

Session opens with moving tribute to Rawlings

Former colleagues honor late legend

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ANNAPOLIS — A tall, yellow flower arrangement, a folded Maryland flag and a white rose covered the former desk and chair of a giant of Maryland politics, absent for Wednesday's opening of the General Assembly's 418th session.

The ornaments and decorations reminded the lawmakers of Del. Howard Peters "Pete" Rawlings, who died Nov. 14, 2003, after a long battle with cancer.

Rawlings (D-Dist. 40) of Baltimore, chairman of the powerful House Appropriations Committee for more than 10 years and the first black chairman of a state budget committee, served more than 20 years as a state legislator.

Rawlings' family and colleagues honored the late titan yesterday as they spoke fondly of his character, vision and missed presence after the opening of the legislative session in the House of Delegates.

Rawlings' legacy, his colleagues said, was to help shape Maryland financial policy. The Baltimore native, described as a powerful politician, brilliant ed-

ucator and mentor to other delegates, was also instrumental in securing and protecting funds for Maryland's schools.

During his address to the House of Delegates, Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R) recalled Rawlings' sharp mind and the mark he left on Maryland's history.

"To his family, I made a point when he died, that legislative giants, real leaders ... few come around every generation, and Pete Rawlings was one," Ehrlich said.

Del. Salima Siler Marriott (D-Dist. 40) of Baltimore remembered Rawlings as a man who challenged her to work in public service.

"I was privileged to have him as a friend for most of my adult life," she said.

Del. George C. Edwards (R-Dist. 1A) of Grantsville worked with Rawlings on Appropriations and praised the late delegate as a straightforward leader who did not play partisan politics.

"Pete was a straight shooter," Edwards said, "You could take his word to the bank."

Del. Talmadge Branch (D-Dist. 45) of Baltimore reminisced about Rawlings' character, determination and career by reading lyrics to the song "My Way."

"He was a great teacher,"

Branch said. "If he was here today, as all of you know, his concern would be the budget."

Branch closed his remarks with a poem he said is often recited in the American-Indian community.

"But do not stand by my grave and cry," Branch read. "I am not dead. I do not die."

Del. Norman H. Conway (D-Dist. 38B) of Salisbury, Rawlings' successor as chairman of Appropriations, said Rawlings made a big impact on the lives of many people he met.

"Chairman Rawlings set a high standard for the [Appropriations Committee] ... a standard that is and will be a part of his legacy."

Del. Samuel I. Rosenberg (D-Dist. 41) of Baltimore reflected on Rawlings' vision and his desire to help Maryland's children — the future — through his legislative work. Rosenberg said Rawlings admired the symbol of the Thurgood Marshall statue outside of the State House. The statue depicts the former Supreme Court justice speaking to children with a book in hand.

"It was Pete's initiative that said, 'That statue belongs in the heart of our complex here in Annapolis,'" Rosenberg said.