

CLOSE RACE SEEN FOR FORD'S SEAT

Nixon's Status Is an Issue
in Michigan Election Today

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GRAND RAPIDS, Mich., Feb. 17—A special election tomorrow to fill the Congressional seat vacated by Vice President Ford may have developed into a close battle involving President Nixon's standing among orthodox middle Western Republicans.

This long-time bastion of Republican conservatism has not elected a Democrat to Congress in 64 years. Mr. Ford regularly won election here, in Michigan's Fifth District, with 60 per cent of the vote or more.

Now, for the first time since 1910, the Republican hold is seen in danger, largely as a result of the Watergate disclosures. Few believe the district will actually go Democratic. But many believe the election will be close—or at least closer than might have been foreseen last month.

A narrow loss for the Democrats, some analysts reason, would be a warning signal for other Republican candidates in this year's Congressional elections.

Favorite a Month Ago

A month ago, immediately after the party primaries, there was little reason to think that this election would be any different from others here.

The Republican nominee, State Senator Robert Vanderlaan, who is 43 years old, emerged from the primary as an overwhelming favorite. He is popular and highly regarded in his role as the Republican leader of the State Senate; a "high visibility" candidate of immense local appeal. He was thought to be a big winner against any Democrat.

His opponent is Richard Vanderveen, 51, a corporation lawyer who has never been elected to public office and who was once defeated by Mr. Ford.

Soon after last month's primary, Mr. Vanderveen began trying to turn the election into a test vote on whether Mr. Nixon should resign. As a result, he is believed by some political observers here to have pro-

Mr. Vanderveen's stance is as much pro-Gerald Ford as it is anti-Nixon. The Democratic candidate has been emphasizing that if Mr. Nixon resigned, Mr. Ford would become President. Mr. Ford has long been revered in this community.

"Our President must stand beyond the shadow of a doubt," say Mr. Vanderveen's newspaper ads. "Our President must be Gerald Ford."