

Stanley Harris, U.S. attorney and federal judge, dies at 93

By [Bart Barnes](#)

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Stanley S. Harris, a longtime fixture in Washington legal circles, as a District of Columbia appeals court judge, a federal district court jurist and as a U.S. attorney involved in the prosecution of John W. Hinckley Jr. for the attempted assassination of President Ronald Reagan, died Aug. 13 at his home in Bethesda, Md. He was 93.

The cause was a heart ailment, said a son, Scott Harris.

Judge Harris began his legal career in the early 1950s with the Washington law firm then known as Hogan & Hartson, where he became a partner and specialized in communications and energy law.

In 1971, President Richard M. Nixon appointed him a judge on the D.C. Superior Court. The next year, he was named to a seat on the District of Columbia Court of Appeals. In that role, according to a [Washington Post profile](#), he developed a reputation as “congenial, patient and fair” but also was known for his conservative bent and for decisions that tended to support government prosecutors.

“In the 200 court opinions he has written in 10 years,” the story said, “he has never been afraid to point his pen at those who would, in his view, hamper law enforcement. In nine years on the appeals court, he has overturned just two murder convictions, while upholding scores.”

He said that in court decisions, “The law does not require that a defendant receive a perfect trial, only a fair one.”

He dissented when the D.C. appellate court upheld the constitutionality of a rent control law, calling it “confiscatory for landlords,” and he supported giving judges increased authority to impose stiff sentences on juvenile offenders.

He served as U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia in 1982 and 1983, during which time the office was prosecuting Hinckley for the 1981 attempted assassination of Reagan. Hinkley was found not guilty by reason of insanity and was confined at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington until 2016.

In 1983, Judge Harris was appointed to a seat on the U.S. District Court in Washington, where he served until retirement in 2001.

Stanley Sutherland Harris was born in Washington on Oct. 19, 1927. His father, Stanley R. Harris, known as “Bucky,” was a Hall of Fame second baseman and player-manager on the 1924 Washington Senators team that won the World Series.

He graduated in 1945 from Wilson High School in Washington, then served two years in the Army. He enrolled at the University of Virginia, where he played on the baseball team before receiving a bachelor’s degree in 1951 and a law degree in 1953.

Survivors include his wife of 57 years, Rebecca Ashley Harris of Bethesda; three sons, Scott Harris and Mark Harris, both of Chevy Chase, Md., and Todd Harris of Las Vegas; a sister; a brother; and eight grandchildren.

While serving on the bench, Judge Harris helped run an ice hockey league for teenagers and often took his law clerks as spectators to his sons' championship ice hockey games.

Among his cherished memories were his childhood trips to Griffith Stadium with his father and sitting in the Senators' dugout to watch a ballgame. He played catch with Walter Johnson, the Hall of Fame pitcher for the Senators who in retirement was a D.C. neighbor of the future judge. And he could not have been happier, his family said, when in October 2019, the Washington Nationals won the World Series, the first for a Washington baseball team since 1924.

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