

TOPICAL

## How New Jersey connections could shape Donald Trump's presidency

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President-elect Donald Trump and his wife Melania Trump arrive at Andrews Air Force Base, Md., Thursday, Jan. 19, 2017, ahead of Friday's inauguration. (AP Photo/Evan Vucci)



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As President-elect Donald J. Trump prepares to take office Friday, a team of Garden State-connected people will help shape his administration and policies.

The state hasn't had this many connections to the country's highest office since former Gov. Woodrow Wilson was sworn in as the 28th president in 1913.

But under Trump, the Jersey connections are so strong, it's possible that age-old debate — is it Taylor Ham or pork roll? — may actually take place in the White House.

Holy Spirit High School grad Don McGahn will serve as Trump's chief White House lawyer. St. Joseph High School graduate Kellyanne Conway will serve as senior counselor to the president.

Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort and Tropicana Atlantic City owner Carl Icahn will serve as an unpaid special adviser. Trump's son-in-law and developer Jared Kushner, who owns property in Atlantic City and Monmouth County, will serve as senior adviser to Trump.

"This is a good thing for the state," said Sharon Schulman, executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy. "It gives attention to the state in a positive way."

Even Gov. Chris Christie served as a surrogate for Trump during the general election in November. And Christie's former deputy staff, Bill Stepien, was hired as Trump's White House political director.

Trump has deep roots in the state. He previously owned three casinos in Atlantic City and still owns three private golf courses. Some think that Trump National Golf Club in Bedminster could replace Camp David as his one of his presidential retreats.

Trump National Golf Club served as a retreat when he wanted to escape Trump Tower while interviewing people for cabinet posts last month.

"Where is his favorite golf course?" joked Matthew Hale, associate professor of political science and public affairs at Seton Hall University. "I think that there is a couple of ways of looking at it. Obviously he has a history in this state with golf courses and casinos, and we haven't had this proximity to the president in a very long time."

Schulman believes Trump will listen to his New Jersey-based advisers.

"I think that his advisers could be an important conduit for the state," Schulman said.

But Hale doesn't think the state's connection to Trump's inner circle will lead to any special treatment. During the November presidential election, Democratic challenger Hillary Clinton garnered 55 percent of the vote in New Jersey, compared with Trump's 41 percent.

"We are a really blue state that is getting bluer," Hale said, "while both our senators are lining up to be the chief needle in Trump's side during his tenure. We also don't have any cabinet post or senators that are going to carry Trump's agenda. Those things will limit the impact on the state."

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