

Warmly retracing giant's steps

Rawlings succession centers on old divisions

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ANNAPOLIS — Tears and political jockeying marked the death of Del. Howard P. Rawlings this week.

With various regional, racial and philosophical scenarios serving as a backdrop, Appropriations Vice Chairman Norman H. Conway and Environmental Matters Chairwoman Maggie L. McIntosh appear to be the front-runners in succeeding Rawlings as leader of the powerful Appropriations Committee.

Speaker pro tem Adrienne A. Jones (D-Dist. 10) of Woodstock remains a wildcard possibility for a committee chairmanship if Speaker Michael E. Busch (D-Dist. 30) of Annapolis decides to move McIntosh.

The death of Rawlings, a Baltimore political icon and House giant, last week sparked an intense behind-the-scenes replacement campaign that in some ways overshadowed funeral arrangements Wednesday and Thursday. It is a replacement process that has splintered the House along regional, racial, philosophical and gender lines.

The Baltimore political establishment and other urban lawmakers are calling on Busch to keep the appropriations gavel in the hands of the city, giving significant momentum to McIntosh (D-Dist. 43) of Baltimore. But Conway (D-Dist. 38) of Salisbury has a coalition of rural delegates and members of Appropriations who say the former school principal and Eastern Shore firefighter has been a loyal second to Rawlings for eight years and deserves the promotion.

"What you're about to see hap-

pen is one of the most important duties of a presiding officer in a House this large and this diverse," said former Speaker Casper R. Taylor Jr., a Democrat and lobbyist for Alexander & Cleaver. "The speaker has to balance geography, race, gender, philosophy and talent in naming a new chairman, and that is very difficult to do."

With his first year as speaker coming to an end, Busch is once again the linchpin in determining a volatile issue that could have a lasting impact on his relationship with the 98-member Democratic caucus. He has already become the most integral player in the fractious debate over slot machines. He has tried to be the glue holding the different factions of the party together, and now he is faced with naming a successor to an irreplaceable member of his leadership team.

"I guess that's why I get paid the big bucks," Busch said Thursday, saying only that he would make his decision based on what is best for the members of his caucus.

Busch said he will begin to consider Rawlings' replacement today.

Baltimore's case

Trying to predict what Busch is going to do has sent speculation in Annapolis into hyperdrive and kept the phones ringing in the speaker's office. Busch has been lobbied by U.S. Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski (D) of Baltimore, Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley (D) and members of Maryland's congressional delegation favoring McIntosh. The (Baltimore) Sun's editorial page endorsed McIntosh on Thursday. The (Salisbury) Daily Times endorsed Conway for the job.

McIntosh said Wednesday evening that she is interested in taking over for Rawlings for the good of Baltimore. She emphasized that she has more than four years of experience on Appropriations, and as a former majority

leader, she knows how to balance the needs of the entire state.

"I want to help my mayor and help the city," McIntosh said in an interview at the 28th annual reception for Maryland's women legislators here on Wednesday. She said she has influence as chairwoman of the Environmental Matters Committee, but that influence is nothing like chairing Appropriations, which carries tremendous clout in how state money is doled out.

McIntosh has been a key adviser to Busch since Taylor was defeated last year.

Having someone from the Democrat-rich Baltimore region chair the Appropriations Committee is essential to the city, McIntosh said, because it has steadily lost seats in the legislature through redistricting and many of its most powerful leaders are no longer in Annapolis. Before redistricting, Rawlings and Senate Budget and Taxation Chairwoman Barbara A. Hoffman embodied the sway Baltimore had over both money committees. Now, it has neither: Hoffman lost her primary, and the city's elder statesman, former Senate Majority Leader Clarence Blount (D), died earlier this year.

"I understand the concerns that rural lawmakers may have" if Conway is passed over, McIntosh said. "But the Baltimore region is really concerned about this seat."

Conway's crew

Conway supporters maintain that the chairmanship does not belong to Baltimore, and some members of the committee say Conway has earned the right to take over.

A diverse cross-section of the committee ranging from veteran conservative Van T. Mitchell (D-Dist. 28) of La Plata, chairman of the Health and Human Services Subcommittee, to the more liberal Tawanna P. Gaines (D-Dist. 22) of College Park say Conway should take over.

"I think [Conway] was held in very high regard by Chairman Rawlings and I think he did a very good job with the committee last year," Gaines said, adding that Conway handled the committee's work when Rawlings was out sick.

Del. Talmadge Branch (D-Dist.

Eyeing fallout

Republicans, meanwhile, say they stand to gain, whoever is appointed in Appropriations.

Conway is more conservative than McIntosh, meaning that GOP members can hammer Busch for selling out to the liberals if he chooses McIntosh. Conway is also in a tough district on the lower Eastern Shore, so if he becomes chairman and is forced to swallow some politically tough issues, the GOP can begin to build its campaign against him.

The 43-member Republican caucus also can count on some conservative Democrats to join with it on key votes on the House floor if Conway is passed over. Republicans are also betting that if McIntosh is selected, some committee members may revolt. They say they can use Busch's decision in candidate recruitment because they will argue that Democrats do not reward veteran leadership and loyalty.

It remains unclear if the move to legalize slot machines would be hurt without Rawlings' strong support. Slots supporters lost one of their most outspoken advocates with Rawlings' death, but other lawmakers said the lines on slots are already drawn and would not be affected.

Environmentalists said Thursday that McIntosh has become a champion for their causes, but many would support her move to Appropriations as long as Busch replaces her with someone of the same ideology. That means if McIntosh is moved, it seems unlikely for Busch to name a rural member to that seat because most of them are aligned with farmers and watermen, not the environmentalists.

While many in Annapolis have placed bets on the Rawlings replacement, there is only one guarantee.

"Like it or not, someone is not going to be happy," Busch said.

45) of Baltimore, a former chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus and a member of Appropriations for more 10 years, said that if Busch wants to keep the chairmanship with the city, he is ready to take on the responsibility. But Branch said Conway would be a capable chairman and see to it that Baltimore was taken care of.

Branch added that he would be happy to serve as vice chairman under Conway.

"If the speaker looks at replacing Pete from a Baltimore city and a racial perspective, I'm interested," Branch said Wednesday. Asked about McIntosh, Branch said that the committee would not be happy.

"A lot of people are not wild about putting in Maggie over Norm," Branch said. "If you haven't been involved with the budget over the past year or two, it would be hard to just walk in the door, pick up the ball and run with it."

Former delegate Cheryl C. Kagan, a Democrat from Montgomery County and a former member of Appropriations, said it would be "insulting" to Conway and to the committee if Busch brings in someone from the outside the committee.

"The rurals deserve it and Norm deserves it," Kagan said. "It's already disrupting to lose Pete, but to disrupt another committee by moving Maggie just doesn't make sense."

Asked about any hard feelings if she were to take over Appropriations, McIntosh brushed aside the question and said shuffling chairmanships between committees "would not set a precedent."

By passing over Conway, Busch would reopen a not-yet-healed wound with the conservative, rural members of the Democratic caucus. The rurals have been upset since the speaker dismantled the Commerce and Government Matters Committee — chaired by Del. John F. Wood Jr. (D-Dist. 29A) of Mechanicsville — and gave his top leadership positions to more liberal urban members.

Conway said Thursday that he is overwhelmed by the support.

"That will be the speaker's call," he said. "I deeply appreciate the numbers of people who have come forward and wished the best for me. ... It shows people are watching."