

Ford's Old District

Nixon View of GOP Loss

Washington

President Nixon reportedly conceded yesterday that Watergate was a factor in the Republican loss of Vice President Gerald Ford's old Michigan district this week but added that by-elections are not necessarily harbingers of general elections.

House minority leader John Rhodes, who relayed the President's comment to newsmen, said the President believes that unemployment and energy shortages in the district also contributed to the GOP defeat.

Mr. Nixon, who was a central issue in the campaign because of Watergate and his handling of energy and economic matters, has refused to make any public comment on the victory of Democrat Richard F. VanderVeen, the first Democrat to win the seat since 1910.

Other Republicans, however, have been busily analyzing and discussing the upset in terms of their own campaigns this year — and in terms of their relations with Mr. Nixon.

Normally after a congressional leadership meeting, Rhodes and Senate minority leader Hugh Scott meet reporters in the White House press room to report on the discussions.

But yesterday deputy press secretary Gerald L. Warren said that the leaders were too busy to appear, suggesting White House reluctance to have the issue discussed further. Warren himself gave a report on the leadership meeting although he had not been present.

Rhodes, who talked with reporters on Capitol Hill, said the President discussed the election briefly with a group of fellow Republicans following the Cabinet Room meeting.

Warren told reporters that the election was not discussed in the more than two hours the leaders spent with Mr. Nixon around the cabinet table.

After the meeting, the President did bring the matter up, Rhodes said, and expressed disappointment at the outcome.

"While he probably did

minutes, Warren said. He would not say what they talked about.

When asked if the Michigan upset would result in new pressure on the President to resign, Rhodes replied: "I would doubt it."

But he said that if the GOP loses the next two special elections — in Ohio and California — Republicans would "certainly have to readdress their whole strategy in November."

In his State of the Union address last month, Mr. Nixon promised to send Congress his own proposals for campaign reform since it refused last year to back him in the creation of a special commission to study the problem.

White House sources said that the President's proposals may be ready within two weeks, and will include the

issues of campaign financing, limitations on spending and on contributions, and campaign practices, including penalties for dirty tricks.

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not use the word 'Watergate,' he implied it by citing the over-all political situation in the country," Rhodes said.

"I believe he also made the point that these special elections are not necessarily harbingers of what will happen in the general election."

Ford said Tuesday night that he would tell the President "Watergate was an issue, but underlying problems were the economy and the energy crisis."

After the meeting, the President and Ford conferred privately for about 40