

Gantt Looks For 'People Power' To Unseat Helms

CAMDEN, N.C. (AP) - When Harvey Gantt exhorts people to get religion and "show some signs," he doesn't mean they should start speaking in tongues. He's talking about a U.S. Senate race that only "people power" can win.

"People power brought down communism in Eastern Europe, and Gantt's task seems hardly less formidable. He's trying to dislodge Republican Jesse Helms, North Carolina's controversial and well-entrenched three-term senator.

"Be missionaries for me. Get out the vote for me, he says, and "we can demonstrate that people power is stronger than all the money in the world." Helms, an outspoken conservative with a national fund-raising network, has been pulling in campaign contributions at a record-breaking pace. And while his views and style alienate many voters, he has a devoted following and a hard-hitting campaign style that has crushed all his previous opponents, including a sitting governor.

But challenges are a way of life for Gantt, a soft-spoken architect. He is the first black student at Clemson University, the first black mayor of Charlotte, the national Democratic Party's first black Senate nominee in this century. A victory in November would make him the first black southern senator since Reconstruction.

Polls show a dead-even race with few voters undecided. But Gantt exuded calm and confidence on a recent campaign journey that took him from depressed rural pockets in North Carolina's northeast corner to healthy coastal villages on the Outer Banks.

"We really are going to bring Jesse Helms home," he told a racially balanced crowd at a "pig-picking" barbecue on the sweeping lawn of a waterfront home.

Neither Helms' multimillion-dollar campaign war chest nor his aura of invincibility fazes Gantt. "I've never seen him as being a great power. He always seen him as a beneficiary of good luck," he says.

Gantt, 47, carries a traditional Democratic message of populism and government compassion, enlivened with tales of his humble origins and gentle digs at Helms.

Though some fans wear Gantt-for-Senate buttons that say "Making History," Gantt does not present himself as a pioneering standard-bearer for blacks. He'd rather be viewed as the unifying, forward-looking alternative to a man he says has few allies and pushes divisive priorities that are irrelevant to most North Carolinians.

"It's all right to get somebody who'll stand up for what he or she believes in," Gantt tells supporters, repeating the rationale many voters give for choosing Helms. "But you also ought to get somebody who'll stand up for you." Helms' prickly personality is at least part of the reason North Carolina gets a poor return on the tax dollars it sends to Washington, Gantt told a group of courthouse employees.

"I've got to think it has to do with the fact that he's kind of ornery. He doesn't get along with anybody," Gantt said mildly as the air filled with howling chuckles.

Gantt also accuses Helms of "thumbing his nose" at the state's voters by refusing to debate, publicize his schedule or answer questions.

The two candidates stood side by side and talked about their visions, but told an affluent Nags Head gathering, "I could win every time. I'm convinced of that." He added, to laughter, "I think he's kind of convinced that, too." Gantt makes no bones about his vision - a government that ensures jobs, health care, education and a clean environment for its citizens.

"If liberal means caring about people, then I'm a liberal," he told those gathered on the banks of the Pasquotank River for the pig-picking. "I just want to return to our party and its heritage and its great leaders." It is an apt message for that area, which went for Helms in 1984 despite overwhelming Democratic edge in voter registration.

Gantt's unabashed liberalism ultimately may not prove any more popular among moderates than Helms' extreme, often combative conservatism.

Helms has been attracting overflow crowds and devoted converts, from mountaintops to the shore. Gwen Cruickshanks, the Currituck County Democratic chairwoman, said out-of-staters at a national businesswomen's conference in Charlotte bombarded her with solicited checks after Gantt spoke. "That's the galvanizing effect this man has," she said.

Gantt also is galvanizing blacks. "G-A-N-T-T, it really sounds good to me. Harvey, Harvey," hundreds of black students chanted at a rally at Elizabeth City State College.

Gantt, who designed three buildings at the college, was mobbed, begged for autographs. "I'm going to be there for you," promised the would-be senator. "My door is going to be open for you."

Blacks account for only 20 percent of North Carolina's voting-age population. And while he won two mayoral terms in 75-percent-white Charlotte, Gantt's race could handicap him in a contest where every last vote will count.

"I meet lots of people who say 'I've never voted for a black man and I'm not going to now,'" said Gail Singh, a white Gantt supporter who runs a video business on the Outer Banks. "You can't say there's no race war in northeastern North Carolina." Gantt does not concede a "race war," just as he will not concede that Helms' financial advantage translates into a competitive edge. Helms had raised \$6 million as of June compared to Gantt's \$853,000.

The Democrat said his campaign is "on track" toward a goal of raising \$7 million. He called that "more than sufficient to maintain a reasonable amount of television. We don't run as many commercials as Helms. We just buy smarter." Helms is making few appearances, relying almost entirely on TV ads, including scathing attacks on Gantt's support for abortion rights and reductions in defense spending.

Gantt says he watches them and is amused. "I end up laughing," he said. "Then I realize I've got to be serious - the people believe this." Gantt is running spots that attack Helms' record, his anti-abortion position and what he considers the senator's misplaced priorities, such as his crusade against federal funding for obscene art.

Gantt also has warm and fuzzy ads in which he talks about his background and beliefs, supplementing his personal efforts to introduce himself to voters around the state.

He tells his life story often, and nowhere was the tale more poignant than at the Perquimans County Courthouse, built in the slave days of the South.

Gantt, a descendant of slaves, stood at the front of a small, colonial-style courtroom that looks like a setting for the Continental Congress. "I came from a working-class family. My father had an eighth-grade education," he began.

He traced his father's life: two and three jobs at a time, the government that allowed him to move the family from public housing to their own home, the government restoring his dignity with civil rights laws, the government helping him put five children through college.

Of his own fortunes, and the threshold on which he now stands, Gantt said nothing then. But later, at a Nags Head fern bar crowded with the well-heeled, he wore an exuberant grin as he declared: "Only in America."



Some of the young ladies vying for the title of Miss Homecoming for Durham High School. The float was one of many in the Durham High School Homecoming Parade. (Photo By Mayfield)

Third Bensonhurst Racial Murder Trial Opens In New York

NEW YORK (AP) - Although he didn't have a gun or fire any shots, prosecutors say Bensonhurst murder defendant Charles Stressler agitated a white mob by arming them with baseball bats prior to the racial murder of Yusuf Hawkins.

"He turned that band into an armed mob," Assistant Brooklyn District Attorney Douglas Nadjari told the jury Monday in his opening statement. "It was Stressler who whipped up the crowd by providing weapons to them."

However, defense lawyer Jacob B. Evseroff told the state Supreme Court jury his 22-year-old client was innocent of the Aug. 23, 1989, slaying.

"When this happened, Charlie Stressler was not part of the gang. He was away from there," Evseroff argued.

Stressler is one of eight young white men from Brooklyn's Bensonhurst neighborhood charged in the racially motivated slaying of Hawkins. The 16-year-old was surrounded by a gang of bat-wielding whites and fatally shot through the chest when he and three friends, all black, went to the mostly white neighborhood to look at a used car for sale.

Stressler is charged with second-degree murder, first- and second-degree manslaughter, riot, assault, unlawful imprisonment and menacing. He faces 25 years to life in jail, if convicted of murder.

Three other whites have been tried and convicted for their roles in the attack.

Triggerman Joseph Fama is serving 32 and two-thirds years to life in prison after being convicted of second-degree murder and numerous lesser charges. Ringleader Keith Mondello was sentenced to five and one-third years to 16 years; he was acquitted of murder and manslaughter charges but convicted on lesser charges of riot, unlawful imprisonment, discrimination, menacing and criminal possession of a weapon.

John Vento received two and two-thirds to eight years in prison. Jurors convicted him of unlawful imprisonment and menacing, but were unable to reach a verdict on a murder count. He will be re-tried later on murder and manslaughter charges.

The other four defendants are to be tried in the coming months.

The trials are being held before Justice Thaddeus Owens.

Prosecutors maintain that Stressler is guilty of murder for acting in concert with the other members of the mob and showing a callous and depraved indifference toward human life.

Stressler not only distributed a box of bats but knew Fama was carrying a handgun and planned to use it, Nadjari told the panel that will decide the fate of the iron worker and college dropout.

Evseroff portrayed the incident as a "territorial dispute" and said the whites assembled and armed themselves because they believed a gang of outsiders was about to invade their south Brooklyn enclave.

When Stressler saw that Hawkins and his friends were not the anticipated interlopers, he turned to walk away moments before Fama pulled a .32-caliber automatic pistol and fired four shots, two of which struck Hawkins in the chest, Evseroff said.

"He did not act in concert or aid and abet anybody else. He was a witness - he saw it," the lawyer told the jury.

While Stressler says he saw Fama shoot Hawkins, he refused to appear before a grand jury or take the witness stand at any of the previous trials.

Luther Sylvester, an 18-year-old high school student who was with Hawkins when he was slain, told the jury about the shooting, but was unable to identify Stressler.

Supreme Court Hears 'Resegregation' Case

WASHINGTON (AP) - The Supreme Court was urged Tuesday to let Oklahoma City children attend neighborhood schools even though that has brought back racial imbalance. Continued desegregation of public schools in hundreds of other American cities could be at stake as well.

Lawyers for the Bush administration and the Oklahoma City school board said formerly segregated school districts should be allowed to escape or art-ordered integration plans once they achieve racial balance.

But a lawyer for some black parents in Oklahoma City said returning to neighborhood schools in a city where whites and blacks live in different areas had turned back the clock to a time when blacks and whites were required to attend separate schools.

In an animated, hour-long session, all eight justices asked questions.

Solicitor General Kenneth Starr, the administration's top courtroom lawyer, acknowledged that many of Oklahoma City's neighborhoods are predominantly black or white, but said, "The school board has no realistic control over where people choose to live." School board lawyer Ronald Day argued that a federal judge's finding in 1977 that the city's schools were fully integrated - or "unitary" - freed the board from continuing forced busing and other court-ordered remedies, until all city neighborhoods are integrated.

Such residential segregation, Day said, "is a phenomenon over which this school board, indeed no school board, has control." Julius Chambers, the New York City lawyer challenging the neighborhood school plan, told the court, "You should not let the school district in Oklahoma City, or in any other city, reinstate the same assignment practices that caused segregation in the past." At issue is whether once-segregated school districts are under any continuing obligation to maintain racial balance in their schools once a federal court says they have achieved total integration.

But the high court also may have to say for the first time, as a decision expected by July, just what constitutes total integration.

Justices Harry A. Blackmun and Anthony M. Kennedy posed questions about the definition of "unitary" and showed no indication that they agreed with the definitions offered.

Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist and Justices Antonin Scalia and Sandra Day O'Connor grilled Chambers on his assertion that school desegregation should last as long as residential segregation exists.

At one point, O'Connor asked whether Oklahoma City school officials would be required to comply with some kind of desegregation plan "100 years from now" if blacks and whites still lived in predominantly one-race neighborhoods.

Chambers said they would be.

Justice Thurgood Marshall, the court's only black member and the winning lawyer in the 1954 case that outlawed racial segregation in public schools, engaged both Starr and Day in spirited exchanges.

Referring to that landmark case, Marshall asked Day, "What assurance do I have that the school board will continue to honor the Constitution?" And the justice challenged an assertion by Starr by stating, "The poor Afro-American kid is still in the same school, it remains a segregated school."

Before the court's 1954 ruling, Oklahoma City's public schools



WASHINGTON (AP) - President Bush, surrounded by members of Congress and the Vice President, President Bush talks about the budget in the early morning hours of Sept. 30. Back row, l-r are: Sen. Wyche Fowler, D-Ga.; Sen. Pete Domenici, R-N.M.; Sen. James Sasser, D-Tenn. Front row: Speaker of the House Tom Foley, Budget Director Richard Darman, Pres. Bush, White House Chief of Staff John Sununu and Vice President Dan Quayle. (UPI Photo)