



Newsletter - Spring 2021



The promise of renewal that comes with spring has never been more welcome. One year ago, the Hughes Center canceled events because the COVID-19 threat was too deadly to gather in person. Stockton University moved most classes online. We Zoomed into a presidential election like no other – and watched in horror on January 6 as domestic terrorists refused to accept the result.

So as millions in New Jersey get vaccinated, we dare to hope normalcy is around the corner. For the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy, normalcy would mean in-person debates, bringing legislators into Stockton classrooms, filling our polling call center with student interviewers and joining a panel discussion where people actually sit on a panel.

Mixed with hope is gratitude for our staff and supporters who have come through this awful year whole. Their support has allowed us to adapt and experience successes.

- Our candidate debates reached record numbers of voters.
- Researcher Alyssa Maurice is putting out quality polls attracting statewide attention.
- The Hughes Center expanded our work with students through internships and civic engagement activities.

We were reminded of our work's inspiration when we debuted “The Life and Legacy of William J. Hughes” film on YouTube Live on March 10. The film documentary captured Ambassador Hughes’ commitment to democracy, bipartisanship and to South Jersey. It also raised significant funding that helps the Hughes Center to continue to engage. As we emerge from the pandemic, our commitment to continue the legacy of Ambassador Hughes is renewed.

Sincerely,

Dr. John Froomjian, Executive Director

In this issue:

- Learn about the recently released film about the Life and Legacy of Ambassador William J. Hughes
 - Review the latest Hughes Center poll results regarding President Biden's policies and the COVID-19 vaccine
 - Read about the NJ legislators who visited Stockton as part of the Hughes Center's Legislator-in-Residence program
 - Find out how the Hughes Center supports student engagement
 - Stay tuned for more programming by the Hughes Center
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Film Celebrates Life and Legacy of Bill Hughes



A film celebrating the life and legacy of the late Ambassador William J. Hughes debuted at a special Zoom showing on March 10, hosted by the Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton University.

Stockton President Harvey Kesselman called Hughes “one of the most accomplished leaders ever in South Jersey,” noting his work as a Congressman, Ambassador to Panama, and educator at Stockton. “He was a model of bipartisanship and believed firmly in civic engagement,” Kesselman said.

A native of Penns Grove, Salem County, Hughes entered politics because of his concern about ocean dumping of trash that was closing Jersey Shore beaches in the summer. He spearheaded legislation that prohibited ocean pollution and protected beaches. The Ocean City resident also led the legislative efforts that created the Pinelands National Reserve and National Wild and Scenic River designations for the Manumuskin and Menantico rivers. After representing South Jersey's 2nd Congressional District for 20 years, Hughes was appointed ambassador to Panama by President Bill Clinton.

Ed Salmon, a longtime friend of Hughes and chair of the Hughes Center advisory board, said that while it took years to get Hughes to agree to do the film, he is thrilled that future generations will be able to learn the story of Bill and Nancy Hughes.

Hughes' son, Bill Jr., thanked those who help to continue his parents' legacy. “They believed in family, faith, public service and giving back,” Hughes said of his parents. “The mission of the Center continues through your support.”

"The story of Bill Hughes is literally the recent history of South Jersey," said John Froomjian, executive director of the Hughes Center. "The impact of his achievements is still felt in our daily lives."

The full film, which was produced by Glasstown Productions of Millville, can be viewed [here](#).

The latest Hughes Center poll results regarding President Biden's performance and the COVID vaccine

In a poll conducted by the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy in March, New Jersey residents indicated stark differences in opinion that closely followed party lines. The poll focused mainly on President Biden's performance and his handling of the various issues relating to the COVID-19 outbreak.



Democrats consistently showed strong support, while Republicans almost universally were critical. Regarding Biden's job performance, 91% of Democrats approved, and only 12% of Republicans approved.

- 97% of Democrats thought the 2020 presidential election was fair and free, whereas only 20% of Republicans felt so.
- 93% of Democrats supported the COVID-19 relief bill, compared to only 25% of Republicans.
- 85% of Democrats were confident in Biden's ability to unify the country, compared to 19% of Republicans.

When asked about the amount of government aid provided in the government COVID-19 relief packages, about half of both Democrats and Republicans thought it was not enough.

In New Jersey politics, 58% approved of Gov. Phil Murphy's job performance either somewhat or strongly, with 36% disapproving. The job approval rating was the highest Murphy has received in the three years the Stockton Poll has asked that question.

In another poll conducted by the Hughes Center this spring, New Jersey residents were questioned about their attitudes toward the coronavirus vaccine. A majority of racial and ethnic minorities and lower-income New Jersey residents said they want a COVID-19 vaccine, but reported getting vaccinated at half the rates of white and wealthier residents. As an example of this inequality, 16% of Black respondents had received a vaccine dose compared to 30% of Whites, and only 14% of Hispanic respondents got their first dose compared to 27% of non-Hispanics of any race. There was further inequality in vaccine administration when considering income: only 15% of respondents with a household income of less than \$50,000 had gotten their first dose, while 37% of those making more than \$100,000 in household income had been vaccinated.

"These findings reflect inequity in how the virus and the vaccination process are affecting people of color and lower-income populations in New Jersey," said John Froomjian, executive director of the Hughes Center. "Black, Hispanic and lower-income residents are just as worried about COVID-19 and are as eager to be vaccinated as the rest of the population. But they are waiting longer to get access to the vaccine, and more of them are getting sick," he said.

There was also a significant number of respondents who expressed hesitancy about the vaccine: 34% had fears about safety or side effects, 13% thought the vaccine was rushed, and 12% wanted to see how others are affected first. A majority of Republicans (52%) said they are not likely to get the vaccine, while only 15% of Democrats would refrain from

getting it. Republicans are also more likely to engage in behavior labeled as risky by public health officials, such as visiting people in their homes and eating at indoor restaurants.

To learn more about the poll results, visit: <https://stockton.edu/hughes-center/polling/polling-results-2021.html>.

Hughes Center Hosts Local Assemblymen as Legislators-in-Residence

New Jersey State Assemblymen John Armato and Vincent Mazzeo, representatives from the 2nd Legislative District in southern New Jersey, visited Stockton University on March 18 and 22 as the Spring 2021 Legislators-in-Residence.



Armato, a Democrat, was elected to the Assembly in 2018 and sits on the Agriculture, Health, and Military and Veterans' Affairs Committees. Mazzeo, also a Democrat, has represented the 2nd Legislative District since 2014, prior to which he was the mayor of Northfield. He is the chair of the State and Local Government committee, and also serves on the Labor and Tourism and the Arts committees.

The Legislator-in-Residence program is designed to bring New Jersey lawmakers to the university to engage with students and faculty, learn about Stockton and its programs, and share their experiences as legislators.

"The Legislator-in-Residence program offers Stockton students a rare opportunity to learn directly from elected leaders how New Jersey government operates and policy is formed," said John Froomjian, executive director of the Hughes Center.

During their visit to Stockton, the legislators toured the Hughes Center and the Office of Military and Veterans Services lounge, where students Karl Shute and Stardust Santiago shared their post-service experiences. Armato talked about his service as a sergeant in the Air Force.

Mazzeo and Armato were updated on trends in online gaming, sports betting and nongaming attractions in a virtual discussion with Coordinator Jane Bokunewicz and Assistant Director Sarah Grady, both of the Lloyd D. Levenson Institute of Gaming, Hospitality and Tourism (LIGHT).

The assemblymen were also briefed about the Coastal Research Center's work on beach protection and flood mitigation by director Stewart Farrell and staffer Kimberly McKenna.

Mazzeo and Armato interacted with students in two online classes. Students in Assistant Professor of Sociology Christina Jackson's Urban Environments class learned about policy initiatives that would affect cities like Atlantic City. Students in the Small Business Management course taught by Assistant Professor of Business Studies Christian Ehiobuche peppered the legislators with questions about business policy and how young people can become entrepreneurs.

The legislators also had lunch with Stockton University President Harvey Kesselman, Interim Provost and Executive Vice President Susan Davenport, and Dr. Froomjian.

“Even though much of it was virtual, the visit gave our local legislators a firsthand look at how issues of importance to South Jersey are being addressed by faculty, staff and students at Stockton,” Froomjian said. “The assemblymen also spoke about topics important to our students and faculty: Atlantic City issues, health care, justice and equality, the local tourism economy and small businesses.”

The Hughes Center Supports Student Engagement

The Hughes Center continues to financially support Stockton University students in the Washington Internship Program, which provides work experience through internships in government, business and nonprofits for participants in the nation's capital. Stockton has participated in the program since the mid-1970s, and more than 1,300 students have spent a semester living, working, and studying in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area.



For the Spring 2021 semester, the Center has awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to Vitoria Miranda, who is pursuing a bachelor of arts in Criminal Justice. The sophomore has significant leadership experience, having led French and feminist clubs, and has teaching experience as a tutor and church leader. She is fluent in Portuguese, and also speaks Spanish and French.

The Center is also proud to sponsor research conducted by Stockton University students. The Hughes Center established a student research internship in fall 2019. Each semester, a student intern researches a public policy issue and produces a paper on that topic. The full list of student research papers can be found [here](#).

This semester's research intern is Chris Lopez, who is a junior political science major with a concentration in pre-law studies. He is currently studying the effects and ramifications of the coronavirus lockdown on motor vehicle traffic in New Jersey, such as decreased toll revenue and increased speeding by motorists.

Upcoming programming by the Hughes Center

The William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy and League of Women Voters of Atlantic County will co-sponsor a Democratic primary candidates forum for Atlantic County Clerk on April 27 and a Republican primary debate among state Senate candidates in Legislative District 2 on May 11. Both events will be presented on YouTube Live at 7 p.m. The link will be made available before each event.

John Froomjian will be one of two speakers on the topic of polarization at a Camden County College online panel discussion on April 21. Also speaking at the virtual event will be Shaylyn Romeny Garrett, coauthor of “The Upswing: How America Came Together A Century Ago and How We Can Do it Again” with Robert D. Putnam.



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