

[https://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/politics/atlantic-city-native-don-mcgahn-gives-glimpse-into-white-house/article\\_57dcdd98-e5f8-574e-895a-50591141c4bc.html](https://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/politics/atlantic-city-native-don-mcgahn-gives-glimpse-into-white-house/article_57dcdd98-e5f8-574e-895a-50591141c4bc.html)

## Atlantic City native Don McGahn gives glimpse into White House counsel role

MICHELLE BRUNETTI POST Staff Writer

Jan 23, 2020



Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a “Conversation McGahn”, at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

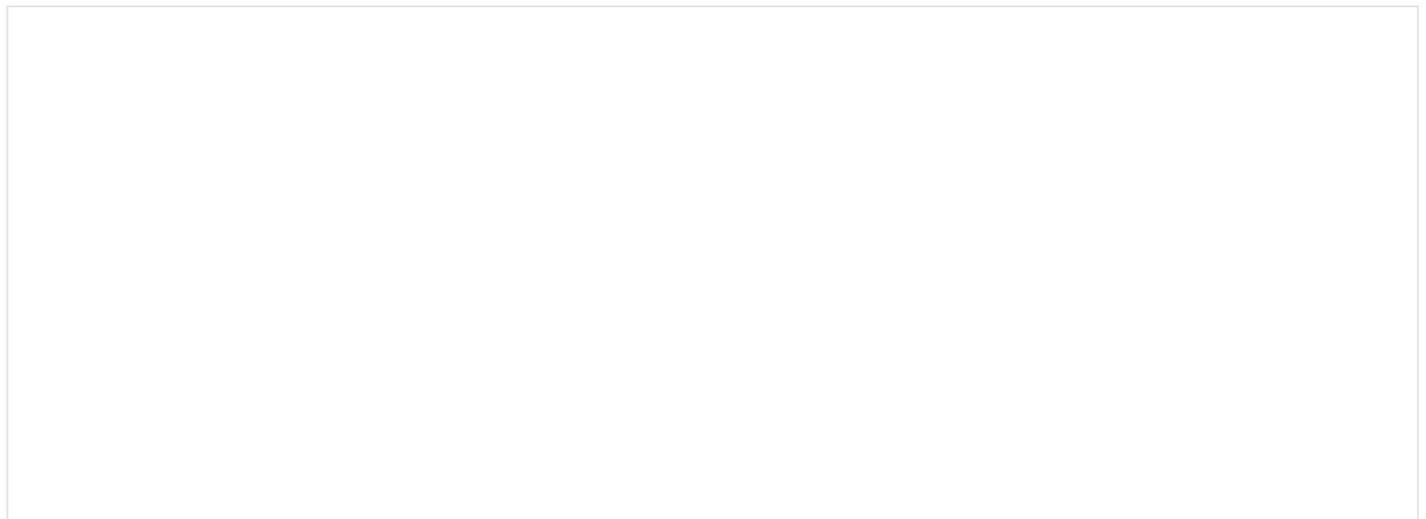
VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---

GALLOWAY TOWNSHIP — As former White House counsel to President Donald Trump, Atlantic City native Don McGahn helped reshape the nation's federal judiciary and remains in the middle of legal wranglings over Trump's impeachment.

McGahn spoke at an event Thursday at the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University, answering questions about how he grew up in a prominent Democratic family and became a conservative Republican; what the job of White House counsel entails, and his family's long association with Trump.

The impeachment issue, however, was off limits, as he is awaiting an appeals court decision about whether it will uphold a judge's order forcing McGahn to comply with a House subpoena to testify in Congress' impeachment probe.





Limited number of tickets available for McGahn at Stockton

Asking the questions was McGahn's friend William J. Hughes Jr., son of the Democratic former congressman and ambassador for whom the Hughes Center is named.

"It's timely that you're here. Couldn't come at a better time," Hughes started by saying. "You have some on one side saying actions were necessary — almost required — and on the other side saying actions aren't justified — it was rash and an institution is in jeopardy. I ask you about ... Harry and Meghan?"

"That's a tough one," McGahn said, playing along. "Not as tough as where I thought you were going. I heard she called the queen and said she thought it was a perfect call."

It was the first of many jokes between the two, and got the biggest laugh of the night.

"I enjoy liberty. I don't like the government," McGahn said when asked why he became a Republican after growing up in a Democratic family.

McGahn's uncle Joe McGahn defeated Hap Farley for state Senate, ending the legendary Republican political machine that dated to Nucky Johnson, Hughes said.

“(Uncle) Pat was the one behind the guy, so to speak,” McGahn said of Patrick “Paddy” McGahn, the Democratic powerbroker and attorney for Trump when he was in the casino business. Paddy McGahn died in 2000.

“I came of age later in the '80s under Ronald Reagan — he appealed to me,” McGahn said. “I didn't see myself as particularly politically active. My parents were not part of the political circus. In a weird way, I disappointed them by going into politics ultimately.”

Trump Adviser Don McGahn to speak at invitation-only Stockton event

Paddy's Saloon in the former Trump Taj Mahal Casino Resort was named after Paddy McGahn. But he had a falling out with Trump over nonpayment of fees and sued him. Trump sued back, alleging Paddy had overcharged him.

“Did any of that register in the back of your mind” when Trump offered McGahn a job first as his campaign's legal counsel, then as White House counsel, Hughes asked.

“I get along with him. ... I got paid,” McGahn said. “There's three sides to every story.”

McGahn said the 1989 helicopter crash that killed several of Trump's top managers brought a new management team in, and the new managers clashed with his uncle.

He said Trump didn't even realize McGahn's family connection until after he'd been working for him and a Washington Post reporter wrote about it.

“Apparently it was news to everybody. He was praiseworthy of my uncle. Said he was a tough Marine,” McGahn said.

The audience was mostly older people, with lots of local politicians like state Sen. Chris Brown, R-Atlantic, in attendance. Students were scattered through the crowd.

Stockton students Michael Jedlowski, of Brick Township; and Anthony Farfalla, of Toms River, are members of the student Republican group on campus. They said they wished McGahn could have talked about impeachment but enjoyed hearing about his work in general as White House counsel.

South Jersey native McGahn named 72 times in Mueller report

There were no protesters, although the school was ready with signs instructing them to stay outside the Performing Arts Center.

McGahn got into political work through practicing law at Squire Patton Boggs in Washington, D.C., he said, where his mentor was Ben Ginsberg, an expert in election law.

As White House counsel, McGahn said his job was to be the institutional conscience in advising the president about what he can and cannot do legally.

He also helped staff with their legal obligations, wrote executive orders, oversaw contracts and created lists of potential new federal and Supreme Court judges, he said.

One day he went from overseeing a contract for the annual Easter egg roll at the White House to handling an international issue in the Situation Room.

“You go from worrying about eggs to the most sensitive national security issues in the blink of the eye,” McGahn said.

As for his influence on federal judge appointments, Hughes called McGahn “the architect of the changing face of the federal judiciary,” saying he oversaw the appointment of more than 107 federal judges, raising the percentage of conservative judges to 51% from about 40%.

“Not to mention two very significant appointments to the Supreme Court, Neil Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh,” Hughes said.

“The president makes appointments, I was fortunate he put a tremendous amount of trust in me,” McGahn said. “What the president was looking for was folks who wanted to read the law as it was passed — not as they wanted.”

McGahn is a graduate of Holy Spirit High School in Absecon, and his mother, Noreen, a former school nurse in Brigantine, still lives in Brigantine.

He has also worked as chief counsel for the National Republican Congressional Committee and served on the Federal Election Commission.



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a “Conversation with Don McGahn”, at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press



Audience listens to Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaking with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a “Conversation with Don McGahn”, at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Former White House Counsel Don McGahn talks about his time in the Trump administration and his family's history with the president Thursday at Stockton University.

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a “Conversation with Don McGahn”, at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a “Conversation with Don McGahn”, at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a “Conversation with Don McGahn”, at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Audience listens to Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaking with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a “Conversation with Don McGahn”, at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Audience listens to Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaking with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a “Conversation with Don McGahn”, at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a “Conversation with Don McGahn”, at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a “Conversation with Don McGahn”, at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a “Conversation with Don McGahn”, at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, left, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a "Conversation with Don McGahn", at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---



Don McGahn, former White House counsel and Brigantine resident, speaks with Bill Hughes, Jr., during a “Conversation with Don McGahn”, at Stockton University, in Galloway, Thursday Jan. 23, 2020. (VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press)

VERNON OGRODNEK / For The Press

---

---

Contact: 609-272-7219

mpost@pressofac.com

Twitter @MichelleBPost

---



South Jersey natives have major role in Trump White House



Ingram's Thorofare Bridge to be closed 2 nights next week for construction



Stockton chosen to host Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Center

---

## Michelle Brunetti Post

Staff Writer

In my first job after college got paid to read the New York Times and summarize articles for an early online data base. First reporting job was with The Daily Record in Parsippany. I have also worked in nonprofits, and have been with The Press since 1990.