

Wisconsin Republicans Candid on Gloomy Election

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By PAUL DELANEY

MADISON, Wis. — Republicans are being unusually candid about their rather dismal prospects in the Nov. 5 election.

For example, when State Senator Thomas E. Petri, the Republican candidate opposing Senator Gaylord Nelson, spoke recently at a Republican dinner in Fond du Lac, he was introduced by State Senator Walter Hollander, who said of Mr. Petri's effort:

"If he doesn't win this time, and nobody expects him to win this time, he'll win next time."

The fear of Watergate has compounded the problems of the Republican party in Wisconsin.

Money is one of the problems. David C. Sullivan, Republican chairman, reported that the party was more than \$300,000 in debt and therefore could not provide the necessary financial assistance to candidates and would have to suffer the consequences.

A Nelson-Lucey Race

On the other hand, a healthy, prosperous and confident Democratic party is favored heavily in several important races. Republicans would consider it a tremendous victory if they could hold on to what they have.

With no formal polls for verification, political observers concur with Mr. Hollander that indeed Senator Nelson has a comfortable lead over Mr. Petri.

The big statewide race is between Senator Nelson and Gov. Patrick J. Lucey—to see who can pile up the biggest majority, some Wisconsin residents joke. Running against the Governor is William D. Dyke, former Mayor of Madison, the Republican, and five minority

party candidates who are given no chance.

Other major fights are in the nine Congressional districts. The five Democrats are considered safe, but the party hopes to pick up two, possibly three Republican seats.

Bert Zien, a wealthy contributor to the Democratic party and chairman of Senator Nelson's campaign, said the Democrats' best chances were in the Third District, where Representative Vernon W. Thomson is challenged by State Representative Alvin Baldus; the Eighth, where Harold V. Froehlich is in a close race against the Rev. Robert Cornell, a Roman Catholic priest, and in the Ninth, where State Senator Robert W. Kasten Jr., the Republican, is facing Lynn F. Adelman, a lawyer, for the seat held by Representative Glenn R. Davis. Mr. Davis, a strong supporter of President Nixon, was defeated in the primary by Mr. Kasten.

'Sweep' Is Foreseen

Democrats also have high hopes in the State Legislature. They already control the Assembly, 62 to 37, and they are pushing hard to gain the Senate, where Republicans have a three-vote margin, 18 to 15.

"It's going to be a Democratic sweep," Mr. Zien said in an interview, reflecting general Democratic confidence.

"The Republicans have come up with no outstanding candidates in the major races. Republicans don't have a chance in the Assembly, and I think we

will end up with a one- or two-seat majority in the Senate," he added.

If the Democrats win control of the Senate, it will be the first time in more than 80 years.

The reasons given for the Democratic surge this year are Watergate, inflation, and discontent among farmers. The farm belt has been traditionally a Republican stronghold here. Mr. Thompson's district is in that region, the southwest corner of the state, which was long considered the most Republican part of Wisconsin.

But last week, in an effort to dramatize their plight, Wiscon-

sin farmers announced plans to kill 1,000 calves.

A Milwaukee Republican gave his assessment:

"All voters are apathetic this year, but Republicans more so than Democrats. Republicans are ashamed of Watergate, confused and turned off. Good Republicans who would have been candidates in normal times were not interested in running this time."

The signs that there is a campaign here are few. Bumper stickers are not abundant. Now and then the political billboard can be seen on the highways.

Prospects

There are almost no radio and TV ads so far.

"And the issues just don't seem to be there," a Milwaukee Republican commented.

Mr. Petri referred to Senator Nelson as "the Senator from Maryland" in accusing him of seldom returning home to Wisconsin. Nevertheless, Mr. Nelson seems to have substantial Republican support.

One issue backfired on the Republicans, a tax relief for businessmen that passed the Legislature last year with Governor Lucey's support. Now the businessmen like the Governor.