

GOP Champ Romney Sits Out

By TIM RICHARD

Michigan Republicans showed at their national and state conventions this year that George Romney is their admired leader and unchallengeable guide, no matter what other politicians and the news media do to him.

But the irony is that in 1968, for the first time in four elections, the Romney name itself won't be leading the state GOP ticket. He's only in the middle of his four-year term.

THE NAME AT the top of the ticket will be Richard M. Nixon, a man whom the overwhelming Michigan majority didn't support for the presidential nomination.

The second Republican name on Observerland ballots will be the congressional candidate -- Marvin Esch in the 2nd District, Jack Boyle in the 15th, Jack McDonald in the 19th. None was a Nixon man before the national convention.

When it comes to state offices, the ticket will no longer be led by the administrative board in presidential years, and this year there isn't even a Senate candidate to vote on. The State Board of Education candidates will lead that ticket.

And so, after being led by Romney to a comeback in 1962, through a debacle in 1964, and back again in 1966, Michigan Republicans will have to turn to Nixon for ticket strength, or use their own drawing power to help Nixon -- whichever the case may be.

AFTER ROMNEY won a third term and elected much of his ticket in 1966, it looked as if he would be the leading moderate-liberal contender for the 1968 presidential nomination. He entered the race -- then promptly blew it with one ill-worded remark about having been "brainwashed" by the Johnson Administration on his trip to Vietnam. He saw he would never make it and dropped out.

Yet Michigan's GOP stuck with him and made him a favorite son at their spring state convention in Detroit. Few realized it at the time, but that move was to have a great significance later at the national convention.

The significance was this: By itself, the Michigan delegation would have thrown 30 or 32 of its 45 votes to New York's Gov. Nelson Rockefeller for president. But to prevent a first-ballot victory for Nixon, the states with favorite sons tried to stick to their positions in order to subdue whatever Nixon minorities there were in the delegation. In Michigan's case, there were a dozen firm Nixon backers.

It didn't work. Michigan went

No Late Starter

At 10 p.m. Election Night, 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower joined the celebration at Washington's Sheraton-Park Hotel. He declined to watch Adlai Stevenson's concession on television. He hadn't looked at Stevenson during the campaign, he said, and had no intention of star-

44 votes for Romney and four for Nixon (these were actually Ronald Reagan supporters trying to embarrass Romney), but Nixon won on the first ballot.

ON THE FLOOR after that session and in the long ride back to the hotel along steamy Miami Beach that Thursday morning, this reporter found a spirit of resignation among Michigan delegates.

There was good reason, especially among suburban and outstate city Republicans. A private poll had shown them Nixon would run nearly as well as Rockefeller statewide, but would trail in the districts of the five freshmen congressmen whom they and Romney had worked so hard to elect in 1966.

That spirit of resignation turned to outright rebellion by Thursday noon when Nixon, after listening to a lot of advice from the South and little from the Industrial Northeast, picked Maryland's Gov. Spiro Agnew as his running mate.

Romney asked his delegation not to "initiate" any revolt, but he didn't try to stop them from taking part in someone else's drive. They did -- and at the last moment, the name put in nomination against Agnew's turned out to be George Romney.

AGNEW WON BIG, of course, but the unsuccessful revolt had taught Nixon a lesson: He had better pay closer attention to the big northern states.

Consider how Nixon had won. He got some support from 46 of the 53 delegations, which looks good. But when one looks at the big states, the story is different. Nixon didn't get a single delegate vote out of California, most populous state in the union. He got a tiny token out of New York. He picked off only a third of Pennsylvania. He got nowhere with Ohio. He got almost nowhere with Michigan. Only when he reached Illinois did he show any first-ballot delegate strength.

WOULD THE ANGER at the Nixon-Agnew ticket cause Michigan Republicans to drag their feet in November?

Apparently not. Romney likened the anti-Agnew revolt to a festering sore that had been lanced,

and its poison drained out. The wound would heal, he said.

And it began to heal quickly. A few weeks later, the Michigan GOP held its state convention in Grand Rapids to nominate candidates for the State Supreme Court and four education boards.

Who should be the keynote but Spiro Agnew. He was greeted warmly by Romney and everyone. Delegates who hadn't known much about him began looking at his record as a "states responsibility"

man and declaring they liked it.

THERE WAS another factor to boost the Michigan GOP optimism at that fall Grand Rapids convention. For the first time in more than a decade, they were nominating a number of incumbents for re-election to state posts. They were no longer having to battle over which unknown would be put up as a sacrificial lamb to be mowed down by the majority Democrats.

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The selection of a campaign committee came off peacefully. Moreover, in the Aug. 6 primary, moderates had generally improved their position against conservatives in precinct delegate races, most notably in Oakland County.

So even after a number of national convention setbacks, and despite the absence of the Romney name on the ballot, the Michigan Republican Party is far from pessimistic.

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