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QuickTakes!

Stockton's Hughes Center Honors NJ Leaders Renowned for Civility; Joe Biden Gives Keynote

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Stockton University President Harvey Kesselman, William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton executive director Sharon Schulman, former Vice President Joe Biden, Ambassador William J. Hughes and Hughes Center Steering Committee Chairman Edward H. Salmon.

A Stockton University Hughes Center program on Thursday, November 9, 2017 highlighted the extraordinary civility and integrity of the program's honorees and the need to restore these qualities in government today. Former Vice President Joe Biden set the inspirational tone for the evening when he presented the Distinguished Lifetime Achievement Award to U.S. Ambassador William J. Hughes, also a former U.S. congressman.

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“When Bill (Hughes) sat down with you, he listened He reached agreement and moved the process along. It is only through consensus that the United States can continue to function,” said Vice President Biden.

Vice President Biden and Ambassador Hughes worked together in Congress when Mr. Hughes was in the House of Representatives and Mr. Biden was in the Senate. They became friends riding the Amtrak train to Washington, DC together, talking about not just policy, but family.

“Those hours were precious because we got to know each other,” Vice President Biden said. “Back in our day people (in Congress) knew each other and respected each other.” He referred to this connection as the “invisible moral fabric.”

In accepting the award, Ambassador Hughes said it was Vice President Biden’s pledge to clean up the Brandywine Creek in Delaware that inspired him to run for office to clean up the ocean. The two also worked together on many crime bills that addressed such issues as the sale of armor-piercing bullets and assault rifles.

“I view my 50 years of success as a labor of love,” Ambassador Hughes said. “Thank you for the opportunity to serve my community and my country. I’ve loved every bit of it. A willingness to compromise made it possible to create good public policy.”

N.J. Senate President Steve Sweeney presented awards to state Senator Diane Allen and Kathy Whelan, the widow of the late Sen. Jim Whelan, who died in August.

“He was so excited to be getting this,” Ms. Whelan said. “Stockton was very important to him. We enjoyed looking out the window and seeing the dorms go up (on the new cams in Atlantic City).”

Senator Sweeney continued the theme of civility and cited Senator Whelan’s class, dignity and humor and Allen’s willingness to work together even though she is a Republican and he is a Democrat.

“It is bittersweet for me to lose Diane (who is retiring),” he said. “We are losing someone we could work with, someone who cares about the people.”

Senator Allen said government is broken right now, but can improve.

“It is important that you know there are still those who will work together,” she told the audience of more than 500 people. “Civility is something we must work for.”

Honoree and Stockton alumna Brigid Callahan Harrison, professor of Political Science and Law at Montclair State University, and political commentator, continued the theme of civility.

“In an era when we are encouraged to hate, it is so very important to honor legislators who are willing to reach across the aisle,” she said.

U.S. Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman said she is thankful for the opportunity to let her voice be heard.

“I try to get to know my Republican colleagues,” she said. “Hyper-partisanship is destroying our country. We are better than what we are experiencing now.”

The youngest honoree, 2017 Stockton graduate Maryam Sarhan, said she has been inspired by Stockton and her parents, who made the one-way trip from Egypt to America 16 years ago. She said Stockton President Harvey Kesselman has been a mentor who sets an example by passionately advocating for causes he holds dear.

“I will always cherish my time at Stockton,” said Ms. Sarhan, who was Student Senate president and a student trustee. “I hope to continue with opportunities for public service.”

President Kesselman also thanked Sharon Schulman, executive director of the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy at Stockton, for her success and service to the center. She is retiring in January.

“Sharon has been a visionary for the center,” President Kesselman said, citing not only the programs the center has sponsored, but the funds Schulman has raised to support those programs.

The Hughes Center Honors are awarded for professional excellence and a commitment to public service, civility and bipartisanship which reflect the life and career of Ambassador Hughes, who served as U.S. Ambassador to Panama and as a U.S. Congressman for 20 years.

For more information visit the Hughes Center website at: www.stockton.edu/hughescenter