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Nixon Role Tested Today in Mich. Vote

By Edward S. Gilbreth
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—Voters in Michigan's rural 8th congressional district will go to the polls tomorrow to send a message to Washington that will be analyzed from one end of the nation to the other for its bearing on the impeachment inquiry of President Nixon.

It will be the fifth such test since Watergate began decimating the Nixon administration. Democrats won three out of four of the other special elections, all of them in districts, like this one, that have been lopsidedly Republican for generations.

Republican nominee James M. Sparling Jr. and his Demo-

cratic opponent, J. Bob Traxler, agree that tomorrow's results will indeed "send a message."

"And you know the message I mean," says the jowly, 42-year-old Traxler, known locally as "Bingo Bob" for his success as a legislator getting Michigan to legalize that game.

Traxler notes that the vote will take place one day after the deadline for filing federal income tax returns.

"We'll never have a better opportunity to put our mouths where our money is," Traxler says, concluding a televised reminder of the whopping deductions attempted by Mr. Nixon in his personal taxes.

Sandy-haired Sparling, 45, a one-time sports writer for the

Saginaw News, is bombarding the district with election-eve appeals not to send the "wrong message."

Sparling's people recall that a Democrat recently won Vice President Gerald R. Ford's congressional vacancy in the Grand Rapid area. They say the Democrat's first vote in congress favored school busing.

"That wasn't the message the people of Grand Rapids wanted to send," Sparling's TV ads tell voters. "You can send the right message."

Both Sparling and Traxler oppose busing as well as the

U.S. Supreme Court's pro-abortion decision.

"Traxler has sought to make an issue out of the economy, charging that many thousands of workers in the district have lost their jobs. Sparling has campaigned in favor of welfare reform and revenue sharing. He shocked members of his own party by inviting the president into the district to explain Watergate and the economic picture.

Mr. Nixon visited the district last week but avoided all mention of White House problems. He carried the district by nearly 2-1 in 1972.