



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

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Bearing Witness to William Floyd's Fallen Sons

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Despite all of the positive things we were able to accomplish by remaining in Albany for all of last week, staying up north on Thursday and Friday meant I had to miss an event I had been looking forward to attending – the dedication of the Armed Forces Memorial at William Floyd High School.

When I first heard about the memorial a few months back, it was in danger of being postponed for lack of funding. I simply could not watch that happen. I knew that this

memorial would be important to the families and important to the community as a whole. I was able to secure \$25,000 in grant money from the state senate to ensure that this tribute to William Floyd's fallen sons would be erected.

The three men whose names are etched on the side of the memorial stone – Specialist Leslie Paul Bernstein (Vietnam, 1967), Specialist Thomas J. Wilwerth (Iraq, 2006) and Corporal Paulo Marko Pacificador (Iraq, 2007) – are true American heroes who were willing to risk it all for the country they held so dear. But they were more than that to the William Floyd community – they were sons, brothers, classmates and friends.

I had the opportunity this Memorial Day weekend to visit the memorial and spend a few quiet moments reflecting on all of the men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our nation, so that each of us might be free. We owe these brave individuals, their families and those who served with them a debt of gratitude that can never be repaid. The best we can do to attempt to repay it is to remember.

The movie "Taking Chance" tells the story of a Marine who escorts the body of a fallen comrade home from war. Part of the message of the film and the documentary that accompanies it is the concept of bearing witness. Bearing witness means that once you have learned their names and heard their stories, you become a witness for the fallen – a witness to the fact that they lived, a witness to the fact that they gave their lives for us. You become someone who has a duty to remember their names and to share their stories.

The poetic tribute on the memorial tells us "The soul of the soldier/Stronger than that of the enemy – Forever lives on." Let us all take it upon ourselves to bear witness to the lives and sacrifice of Specialist Bernstein, Specialist Wilwerth and Corporal Pacificador. Let us seek and accept the duty to remember each of their names and share each of their stories with others, both within the community and outside the community, so that they may forever live on.