

# A Bellwether County in Wyoming Is Leaning

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CHEYENNE, Wyo., Nov. 2—

Norman Joyce 3d is a boyish 18-year-old who loads groceries into cars at a Safeway store two blocks from the Wyoming state Capitol. He recently registered, as a Republican, and will vote for President Nixon on Tuesday because he believes the current peace efforts "will get us out of the Vietnam war."

Daniel L. Stokes is a hefty, middle-aged railroad supervisor, a lifelong Democrat who decided to vote for President Nixon after much soul-searching because he considers Senator George McGovern "too radical." He dismisses the corruption charge against the President as unimportant.

"There is corruption on both sides," he said. "Politics is corrupt to start with, isn't it?"

### They Back the Winner

Norman Joyce and Daniel Stokes are only two voters, but their opinions seem to be representative for the majority in a national bellwether area regarding two issues that could alter the Presidential election in the final days of the campaign—Vietnam peace negotiations and charges of political sabotage and corruption against the Nixon White House.

Laramie County, which consists largely of the small city

of Cheyenne and endless miles of prairie grass, has a reputation as a weather-vane in national politics because since 1896 it has always voted for the winner in Presidential elections.

Only two thinly populated rural counties are known to share this bellwether status with Laramie County—Palo Alto County, Iowa, and Crook County, Oregon.

It was not surprising, then, that in every poll taken this year President Nixon has shown an overwhelming lead here. Interviews this week with voters and political leaders to determine how the issues of Vietnam and corruption might be changing the picture indicated more trouble for Senator McGovern.

The apparent peace breakthrough seems to be helping solidify Mr. Nixon's already strong position and the corruption issue is doing only marginal damage to his candidacy.

### Contempt for Politics

This is because the Presidency in matters of war and peace and defense is viewed with almost unquestioning awe and respect while politics is looked upon with contempt, a

## Heavily Toward the President

process in which dirty tricks are to be expected by all participants.

Cheyenne, population 40,000, and the surrounding rural area does not seem like a place to

measure national voter attitudes. But the small-town frontier flavor and the fact that this is the seat of the Republican-controlled state government can be misleading.

John Huisman, the County Clerk, said the county has provided a "constant good cross-section" because it has a mobile population and an economy that is sensitive to national fluctuations. There is a diversification of light industry, as well as chemicals and cattle. Warren Air Force Base, the center for the Minuteman missile, is here. Before that it was the cavalry and the Quartermaster Corps.

### Labor Unions Active

Migrant workers came in with the Union Pacific Railroad, which maintains a division point here on its transcontinental line. A few thousand Mexican-Americans and a few hundred blacks are settled along the tracks. The neighborhoods range from grimy slums to fine homes. There are politically active labor unions.

Democrats outnumber Republicans 13,000 to 11,000, and provide the base for Wyoming to send to Congress men like Representative Teno Rancalio, a Kennedy Democrat. Voters of both parties are adept at ticket splitting. There are 5,000 registered independents and their number is growing.

This year, say the political

leaders, something very strange is occurring in Laramie County, as elsewhere in the nation. Usually at this time in a Presidential year, Cheyenne is alive with partisan political activity. This year there is little talk of politics. There is an absence of bumper stickers, campaign but-

tons and other signs of election interest. Yet despite the apparent apathy, voter registration has taken a great leap forward, up 7,000 since last March. And of 30 persons interviewed at random this week in various sections of the city, all said they would vote Tuesday.

Between Sept. 29 and Oct. 1, the University of Wyoming conducted for the National Public Affairs Center for Television a telephone poll of 500 Laramie

County voters. The result was 54.7 per cent for President Nixon, 16.7 for Senator McGovern and 25 undecided. Two weeks later the same people were called again. Mr. Nixon had 56.5 per cent, Senator McGovern 21.4 and 19.8 were undecided.

The consensus of almost everyone questioned here is that President Nixon is still far ahead. The Republican candidates for House and Senate are running more against Senator McGovern than they are against their Democratic opponents.

### McGovern Aide Baffled

Edwin H. Whitehead, a Cheyenne businessman who is co-chairman of the McGovern campaign here, seems baffled by it all and said only a large turnout of Democrats on Tuesday would turn the tide for Senator McGovern.

But here as elsewhere it is the defecting Democrats who are causing trouble for the Senator. John J. Rooney, a Cheyenne attorney who is former state Democratic chairman, said the party is split as a result of the McGovern nomination in July.

In the little houses and mobile homes south of the Union Pacific tracks, people are pinning for George Wallace. In the last few days, with the election date growing near, they have been making a reluctant choice.

they say, some picking the Republican they never liked, others the Democrat they do not understand and, thus, distrust.

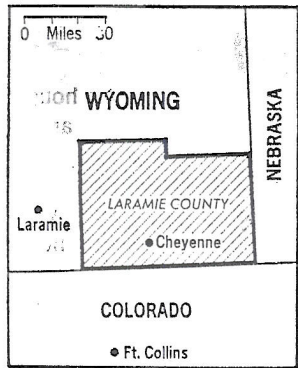
In two days of interviewing in Cheyenne, it was apparent that people are not disinterested. But there is no compelling desire for change. The issues such as Vietnam and the Watergate bugging seem far away and are only dimly viewed.

### No Desire for Change

The only person found to be in a moral outrage was a Republican state official who said he would vote for Senator McGovern because of the stature of the Watergate case, but he confessed to being almost alone.

Steve Lobell, a retired railroad worker, stuffed clothing into a dryer at the Lady Saver Launderette on Central Avenue and watched it spin as he sat and talked and twirled the pointed toe of his boot.

"I'm a Democrat and I prefer George Wallace," he said. "I will vote for McGovern as a lesser of two evils. But the corruption is just politics and while I question the timing on Vietnam, I can't imagine them using it as a political gimmick. Nixon will be re-elected and when he is I predict he will show his old colors, the way he used to be."



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