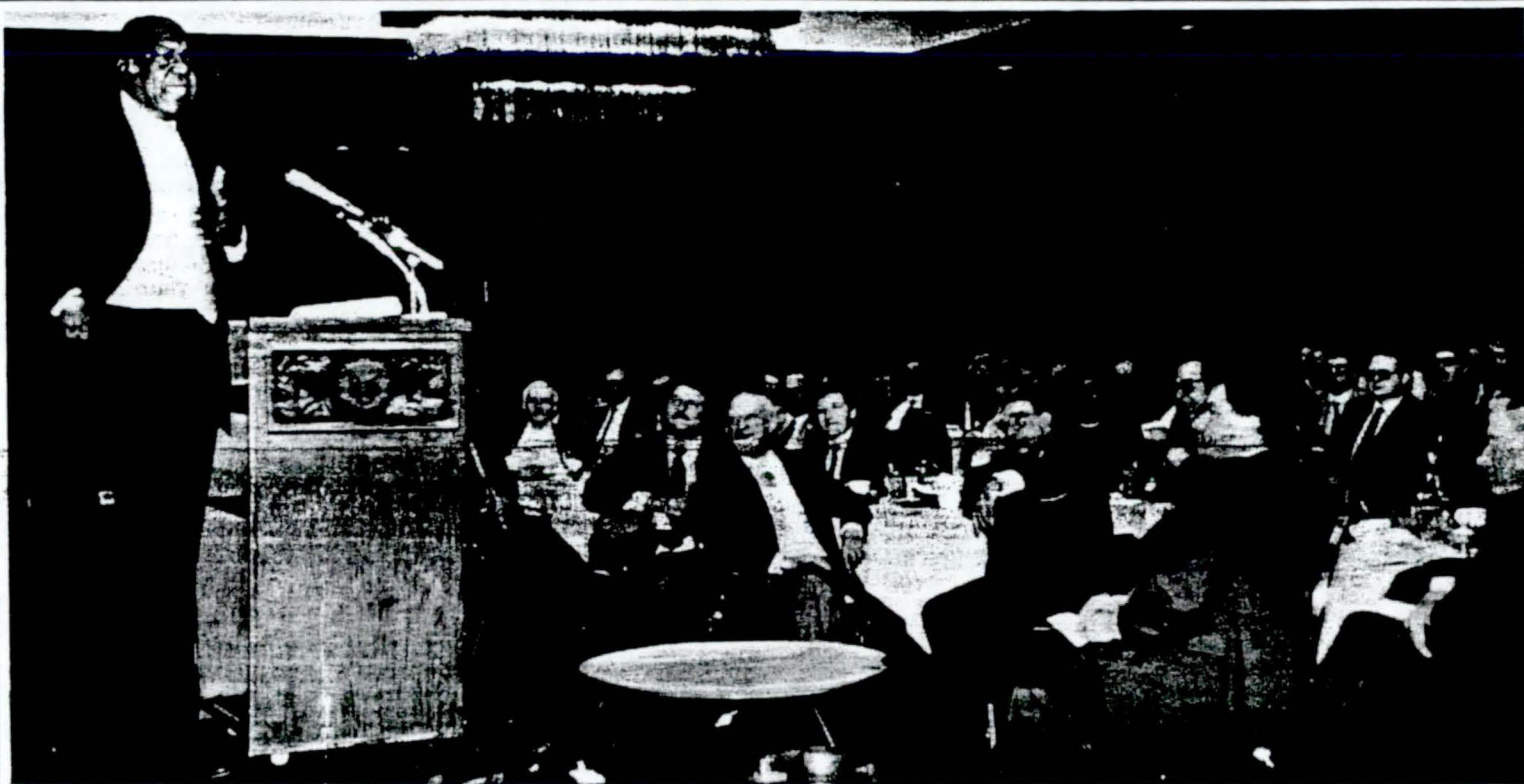


April 5, 1989



Herald/Dorothy Adcock

Art Fletcher, a former Pasco councilman who is now a candidate for chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, speaks Tuesday to 136 people during a Tri-Cities Industrial Development Council meeting in Pasco.

Nation's fate 'in your hands'

By WANDA BRIGGS

Herald staff writer

The nation's fight to remain competitive in the world economy is being lost in the living room.

That was the warning sounded by Art Fletcher to a Tri-City Industrial Development Council luncheon meeting of 136 people in Pasco Tuesday.

He said those who are competing against the United States, especially in the Pacific Rim countries, have strong role models in the home, not on the basketball court or the football field.

The former Pasco city councilman, who says he "took the elevator to the White House" from Pasco in 1969, is President George Bush's choice as the next chairman of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission.

Fletcher cautioned that other nations hope the multi-racial mix of the United States will cause such internal bickering and strife that there will be little time or effort left to compete internationally.

"I just hope that doesn't happen."

Fletcher, who helped form the East Pasco Self-Help Co-Op aimed at building pride and involving blacks in the economy of their own community, also attended Monday night's

Pasco City Council meeting, where he reminisced about his service on that council from 1967 to 1969. He resigned to become assistant secretary of labor in the Nixon Administration.

Fletcher told the Pasco council he expects great emphasis will be placed on trying to revive the economies of small cities, including shifting business opportunities to smaller communities.

He said a task force will be looking into how to get people out of the crowded cities and into growing rural areas.

The Tri-Cities is an ideal place for some

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Fletcher

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business relocation because of the room for growth, its scientific base and its proximity to the Orient, he said.

"You're sitting right in the middle of the flow," said Fletcher.

After his TRIDEC luncheon, Fletcher was squired around Battelle-Northwest, whose parent company, Battelle Memorial Institute, sponsored his visit to the Tri-Cities.

"The nation wasn't ready for what we were trying to do in Pasco until 20 years later," Fletcher told the luncheon meeting Tuesday, which was attended by several people who worked with Fletcher during the 1960s.

"What we were trying to do in Pasco is what Jack Kemp at HUD (the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development) will attempt to do ... and that's to develop neighborhoods with the people who live there," Fletcher said.

What the effort in east Pasco was all about was an "opportunity to participate in the economy," said Fletcher, a great-grandfather who runs Arthur A. Fletcher and Associates, a Washington, D.C., food-service firm that produces 64,000

meals a month.

He praised his employees, most of whom he said have only GED's, the equivalent of a high school diploma, but obtained after dropping out of school.

"But these people aren't wash-outs," he said, reminding his audience that the only barriers to a successful future are self-doubt.

Fletcher says studies show that within the next decade, women and minorities will make up 80 percent of the nation's work force. How the nation's employers adapt to that changing work force "will determine if this country is an also-ran."

He said he intends to take his message to all 435 congressional districts and wants to ask church leaders in each of them to set aside space in church basements as tutoring centers.

"Then I want to tell those people to talk to companies like Battelle to help provide some computers" so people have opportunities to learn.

People and communities have to help themselves, he said.

There is no money in the federal budget to do it, he said. "If (the Tri-Cities) is going to turn around and diversify, it's in your hands," he said.

Fletcher said he will arrange for Bill Wiley, president of Battelle's Pacific Northwest Laboratories at

Hanford "and (Wiley's) friends," to go to Washington, D.C., "and talk to George Bush."

Fletcher said that during his time in the U.S. Department of Labor he implemented regulations requiring employers to show that they had made every effort to hire minorities.

"I consider that my personal legacy in history." Until then, the legislation, he said, didn't define discrimination. "It just said there should be none."

In today's America, the government wants concrete goals for its programs, not the nebulous criteria often cited in the past, he said. Black leaders consequently have set these goals for their communities by the year 2000:

- To represent 10 percent of the nation's wealth; today that number is 3 percent.
- To spend 36 percent of its money with other African-American owned businesses, compared with 7 percent spent today.
- To decrease the poverty rate for African Americans from 31 percent to 13 percent.
- To elect 27,000 black officials, compared with today's 6,600.