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NORMA GONSALVES,
Presiding Officer

Full Legislative Committee
TRIBUTE TO PETER SCHMITT

NORMA GONSALVES, Chairwoman

1550 Franklin Avenue
Mineola, New York

Monday, October 15, 2012
1:00 P.M

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A P P E A R A N C E S :

NORMA GONSALVES,
Presiding Officer

HOWARD KOPEL,
Deputy Presiding Officer

DENISE FORD

JOSEPH SCANNELL

FRANCIS X. BECKER

VINCENT MUSCARELLA

RICHARD NICOLELLO

JUDI BOSWORTH

WAYNE WINK

ROBERT TROIANO

KEVAN ABRAHAMS,
Minority Leader

ROSE MARIE WALKER

JOSEPH BELESI

DENNIS DUNNE

JUDITH JACOBS

DAVID DENENBERG

DELIA DERIGGI-WHITTON

CARRIE SOLAGES

WILLIAM J. MULLER,
Clerk of the Legislature

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2 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: I
3 apologize for the delay but there was a
4 great deal to talk about. At this time I
5 would like to call on Judy Jacobs for the
6 Pledge of Allegiance.

7 (Whereupon, the Pledge of
8 Allegiance was recited.)

9 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Would
10 everyone please remain standing for a moment
11 of silence for our Dear Peter Schmitt who
12 left us unexpectedly about two weeks ago. I
13 think that all of you knew him and you knew
14 him in different ways, but at this time a
15 moment of silence for Peter.

16 (Whereupon, a moment of silence
17 was held for Peter Schmitt.)

18 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: I just
19 have a very brief statement regarding Peter.
20 No one could ever say that Peter was not a
21 devoted public servant. I've only known him
22 a little bit more than 15 years and, during
23 that time, there was no doubt in my mind
24 that Peter was one who had the best
25 interests of the Nassau County residents at

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2 heart, whether they were in his district or
3 throughout the county.

4 His leadership, his loyalty, his
5 caring and compassion will definitely be
6 missed but, most of all, his friendship.
7 For me, Peter's passing was very unexpected,
8 as it was for most of you, but it was
9 something that I think that really touched
10 each and every one of us.

11 I will say, and I attest to this
12 right now, we were about 25 minutes late
13 coming into this chamber, and Peter probably
14 would have said, "What did you do, Norma?
15 How come you were so late?" But, you know
16 what, Peter, your spirit will live on and
17 we'll remember that in future meetings that
18 we will begin on time and make sure that
19 everything that you worked hard for over
20 these years will not be in vain. And, let
21 me say, I don't know of any other legislator
22 who worked as hard as my dear friend Peter.

23 At this time I think Minority
24 Leader Kevan would like to say a few words.

25 LEGISLATOR ABRAHAMS: Thank you,

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1 Norma. As I said before, Peter Schmitt was
2 a pillar for this institution. The one
3 thing that we always had for high regard for
4 Peter's position has always been the fact
5 that he was a staple of this institution.
6 That this institution was a separate
7 identity from any other position in
8 government and that this position, the
9 legislature deserved its rightful due, and
10 no one could ever knock that.
11

12 Peter Schmitt, after many many
13 years, 17 years to be exact in government,
14 will truly be missed. From our standpoint,
15 our condolences to his family, obviously my
16 colleagues to the right, we want to express
17 our deepest condolences for the loss of
18 Peter.

19 In a lighter note, I've always
20 said that Peter and I have always had our
21 differences. We have had some common ground
22 also, but the difference is I guess is what
23 you see sometimes on the floor, and many
24 times Peter and I, or Peter and my guys,
25 maybe Dave or Wayne, or anybody, will be

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1 going back and forth, and it wouldn't be
2 uncommon to show you the kind of person that
3 Peter was for Peter to gavel the meeting and
4 say, "Abrahams, you don't know what you're
5 talking about." And then, as soon as he
6 gaveled the meeting say, "So, what do you
7 think about the Yankees?"

8
9 Peter had a love for the Yankees,
10 a love for his kid, and a love for his
11 grandkid. But at the same time we were able
12 to have a more human conversation and talk
13 about my kids, and he would talk about
14 becoming a new grandfather. That's the part
15 I will always appreciate, his concern and
16 our cordial relationship when the
17 microphones were off, he was always a
18 gentleman and, from that standpoint, he will
19 truly and deeply be missed.

20 I just wanted to express my
21 condolences to his family in their time of
22 grief. So thank you.

23 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Is there
24 anyone else who would like to say anything?

25 LEGISLATOR ABRAHAMS: I just

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2 wanted to add one more thing, Norma. In the
3 passing of Peter, we'd also like to express,
4 in a position of good will, we will silence
5 Legislator Denenberg's microphone just for
6 today.

7 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Thank you,
8 Kevan. Legislator Judy Jacobs served as
9 presiding officer of this body a few years
10 ago and I know she worked closely with
11 Peter. At that time Peter was the minority
12 leader and so, Judy, would you like to say a
13 few words?

14 LEGISLATOR JACOBS: You know,
15 it's something to remember in our lives, I
16 guess most of us do, except you do move on
17 which is part of the healing process, but
18 whenever something like this happens you
19 reflect on your life and what's really
20 important and what's not that important.

21 Peter and I really knew each
22 other, no one knows this, for probably 30
23 years because I was this young civic leader,
24 I was young once. I was this young civic
25 leader in Oyster Bay and Peter worked in

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1 Oyster Bay in varying capacities and I knew
2 him very well then.

3
4 When the legislature began, Bruce
5 Blakeman was presiding officer, Peter was
6 his deputy, and I eventually became the
7 minority leader at that time.

8 About nine months after that, we
9 became the majority and Peter became the
10 minority leader. I have to tell you,
11 through all of that, of course we disagreed
12 on many many things. We also, and people
13 don't understand, if they looked at our
14 calendar, is how much we really agreed on.

15 But, obviously, like in anything
16 else in life, the things that stood out, is
17 what made the papers and everything else.
18 But what didn't make the papers was the
19 friendship we developed and an understanding
20 for each other and an understanding for what
21 it meant to have a good friend even though
22 you could disagree on just about every issue
23 that we felt was important and he felt was
24 important in his own way, but that kind of
25 thing doesn't make the papers but it really

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1
2 does happen.

3 I will definitely miss this
4 person. Peter was a very good friend. We
5 went through a lot together. We each had
6 different roles within the legislature.

7 I can almost speak for Peter now
8 to say that this legislature has to go on.
9 This institution has to go on. We have to
10 make the right decisions and do what we
11 believe is right but always remember we are
12 all individuals and we can care about each
13 other. There's nothing that makes us weaker
14 to say we care about each other.

15 Yes, the papers said we did kiss
16 and hug. I'm not saying we kissed and
17 hugged every hour on the hour but, at the
18 end of the week, like Kevan said, when we
19 would be exchanging very heated words, if we
20 saw each other, especially in that old
21 building which was much more homey, we would
22 definitely give each other a hug and kiss
23 before we left for the weekend.

24 So I will miss him very much and
25 I pray he's resting in peace and pray Lois

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2 and the children, his grandchild, enjoy a
3 wonderful life and they have a wonderful
4 basis of memories with Peter.

5 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Thank you
6 Judy. Legislator Nicoletto.

7 LEGISLATOR NICOLELLO: I guess
8 there's only five of us now left here that
9 were here originally starting in 1996. It's
10 a lot of years and a lot of wars that we
11 went through both on the minority and
12 majority. I think I've seen Peter more in
13 those years than I've seen my brother.
14 Those of us who served, he was a good
15 friend, as close to a brother as you can
16 get.

17 I think Kevan hit the nail on the
18 head. The one thing that stands out about
19 Peter is his tireless, adamant, strong
20 support of the legislature as an independent
21 body. We have seen him battle the Gulotta
22 Administration, Suozzi Administration, and
23 now the Mangano Administration, just to make
24 sure this body remains independent. That,
25 in part, will be his legacy, I believe so.

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2 I guess just to sum up by saying we will all
3 miss him.

4 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Thank you
5 all. Someone else? Dennis.

6 LEGISLATOR DUNNE: Peter Schmitt,
7 Rich Nicoletto, Vinny Muscarella, Fran
8 Becker, and Judy and I were with him 18
9 years. Because running for office and then
10 17 years being here. I still feel his
11 presence. I don't know about you, but it's
12 kind of eerie. I still feel that Peter is
13 with us. It's a good thing.

14 We all went to a Christmas party
15 at the Friars Club. All the Republicans
16 went there with Bruce Blakeman and everybody
17 had charge cards. So a couple of people had
18 cash. But who got stuck with the bill was
19 Peter and he charged all of our dinners on
20 his charge card. I think John Canning still
21 owes him like 40 bucks. John sang on the
22 bus all the way there and all the way home.
23 We had great times with Peter. We had great
24 memories of things that we did with Pete
25 over at Paddy's Loft and so many good things

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1 we did with him.

2 When things come up we are going
3 to remember what Pete would say. You know
4 what he would say. His presence is always
5 going to be felt. God bless him.

6 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Legislator
7 Walker.

8 LEGISLATOR WALKER: I probably
9 had the pleasure of knowing Peter for over
10 30 years. Peter worked alongside my late
11 husband in town government. He watched my
12 children grow up. It's hard for me to
13 believe that Rob was a little kid, and now
14 here Rob is the chief deputy county
15 executive working side by side with Peter on
16 many issues.

17 But everybody has spoken about
18 his commitment to our county residents,
19 certainly to his district, certainly to this
20 legislature. I'm just going to speak a
21 moment just about Peter as a wonderful
22 friend and always there for everybody.

23 He was so good to my family and
24 I, when John was sick and certainly when
25

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1 John first passed away. This year with some
2 issues that I have been dealing with, he
3 certainly -- government and politics was
4 very, very important to him but most
5 important to him was certainly everybody's
6 individual lives and their families and what
7 he could do for you and just to make things
8 better for you.

9
10 Kevan, I have to say that I think
11 Peter had the biggest smile on his face when
12 you made that statement before and, if he
13 was sitting next to you, I think he would
14 have hugged you today just with your comment
15 made to silence Denenberg's microphone.

16 But I do feel very much his
17 presence here and, I mean, I know I couldn't
18 attend his funeral because I had to be over
19 at the infusion center in the morning and I
20 felt terribly sad about that, yet I could
21 hear Peter's voice saying to me, if you're
22 not at that center and you're at my funeral,
23 I'll come down and kill you myself.

24 So we do hear him, I know his
25 presence is felt here. I know, in as much

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1 as we could all battle, and certainly there
2 were times in our caucus room we battled,
3 today was a very difficult day for all of
4 us, and for us to go in that caucus room
5 with Peter not there, it's very hard. We
6 are a family here. No matter which side of
7 the table we sit on, we are a family, we
8 care about one another. We care about one
9 another's lives, which is really most
10 important that you worry about each other on
11 a personal basis and we put other things
12 aside many times.

13
14 So, Peter, we love you and miss
15 you, and we know you're going to help to
16 continue to guide us along the way.

17 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Thank you,
18 Rose. Vinny.

19 LEGISLATOR MUSCARELLA: This is
20 difficult for all of us. Each of us up here
21 and in the audience, we are all very
22 complicated people. Sometimes we get to see
23 someone for an hour or two hours a day or
24 one day a week or at a legislative meeting
25 and you get an impression of people that can

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1 often times be very deceiving.

2 I know people who were friendly
3 with Peter in high school. If you talk to
4 them about him in high school, Peter was a
5 mild mannered, meek, quiet person, someone
6 who they tell you they never ever would have
7 expected to go into the political field.
8 But he did.

9 I will tell you from my
10 observations that no one could have a
11 stronger ally in Peter nor a tougher
12 adversary than Peter in this world of
13 political correctness and not wanting to
14 hurt feelings. You always knew where you
15 stood with Peter. He didn't mince his
16 words. I think we can all agree that
17 sometimes maybe he said a little too much or
18 overstepped his bounds or wasn't as
19 courteous as he could, but I will tell you
20 knowing him off this platform, in personal
21 situations, that he really respected his
22 colleagues, all of his colleagues. He
23 respected the citizens of this county. All
24 of you. He respected and loved his family,

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2 his county, and his country.

3 I think we are all a little less
4 well off because of Peter's passing and I
5 will miss him tremendously. Thank you.

6 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Legislator
7 Becker.

8 LEGISLATOR BECKER: In regards to
9 the five of us who still remain, I have to
10 say, in the 17 years we have been here, I
11 can say there have been times we can call
12 really good. But it's been tough here, as
13 people in the audience well know, and people
14 on this legislature well know. It seems to
15 be one crisis after another from year to
16 year, and just very few moments to sit back
17 and revel in any real success.

18 But one thing that I've got to
19 say, with my republican colleagues, because
20 we're by each other's side, there's not one
21 that is not like family to me and a dear
22 friend, but no one like Peter. He is and
23 was a true warrior in every sense of the
24 word. A warrior in the things he believed.
25 As my other colleagues said, to me he was a

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1
2 rock here. He was always here and always
3 reaching out to us to keep us informed of
4 what was going on, which didn't always
5 happen all the time. He was a man of his
6 word so when he told you that he was going
7 to do something, he did it. He truly was a
8 rock in this legislature, and I'm not
9 talking about just about as a presiding
10 officer, but really as a human being.

11 When you serve with somebody 17
12 years and you're in the trenches with that
13 person and things are tough and they're
14 hard, you develop really deep bonds of
15 friendship, you come to appreciate a human
16 being to their core.

17 One thing that, it was just not
18 here at the legislature, but became really
19 really good friends with Pete. We didn't
20 socialize other than the times in the
21 legislature but I became very good friends
22 with him and one thing that Pete always
23 loved to do, he did a lot of traveling.

24 In the later years when my kids
25 grew up, I found the opportunity, my wife

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1 and I, to do some traveling, and you would
2 always go to Pete for advice, where to go,
3 what to do. He really knew everything. He
4 was a world traveler in every sense of the
5 word. I'll never forget the one thing, my
6 wife and I were doing a Mediterranean cruise
7 and one of the places we were going to stop
8 was Santorini Island which is sort of a
9 volcanic island, half of which has fallen
10 into the sea, but you have to go up a couple
11 of hundred feet to get to the town.

12
13 When I told Pete I was going to
14 Santorini Island, he said, "Listen, don't go
15 by the tram, take the donkeys up." Of
16 course it was hard for me to imagine Peter
17 taking a donkey or even any donkey willing
18 to let him get on top of them to go up the
19 900 or so steps to take you to the top of
20 Santorini Island.

21 I will always remember Pete for
22 that because my wife and I and our friends
23 that were with us we took the donkeys up,
24 and I've got to tell you, we laughed the
25 whole way up, looking at each other on a

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1 couple of donkeys, and the donkey masters
2 were snapping the whip to keep the donkeys
3 going up the hill because they didn't want
4 to go up, because they knew that once they
5 got to the top they had to come down and do
6 the same thing again.

7
8 But, Peter, I miss you terribly
9 and your friendship, and you being the rock
10 that you were, the warrior that you were,
11 you will always loom very large in my spirit
12 for the rest of the days of my life, no
13 matter what I do, in public service, or
14 private life. Thanks, Pete.

15 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Legislator
16 Wink.

17 LEGISLATOR WINK: Peter and I
18 rarely rarely agreed on most things. It
19 probably had a lot to do with the fact that
20 we were both stubborn Germans, but for 17
21 years I have come to know Peter as a friend.
22 One of my memories of Peter that I most
23 cherish is the fact that when my former
24 legislator and mentor, Barbara Johnson, was
25 in some of her lowest points, Peter was one

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1
2 of the few people that always went out of
3 his way to take her aside, talk to her, and
4 many of the times I got to be a fly on the
5 wall while the two of them talked about so
6 many different things, significant and
7 otherwise.

8 One of Peter's early bouts with
9 heart problems ironically enough took place
10 up in our neck of the woods in my current
11 district and Barbara's old district, and I
12 remember him after he recovered thanking --
13 not so much thanking Barbara, but thanking
14 God that he was up so close to Saint Francis
15 Hospital, and that he was up in our neck of
16 the woods when, God forbid, something bad
17 happened.

18 Peter always had a sense of the
19 bigger picture. Even in the days when we
20 were fighting over the minutia. His
21 compassion and his respect for Barbara in
22 the days that were most difficult for
23 Barbara is something that I will always
24 appreciate about Peter.

25 I know that he's looking down on

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1 us right now saying, don't forget that we
2 are a significant body here and that we need
3 to keep autonomy as a legislature. He is
4 wishing all 18 of us well. Those are some
5 of my thoughts on Peter and I will miss
6 Peter.

8 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Thank you,
9 Wayne. Legislator Kopel.

10 LEGISLATOR KOPEL: Thank you. As
11 distinct from everyone else who has spoken
12 before, I'm one of the newcomers here. I'm
13 here less than three years.

14 I met Peter just shortly before I
15 actually was sworn in here. So it's a
16 different kind of perspective. Peter and I
17 were pretty close in age, I think he was
18 just a few months older than I was. Less
19 than a year older than I am.

20 We became friends very quickly
21 notwithstanding that we were so close in
22 age, he actually became my mentor. When you
23 start in a job like this, it's kind of
24 complicated, there's an awful lot to learn,
25 it takes time. As some of my colleagues who

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1 were recently elected will attest, it's kind
2 of bewildering at times. He was there to
3 guide me. He was wise. He was tough. When
4 he wanted to get something done, he got it
5 done, but he was, in my experience, always
6 courteous. Even if I had something in mind
7 that he didn't agree with, he would simply
8 tell me just do the right thing as you see
9 it. That was something that was almost a
10 mantra with him.
11

12 I'll have that little voice in my
13 head going forward over the years for as
14 long as I'm here. I will have it in the
15 back of my mind saying, "Just go ahead and
16 do the right thing." He was part of this
17 institution, he was proud of all of us. I
18 will miss him and I will cherish his memory.

19 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Legislator
20 Ford.

21 LEGISLATOR FORD: I, too, am
22 going to miss Peter, even though Peter and
23 I, believe it or not, didn't always agree
24 and see things eye to eye. But despite our
25 philosophical differences, we remained very

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1 very good friends. He was always a strong
2 advocate for a lot of things that I believed
3 in.
4

5 The one thing that I found very
6 refreshing and unique about Peter is that he
7 truly valued the opinions of a woman just as
8 much as he valued the opinions of a man. So
9 he held women on the same level as he did
10 his fellow man.

11 I think that for me, Peter really
12 was, I guess, a very, very warm person. He
13 used to tell me I wasn't allowed to really
14 reveal the truth about him, that he really
15 wasn't some crusty old guy that came out and
16 yelled at everybody. But Peter really had a
17 lot of compassion, a lot of understanding,
18 and he was one of the finest individuals I
19 had the pleasure of knowing, and I have to
20 say that he is going to be missed.

21 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Legislator
22 Denenberg. Today is a very different day,
23 right, David?

24 LEGISLATOR DENENBERG: For sure,
25 no two people had a more combative

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1 relationship when it came to the legislative
2 floor and politics. But I know we had a
3 mutual respect for each other and we got to
4 enjoy a lot of good moments together. Once
5 a year when election time came we always
6 picked a race to have a bet against each
7 other on, the results of that race, and the
8 winner would take the other one for a drink.

9
10 I do remember when my colleagues
11 to the right got back in the majority, I
12 said I lost the bet that much that I brought
13 all of you around. Those were good
14 conversations. We got to discover that we
15 don't only disagree in politics we also
16 disagreed about baseball as well. He loved
17 the Yankees and I loved the Mets.

18 But, the bottom line was, that we
19 could both -- I appreciated that he could
20 put aside the differences politically and
21 know that politics and the business of
22 politics was one thing, but that people are
23 people and that we can talk about each
24 other's families. Just two weeks ago he
25 came over and said, "You're paying a lot of

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1 tuitions," about all three of my children in
2 college at the same time, and I had given a
3 gift for his grandson. So there was a
4 mutual respect and friendship on the
5 non-political things, but very combative
6 politically, and I think that is the way
7 Peter was.
8

9 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Last, but
10 not least, Judy.

11 LEGISLATOR JACOBS: Well, I
12 decided I wasn't sure I ever wanted to tell
13 this story, but I think that it's something
14 that should be told because it really tells
15 you who Peter was. We are all, more or
16 less, saying the same thing that the person
17 that we knew off this floor was definitely
18 not always the same person you saw on the
19 floor.

20 We were once in the middle of a
21 very raucous hearing in the old building at
22 the legislature. I was presiding officer,
23 he was minority leader, and anyone who knows
24 me well knows that I do not curse.

25 I was so angry at him at that one

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1 moment, and Long Island press was there, and
2 they grabbed a picture of us actually
3 holding our fingers together and I said to
4 him, Mr. -- and I left out the M in his
5 word, and he and I dissolved into laughter,
6 and then they had another picture of us
7 hysterical. I'm only bringing it out
8 because that was who Peter was. I mean, he
9 had a great sense of humor and the two of us
10 in the middle of a heated battle just
11 absolutely lost it. I just thought you
12 would like to know that, because it's just
13 been with me since it happened.

14
15 CHAIRWOMAN GONSALVES: Thanks,
16 Judy. Those of you who are sitting out
17 there probably never really truly knew
18 Peter, but from the expressions of
19 friendship and love from this body, I think
20 you got another side of Peter that you will
21 go away with today.

22 I, for one, know that working
23 with Peter was always gratifying primarily
24 because he and I shared many of the same
25 beliefs. But my greatest point today is

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1 that he was a beloved leader. I think from
2 what has been said today, all of us will
3 agree that he will certainly be missed, but,
4 as I said before, his spirit will live on.
5 I thank you very much for being so patient,
6 but it was important that we tell you a
7 little bit about Peter that I know you did
8 not know.
9

10 So now, without any further ado,
11 those of you who are not on the Rules
12 Committee, if you like to have a minute to
13 leave the chamber, so be it. In the
14 meantime, I'm going to ask the clerk of the
15 legislature to call the roll for the Rules
16 Committee.

17 (Whereupon, the Full Legislative
18 Committee's Tribute to Peter Schmitt
19 adjourned at 1:27 p.m.)
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C E R T I F I C A T E

I, FRANK GRAY, a Shorthand Reporter and Notary Public in and for the State of New York, do hereby stated:

THAT I attended at the time and place above mentioned and took stenographic record of the proceedings in the above-entitled matter;

THAT the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate transcript of the same and the whole thereof, according to the best of my ability and belief.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 18th day of October, 2012.

FRANK GRAY