

Cincinnati Vote Called A Key to GOP's Future

Cincinnati

Only three times in this century — in 1912, 1936 and 1964 — have a conservative voters of Ohio's First Congressional District sent a Democrat to Congress. Tomorrow, in the view of local politicians, there is a good chance they will do so again.

The outcome of the special election here is of intense interest to both national parties, which view it as another index of the effects of Watergate, after Democratic victories in Johnstown, Pa., and Grand Rapids, Mich. If the Democrats win here, it could signal a Democratic sweep in November and increased pressure on President Nixon to resign.

"If we blow this one," said an official of the Republican National Committee in Washington, "I expect to see something approaching panic on Capitol Hill the next day."

The Republicans said that Ohio's Democratic governor, John J. Gilligan, who carried the same district in 1964, "would send Phantom jets and napalm in there if it would help."

In fact, the Republicans have sent in a platoon of technical advisers, headed by Edward Maye, chief of the national committee's political division. Their complacency in the Grand Rapids race has been replaced

by anxiety here.

On the Democratic side, labor is continuing its all-out effort to take seats away from the Republicans. In addition to providing help with phone banks and mailings, the unions have provided money — \$15,050 from 15 labor groups.

The candidates have served together for years on the Cincinnati City Council, and both are former mayors. But they are dissimilar in most respects.

Willis D. Gradison Jr., the Republican, is slight, aristocratic, a stockbroker with

intimate ties to Cincinnati's first family, the Tafts. (His father was the late Senator Robert A. Taft's campaign manager.) Thomas Luken, the Democrat, is bulky, middle class and blunt.

Gradison, walking through this riverfront city and its suburbs four or five hours a day, insists again and again that he is his own man, not Richard Nixon's, and that Luken would be obliged to vote the labor party line.

On Watergate, the 45-year-old Republican candidate, who is a moderate on most issues, has carefully separated himself from Mr. Nixon. The President, Gradison said in an interview this week, "has been secretive and too legalistic."

Luken has not emphasized Watergate as much as the upset victor in the Michigan race on February 18, Richard F. Vanderveen. Against the advice of some of his aides, he is talking about inflation, unemployment and energy.

"He should give the courts the key to the White House. The courts are not going to give state secrets to our enemies."

"Watergate isn't the issue," Luken said. "It's only a part of Nixon's inability to deal with the problems of the country. People aren't afraid of Watergate, they're afraid of gas shortages and prices."

The special election was called to replace Republican William Keating, who quit Congress to become President of the Cincinnati Enquirer. The Enquirer has endorsed Gradison, while the city's other daily, the Cincinnati Post, has editorialized for the election of Luken.

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