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Democrats to honor former Rep. Hughes Thursday

Posted on [September 6, 2011](#) by [John Schoonejongen](#)

VINELAND — William J. Hughes, a former South Jersey congressman and ambassador to Panama, will be honored by Cumberland County Democrats during their annual dinner on Thursday.

Hughes, a 10-term Democratic congressman from Ocean City, is a legend in South Jersey.

Hughes was nominated by President Bill Clinton as ambassador to Panama and confirmed in 1995. He held that post for three years.

The ambassador's political roots are in Cape May County. He served as the attorney for Upper Township 50 years ago, was the first assistant prosecutor in the county during the 1960s and initially ran for Congress in 1970 against Rep. Charles Sandman, a staunch conservative most famous for his unwavering defense of President Richard Nixon during the Watergate impeachment hearings in the House.

It was in that first post-Watergate election, when anti-Republican fervor was high, that Hughes unseated Sandman.

Now 78 years old, the congressman has never left New Jersey, remaining in Cape May County and maintaining a relationship at Stockton State College, where the William J. Hughes Center for Public Policy is located.

Hughes and his wife, Nancy, will be present at Thursday's dinner, held at the Ramada Inn in Vineland.

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