

Michigan Bean Farmers in

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In the magnified universe of impeachment politics, the sturdy bean farmers of Michigan's 8th Congressional District stand 10 feet tall. They've assumed an exaggerated role as arbiters of President Nixon's fate.

Or so the political prophets and Congressional weather vanes would have them believe.

If yesterday's sortie by the President through such critical villages as Bad Axe, Deckerville, Snover, Ivanhoe and Elmer results in a Republican victory in a special election April 16, the psychological impact upon the House impeachment inquiry, according to the dopesters, could be decisive.

Nixon is gambling that he can prove he is not an alba-

trous around the necks of GOP candidates.

And the GOP candidate, James Sparling, 45, who worked on the White House staff for 10 weeks last summer, is gambling that the president succeeds.

Nixon's visit was a matter of some controversy among Michigan republicans. Some felt it would be a disaster if he were invited to come to the district. Sparling agreed that the President was "the issue," and thought it would be a good idea if "the issue" appeared to explain himself.

The president's itinerary included arrival at the Tri-City Airport (which serves the predominantly democratic cities of Saginaw Bay City and Midland), a helicopter hop to Bad Axe (pop. 2,000), and a motorcade to Cass City and thence to San-

dusky in what is known as "The Thumb" section of Michigan.

The area, which borders on Saginaw Bay and protrudes into Lake Huron, is rural in character. The bean farmers are prosperous but reportedly turned off on politics. They're mainly Republicans.

The Sparling strategy is to "stir 'em up," and he hoped that the President's carefully mapped route would arouse the potential stay-at-homes.

Sparling's opponent, J. Robert Traxler, 42, a Bay City lawyer and state legislator, has campaigned as much against the Nixon Administration as against the GOP stewardship of the district since the depression years.

Exaggerated Role

With a 10-to-11-per cent jobless rate in the industrial Tri-City region, Traxler hopes for a large turnout next Tuesday. He is said to believe the Watergate scandals have disgusted the GOP majority in the district, and that many Republicans simply will not vote.

A GOP spokesman in Saginaw said on the eve of the President's visit that Sparling and his associates are making the case that on April 17 all the national media will be gone, the headlines will have faded, and "the district will be stuck with a congressman. Is he to be a \$3-year veteran of Washington who knows the problems (Sparling) or an 'ultraliberal' who favors high taxes and school busing (Traxler)?"

The Republicans have at-

tacked Traxler's absentee record in the state legislature, which they claim to be something of a record. Sparling apparently concedes that the President's situation is a substantial factor "because he has said he will vote for impeachment if the evidence warrants it.

The district has been swarming with political reporters from Washington. One television network has six crews working the pre-election story. Newsman from London, West Germany and Denmark have invaded the area, attracted by the suspicion that these by-elections may determine Nixon's future. The Republican loss of Vice President Gerald Ford's congressional seat in the 5th district last February, a jolting upset, has whetted that suspicion.