

Michigan, GOP Wary of

By Lou Cannon

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Michigan Republicans are apprehensive about a campaign speaking trip next week by President Nixon which they view as a risky gamble by GOP congressional nominee James Sparling with very little risk at all to the White House.

The White House confirmed yesterday that Mr. Nixon will campaign for Sparling in Michigan's 8th District, where Republicans are sharply divided over the presidential appearance.

"It's a big gamble for Sparling, but he's behind anyway, and elections are sometimes won on gambles," one Republican official said. "Nixon will be blamed for the loss whether he comes or not, and he'll be a hero if Sparling wins."

The President will travel to the 8th District next Wednesday and make two or three campaign stops there. The district has a large Catholic population, and virtually no campaigning is planned by either candidate between Wednesday and the April 16 election because of Holy Week activities.

Saginaw County Chairman Robert Grant Jr. has opposed the presidential visit, and Michigan state Chairman William McLaughlin has been lukewarm about it.

The Michigan 8th, embracing industrial Saginaw and Bay City and four rural-suburban counties of eastern Michigan's thumb region, has been safely Republican throughout the century except for three years in the depths of the Depression.

However, Democrats have won three out of four other special congressional elections this year, all of them in supposedly secure Republican districts.

A Market Opinion Research poll taken before Sparling invited Mr. Nixon to campaign for him showed Democratic nominee J. Robert Traxler, 42, a state senator, leading by 7 percentage points.

Until the Nixon visit became an issue Sparling had kept Traxler on the defensive by jabbing away at him for purported legislative absenteeism and for pro-busing votes.

The invitation to the President has already accomplished what Democrats had hoped from the start to do in the campaign—make Mr. Nixon the No. 1 issue.

This was the tactic used by Democrats in the Michigan Democrats in the Michigan 5th District (Grand Rapids), where they won a surprising upset Feb. 18 in the district formerly represented by Vice President Gerald R. Ford.

Michigan Republican Sen. Robert Griffin warned in a fund-raising letter circulated

this week that the GOP also might lose in the 8th District.

"Professional organizers and Democratic money, mostly from the big unions, are pouring into the district in an all-out effort to repeat the Grand Rapids upset," Griffin said.

Traxler concedes that most of his financing is coming from the AFL-CIO and the

United Auto Workers union, but says that the GOP will heavily outspend the Democrats. He said he spent \$54,000 in his relatively uncontested primary, the most money ever spent by a Democratic congressional candidate in the district.

Griffin warned in his letter that Democrats were seeking

Nixon Visit

to turn the election into a "referendum on the White House," a contention that Traxler did not dispute.

"This is a referendum on Nixon's policies, programs and failures," Traxler said. "Senator Griffin's right on that."

In a telegram to Republican National Chairman George

Bush released yesterday morning by the White House, Sparling made a similar point. He said the district's voters "are vitally interested in knowing what can be done to solve the energy crisis, stop inflation and cut taxes, while continuing the President's outstanding role in bringing peace in the world."