

Consternation -- at Nixon offer

Knight News Service

CHICAGO — In an extraordinary political struggle, Michigan Republicans are trying to keep President Nixon from coming into the state to campaign next month.

The behind-the-scenes controversy unfolded in back room conferences here this weekend during a meeting of midwestern Republicans.

The White House proposal that Nixon fly to Michigan to campaign with GOP congressional candidate James

Sparling was handcarried to the Chicago meeting by presidential aide Dean Burch.

Burch and Republican National Chairman George Bush called Michigan GOP Chairman William McLaughlin aside here Friday night and told him bluntly that Nixon wanted to campaign in Michigan for Sparling before the April 16 special election to fill the vacant Eighth Congressional District seat.

Afterward, a tight-lipped McLaughlin would only say

the decision would be Sparling's.

But the private reaction of the Michigan party leaders was one of consternation.

McLaughlin and other top Michigan Republicans blame Nixon's scandal-tarred reputation for the party's stunning loss last month of the traditionally Republican Fifth District seat, which had been held by Vice-President Gerald Ford.

Further, party sources said that a new Republican poll in the eighth district

showed that Sparling's chances of defeating Democrat J. Robert Traxler are poor and that Nixon "is the greatest single negative factor" dragging Sparling down.

McLaughlin summoned Detroit pollster Robert Teeter, who took the poll, to the meeting with Bush and Burch in an attempt to convince the White House emissaries that it could be disastrous if Nixon went to Michigan, both for the President and the party. Teeter was the President's official cam-

to campaign

paign pollster in 1972.

Although McLaughlin would not comment, it was apparent that he could not dissuade Burch and Bush from pushing for the Nixon visit.

One Republican source said afterwards it appeared that the two presidential envoys had been flatly ordered by the President to wangle an invitation.

Another angry Michigan Republican pro told McLaughlin: "We ought to give those White House guys our

questionnaires and make them go up and down the streets and see how tough it is out in the real world."

Sparling, a former assistant to James Harvey, who quit the seat to take a federal judgeship, was campaigning in a rural area of his district and could not be reached for comment. But in recent speeches, Sparling has made it clear he did not want Nixon to come anywhere near the race, adding pointedly: "I don't think the President would want to come into the district."