

# Battle intensifies under Rawlings' continued scrutiny

*'We're going to fight  
him to the end,' says  
Sen. McFadden*

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Some of Maryland's most powerful legislators are at odds over one of the venerable Black institutions of higher education in the nation.

Senate Majority Leader Clarence W. Blount, and Chair of the Baltimore City Senators Nathaniel McFadden, are among several legislators who are in conflict with Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee Del. Howard P. Rawlings.

Del. Rawlings motives are being strongly questioned behind his committee's attempt to withhold \$1 million of the general fund appropriation for Morgan State University. Del. Rawlings added language to Maryland's budget for fiscal year 2001 that originally withheld \$2.3 million from Morgan pending the submission of an action plan by the University's Board of Regents. That plan would implement recommendations of a recent review of the school by an external consultant.

James L. Fisher LTD, an education consultant recommended by Del. Rawlings, administered the review from November 1999 to

February 2000. However, this review was beyond the bi-annual legislative audit and other methods of review for other institutions, according to Sen. McFadden.

"No other public higher education institution has to do this outside of normal procedures. No money has been embezzled, no students have been adversely effected," says Sen. McFadden.

On the contrary, the Fisher Review is overwhelmingly complimentary of Morgan State University.

"Today's Morgan State University is an institution of growing enrollment, an attractive and expanding physical plant and campus, an increasingly well prepared student body, a clearly articulated and attractive urban mission, an expanding roster of graduate and professional programs, an increasingly strong political constituency, vastly improved fiscal controls, ubiquitous technology, and exceptionally capable leadership," according to the report.

And the Fisher Review was in accordance with an earlier evaluation of the University by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools in April 1998.

"Morgan State University is to be commended for tremendous improvements in the physical plant...the efforts in enhancing the quality of its programs...for increasing the average SAT/ACT scores of entering freshman...and recent efforts to reach out to the corporate community," according to the Middle States Report.

The question Sen. Blount, Sen. McFadden and others have for Del. Rawlings is why the increased scrutiny of Morgan, scrutiny they

argue is totally unwarranted.

"Why is Morgan being singled out...why is there a need for more reviews by the Legislature...is the goal to continue calling for review and evaluations until, at last, we get a negative report on the University?" stated Sen. Blount in a recent memo to Del. Rawlings.

In response, Del. Rawlings recently characterized the concerns of Sen. Blount and Sen. McFadden as "hysterical."

"They don't believe our institutions ought to be held accountable to students," said Del. Rawlings. Specifically he cited concerns with Morgan's services to students, graduation rates and availability to students. In fact, Del. Rawlings refers to the mostly favorable Fisher report to bolster his claims.

The preface of the report indicates several areas that "need improvement" at Morgan including "the need for improvement in all student services areas, particularly financial aid."

Furthermore, Del. Rawlings suggests reviews of this nature usually take a benevolent stance in reference to the institution it analyzes.

**"...MURDER AND MAYHEM  
FOR AN AUDIT OF THIS MAGNITUDE."**

This controversy began to boil over in the summer of 1999 when Del. Rawlings initiated a performance audit for Morgan State University. According to Sen. Blount, a performance audit is a full-scale audit that examines all operations of a university, and that type of audit has never been done for any state institution in the history of Maryland.

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"There should be almost mayhem and murder for an audit of this magnitude. Morgan is at its zenith, the school is up there with Howard, Colgate and Amherst ... This is unfathomable," stated Sen. Blount.

Despite the prospect of that type of rebuke Del. Rawlings attempted to have the performance audit executed.

In June of 1999 auditors arrived on the campus of Morgan State University without the knowledge of Morgan President and CEO Dr. Earl S. Richardson, Sen. Blount, Sen. McFadden, Speaker Casper R. Taylor or President Thomas V. Mike Miller.

Once the speaker and the president were informed that the auditors were on the campus the order was given for them to leave. According to Senators Blount and McFadden, Del. Rawlings did not have the authority to order the performance audit — an assertion backed up by Speaker Taylor (who referred to Del. Rawlings actions as "improper") and President Miller. Del. Rawlings insists that the Appropriations Committee did have the authority to execute the performance audit, but President Miller thwarted the effort.

After the performance audit was blocked, Del. Rawlings pursued other avenues to have a review of Morgan implemented. And despite resistance on the part of legislators directly involved with the Morgan scenario, and impassioned pleas by Sen. Blount, the Fisher Review did take place.

"When the issue (withholding funds pending implementation of the action plan) came to the floor yesterday (March 22) there were no objections raised by anybody Black or White," said Del. Rawlings.

However, objections continue to be raised outside the context of the Legislature. "We're going to fight him (Del. Rawlings) to the end...a lot of us are just drawing the line here," said Sen. McFadden.

Many observers hope that this

disagreement between these influential state legislators does not obscure the bigger picture — the continued well being of Morgan State University.

"I'm not interested in a fight with the chairman, I'm interested in safeguarding one of the greatest things this state has — Morgan State University," says Sen. Blount.