

# *An Ohio Businessman Faces Death Threats for Praising His Haitian Workers*

The lifelong Republican employs fewer Haitians than others in Springfield, but his life has been upended since Donald J. Trump spread falsehoods about immigrants in his hometown.

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**By Miriam Jordan**

Reporting in Springfield, Ohio

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For Jamie McGregor, a businessman in Springfield, Ohio, speaking favorably about the Haitian immigrants he employs has come to this: death threats, a lockdown at his company and posters around town branding him a traitor for hiring immigrants.

To defend himself and his family, Mr. McGregor has had to violate his own vow to never own a gun.

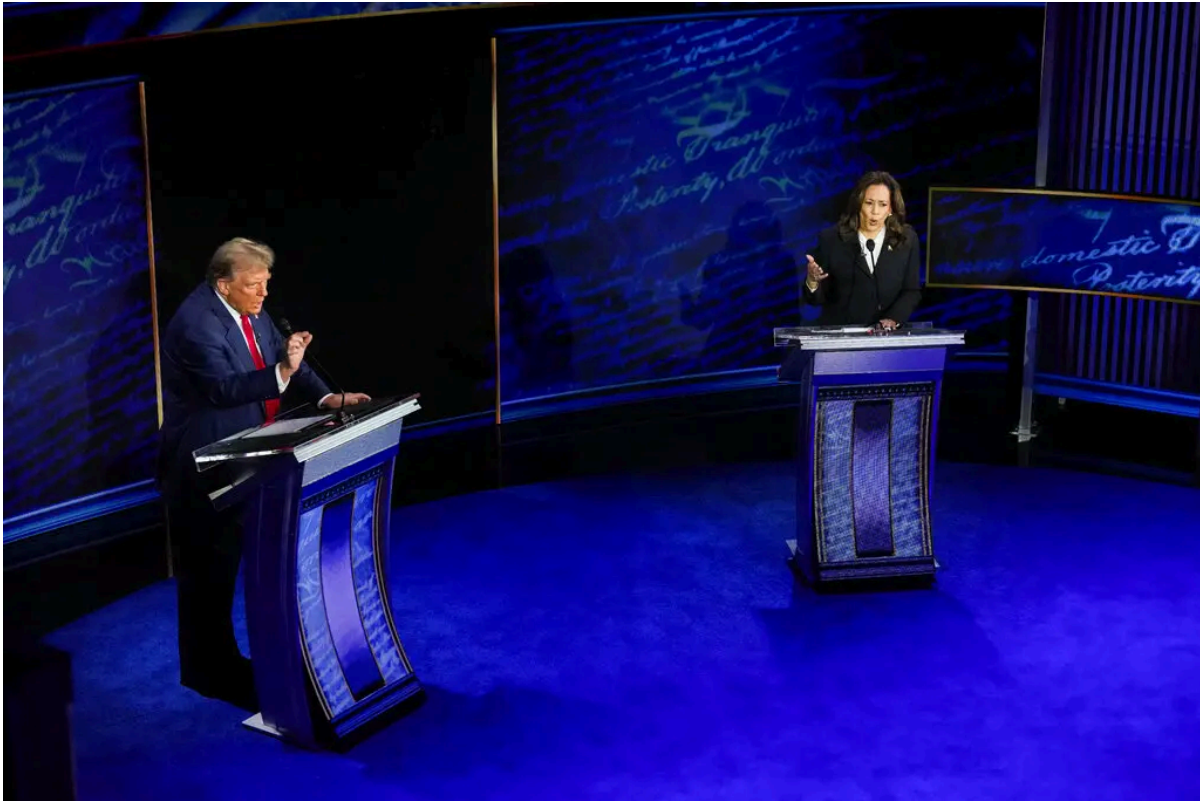
“I have struggled with the fact that now we’re going to have firearms in our house — like, what the hell?” said Mr. McGregor, who runs McGregor Metal, which makes parts for cars, trucks and tractors.

“And now we’re taking classes, we’re going to shooting ranges, we’re being fitted for handguns,” he said on a recent day, pulling up a photo of his 14-year-old daughter clutching a Glock.

A fifth-generation resident in the small city between Columbus and Dayton, Mr. McGregor was struggling a few years ago to fill positions for machine operators, forklift drivers and quality inspectors. Mr. McGregor, 48, began hiring Haitians who

had recently settled in Springfield. They now represent about 10 percent of McGregor Metal's labor force of 330.

But he has suddenly found himself in the middle of a political firestorm. Former President Donald J. Trump and his running mate, JD Vance, denounced the Haitians in Springfield with false claims that they were stealing and eating pets. The rumors fed growing resentment over rising housing prices, crowded clinics and a town whose character seemed to be changing. Mr. McGregor, who had publicly praised his new employees for their hard work and willingness to learn, became a target.



Mr. Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris during their first presidential debate in Philadelphia on Sept. 10. Doug Mills/The New York Times

A flood of threats was directed not only at him, but his family and his business.

They came by the hundreds — phone calls, emails and letters from white supremacists, neo-Nazis and other people they had never met.

“The owner of McGregor Metal can take a bullet to the skull and that would be 100 percent justified,” said one message left on the company voice mail.

“Why are you importing Third World savages who eat animals and giving them jobs over United States citizens?” another asked.

“Stack all 20,000 Haitians inside Jamie McGregor’s factory at once and force him to praise the benefits of foreign labor while being crushed to death by Black bodies themselves being crushed to death,” another said.

Mr. McGregor’s children and his 80-year-old mother began receiving hateful calls.

“We’re being hunted like animals,” Mr. McGregor’s wife, Cameron, said.

Mr. McGregor said he had spoken out hoping to show that the Haitian workers had helped his company grow. He said the newcomers have helped revitalize the blue-collar town and reverse its population decline.

“They come to work every day. They don’t cause drama. They’re on time,” he told The New York Times in an interview in early September that helped trigger the backlash. On PBS News Hour the next week, he noted that they were drug-free. “I wish I had 30 more,” he said.

One of his employees, Wilford Renvil, has been with the company since 2021, operating a mechanical press. He fled Haiti, where he had a white-collar job at a telecommunications company, after bandits took control of his town and went on killing sprees. His attendance record at McGregor is perfect, Mr. Renvil said, and he has befriended his American co-workers.

McGregor Metal employs fewer Haitians than companies like Dole; Topre, another auto parts maker; and several others in the region. But executives of those companies have refrained from issuing public statements, even as Springfield has descended into a crisis, with bomb threats shuttering schools, colleges and government offices for days.

A lifelong Republican who voted twice for Mr. Trump, Mr. McGregor said that he had never imagined that speaking up on behalf of his workers would imperil his family.

He also faced blowback from American workers at his company who said they felt maligned by his comments, some of which implied that Haitians were more reliable than other employees.

Mr. McGregor called emergency meetings at all three facilities.

“If you found what I said to be offensive, or if you took my comments personally, I’m deeply sorry, as it was never my intent,” Mr. McGregor recalled telling his employees during the emotionally charged meetings.

He explained that the Haitians he had hired were in the country legally and paying taxes, contrary to claims on social media that McGregor Metal paid them lower wages under the table.

“We have different opinions and beliefs, but we’re here to make metal parts,” he told the staff. “We’re not here to debate immigration.”

F.B.I. agents showed up at McGregor Metal out of the blue on Sept. 12.

They warned him that they had determined that some of the threats on social media were credible and that he must take precautions.

They advised locking the lobby doors at McGregor Metal along with other safety protocols.

Security experts also sat the family down. Vary your driving routes to work, school and other places, they advised. Don gloves and use tongs when handling and opening mail. Keep the blinds drawn at your house.

The family was also advised to scrub their digital footprints, install cameras, motion sensors and alarms, and start parking rear-first in the garage, keeping the car in drive until the door is all the way down.



McGregor Metal Co. had to update its safety protocols in response to the threats.  
Maddie McGarvey for The New York Times

The hardest recommendation of all for Mr. McGregor was their advice to buy a gun. More than one, in fact.

He said he had always supported people's right to own firearms. But "I'm not a gun person," he said, breathing deeply. "I do not like guns. I never liked guns."

He felt heartbroken when he had to pull his daughter out of school for shooting lessons.

"It was a complete loss of innocence," he said.

As the family tried to adjust to their new reality, ominous posters of Mr. McGregor popped up near his plants, outside a grocery store and on poles.

They featured quotes from Mr. McGregor praising his immigrant workers, and the word "traitor" scrawled on his forehead in red capital letters.

Last week, Springfield experienced its first relatively normal week since the claims about Haitians and pets derailed the city's routines and created chaos. All 17 schools opened without new bomb threats, although state troopers still swept the buildings beforehand.

On Tuesday night, the city held an in-person commission meeting — the first since the bomb threats. Attendees had to pass through metal detectors.

During the public comment period, some angry residents aired grievances about Haitians, as they had done in the past. But the gathering was not as heated as previous ones, and several people voiced support for the immigrants and encouraged community unity.

Threats against the McGregor family and his company have abated in recent days. But they cannot rest easy.

“You know, things are just different now,” Mr. McGregor said, noting that he would not vote for Mr. Trump again.

“Here at the shop, you know, on a warm day, we would normally have all of our doors and windows open and the breeze blowing,” he said.

On a recent evening, when Mr. McGregor arrived home feeling unwell, his family worried that he had been exposed to a biological agent such as anthrax after handling mail.

Mr. McGregor said he was more likely just suffering from the accumulation of stress, but that did not relieve his wife's anxiety.

“I can't imagine living my whole life like this,” Ms. McGregor said. “You know, it's got to end. It's got to stop — hopefully after the election.”

***A correction was made on Sept. 30, 2024: An earlier version of this article referred imprecisely to the Ohio State Police officers who swept school buildings after bomb threats. They were troopers, not paratroopers.***

*How we handle corrections*

**Miriam Jordan** reports from a grass roots perspective on immigrants and their impact on the demographics, society and economy of the United States. [More about Miriam Jordan](#)

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