

Ohio Loss Shakes Conference

Nervous GOP Governors

By George Murphy
Chronicle Correspondent
Washington

On the whole, to paraphrase W.C. Fields, the Republicans would rather be in Santa Barbara.

And they'd also prefer that Cincinnati did not exist.

That appeared to be the GOP sentiment here yesterday at the opening of the National Governors' Conference.

Vice President Gerald Ford found much solace in the victory of Republican State Senator Robert Lagomarsino in Tuesday's special Congressional election in the 13th (Santa Barbara-Ventura) District.

"I was greatly encouraged by the news that the Republican candidate got 54 per cent of the vote and defeated seven Democrats," Ford told a hotel corridor press conference. (In 1972, the GOP won the district with 70.3 per cent of the vote.)

Ford said he was "disappointed" the Republicans had lost in Ohio's First Congressional District, long a party stronghold.

In his address to the governors earlier in the day, Ford said ruefully:

"I hope you will not take note of the fact that I campaigned recently in Cincinnati but not in California."

He told reporters the Ohio results present "a very serious problem to us as Republicans," but he felt that the general elections in November will not be a disaster for the party.

"In my judgment, the economy is going to be moving forward in the Fall and that should help the Republican candidates," Ford said.

Asked if he felt that GOP candidates should "separate" themselves from President Nixon, the Vice President replied:

"I see no need for any Republican to abandon the President . . . who has done such a good job in so many areas."

On Capitol Hill, California's Ronald Reagan paused briefly before attending a luncheon of Republican Congressional assistants to assess the election results thus:

"I'm sorry we lost in Ohio, of course, but we had a great triumph in California.

"The Democrats think they've got something (in Watergate) to run with as a

single issue, but Bob Lagomarsino made them run on the question of 'who do you want to represent you in Washington' and won."

Republican Dan Evans, of Washington, chairman of the conference, viewed the Ohio results in a manner that would please Dr. Norman Vincent Peale.

"These reverses may well regenerate party strength," he said.

"The trial by fire in '74 could build strength for the party in '76."

But Ohio's Democratic Governor John Gilligan was not all that sanguine about either the Republican chances or Mr. Nixon's future.

Understandably elated over the Cincinnati win, which both parties chose as a testing ground on the Watergate issue, Gilligan said: "Nobody can say they (the

Republicans) were caught with their guard down. They sent in all their big guns.

"I'd guess there are about 20 to 25 Republican Congressmen and a couple of Senators who won last time with 55 to 58 per cent of the vote who are now checking their hole cards.

"I think they might quietly go to the President and suggest he step aside. Personally, I think it would be better for the country and also better for his party."

Earlier in the day, the governors were told that if the states will lose up to \$2 billion in fuel tax revenues this year.

"In less than two months," said the report of the Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, "the general fiscal situation for state governments has radically changed from optimism to great uncertainty."