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**Watergate Is Called Factor
In G.O.P. Loss in Michigan**

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WASHINGTON, April 17 —

Republican and Democratic politicians agreed today that the Watergate scandals had contributed substantially to the Republicans' loss yesterday of Michigan's Eighth Congressional District—a House seat held by Republicans uninterruptedly for 40 years.

The 3,000-vote victory by State Representative J. Bob Traxler, a Democrat, in the staunchly conservative district was widely interpreted as a sign of political weakness on the part of President Nixon.

Poll data and other information indicated that Mr. Nixon's visit to the district last Wednesday probably saved the Republican nominee, James M. Sparling Jr., from a more severe loss. But the President's personal appearance was not enough to counteract the damage done earlier by the Watergate scandals, by his income tax problems and by his Administration's handling of various economic problems.

The White House portrayed Mr. Nixon as neither dismayed nor disheartened by the outcome of the contest, into which the national party had poured

\$55,000—more than it spent in this year's other by-elections combined.

"The President believes that Jim Sparling fought a good fight," said Gerald L. Warren, the deputy Presidential press secretary, "and if a man is willing to run hard and campaign hard on the issues, the President will never turn away an opportunity to help him."

None of the political leaders who discussed the election at a series of briefings for correspondents today were willing to guess precisely how much Watergate had to do with Mr. Sparling's defeat. But political

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analysts were unable to find any other explanation for the turnaround in the district which includes the cities of Bay City and Saginaw and large rural hinterland. In 1970 the Republicans carried it by 40,000 votes; in 1972, by 33,000 votes.

The final tally yesterday was

as follows:

Traxler 59,918 51.4 per cent

Sparling 56,575 48.6 per cent

Both George Bush, the Republican National Chairman, and Dean Burch, a Presidential counselor who deals with political matters, suggested that Mr. Sparling had closed the gap in the final days of the campaign.

Poll figures tended to bear them out, but the changes were so small as to be statistically insignificant and therefore perhaps misleading. Late last month, a Republican poll found Mr. Sparling behind by 9 percentage points; a week ago Sunday a Democratic survey (completed before Mr. Nixon's visit) put the margin at 6 points. The gap turned out to be 3 points.

In the view of the experts, the President's visit excited interest in the campaign and contributed to the turnout—better than 50 per cent of the registered voters, the largest turnout in any of this year's five by-elections. The Democrats won four of them, although all were in previously safe Republican districts.

Mr. Nixon spent most of his campaign day in the rural "Thumb" district, so-called because of its shape on the map. But even there, the Republican vote fell off sharply. Mr. Sparling won Sailac County, for example, by less than 2 to 1; former Representative James Harvey, who resigned to accept a judgeship, took it by 4 to 1 in 1972. Mr. Sparling won Huron County by 3 to 2, Mr. Harvey by 3 to 1.

The election was not a pure referendum on Mr. Nixon and Watergate. Mr. Traxler was aided by a reapportionment that added Democratic Bay County to the district. He carried the county by 10,000 votes, more than his margin of victory.

Aided by Unemployment

In addition, Mr. Traxler was benefited by unemployment in the industrial Bay City-Saginaw corridor. The unemployment rate there is about 12 per cent. And the energy crisis, in the view of local observers, contributed to some degree to an impression of disarray in Washington.

On the other hand, Mr. Sparling scored points with his attacks on Mr. Traxler's poor legislative attendance record and won votes because of his association with Mr. Harvey.

Nonetheless, Peter D. Hart, who polled for the Democrats in Saginaw and also in an earlier contest in Cincinnati, said

that a swing of independents had again proved decisive, with Watergate the major factor in moving that bloc. Of those he found undecided 10 days ago, Mr. Hart said, 65 per cent were

undecided Republicans and many of those went to Mr. Traxler.

A comprehensive poll taken yesterday by The Detroit Free Press, in which 1,506 voters were interviewed as they left the polls, showed that 65 per cent of the respondents had been favorably impressed by Mr. Nixon's visit, but that only 12 per cent said that it had increased their inclination to vote Republican.

Although 14 per cent said that they had been prompted to vote Democratic by the trip, Philip Meyer, who designed the survey, said that the large favorable reaction indicated that the President's visit was probably, on balance, a plus for Mr. Sparling.

Using a standard statistical technique known as multiple regression analysis, Mr. Meyer concluded that the two issues most closely associated with Mr. Traxler's vote were President Nixon's income tax problems and Watergate. More than 80 per cent of those who mentioned those two issues voted for Mr. Traxler.

Combined with the outcome of earlier special elections, the Saginaw results suggest that unless Watergate is passé by November—which appears unlikely, given the impeachment timetable—the Republicans will be in trouble in the general Congressional election.

As Mr. Bush pointed out at breakfast with a group of re-

porters, the presence of incumbents in many of the fall races should cushion the impact for his party. But there may be as many as 40 Republican House seats without incumbents.

Perhaps with that in mind, Senator Robert P. Griffin, a Michigan Republican, told The Associated Press in Bucharest, Rumania, this morning that "no Republican should assume he has a safe seat any more."

In addition, Mr. Starling's loss cannot help Mr. Nixon in his campaign to head off impeachment. While most Capitol Hill observers consider it unlikely that the votes of many members will be solely and directly influenced by purely political considerations, they believe that Mr. Nixon demonstrated electoral weakness will erode whatever loyalty fence-sitting representatives may feel toward him.