

November 22, 2008 - Leaders bid Knoll a Capitol farewell

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HARRISBURG

-- Rep. John Murtha lightly tapped the flag-draped casket of his friend, the late Lt. Gov. Catherine Baker Knoll, as he exited her memorial service.

Lt. Gov. Joe Scarnati, a Jefferson County Republican who succeeded Knoll in office, touched the casket once and then crossed himself.

"Catherine was a transformational figure," Murtha, a Johnstown Democrat, said Friday about the woman who became Pennsylvania's first female lieutenant governor in 2003.

Knoll, a former two-term state treasurer, died Nov. 12 in a Maryland rehabilitation clinic, four months after disclosing she had neuroendocrine cancer. She was 78.

"Catherine is up there looking down at us, and she is so proud," Murtha said. Knoll had a drive to be constantly on the move, he said. "This is one time she won't have to go any place."

Hundreds of mourners attended her memorial service at the Capitol, where Knoll's body will lie in state, an honor given to only two others: President Abraham Lincoln in 1865, and the late House Speaker Matthew Ryan of Delaware County in 2003, according to Jeanne Schmedlen, an aide in the state House speaker's office.

A six-member honor guard of state police, Capitol police and members of the National Guard stood at attention in front of Knoll's casket and

saluted when the service ended.

Knoll of McKees Rocks was a "straight-shooter and a fighter (who) shattered glass ceilings for women," Sen. Hillary Clinton, a New York Democrat, said during the service.

"She said herself she was a steel woman from the steel city," Clinton said. "She may have been made of steel, but Catherine Baker Knoll was all heart."

Clinton drew laughter addressing Gov. Ed Rendell, who told mourners that Knoll probably is organizing heaven with St. Peter, and Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades of Harrisburg, who gave the invocation and benediction: "Frankly, Bishop, she's encouraging St. Peter to let women have more of a role."

Rendell said Knoll "was truly the Energizer Bunny on the campaign trail."

The governor recalled two recent controversies in Knoll's public life: when she showed up uninvited and handed out business cards at the funeral of a Marine killed in Iraq in 2005, and this year, when she grabbed a microphone from Allegheny County Executive Dan Onorato at a rally for Clinton's primary presidential campaign in Pittsburgh, accusing him and Mayor Luke Ravenstahl of not liking women because they bypassed her as an introductory speaker.

Rendell said he mentioned those incidents to illustrate that Knoll only meant to do good.

"When she made mistakes, they were mistakes of the heart," he said. "Anyone who knows Catherine knows she wasn't handing out her business cards because she wanted to get votes. She was handing out those cards because she wanted the family and friends of the family to call her if there was something they needed."

At the Clinton campaign event, Knoll "decided to take things into her own hands," Rendell said. She threw "a cross-body block" on a young man guarding the stage and threw "a short and pretty sweet rabbit punch to another elected official" in her efforts to get the microphone, Rendell said.

She did so because of her enthusiasm for Clinton's candidacy, he said, and with the possible exception of former President Bill Clinton's remarks, hers was "the best speech of the day."

Knoll's casket will remain in the Capitol Rotunda until 2 p.m. today, officials said.

A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at noon Tuesday in St. Paul Cathedral in Oakland.
It is open to the public, but Knoll's burial will be private.