

Coast Republican Denies Victory

By JON NORDHEIMER

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SANTA BARBARA, Calif., March 6—Robert Lagomarsino, the only Republican winner in four recent special Congressional elections across the nation, cautioned the national party leadership today against interpreting his victory as a vote of confidence in President Nixon.

"I'm sure the Republican National Committee will take heart from my election as a sign that Republicans can still be elected under the right conditions," said Mr. Lagomarsino, who won a majority of votes against a field of seven Democrats in a special election yesterday to fill the seat left vacant in the 13th California Congressional District by the death of Representative Charles M. Teague, a Republican who held the office for 19 years.

"But I would caution them not to interpret it as a vindication of the President," Mr. Lagomarsino said in an interview. "I don't think he won anything in this race."

Mr. Lagomarsino, a State Senator, narrowly escaped being forced into a runoff by carrying 53 per cent of the vote in a district normally considered safe for local Republicans, despite a nearly equal split in registration between the parties.

Actually, his legislative district, where he carried 65 per cent of the vote less than 18 months ago, is identical with the 13th Congressional District, spread over the farmlands and coastal ranges of Santa Barbara and Ventura Counties north of the Los Angeles urban sprawl.

His inability to match his past levels of support inside

the district, despite that fact that his Democratic opponents were for the most part without political experience, could be attributed directly to the issues surrounding the national Administration — Watergate, the fuel shortage and other economic problems, Mr. Lagomarsino explained.

"When I made the decision to make this race, I was fairly confident that I could win handily without the need of a runoff," he continued. "By the time the first returns came in yesterday, I was sweating bullets."

Even in Ventura, where his family has lived for three generations and operates a large wholesale liquor distributorship, the 47-year-old legislator's winning edge fell to a paper-thin 50.4 per cent, in an area where he has always carried by two-to-one majorities.

Meanwhile, local Democrats were frustrated by the failure to stop Mr. Lagomarsino at a time when the death of Mr. Teague and the public concern over national issues presented the party with its best opportunity in a generation to elect a Congressman from the conservative district.

'Could Have Won'

"We could have won here, and we should have won here," asserted Shirley Gitterman, head of the Ventura County Democrats. "All we needed was \$5,000 and 100 more campaign workers, and we could have pulled it off."

She said the Democratic effort, because of the number of candidates who opposed Mr. Lagomarsino, was fragmented, and failed to focus sharply on the national issues that have won Congressional seats for

Was a Confidence Vote for Nixon

Democrats in special elections this year in Ohio, Pennsylvania and Michigan.

"The Democratic National Committee was pouring people and money into the Ohio race, and we didn't receive any assistance, and that could have made the difference here," she said. "I had to run an election with \$1,500 out of my own pocket."

The tight voter turnout reflected a mood of apathy. Many Democrats had no personal reaction to the seven candidates whose names were unfamiliar to most local voters. A large number of Republicans — who have a good record of participa-

tion in local elections — sat out the election and did not vote.

There was even some evidence that the fuel shortage kept voters away from the polls. Balloting between the hours of 7 to 10 A.M., when local gasoline stations were dispensing fuel to long lines of motorists, was abnormally light, a local elections official reported.

"And if anyone went to vote directly from waiting in line one hour for gas," he said, "I feel sorry for the party in power."

Mr. Lagomarsino said he would go to Washington early next week to take the oath of

office and start working on a strategy for re-election. The term he was elected to yesterday runs only to the end of the year. Like every other member of the House of Representatives, he must run for a new two-year term in the November elections.

However, redistricting has created a new Congressional District for Mr. Lagomarsino, which will cut off some of his Republican strength in Ventura County and add about 25,000 registered Democrats, concentrated mostly around the relatively liberal University of California campus near Santa Barbara.



Associated Press

State Senator Robert J. Lagomarsino and his wife, Norma, greeting well-wishers in Ventura, Calif., Tuesday night. Mr. Lagomarsino, a Republican, won seat in House.