

Goodbye, Pete

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On the telephone or in person, the slow, steady rumble of his bass voice could cut to the quick or melt, chocolate smooth, into an infectious chuckle. He was a giant, an institution, a legacy upon which commitment and dedication were born, and a force to be reckoned with in battle that will prove hard to follow.

However, on Nov. 14, Del. Howard "Pete" Peters Rawlings lost his four-year battle with cancer at the age of 66. A service of triumph, presided over by the Rev. Raphael G. Warnock at Douglass Memorial Community Church on Nov. 20 included tributes from Mayor Martin O'Malley, State Superintendent of Schools Dr. Nancy S. Grasmick, Dr. William Brody, president of Johns Hopkins University, and a host of delegates, senators, friends and family.

Rawlings ended his multi-faceted life as a member of the House of Delegates in the 40th Legislative District, and the distinguished chair of the Appropriations Committee, a position he held for 24 years.

His political career, born midway through his life, at 41 years old and a mentee of the late Sen. Vernia Welton, succeeded an academic career that began in the Baltimore Public School System and ended as a mathematics professor at Baltimore City Community College.

Rawlings matured in Baltimore, attending city schools and graduating from Douglass High School. He earned a bachelor's in mathematics from Morgan State University and a master's in mathematics from the University of Wisconsin.

Fighting to cure Baltimore's ills started for Rawlings during his academic career, with education a passion which he advocated for before and after joining the Maryland House of Delegates.

Tall and wide, Rawlings bore a Professor Sherman Klump girth in his heyday that commanded attention, which turned to awe when he spoke, capturing the respect of supporters and critics alike with his dedication to fact and self-confidence.

"Del. Rawlings was a man of great integrity," stated Rep. Elijah E. Cummings. "In his commitment to the education of our children, Del. Rawlings consistently followed his vision of what is right, both for the present and for decades to come. At times, he was rewarded for his dedication by harsh criticism. Yet, Pete remained steadfast, knowing that the course that he followed was opening the doors to opportunity for many young people who, otherwise, would be left on the outside looking in."

Last year, Rawlings' steel resolve levied an arsenal of insults, protests and community wide criticism when he refused to support a \$3.1 million appropriation to Morgan State University to build a new library.

In the 1999 elections, he withdrew his support for a Black candidate for mayor and rallied around now-Mayor Martin O'Malley.

While keeping his finger on the financial pulse of Baltimore City and Maryland as one of Baltimore's and Maryland's most powerful and influential African Americans, Rawlings often raised the hackles of fellow politicians and community members on many issues, garnering criticism that he was a sell-out, not fighting for the Black community, even suffering threats to remove his name from a Morgan State University dorm named after him.

Rawlings' other passion in his career was to support the political leadership of the next generation.

"Pete Rawlings did not seek celebrity or acclaim, but generations to come will remember him as a true and faithful servant who kept the faith of the people he served," Cummings said.

Throughout his academic and legislative careers, Rawlings served on many community, legislative and academic committees and task forces, winning many awards, including the John R. Hargreaves Distinguished Legislative Fellow Award in 2003.

"Every day I knew him," Mayor O'Malley said, "Pete Rawlings fought for what's right, never let[ting] people off the hook for their own personal responsibility. He always followed his moral compass, ignoring political expedience, whatever the consequences. I'm going to miss him."