

Baltimore Lawmaker Howard Rawlings Dies

Appropriations Chief Used Post to Fight for Schools

By LORI MONTGOMERY
Washington Post Staff Writer

Del. Howard P. "Pete" Rawlings Jr., a postal worker's son whose powerful intellect propelled him out of a Baltimore public housing complex and into one of the most influential posts in the Maryland General Assembly, died early yesterday after a long battle with cancer. He was 66.

For more than a decade, the Baltimore Democrat commanded the House Appropriations Committee with imperious panache, using its authority over the state's \$22 billion budget to force momentous change in state policy, most notably on behalf of Maryland schoolchildren.

A mountainous man who spoke in a rumbling bullfrog bass, Rawlings was renowned for demanding accountability from government. He

blasted poor performance with withering criticism, as when he described underachieving schools in Prince George's County as a "national embarrassment."

Rawlings championed what he believed to be right with equal fearlessness. In 1999, he endorsed a white candidate, Martin O'Malley, over two black contenders for mayor in majority-black Baltimore because he thought that O'Malley was the best man for the job.

Rick Berndt, a lawyer and civic activist who knew Rawlings for more than two decades, described him as "a tremendous force for good."

"He would say things other people were thinking. Do things other people knew were the right thing to do," Berndt said. "To say he was a big

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BY DOUG KAPUSTIN—BALTIMORE SUN VIA ASSOCIATED PRESS

"To say he was a big man is an understatement. He had a big heart, a very big brain and a very great will," a friend said of Rawlings.



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Del. Howard P. "Pete" Rawlings Jr., who grew up in the Edgar Allan Poe Homes in West Baltimore and went on to teach math, worked hard on behalf of students, pushing a partial state takeover of the city's schools in 1997.

Baltimore Lawmaker Fought For Education as a Way Out

RAWLINGS, From B1

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Flags flew at half-staff in Baltimore and Annapolis yesterday. Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr. (R) called Rawlings's death "a great loss for the Maryland General Assembly and the citizens of Maryland." House Speaker Michael E. Busch (D-Anne Arundel) called Rawlings "a very large man who cast a very large shadow." O'Malley praised him as "a giant."

Rawlings "refused to let this wealthy state forget, for one second, that there were many poor people—the people he was privileged to represent—who were just as important as millionaires," O'Malley said in a written statement.

"Every day I knew him, Pete Rawlings fought for what's right. But while fighting against injustice, he never let people off the hook for their own personal responsibility," O'Malley said.

Rawlings's absence will have an immense impact on the coming legislative session, particularly on the issue of slot machine gambling, which Rawlings supported. Busch declined yesterday to say who might replace him as appropriations chairman. Contenders are said to include Environmental Matters Committee Chairwoman Maggie L. McIntosh (D-Baltimore), Appropriations Vice Chairman Norman H. Conway (D-Wicomico), Health and Government Operations Chairman John A. Hurson (D-Montgomery) and Del. Samuel I. Rosenberg (D-Baltimore), a respected appropriations veteran.

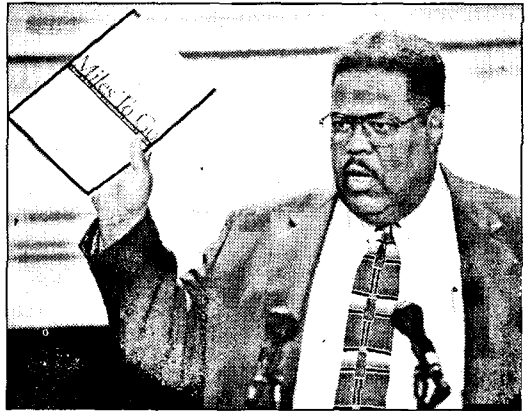
Rawlings was born on March 17, 1937, and grew up in the Edgar Allan Poe Homes in West Baltimore. He attended city schools and received degrees in mathematics from what is now Morgan State University and the University of Wisconsin. He studied at the University of Maryland at College Park, but left before finishing his doctoral thesis.

Rawlings taught mathematics at Baltimore City Community College and won election to the House of Delegates in 1978. He was named to the Appropriations Committee, ascending to chairman in 1992.

He loved to play the intimidator, with his deep voice and imposing physical presence. A few years ago, he memorably entered conference committee negotiations with Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" tucked under his arm. But he could just as easily disarm his competition with an impish smile.

His most enduring legacy is a series of education reforms, hard-won in bitter fights against local officials. In 1997, he spearheaded the effort to force a partial state takeover of Baltimore's failing public schools, a battle that pitted him against then-Mayor Kurt L. Schmoke (D) and much of the city's black establishment.

In 2002, Rawlings took the same fight to Prince George's County, threatening to withhold millions of dollars in state aid unless local lawmakers agreed to restructure the county's troubled school board.



BY JOHN GILLIS—ASSOCIATED PRESS

"Every day I knew him, Pete Rawlings fought for what's right," said Baltimore Mayor Martin O'Malley, whom the state legislator endorsed in 1999.

That same year, Rawlings played a pivotal role in developing a landmark initiative to eliminate disparities between rich and poor districts by pumping an extra \$1.3 billion into schools statewide.

"Pete wanted excellence all the time, from everybody, but particularly in the schools," said former senator Barbara A. Hoffman (D-Baltimore), an ally in many of Rawlings's battles. "Education was Pete's pathway out. He firmly believed that all children can learn and we've got to do better."

Rawlings's willingness to criticize African American institutions often provoked black leaders. In 2002, when he pushed for a wide-ranging performance audit of Morgan State, Maryland's preeminent black college, Sen. Nathaniel J. McFadden (D-Baltimore) complained that Rawlings "thinks he is the emperor of the African American community for the entire state."

But others respected Rawlings for his candor and his effectiveness. "A lot of people had a jealousy for Pete because he had ability and vision and the power. And I think people kind of resented that," said Del. Talmadge Branch (D-Baltimore), a former leader of the legislative black caucus. "He stood tall. He made tough decisions that ultimately got results."

In 1999, Rawlings was diagnosed with bladder cancer. Friends said it spread to his lungs and, finally, his brain. Until this year, he nonetheless maintained a crushing schedule. He appeared in Annapolis two months ago, hooked to an oxygen tank, for a hearing about the future of public school funding.

Rawlings died at 4:19 a.m. yesterday at the University of Maryland Medical Center in Baltimore.

He is survived by his wife, Nina, a pediatrician, and three children, Wendell Rawlings, Lisa Rawlings and Stephanie Rawlings Blake, who serves on the Baltimore City Council. His first grandchild, Sophia, was born a few weeks ago, in time, friends said, for Rawlings to hold her.