

Election for Ford Seat Monday Held Crucial

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., Feb. 16—For the first time since 1910, the Republican Party's hold on Michigan's Fifth Congressional District is in jeopardy.

Contestants for the seat held for 25 years by Gerald R. Ford are Republican state Sen. Robert VanderLaan and Richard F. VanderVeen, a Democrat who lost to Ford in 1958 by nearly 38,000 votes.

VanderVeen has campaigned on the theme that Monday's election is a referendum on President Nixon. He asserts that the country is in a crisis of leadership and of confidence, a crisis in the economy and the energy supply, and a crisis in our constitutional form of government.

Even VanderLaan, who gave up his seat as majority leader in Michigan's Senate to campaign, concedes that 1974 is a year of uncertainty for Republicans.

He has said that for the first time in 25 years the voters, enchanted by Ford since 1948, have been influenced by such issues as Watergate, inflation, unemployment, lack of trust in persons who currently hold political office, and the energy crisis.

VanderVeen, 51, a Harvard law graduate, is president of one of the largest law firms in Grand Rapids. He serves on the board of education and planning commission, and is president of an organization devoted to the river front de-

velopment of Grand Rapids.

VanderVeen ran unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor in the 1960 Democratic primary and for East Grand Rapids mayor in 1971.

He has received considerable support from outside the Democratic Party. Even the supporters here of Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace have endorsed VanderVeen.

Edward Frey, Grand Rapids banker and businessman, whose wealth is reported to be in excess of \$200 million, has donated \$200 to VanderVeen's campaign. The amount is small, but the act is significant. Frey, a long-time Republican, has also contributed \$800 to VanderLaan's campaign.

Democrats have more money to spend in this congressional election than during Ford's tenure. There is more than \$50,000 in the till, and the total may run as high as \$70,000.

VanderVeen's organization has hired John Martilla and Associates, a Boston public relations firm, to supervise the campaign—the bill is running more than \$14,000.

VanderVeen has called for tax reform, improvements in criminal justice and the fight against crime, environmental improvements, federal intervention in the energy crisis and national concern over unemployment.

To fight inflation he has called for a restoration of the balance between corporate profits and the income of wage earners, small businessmen and people in service industries. For the elderly, he has proposed increasing Social Security payments by 15 per cent immediately now and a federally funded job corps.

VanderLaan, 43, a school teacher, got his start in politics at the township level. After serving as township supervisor and member of the Kent County Board of Supervisors, he was elected in 1962 to the state senate. He served as majority leader for 3½ years.

VanderLaan has received less in campaign contributions than his opponent. He is believed to have received about \$35,000 although it is expected that figure will be higher when the final reports are in. The Fifth District Republican

organization recently conducted a drive to add \$10,000 to VanderLaan's campaign.

The Fifth District "belongs" to Ford, and a defeat by VanderLaan would be considered a repudiation of the entire Nixon administration.

VanderLaan has spoken out against Watergate, but has reminded his audiences that the "seeds of Watergate were sowed at home and bloomed in Washington."

Ford made one appearance in Grand Rapids two days after VanderLaan was nominated over three other Republicans in the Jan. 15 primary. He has not been back, although he made what he described as a "modest" contribution to VanderLaan's campaign. The Vice President followed that up with a letter to constituents in the Fifth District urging the election of the state senator.

In his campaign, VanderLaan has emphasized such issues as inflation. He has urged Congress to curb deficit spending and help persons who live on fixed incomes. On the energy crisis, he has proposed more use of coal, new sources of conventional fuel and greater management by government of energy resources.