

Michigan Strains Nixon-GOP Ties

By Robert Shogan

Washington

"I want my party to succeed," President Nixon said at a White House press conference in February. "But more important, I want the presidency to survive."

The Republican defeat Tuesday in a Michigan congressional election added to the mounting evidence that the Nixon presidency is making it increasingly difficult for Republicans to survive in office.

The latest GOP defeat, observers in both parties believe, will add to the pressure on Republican candidates to put considerable distance between themselves and the administration. It may also erode the resistance of Republican congressmen to the idea of impeaching the leader of their own party.

Mr. Nixon knew all this before he ventured into Michigan's Eighth Congressional District to campaign for James Sparling, the losing Republican candidate. His willingness to take that risk reflects the seriousness of his predicament.

White House deputy secretary Gerald L. Warren said the President was "not dismayed or hisheartened" by the results. Warren said: "The President was pleased to take the opportunity to go into the district and discuss the issues, the important issues facing this country."

White House counsellor Dean Burch found a silver lining in the fact that Democratic candidate J. Bob Traxler won by less than three per cent of the vote. The margin was so small, Burch contended, because of the President's appearance on Sparling's behalf.

"Nobody is ever ecstatic in politics about losing," said Burch. "Obviously the name of the game is winning. But I think it's just human nature to feel some-



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what comforted if you can take a very bad situation and have it turn out considerably better."

Others took a less sanguine view of the outcome in Michigan. "I'm sure there's going to be a lot of brave souls who are going to be grabbing their behinds with both hands," said a top campaign strategist for the Republican National National Committee.

"I doubt if anybody else asks him (the President) in to help. And I'm sure there's going to be a lot of candidates drawing a definite line on the ground and saying: 'He's on this side and I'm on the other.'"

Sparling's defeat, said Senator Robert Griffin (Rep-Mich.), whose aides helped staff Sparling's campaign, means "no Republican should assume he has a safe seat any more."

The results in Michigan followed three earlier GOP losses in long time Republican House strongholds which had already painfully strained relations between the President and his party.

"All sitting Republican congressmen are being reserved about political contacts with the President," said Representative Jerry L. Pettis, conservative Republican from Loma Linda, Calif.

But attempts at disassociation inevitably have limited effectiveness. "He's obviously a Republican president," said the political aide to one eastern GOP senator. "And despite everything said about CREEP (Committee for the Re-election of the President) he was elected with the help of the Republican party."

"You can talk about campaigning on the issues," this staffer said, "but there's only one issue in most people's minds. What you really have to do is to hope he goes away."

But that's a slim hope at best, in view of Mr. Nixon's repeated declarations that

he has no intention of resigning.

The outcome in Michigan seemed likely to add to the already substantial impetus for impeachment.

Senator Edmund Muskie (Dem.-Maine) said he hoped the Michigan election would prompt the President to be more cooperative with the House Judiciary Committee that is considering his impeachment. The impeachment issue, Muskie said, is one he would like to "put behind us" as soon as possible.

So would many Republicans. "When the crunch comes," said one GOP Capitol Hill staffer, "a lot of Republicans are going to be very tempted to vote for it and get it over with."