

NYTimes
Loss of Ford Seat Shakes G.O.P.;
Democrats Predict Sweep in Fall

FEB. 20 1974

By MARJORIE HUNTER

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Feb. 19—The loss of Vice President Ford's former Congressional seat to a Democrat yesterday left Republicans badly shaken today, while Democrats jubilantly predicted landslide victories this fall.

Mr. Ford said he was just a little bit "frightened" by the election outcome in Michigan's Fifth District. George Bush, the Republican National chairman, said he was "concerned." "Watergate killed us," said William McLaughlin, the Republican State Chairman in Michigan.

In the election, Richard F. VanderVeen, the Democrat, defeated Robert VanderLaan, the Republican candidate, by 53,008 votes to 46,159.

Rank-and-file House Re-

publicans were clearly jolted at the loss of what they had thought was a "safe" Republican seat.

For the first time, some of the top Republican leaders conceded that Watergate might indeed be a major factor in this year's elections.

For months, Republican leaders had been discounting suggestions that the Watergate scandals might rub off on their party's Congressional candidates this year.

Just two weeks ago, John P. Murtha, a Democrat, won a still-disputed victory over Harry M. Fox, a Republican, for a vacant House seat in

Continued on Page 16, Column 4

JIM Esposito is General Manager of Spur Products Division of WILLCOX & GIBBS (WG-AMEX)—ADVT.

Continued From Page 1, Col. 4

Western Pennsylvania. But the margin was so narrow—about 200 votes—that it represented no clear-cut indication of voter sentiment.

Furthermore, Mr. Murtha had largely ignored the Watergate issue in that campaign, concentrating instead on economic issues.

But as returns from the Michigan race began coming in last night, Vice President Ford conceded that, "to some extent, it [Watergate] had an impact."

The Vice President had just addressed a gathering of engineers in Chattanooga, when news of the election outcome reached him.

Safe G.O.P. Seat

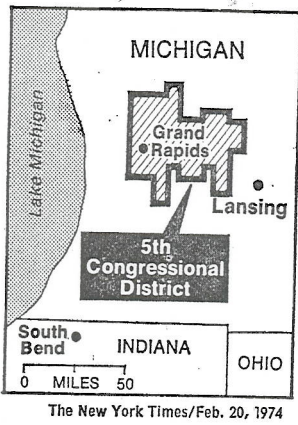
Delaying his departure for more than an hour, the Vice President conferred by telephone with officials in both Washington and Michigan before moving into the dimly lit cabin of the plane—part of the White House fleet—to talk to newsmen.

"Well, it's a beating," he said dejectedly. "I'm very upset."

Earlier in the day, at a news conference in Chattanooga, Mr. Ford had predicted victory for the Republican nominee, Robert VanderLaan, against Richard F. VanderVeen, the Democrat.

It had been a safe Republican seat since 1910, and Mr. Ford has usually won 60 per cent or more of the votes in elections to that seat during the last 25 years.

While saying last night that Watergate had an impact on the election, Mr. Ford made no direct mention of the Watergate scandals in a more formal statement today. He attributed the Democratic victory to "the



temporary turmoil plaguing Michigan's economy," heavy spending by the Democrats, failure of Republicans to turn

out at the polls and "skepticism prevalent about politics today."

Mr. Bush, the Republican National Chairman, also expressed some concern today that Watergate might have had an impact on the election.

Asked if he was still confident that Watergate is irrelevant to the elections, Mr. Bush replied: "Less than I was yesterday. I have to say when this man [the Democrats] injected Watergate and made the President an issue, I have to be concerned."

Mr. Vander Veen had sought to turn the election into a test vote on whether Mr. Nixon resign. One of his newspaper ads had stated: "Our President must stand beyond the shadow of a doubt. Our president must be Gerald Ford."