

Democrat Wins Ohio House Seat

By Jules Witcover

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The Watergate-plagued Republican Party suffered its third straight 1974 special congressional election defeat yesterday in the traditional GOP stronghold of Cincinnati—a result certain to send panic waves through the ranks of Republican House incumbents.

Democrat Thomas A. Luken, after a hard-hitting campaign urging voters to "send a signal to Washington" that they were fed up with the Nixon administration, beat Willis D. Gradison Jr., a prominent Republican, who had tried desperately to keep the voters' focus off Mr. Nixon and on local issues.

With all 478 precincts reporting in Ohio's First Congressional District, half in the city of Cincinnati and half in the suburbs, the unofficial vote was: Luken 55,171, or 52 per cent; Gradison 51,057, or 48 per cent.

Little more than two hours after the polls closed at 6:30 p.m. EDT, Earl Barnes, Republican chairman of Hamilton County, conceded defeat—only the fourth in 62 years suffered by GOP candidates for this House seat. Barnes said independent voters who usually vote 2 to 1 Republican had swung for Luken and "obviously the Washington thing was the factor in losing the independent vote."

Gradison said Watergate was one of many factors in his loss. Luken said he believed the voters "have expressed their concern about the nature of this administration and our



THOMAS A. LUKEN
... "send a signal"

society." But in his victory statement at his headquarters, made over chants of "Nixon Must Go!" he did not mention Watergate. "The President was an issue," Luken said, "but he wasn't necessarily the primary issue."

The Republican Party nationally had been looking to this traditional GOP bastion as a stopper against a growing Democratic tide, started in a special House election victory in Johnstown, Pa., on Feb. 5 and continued in another for Vice President Gerald R. Ford's old House seat in Grand Rapids, Mich., on Feb. 18. Both seats had been in Re-

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publican hands for the last 25 years.

Ford, campaigning for Gradison in Cincinnati two weeks ago, had called on the local party faithful to "turn the tide and stop this stampede," and the Republican National Committee had sent forces into the district to help Gradison.

Instead, the Democratic groundswell continued, with Luken stepping up his anti-Nixon campaign last Friday in the wake of seven federal indictments of former presidential and campaign aides in the Watergate cover-up.

While stopping short of calling for the President's impeachment, Luken began citing a 1789 declaration of James Madison that a President should be impeached if his appointees were "found guilty of high crimes or misdemeanors." Gradison rejected the argument, contending that if it prevailed "we probably would have impeached just about every President we've ever had."

Luken, in his victory became the second Democrat this year to win a special House election by going hard after Mr. Nixon. Richard F. VanderVeen, the Democrat in Grand Rapids, made his race even more pointedly a referendum on the President. The third Democratic winner, John P. Murtha in Johnstown, soft-pedaled Watergate and barely squeaked through.

The prospect therefore is for more Democrats running against Mr. Nixon rather than on local issues in House races in the fall. Also, the impact at the polls of Watergate and the President's other troubles as seen in these first three 1974 races could seriously color the thinking of nervous Republi-

cans weighing the issue of impeachment.

The turnout yesterday in Ohio, about 50 per cent of all eligible voters, was considered a good one for a special election, especially amid reports of general voter disillusionment with politics. The weather, sunny and balmy in Cincinnati, and the national attention given the race as a barometer of Watergate's impact, were probable contributing factors.

Ford, in his campaign visit to help Gradison, raised the specter of "outsiders" from organized labor moving into Cincinnati from Johnstown and Grand Rapids to aid Luken. Gradison picked up the theme in his late campaigning and television commercials. The AFL-CIO's Committee on Political Education, as in the two earlier races, did conduct a get-out-the-vote drive among union members, but reportedly not so large an effort in Cincinnati.

In the last days, as Luken hit at the President, the state of the economy, and the Watergate indictments, Gradison pushed a school busing issue, a matter before the local school board that Luken said should be left to that board. But it could not save Gradison.

Neither could a last weekend of campaigning in his behalf by former Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson, who resigned over the President's firing of Watergate Special Prosecutor Archibald Cox.

On top of his other woes, Gradison ran into stiff opposition from local anti-abortion forces when he declined to say he would vote for a constitutional amendment to negate the Supreme Court's pro-abortion decision. Luken said he would back the amendment.

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