

Sandman's Aggressive Defense of Nixon Imperils

By RONALD SULLIVAN
Special to The New York Times

ATLANTIC CITY, Oct. 28—Charles W. Sandman Jr., the Republican Representative who was Richard M. Nixon's most pugnacious apologist, is in serious danger of being unseated in next week's Second Congressional District election because of his defense of the former President.

While other Congressional races will also measure voter reaction to Watergate and the resignation of Mr. Nixon, political observers here expect this to be the most revealing local referendum on those issues. The campaign in the sprawling southern New Jersey district is clearly polarized, involving protagonists who have willingly made Mr. Sandman's defense of the former President the overriding topic.

And to make certain that there is no mistake about it—that no one here forgets—Mr. Sandman, who enjoys a statewide reputation for political combat and for his missionary-like conservatism, has plastered the district with highway billboards that portray him during what he regards as his finest hour: facing a battery of microphones during the House Judiciary Committee's impeachment inquiry.

"When he speaks, the nation listens . . ." the billboard proclaims.

"That's just like Charlie," remarked one of his friends. "It's as if he has gone out of his way to make Nixon a chip on his shoulder and is defying anyone to knock him off."

William J. Hughes, Mr. Sandman's 42-year-old Democratic opponent, agrees. But he contends that Mr. Sandman has made a fatal mistake. "It's no chip, it's an albatross," he says.

'Chose to Grandstand'

Both Mr. Sandman's posters and Mr. Hughes's criticism refer to the Congressman's dogged defense of Mr. Nixon during last July's impeachment proceeding by the House Judiciary Committee. To television viewers nationwide, Mr. Sandman became a familiar figure with his daily attempts, through sarcasm and what he called "strict constructionism," to portray the inquiry as a partisan attack on Mr. Nixon, or his repeated insistence on ironclad proof of wrongdoing by Mr. Nixon.

"Furthermore," Mr. Hughes said in an interview during a campaign stop in Egg Harbor, "Sandman's posture during the impeachment hearing showed the nation what he is really like. Instead of the civility of the other Republicans on the committee, Sandman chose in-

stead to grandstand, to be partisan, to be deceitful."

"When Sandman spoke," Mr. Hughes said, "the nation either laughed or wept and the people were disgusted with what they saw: a sneering, sarcastic, old-line politician who behaved like a carnival barker and one who couldn't possibly see right from wrong, even when it was staring him in the face."

So the overriding issue, according to Mr. Hughes, is whether the voters in this predominantly Republican and rural district have been repelled by Mr. Nixon and by all he represents, and whether they will take their anger out on the four-term incumbent who has defended Mr. Nixon so aggressively. There is only one independent candidate in the Congressional race here, Andrew Wenger, a builder, who is not expected to be a factor in the campaign.

In part the 53-year-old Mr. Sandman agrees with his opponent. "There'll be no votes for Hughes," he says. "All the votes will be either for or against me."

However, there are other interpretations of Mr. Sandman's impeachment role. The one by State Senator James S. Cafiero, a Cape May County Republican, seems to exemplify most of Mr. Sandman's supporters received him.

"Sure, the professorial types and the egg heads would say he looked like a swashbuckling, two-bit politician," Senator Cafiero said. "But to 99 per cent of the people here, Charlie Sandman showed he had guts. He stood up with the best of them, his chest high, and held his own. They like that around here."

Of course the sagging economy and the 8 per cent unemployment rate that it has generated in this area is a paramount concern, as it is everywhere else. And it has made Mr. Sandman uneasy.

In an interview at his Vineland district office, which has been stripped of all pictures of Mr. Nixon, Mr. Sandman conceded, "It's going to be tough on Republicans." He also conceded that it might be tough on him, too.

For one thing, Mr. Sandman lost the gubernatorial election last year to Byrne in the biggest gubernatorial landslide in New Jersey's history. As a consequence, Mr. Sandman is still in debt and he still carries the stigma of losing in that election five of the six counties that make up his district. Furthermore, despite winning re-election here in the 1972 Nixon Presidential landslide by a margin of 66,000 votes over another

candidate, he defeated Mr. Hughes in 1970 by only 4,000 votes.

Since then, the district has been reapportioned and now includes all of Cape May and Atlantic counties, as well as portions of Cumberland, Salem, Burlington and Ocean Counties. It has also seen major Democratic gains, many of them precipitated by local Republican scandals.

But Mr. Sandman is counting on his high political profile and the intrinsically conservative Republican, middle-American and rural character of his constituency. His district is one that many here regard as below the Mason-Dixon Line, even though the line stopped short of New Jersey, at the Delaware River. The district has gone Democratic only once in recent

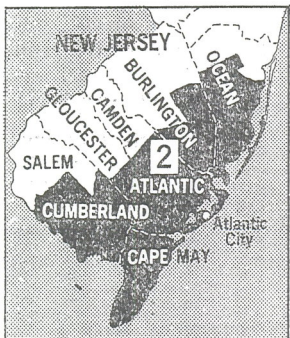
history, during the landslide in 1964 for President Lyndon B. Johnson.

In his campaign, Mr. Sandman emphasizes his seniority and President Ford's warning that big Democratic Congressional gains would create a veto-proof Congress.

"Now who the hell would want that," Mr. Sandman asks, "particularly since anyone disgusted with Congress has to go to be disgusted with the Democrats who control it."

Both candidates support the proposal for casino gambling in the state.

For his part, Mr. Hughes, a former Cape May County assistant prosecutor, has attacked heavy defense spending, corporate special interests that he says have prevailed at the ex-



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His Chances of Re-election

pense of the working man, the Congressional seniority system that Mr. Sandman defends, and a tax structure that he says favors the rich.

Voter Defenes Sandman

But interviews with a number of voters here elicit something else: a deep concern about soaring consumer costs, an apathy about politics that borders on revulsion, and an apparent feeling that no one—Mr. Sandman and Mr. Hughes included—can do anything about it.

For example, Max Moldean, a 64-year-old house painter from Norma in Salem County, complained that the cost of the oils he uses had doubled. But he does not hold Mr. Sandman responsible.

"I'm a Republican, I voted for Nixon, and I was fooled," he

said. "but why should we take that out on Sandman because he got fooled too?"

But another Republican, William Fritz, a 58-year-old engineer in Cumberland County, was bitter. Stopping at a gasoline station in Vineland, Mr. Fritz remarked:

"Look what Nixon did—he's a crook. How much more can we take? Everyone I know is fed up."

Benjamin Bowser, a 30-year-old mechanic at the station, glanced up from the motor he was working on:

"Sandman?" he asked incredulously. "He can't win. He's a Republican, isn't he? He's going to lose because he no good. He's a three-time loser who tried to help coverup for Nixon."



The New York Times

Rep. Charles Sandman Jr.

Republican



Associated Press

William J. Hughes

Democrat