

In Nixon's Orange County, He Still Rates

By JON NORDHEIMER
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LAGUNA HILLS, Calif. — The courtly man from Michigan confided that although he had always admired Richard M. Nixon, he secretly wished the House Judiciary Committee would vote articles of impeachment against the President.

"I'm still behind the man 100 per cent," he said the other day, betraying mild embarrassment for what he was about to propose, "but to tell the truth an impeachment hearing on television would be so much more interesting than all those summer reruns that we get nowadays."

The prospect of impeach-

This is another in a series of articles exploring the attitudes of President Nixon's supporters in communities around the country.

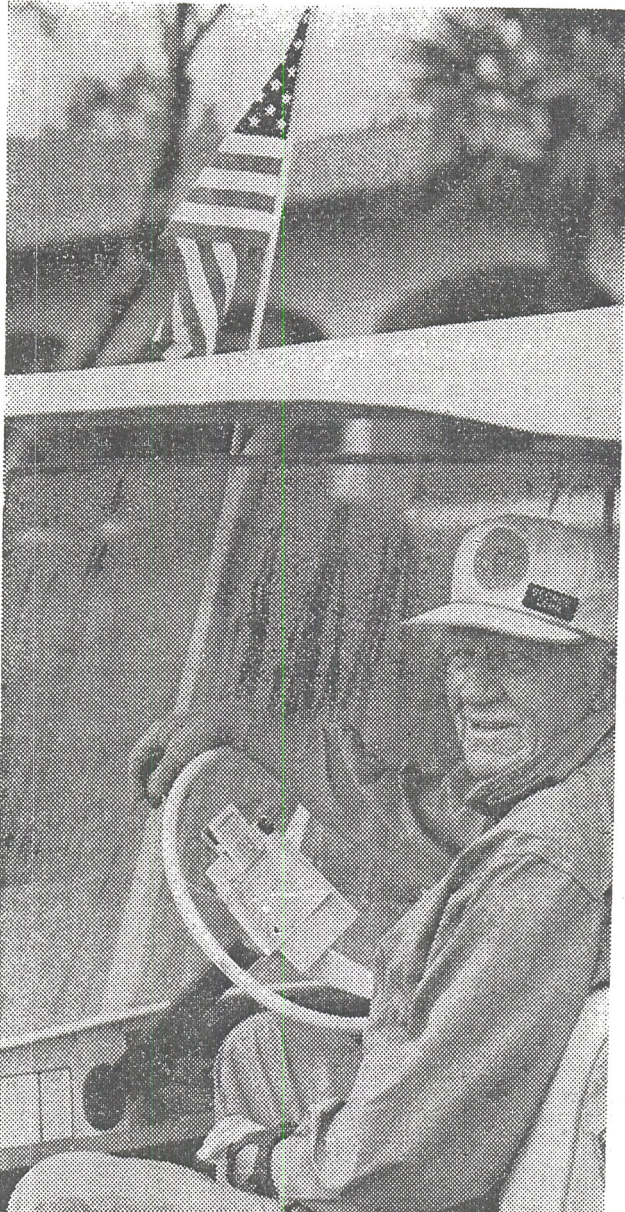
ment, however, does not entertain most of the Michigan man's neighbors at Leisure World, a serene retirement community of 17,000 residents who have come here from all across the nation to settle in the sunshine and security of conservative Orange County.

Instead, there is a special look of anger and exasperation that tightens the face of the average resident here when words like "impeachment . . . Watergate . . . transcript . . . executive privilege" are injected into a conversation.

For this is Richard Nixon country—he was raised in Orange County and, like the residents of Leisure World, he will probably retire here to his home at San Clemente, several miles to the south.

Though most of the Leisure World residents are newcomers to Orange County, they seem comfortable with the area's staunch conservative politics and they represent a major element in the number of Americans who do not want to see the President impeached.

Since no one under the age of 52 is permitted to reside here—creating an average age above 71—and since only two of the 10,000 dwelling units are occupied by blacks, Leisure World is one of the largest concentrations of elderly whites in the country.



The New York Times/Dave Strick

George Lehn, retired executive from Los Angeles, in a golf cart at Leisure World, in Laguna Hills, Calif. "I support the President all the way," he said. "The whole business is just his enemies out to get him."

In the 1972 election, 83 per cent of Leisure World votes were cast for Mr. Nixon—with a number of others going to John Schmitz, the local Congressman who took George C. Wallace's place at the head of the American Independent party ticket.

One of the most outspoken defenders of the President in Leisure World is Joseph Ia-

covo, a retired insurance man from New Jersey. His views are not typical of Leisure World's attitudes—his frequently published letters in local newspapers are considered extreme right-wing—but they are not isolated from the special brand of conservatism that permeates Orange County.

"The news media is helping fan the flames of hatred

for Nixon while concealing his accomplishments," said Mr. Iacovo, who likes to shore up his allegations with quotes from right-wing groups like the Liberty Lobby and the Christian Crusade.

He said the news media were controlled by a conspiracy of "money manipulators" and "international bankers" and "big money changers" who wanted to undermine America and its traditional values.

"After all," she continued, scouring a workboard with a brush and then wiping her hands on a green paisley smock that covered a blue-flowered pants suit, "what was Watergate? A bad mistake," she said, answering her own question, "that's what it was. Some people around the President used some poor judgment. It's always been done in other administrations and they just got caught at it."

She said she had not read the transcripts of the subpoenaed Watergate tapes and for a long time now she has refused to follow the developing story in Washington.

Her views were echoed by a man seated at the next bench in the workshop, Dr. Otis True, retired Veterans Administration radiologist from Kansas.

"It's getting to be a witch hunt," he said, that tight look pulling at the edges of his mouth. "The trouble with this whole thing is that the President is being investigated by enemies who are more interested in getting him out of office than in finding the truth. The press convicted him a long time ago."

Another man who recently wrote to the local Orange County Register, a news paper with very conservative leanings, contended that only a military coup could now save the country from an attempt by the media to destroy the President.

These notions have long had currency in Orange County, but the point worth noting in Leisure World, which attracts middle class-to-affluent whites from every state in the union, is what appears to be a growing distrust of the news media throughout conservative circles. Everywhere individuals talked darkly of "the media's vendetta" against the President and alleged there was a connection between the media and Democratic politicians against Mr. Nixon.

"Watergate is a terrible blot on our country," said a woman washing sculpting tools in the ceramics workshop of Club House No. 2 in Leisure World. But the "blot" was not the fault of the Ad-

High Marks

ministration, she quickly added, but was "the black eye the press and the Democrats are giving us in world opinion."

At first, she refused to give her name. "I'm afraid of repercussions," she asserted. "We've got a lot of militant people in this country who are after straight-thinking Americans like me." Later, she allowed her maiden name, Jean Campbell, to be used.

On the other side of Clubhouse Two, elderly men stood at the humming grindstones and buffer wheels in the lapidary shop and fashioned stones like fire agates, tiger's eye and red jasper into rings and Western shoestring tie chokes.

"People around here don't really give a damn about what's going to happen 10 years from now in Washington because they won't be alive then," remarked one of the workers, Homer Crossley, 74 years old. "But there's hardly anyone here who does not feel like the damn Democrats are ruining this country. They're laying it on Nixon and he has his hands tied and can't do a damn thing about it."

Mr. Crossley, a retired industrial instruments executive from Los Angeles, mentioned that he and others in Leisure World were being hurt by inflation, and the increase in gasoline prices had virtually ended his auto trips outside the eight-mile-long security wall that surrounds the community.

But he did not fault the Nixon Administration for the problems of the economy as much as he castigated the labor unions and those on welfare for "the mess."

Henry Beaudry, the president of the Republican Club in Leisure World, where G.O.P. registration is more than three times higher than that of Democrats, said it was his impression that most Republicans there felt the case against the President had been prejudiced. "Even the lowest citizen in this country is given the right of innocence until he is proven guilty," said Mr. Beaudry, a retired retail food executive from Canton, Ohio. "Let's give the President the benefit of the doubt."

This sentiment was expressed in a number of interviews, but in the same breath many were quick to judge other public officials. The name of Senator Edward M. Kennedy, for example, was frequently mentioned in the most derogatory, accusatory manner by individuals—not Mr. Beaudry—who had just called for fair play for the President.
