Harvey Gantt came to Asheville, Friday, September 13, to an afternoon rally in his honor, to support local Democratic candidates, and to launch the beginning of his campaign in Western North Carolina.

More grey-haired in 1990, but still hale, hearty, and in top form, Gantt easily won the applause and the apparent devotion of the approximately 400 supporters who surrounded him on the stone steps of Asheville High School. Returning often to themes of mutual respect and community responsibility, he also spoke forcefully in support of the gay community, if at times in the strategically-couched language that has evolved to contend with these ‘queer’ political times.

The assembled crowd, from high school students to senior citizens, looked mostly straight and almost exclusively white. In contrast to Gantt rallies of six years ago, one could not fail to note its more conservative tenor - even the bumper stickers seemed more tame: “Are you rich enough to be a Republican?” and “Pro-Choice” stickers were among the most clearly partisan.

And yet, the mostly sedate crowd broke into several bursts of prolonged yelling and hollering when Gantt expressed support of stronger environmental regulations, financial equality for women in the work force, and the “diversity” of our communities.

But, by far, the loudest and longest eruptions of screaming applause were reserved for Gantt’s championing of diversity, and an end to divisive hatemongering based on fear.

Michael Harney and Marty Prairie were among those from the LGBT community who came to support Gantt. Both men are members of

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