

Battleground Dispatches: 9 Days to Go

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Body

NEVADA: Worried About Their Votes

LAS VEGAS -- Long lines and scorching temperatures didn't stop Nevadans from showing up for the first full week of early voting in the state. Afternoon highs in the mid-90s in Las Vegas had some would-be voters sweating it out for two hours in lines that looped through blacktopped parking lots. The good news: Early voting sites are placed within about two miles of one another throughout the Las Vegas Valley, and voters can choose any of the locations in Clark County. Joelle Righetti, 53, a performer in a Las Vegas stage show, found an easy route: She strolled past the winding line at a voting site in the northwest Valley to drop off her mail-in ballot. "It felt safer to bring it here with all the noise we've heard about voting," she said, her face flecked with traces of show makeup.

"They checked my signature, and I appreciate that. That makes me feel better." Nevadans have always shown a predilection for early voting. Many prefer to do it in person, but legislation passed in August also required election officials to send all active voters a mail-in ballot. More than 300,000 Nevadans have already voted by mail, compared with about 79,000 in 2016. Mr. Trump lost Nevada by about 27,000 votes in 2016 and has targeted it as a potential pickup opportunity this year. Democrats are trying to turn out enough of their supporters to defend the state. "Nevada leans blue because of its demography and the Democrats' superior get-out-the-vote operation," David Damore, a professor of political science at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas, wrote in an email. But, he said, Mr. Biden may have trouble finding new converts in a state with a less-educated, more blue-collar work force. "There are fewer white suburban voters who are poised to flee the G.O.P. like in other swing state metros," he said. Many of the voters who chose to wait in lines instead of mailing ballots said they wanted to make sure their votes would be counted amid the confusion over the process this year. Tammy Osborn, 46, rose early to get to a voting site before long lines formed, searching polling places near her home and workplace until she found a short line. "I worried about the legitimacy of my vote being counted," she said. "It has not been like that with any other election. I've always voted in person. I think our system works, but I wanted to make extra sure this year." KIMBERLEY MCGEE

WISCONSIN: Trump's Approach to China Stings G.O.P. County Known for Ginseng

WAUSAU, Wis. -- In China, ginseng is a popular gift prized for its healing powers, and surprisingly enough, Wisconsin-grown ginseng is considered the world's best. In 2016, 590,000 pounds of the root, claimed to boost immunity and ease the effects of chemotherapy, was exported from the United States, most of it to China -- with 98 percent coming from here in Marathon County. But Mr. Trump's trade war with China, along with the coronavirus

pandemic, which has stymied air travel between the countries, has caused ginseng prices to plunge to 1970s levels, far below today's production costs. Many farms, some of them generations old, are rapidly failing, according to Joe Heil, a longtime grower in Edgar, Wis., and a 20-year member of the Ginseng Board of Wisconsin. In Marathon, Wisconsin's largest county by area, voters traditionally lean Republican. Although Barack Obama won Marathon County in 2008, he lost it in 2012, and Mr. Trump enjoyed a sweeping win in 2016. For local Chinese-American ginseng farmers like Ming Tao Jiang of Hatley, the pain of the downturn has been worsened by Mr. Trump's rhetoric blaming China for the virus. Mr. Jiang and his wife, Feng Lu, a physician at Marshfield Clinic, "feel physically threatened for the first time in our lives," he said. He has gotten stares, he said, and heard echoes of Mr. Trump's references to the "Chinese virus" and "kung flu." Mr. Jiang, who holds a Ph.D. in physiology, has worked to placate neighbors by giving away masks and ginseng. In Wausau, home to a large population of Hmong-Americans, residents have reported several racist attacks since the coronavirus outbreak, including being spat on, said Yee Leng Xiong, director of the city's Hmong American Center. The heightened tensions, along with Mr. Trump's immigration policies, have energized local Asian-American voters in this election, Mr. Xiong said, adding, "This is the most active and engaged I've ever seen them." Throughout Wausau, competing Trump and Biden yard signs are evidence that Democrats are winning favor here. Along Highway 29, just outside Edgar, a dazzlingly bright LED billboard flashes "Trump," but seconds later changes to a Biden ad. Trump flags fly over many farm fields, including Mr. Jiang's, but he has no say, because, like many farmers here, he rents the property. Because the Trump administration's trade war hurt local dairy farmers as well, "I'm sure 5 to 10 percent of them are not so sure anymore" about their Republican allegiances, Mr. Jiang said. Mr. Jiang's farm equipment still sports "Yang Gang" stickers in support of the former Democratic presidential candidate Andrew Yang, but he now hopes that Mr. Biden will win, fearing that Mr. Trump's stubbornness could "boil over into war" with China. "It started out as a business dispute," he said. "Now it's more 'who's the bigger guy on the block.' It's chilling." Mr. Heil, on the other hand, hopes Mr. Trump is re-elected and will play hardball with China until that nation backs down and rescinds tariffs as high as 41 percent on ginseng, or until U.S. tariffs on China's exported ginseng match that level. "We've always had to pay a tax and a duty to get ginseng into China -- it's never been a fair playing field for us," he said. "Nobody will survive. There will be no ginseng industry in the U.S. if things don't change soon. It's sad." KAY NOLAN

MINNESOTA: Voting Where Floyd Died

ST. PAUL, Minn. -- David Schultz, a professor at Hamline University here, this past week gave the students in his introduction to American politics class a lecture on the history of voting rights. In an interview outside class, he noted just how many Minnesotans were already exercising those rights -- by Friday, more than 1.1 million early ballots had been accepted, far surpassing 2016 totals. "Democrats have been heavily mobilizing to get out and vote this time," Professor Schultz said. "Republicans show up more on Election Day, but high turnout should bode well for Joe Biden." The divide between those Democrats who are voting early and Republicans who plan to vote on Nov. 3 matches what has been seen in other states. Rates of returned ballots have been particularly high in Hennepin and Ramsey Counties, home to the Democratic-leaning Twin Cities. Jennifer Carnahan, the chairwoman of the Minnesota Republican Party, agreed in an interview that a large number of Republican voters would turn out on Election Day. "For a lot of people it's a matter of tradition," she said. Both parties hope a big turnout can help them in the state, which Hillary Clinton won by a surprisingly slim margin in 2016. "No one is taking anything for granted," said Ken Martin, chairman of the Democratic-Farmer-Labor Party, Minnesota's version of the Democratic Party. Colleen Moriarty, president of the Minneapolis chapter of the League of Women Voters, said she was hoping that younger voters would turn out in high numbers. The organization has made a special point to encourage voting in the city's Eighth and Ninth Wards, which converge at the intersection where George Floyd was pinned beneath a Minneapolis police officer's knee before he died. In the three voting precincts immediately surrounding the site, which many now call the George Floyd memorial, 42 percent of roughly 6,000 registered voters had already cast ballots by Friday -- 20 percentage points higher than the total early turnout rate in 2016. "We are the community that led to the murder of George Floyd, and we want to make sure that everyone has a voice and that those voices are protected," Ms. Moriarty said. "Right away at the George Floyd site, we had voter registration tables and we focused in on areas where there was a lot of civil unrest." MATT FURBER

PENNSYLVANIA: City Residents See Biden Faring Better Than Clinton

PHILADELPHIA -- At 52nd and Market Streets in the heart of West Philadelphia, Black residents offered their predictions on the presidential race in interviews this past week, with several saying that Mr. Biden had made more significant inroads with Black voters and might have better success than Hillary Clinton did here in 2016. Linda Patterson, 20, said she thought there would be a greater turnout among this city's Black voters this year than four years ago. Ms. Patterson, a journalism student, said Mr. Biden had broad support because he is still linked in the minds of many Black voters with President Barack Obama; he accomplished a Democratic wish by choosing Senator Kamala Harris as his running mate; and he is seen as trying to fit in with Black people. "Everyone wants to love Joe Biden because he was Barack Obama's vice president," Ms. Patterson said. She has yet to decide whom to vote for because she doesn't like Ms. Harris, who she says sought harsh prison terms for offenders when Ms. Harris was a prosecutor in California. Jacqueline Pernell, a 72-year-old owner of a pots and pans business, also said Mr. Biden looked set to win more support from Black voters in Philadelphia than Mrs. Clinton did. After four years of Mr. Trump, Black voters are motivated to support his rival, who is more likely to represent their interests, she said. "Biden, he's giving us hope and not lying," said Ms. Pernell, who voted for Mrs. Clinton and plans to vote for Mr. Biden. "I trust more what he's saying than I do Trump." With more than 80 percent of the vote, Mrs. Clinton won Philadelphia handily. But her margin was smaller than Mr. Obama's in 2012, a shift that some analysts attributed to lower turnout in majority-Black areas including West and North Philadelphia. The reduced enthusiasm for Mrs. Clinton in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania's biggest Democratic stronghold, contributed to the state electing a Republican presidential candidate for the first time since 1988 -- albeit by less than one percentage point. If Mr. Trump holds the crucial battleground state this time, it won't be because of reduced turnout in places like West Philadelphia, predicted James Jones, 62, a retiree who was waiting for a bus at the busy intersection. He said he sees more yard signs and hears more talk of supporting Mr. Biden than he did for Mrs. Clinton, and argued that his neighbors are motivated by anger at Mr. Trump's management of the coronavirus pandemic. "He's lied to us, he didn't give us the supplies, he just didn't look out for us," Mr. Jones said. Aaron Bowers, 30, a restaurant manager, said he too sees more Black support for Mr. Biden than for Mrs. Clinton, fueled by opposition to the president. But he doesn't see anger against the incumbent as a good reason to vote for Mr. Biden, and he may not vote at all. "I don't just want to make the decision because I disagree with how somebody is handling the job," he said. "Are we choosing the lesser of two evils? If that's the case, then no, I don't want to vote." JON HURDLE

IOWA: A Race That Makes Two Grown Farmers Cry

SIOUX CITY, Iowa -- Two Iowa farmers, separated by more than a hundred miles but by only a year in age, teared up while talking about the presidential race -- for completely different reasons. A supporter of Mr. Trump, Denny Gergen, a grain, corn and soybean farmer from northwest Iowa, got choked up thinking about how his way of life seemed to be slipping away, and how Mr. Trump seemed like the only politician who really cared. "Trump supports the American farmer," said Mr. Gergen, 69, who recently posted a large sign on his property that says "God Bless America and God Bless the American Farmer" next to signs encouraging passing drivers to vote to re-elect the president. "There are farmers right now -- they're losing so much money, they cannot continue; they're done," Mr. Gergen said, speaking at a motorcycle rally in Sioux City to support Senator Joni Ernst, Republican of Iowa. "I'm just a small family farmer trying to make it." A three-hour drive away, near Iowa's northern border with Minnesota, the other farmer became emotional, too. Raymond Smith, 68, whose family has owned a farm in Buffalo Center for more than 100 years, is supporting Mr. Biden and the Democrats. "We were not very well-off when we were growing up," Mr. Smith said as he showed Ms. Ernst's opponent, the businesswoman Theresa Greenfield, around his farm. "But because of the Democratic programs, I was able to go to college. I get choked up when I think about how somebody else put their money up there, just to help me get started. And now I feel it's my responsibility to pay whatever I can." Mr. Smith said he likes and respects his neighbors who support Mr. Trump in his town of fewer than 900 people. "I have a lot of people that don't agree with me in the neighborhood, but that's never stopped me in the past," he said. Mr. Trump won Iowa by a comfortable margin four years ago, but Mr. Biden had a narrow lead in the state in a New York Times/Siena College poll released on Wednesday. A perennial battleground state where voters are known for their political independence, Iowa, whose population is 90 percent white, has voted for the winner of the presidential race in six out of the past seven elections, including for Mr. Trump, Barack Obama twice and George W. Bush's re-election. Steven Peterson, 59, a Democrat who owns a greenhouse in Lake Mills, said he was supporting Mr. Biden in part because he was concerned about the future of the federal courts should Mr. Trump win a second term. "They've loaded up the courts," Mr. Peterson said, referring to the Republicans and the

Senate majority leader, Mitch McConnell of Kentucky. "Not only the Supreme Court, but all the other courts. When President Obama was in office, basically, McConnell made sure we didn't get any judges in anywhere. He blocked everything out. And then the next Republican president comes in and he gets 300 judges." Mr. Trump's nominee to the Supreme Court, Judge Amy Coney Barrett, is expected to be confirmed by the Senate on Monday. LUKE BROADWATER

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/10/24/pageoneplus/25rex3.html>

Graphic

PHOTOS: Ming Tao Jiang with harvested ginseng on Monday. He said he felt threatened by the president's tiff with China.

Ginseng is prized in Asia for its healing powers. Most of the crop in the county is exported to China. (PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAUREN JUSTICE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

Members of a drum squad listened as former President Barack Obama campaigned on behalf of Joseph R. Biden (PHOTOGRAPHS BY LAUREN JUSTICE FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES)

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