

Gantt, Helms race for Senate seat and ad campaign dollars

By WENDY BOUNDS
Staff Writer

N.C. voters following the 1990 U.S. Senate campaign will find two candidates running in opposite directions toward the same election-day goal.

On Nov. 6, Republican incumbent Jesse Helms, often described as an "ultra-conservative," will face Democratic nominee Harvey Gantt, the former mayor of Charlotte and first African-American candidate for the U.S. Senate in N.C. history.

The Helms-Gantt race has received heavy national press coverage, with many commentators describing the race as a battle of Old South (Helms) versus New South (Gantt).

But while recent polls indicate Gantt has a 2 percent lead over Helms, at least 10 percent of N.C. voters remain undecided, and Gantt faces an uphill battle against a three-term incumbent.

Helms' success in the past three U.S. Senate elections has been largely dictated by his ability to tap this state's deep reservoir of traditionalists, said David Lowery, chairman of the political science department at UNC.

His success margin has been relatively slim, however. In the 1984 election, Helms won with 52 percent of the vote. He took 55 percent in 1978, 54 percent in 1972.

These close percentages are not due to a lack of campaign spending by Helms. His expenditures ran close to \$16.5 million as he vied against Jim Hunt in his 1984 race, the most expensive race in Senate history.

Gantt will try to raise somewhere between \$5 million and \$7 million, said Gantt's press secretary, Susan Jetton.

"We are not going to raise (funds) anywhere near Helms," she said.

Helms' high campaign spending is an effort to combat the attention Gantt receives from the media, said Helms' press secretary, Beth Burrus.



"Harvey Gantt gets thousands of dollars of free publicity from the major daily newspapers that are supporting him. We have to raise as much money as possible to answer the biased media," Burrus said.

Gantt has followed what Burrus calls "the liberals' plan" by supporting a variety of increased taxes during his four-year reign as mayor of Charlotte. By contrast, she said, Helms has voted with conservatives on several key issues during the past three years.

Burrus said Gantt supported higher real-estate, payroll, property, sales and gasoline taxes in Charlotte during his two consecutive terms lasting from 1983-1987.

Helms voted against a proposal to limit the testing of space-based antiballistic missiles, supported the confirmation of Robert Bork as Supreme Court justice and is in favor of the death penalty for drug-related murders.

The death penalty will be used as a symbolic issue in this campaign, Lowery said. For Helms, supporting the death penalty will be his way of claiming to be tough on crime.

"It will be less the death penalty per se than what it implies in a larger sense," Lowery said.

Gantt's cross-the-board opposition to the death penalty provoked one of Helms' latest commercials denouncing Gantt for his position on the issue.

Gantt retaliated with a similarly de-

signed commercial specifically condemning Helms' anti-abortion stance in cases of rape and incest.

Asked if Gantt is being forced to plan his commercials on the basis of what Helms is broadcasting, press secretary and director of research at the N.C. Democratic Headquarters, John Humphrey, said this strategy will soon change.

"Helms will have to start chasing Gantt," Humphrey said.

Humphrey also said television advertising was one aspect of the race in which Gantt is matching Helms financially.

Jetton denied this claim, saying Gantt's party had not spent anywhere near the amount Helms had.

Lowery warned voters not to expect a policy-emphasized campaign. "I expect it will be one less addressing of specific political issues than issues of styles."

Gantt will try to paint Helms as a negative, divisive senator, while Helms will attempt to identify Gantt with liberals, communists and homosexuals, Lowery said.

The most recent evidence of this came last week when The (Raleigh) News and Observer ran a front-page article saying Gantt had accused Helms of using racist tactics in his campaign strategy.

While attending an editorial board meeting of The News and Observer, Gantt was asked if he thought Helms was racist. Gantt answered: "I think clearly his record over the last 18 years would suggest that he's got inclinations to play on people's fears on the race issue."

Gantt pointed to Helms' fund-raising letters that have consistently mentioned Gantt's name in connection with other black politicians such as Rev. Jesse Jackson and Democratic National Party chairman Ronald Brown, Jetton said.

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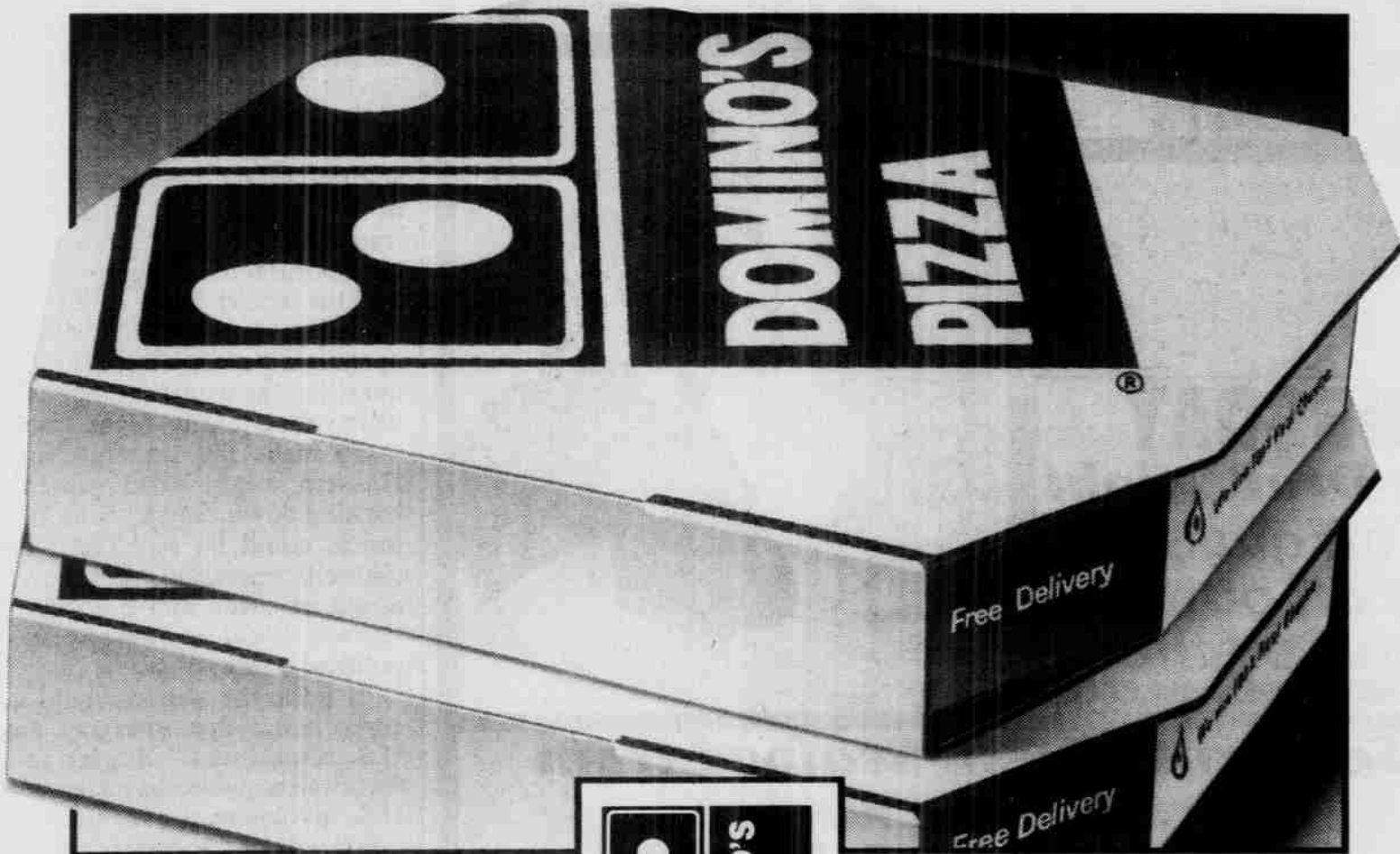
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