

Michigan Candidates Sidestep President

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WXPPost
 'Don't Blame Me,' Message Says

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GOP, From A1

the brochures of the four Republican congressional candidates striving to win their party's nomination in Tuesday's primary.

"The income-tax deductions, the milk donations, the Watergate cover-up, the satchels of money for Nixon, the plumbers and the despicable acts of wiretapping all symbolize the level to which we've fallen," says state Sen. Robert Richardson. His brochure stresses his legislative experience, his personal integrity and his tie with incumbent GOP Governor Milliken.

"All this business about executive privilege and separation of powers doesn't apply," says James Sparling, former assistant to Rep. James Harvey and the supposed front-runner. "Other Presidents have withheld information from Congress, but they're not supposed to do it in the case of a crime."

Sparling's brochure features poses of himself with Harvey, with Senate Minority Whip Robert Griffin and with Ford "when he was House minority leader." He promises to continue serving his constituents "in the Harvey tradition."

In normal times Sparling would seem a shoo-in for his party's nomination in the Michigan 8th, which last sent a Democrat to Congress in the Depression year of 1932. He spent 13 years as Harvey's administrative assistant, and has the blessing of the popular outgoing congressman and the support of key Harvey loyalists throughout the district. Sparling also has spent more money than the other GOP candidates combined.

But Sparling's candidacy is viewed by some organization Republicans here as especially vulnerable to an anti-Nixon Democratic campaign in the April 16 special election.

Last summer Sparling left Harvey briefly to work on the White House congressional liaison staff. He returned as Harvey's top aide soon after the congressman announced he was leaving the House to accept a federal judgeship. This White House service is now seen as a political millstone around Sparling's neck.

The weekly Lapeer County Press, for instance, advised Republican voters to "forget Sparling" in these words: "For a few months last year Sparling was a White House aide. These days this is similar to being Al Capone's bodyguard."

Sparling, who is counting on Lapeer County as one of his strongholds in Tuesday's election, replied to the editorial in words he has used ever since to promote his own disassociation from the White House.

"I've served under two Presidents," Sparling said. "I served two years for Harry Truman (when Sparling was in the Navy from 1946 to 1948) and 10 weeks for Richard Nixon."

It is a measure of the disaffection with Mr. Nixon that Sparling is regarded in Saginaw as the candidate most likely to attract the support of Nixon loyalists. From a White House point of view, there is nothing particularly loyal about him. Discussing the Watergate cover-up, he says that President Nixon should make full disclosure to the House Judiciary Committee and also that he is open-minded about the President's guilt or innocence.

"I take the same position as does House Speaker Carl Albert," Sparling says.

By Lou Cannon

Washington Post Staff Writer

SAGINAW, Mich.—"Dear Mr. President," began Michael Gillman's letter. "It now seems the time for purely partisan defense of the administration and its handling of the Watergate-related matters is at an end. As a candidate for Congress in the special Republican primary in Michigan's 8th District, I am taking this means to urge your complete disclosure of all files, tapes and possible evidence..."

Other Republican candidates are using other means of communication in this politically troubled eastern Michigan district, site of the last congressional special election likely to be held before the House Judiciary Committee votes on the impeachment of President Nixon. All, however, are

conveying the same message to anyone who will listen, a message that says: don't blame me for President Nixon.

"Our candidates are going to have to disassociate as much as possible from the President and take their chances with the hard-core Nixon loyalists," says Saginaw County Republican Chairman Robert D. Grant.

This disassociation is already in evidence at Republican headquarters in Saginaw, where the storefront windows display portrait photos of Lincoln, Eisenhower, Gov. William Milliken and Vice President Gerald R. Ford—but none of Mr. Nixon. Likewise, there are no pictures of Mr. Nixon and no mention of him in the brochures of the four

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Both Sparling and Richardson are cautiously trying to attract voters who are disenchanted with the President without completely giving up on those who are sticking by him.

Accordingly, both candidates oppose presidential resignation while declaring that Mr. Nixon should make full disclosure of the Watergate cover-up to Congress and take the consequences. The emphasis of their statements shifts from audience to audience.

Gillman's act of disassociation has been less delicate.

In his Feb. 20 letter to the President, Gillman said he was making his candidacy "a referendum on your failure to act" in turning over all requested materials to Watergate Special Prosecutor Leon Jaworski. He now extends the same principle to the House Judiciary Committee.

"The legislative accomplishments of your administration are being overlooked, our party is being left in shambles and the two-party system itself is in jeopardy," Gillman's letter declared. "The majority of people are raising sincere questions about government in general and your administration in particular... Americans have always valued openness—yet who can fault them for disbelieving energy shortages or the economic reasons for inflation and unemployment if they believe the truth is not being told them in other matters?"

Gillman is Milliken's appointee to the \$25,200-a-year chairmanship of the state workmen's compensation appeals board. He is the youngest man and only non-attorney ever to serve in the position. Like Sparling, Gillman is a former newspaper reporter. Like Richardson, he has long been active in local government and is a member of his party's moderate-to-liberal wing. Unlike either of the other two candidates, Gillman is a Roman Catholic and a supporter of "right-to-life" proposals he hopes will win him the backing of those who desire more restrictive abortion laws.

In this year of impeachment, inflation and the energy crisis, the abortion issue has become the emotional "X factor" of the special congressional elections. It is blamed by some Republicans with causing the defeat of the GOP candidate in Ohio, and it is likely to become an issue in the Michigan 8th if the nomination is won by Richardson, who voted for a liberalized state abortion law in the state legislature.

To sophisticated Republicans Gillman argues that he is the best potential candidate against Democratic state Sen. Robert Traxler because (unlike Sparling) he can neutralize Watergate and because (unlike Richardson) he can neutralize abortion.

Both Gillman and Traxler, who has only token opposition in the Democratic primary, come from Bay City, a Democratic stronghold that was added to the district by a 1972 reapportionment.

Sparling, Richardson and a minor candidate, Dow Chemical Co. supervisor Otis Nelson, are from Saginaw, an industrialized automotive city of 92,000 with a 45 per cent black population.

Since Bay City has a school tax election on the same day as the Republican primary, Gillman is hoping that a proportionately greater number of his hometown supporters will go to the polls.

The Michigan 8th has voted Republican in congressional elections throughout the century except for a brief period in the depths of the Depression, after a Republican congressman died in office.

That happened in 1931, and the district promptly elected a Democratic bean dealer to office in an election that was a portent of the Republican collapse of 1932. The Democrat was re-elected in 1932, but lost two years later, and the district has remained lopsidedly Republican ever since.

Democrats were marginally optimistic in 1972 because of the addition of Bay City to the district, but it didn't help them much in the general election. Harvey won with a reduced percentage of 59 per cent while Mr. Nixon was carrying the district with 64 per cent of the vote.

However, both political parties have known for months that Harvey was leaving to take a judgeship, and Democrats were hoping to capitalize on unemployment to make a serious fight in the special elections. Then came the stunning Republican defeats in supposedly safe GOP districts in Grand Rapids and Cincinnati.

Richardson and some other Republicans now contend that the Democrats actually should be considered the favorites in the April 16 runoff. The political geography of the 8th, however, suggests that it is still basically a Republican district.

Michigan's lower peninsula is shaped like a mittened hand with the thumb jutting out into Lake Huron and forming Saginaw Bay. The four rural and overwhelmingly Republican counties of the thumb have nearly 40 per cent juncture of the thumb and the mitten, has only 20 per cent, with the remaining 40 per cent coming from Saginaw, 15 miles south.

In the orthodox Republican counties of the thumb the Republican nominee will be relying on the help of Secretary of Agriculture Earl Butz, whom Sparling considers one of the most popular figures in the Nixon administration.

While unemployment hovers around 10 per cent in the General Motors plants of Saginaw, farmers in the thumb are enjoying unprecedented prosperity because of the soaring prices of soybeans and other cash crops.

This mixture of prosperity and economic slump is reflected in the speeches of the Republican candidates. Generally, they are laudatory over administration farm and foreign policies, while backing away on economic issues and Watergate.

The energy crisis in the 8th has been far less serious than in the country as a whole. Both farmers and city dwellers have had plenty of gasoline, and even at the worst of the shortage there were no long gas lines in Saginaw.

All of the candidates, however, encounter the now-familiar decline of confidence in government.

"People no longer have faith in the accountability of elected officials," Sparling said. "The people don't believe Washington. They don't believe Lansing, either."

Like Republicans everywhere, the GOP candidates of the 8th are attempting to turn this liability of limited confidence into an asset by running against the Democratic Congress. All of the candidates join in blaming Congress for inflation. All seem to regard the coming election as an opportunity for voters to support Nixon policies without supporting Mr. Nixon.

"This is the last chance to prevent a veto-proof Democratic Congress which will enact the spending schemes that people rejected," Richardson says in a typical statement.

Unlike Republicans in past special elections, however, the GOP here seems to realize that voters won't focus on the transgressions of the Democratic Congress as long as the party clings to Mr. Nixon. In some respects Saginaw is a logical place for the Republican Party to divorce itself from Mr. Nixon because personal skepticism about his conduct in the Watergate scandal existed here long before the President became a political liability.

Republican County Chairman Grant, a soft-spoken institutional food wholesaler, predicted a year ago that the party would have to disassociate itself from Mr. Nixon because of Watergate. At the time his statement brought critical Republican reaction. Now he is regarded as something of a prophet within his own party.

Under the leadership of Grant and GOP campaign coordinator Jerry Nissley, the Saginaw Republican Party has regularly nominated black candidates for a variety of offices, and its candidates of any color tend to be relentlessly moderate or progressive in philosophy. As a result, Saginaw is one of the few industrialized cities in the United States that regularly votes Republican in both local and federal elections.

"The party's bigger than the individual," Nissley said. "It's going to be around for a long time. We're not going to compromise it."

Saginaw Republicans have a \$24,000 goal out of \$60,000 the GOP is trying to raise in the 8th District for the runoff election. Their main fund-raiser is a \$40-a-couple reception at which the featured speaker is to be Sen. Charles H. Percy of Illinois.

Percy was one of three Republicans—the others were Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. of Tennessee and former Attorney General Elliot L. Richardson—whom Grant asked the Republican National Committee to send into Saginaw. "I wouldn't dare bring in anybody who was closely identified with Nixon at this stage," Grant said.

One person Grant doesn't put in this category is Vice President Ford, who was the featured guest at a \$1,000-a-couple reception in Saginaw last month that helped the state party nearly liquidate a lingering \$450,000 debt left over from the 1970 Lenore Romney campaign.

Beyond the boundaries of the 8th, it sometimes seems as if the Michigan Republican Party is on the verge of breaking with the President.

Ford, the most popular GOP politician in the state, mentions Mr. Nixon less and less in his speeches. Griffin has tried various trial balloons in Detroit newspapers which hint that he will disassociate himself from the President. State Chariman William McLaughlin consistently blames Watergate for the Grand Rapids defeat, and says Congress should "enforce the Constitution."

Even Rep. Edward Hutchinson, the ranking Republican on the House Judiciary Committee, who once said that the country couldn't afford impeachment, has bluntly accused the White House of withholding information on the Watergate cover-up.

Last week Richardson widely quoted Hutchinson's "broad definition" of impeachment, which Richardson said meant that the President could be held in contempt of Congress and properly impeached if he refuses a subpoena from the Judiciary Committee.

Among Saginaw Republicans, the White House answer that the Judiciary Committee is engaged in a "fishing expedition" simply doesn't wash.

"I think our candidate has to take a stand," county chairman Grant said. "To say that Watergate-type offenses have happened before has nothing to do with anything. The people want some answers now, and the President has to acquiesce in the process. If he's guilty, let the chips fall where they may."