

Michigan Votes To Fill Ford's Seat

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GRAND RAPID, MICH., Feb. 18—Michigan's Fifth Congressional District, home of Vice President Gerald R. Ford, is deciding today whether its man in Washington will continue to be a Republican.

Contestants for the seat, vacated when Ford accepted the vice presidency under President Richard M. Nixon, are state Sen. Robert VanderLaan, former Republican majority leader of the Michigan Senate, and Democrat Richard F. VanderVeen, prominent Grand Rapids attorney, who in 1958 tried unsuccessfully to unseat Ford.

VanderVeen was beaten badly in that race; Ford picked up 63.7 per cent of the total votes cast.

But that was during the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, one of the most popular Republicans in history. It was also prior to Watergate, national energy shortages, inflation and evidence of criminal acts by prominent national figures.

Observers are predicting the closest election in 25 years. Not since 1910 have Democrats held the office, and VanderVeen, who spent today shaking hands in downtown office buildings, was predicting a "close" election.

VanderLaan made a luncheon appearance in Grand Rapids before leaving for Lansing, the state's capital. Although he has resigned as majority leader, VanderLaan remains a state senator.

VanderVeen has declared the issue to be a "referendum on the President." He has urged in full-page newspaper ads that the country "needs" Jerry Ford as President and that Nixon should resign. He also has accused his opponent of Watergate tactics as a result of a last-minute campaign letter sent out by a suburban man, formerly active in Republican politics.

The letter included endorsements for VanderLaan, three of which were forged, not by VanderLaan but by an overzealous supporter.

Both men carry high educational qualifications for public office. VanderVeen, 51, is a graduate of Harvard Law School and president of one of

Grand Rapid's largest law firms.

VanderLaan is a graduate of Calvin College in Grand Rapids and has his masters degree in political science from the University of Michigan. He taught school on the high school and college level, and began his political career in town and county government. He was elected to his first term in the state Senate in 1962.

VanderLaan has adopted a low-key attitude toward the Nixon issue, saying it should be decided when all the evidence is in. He has called for a new political ethic in the 1970s, and frequently has spoken out against the "evils" of Watergate. VanderLaan, 43, has said he would vote for impeachment of the President if he believes the evidence is sufficient for the Senate to try the President.

For the first time ever, Democrats have spent more money than Republicans in a congressional race in the Fifth District. VanderVeen said he expects the campaign will cost his organization about \$70,000, while VanderLaan's campaign committee expects to spend about \$20,000 less.