

Rawlings' death leaves 'power vacuum'

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The death of Del. Howard P. Rawlings last week delivered another blow to a city grappling with a decline in political influence, and challenged a new generation of leaders to emulate his skills and passion.

"He was just a giant in terms of his commitment to the city," said state Sen. Joan Carter Conway, a Northeast Baltimore legislator. "He was a legend all his own."

No decisions have been made on who will replace him as chairman of the House Appropriations Committee — the chamber's chief budget-writing panel — and as a representative in the 40th District in Central and Northwestern Baltimore. But possible successors are being discussed, as is the responsibility they will have to the city.

Alone, the loss of Rawlings — a longtime fiscal leader who championed better education and hometown projects — would be bad enough for Baltimore.

But it follows a series of events that have combined to silence some of the city's most respected voices in the state capital: the election loss last year of Sen. Barbara A. Hoffman, chairwoman of the Budget and Taxation Committee, and the retirement of Senate Majority Leader Clarence W. Blount, who died in April.

More than perhaps any other community in Maryland, Baltimore depends on largess from Annapolis. As it struggles to break free from a faded industrial past, the city relies on state support for everything from paying teachers to treating drug addicts and running its subway. And that support is becoming harder to come by as the city's decline in population has cut into the number of representatives it sends to the State House.

"It's clearly going to be much, much more difficult for the city to get the fair share it got in the past," said former Gov. Parris N. Glendon. "This is a low point in political power for the city itself."

While Rawlings, Hoffman and Blount compellingly argued that Baltimore is an economic engine that drives a larger region, their effectiveness often fueled resentment in the more populous Washington suburbs, which are gaining residents and seats in the General Assembly.

"When you lose talent like that, it's going to be felt in Baltimore," said Rep. Benjamin L. Cardin, a former Maryland House speaker.

But as city leaders remembered Rawlings, who died of cancer Friday at age 66, they noted his pride in cultivating fu-

Services

The viewing for Del. Howard P. Rawlings is scheduled for noon to 8 p.m. Wednesday at Nutter Funeral Home, 2501 Gwynns Falls Parkway.

Services are scheduled for noon Thursday at Douglas Memorial Community Church, Lafayette and Madison avenues, with a wake scheduled for 10 a.m. to noon.

Burial is to be at Woodlawn Cemetery.

ture leaders.

A collective effort

"He's got a lot of people planted around this city and this state that he helped get there, through his mentoring and through his guidance," said Del. Maggie L. McIntosh, a Baltimore Democrat mentioned as a possible replacement as appropriations chief. "We are all going to try to fill those shoes. They are big shoes. No one of us can do it. But collectively, we are going to continue to be the type of public servants he taught us to be."

Sen. Lisa A. Gladden, another Rawlings protege, said Rawlings' death leaves a "power vacuum" that no one person can fill.

Without Rawlings to lobby for city interests, Gladden said, additional pressure will be placed on Mayor Martin O'Malley to "step up" and play a more active role in Annapolis.

Rawlings' death will change the tenor of debate in Annapolis on a range of issues, notably education funding and slot machines. Rawlings was a supporter of legalized slot machine gambling at racetracks.

His absence creates a challenge for House Speaker Michael E. Busch, a Democrat who must consider geography, race, gender and other factors when he decides whom to elevate to the influential committee chairman position just two months before a contentious General Assembly session is to begin.

With Rawlings at appropriations and McIntosh running the environmental matters committee, Baltimore lawmakers controlled two of the six standing committees in the House of Delegates — a proportion some think the city does not deserve.

But Baltimore remains reliable territory for Democrats, and Busch, of Anne Arundel County, knows he must keep city lawmakers on his side to withstand future challenges to his leadership. Moving McIntosh to appropriations, a shift she has told others she would welcome, keeps a Baltimore lawmaker in a key position.

Possible successors

"Maggie's certainly somebody

that I would recommend," said Nathaniel J. McFadden, the Senate's majority leader and chairman of its Baltimore delegation.

But there are other options. Del. Adrienne A. Jones of Baltimore County has impressed many in her role as speaker pro tem. Jones is a former appropriations committee member and, as an African-American, would keep the same racial balance among chairmen as Rawlings provided. While not a city lawmaker, she represented parts of West Baltimore before last year's reapportionment.

Rural Democrats, however, will be chagrined if the vice chairman of appropriations, Del. Norman H. Conway of Salisbury, is not elevated to the post. Busch, after becoming speaker almost a year ago, replaced a rural lawmaker, Del. John F. Wood Jr. of Mechanicsville, as chairman of what was then the Commerce and Government Matters Committee. Another snub could cause deeper damage among the small but vocal group of lawmakers, who could be pushed into closer alignment with Republicans on some issues.

Busch rebuffed talk last week of moves within the House, calling it premature. Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, a former delegate, predicted Busch will "bend over backwards" to maintain racial and gender balance in leadership positions, and "will make sure Baltimore gets its due."

Rawlings' successor as a delegate will be appointed by Gov. Robert L. Ehrlich Jr., who, according to the state constitution, must fill the opening with a candidate selected within 30 days by the city's Democratic central committee.

One name that has been mentioned for the seat is Baltimore City Councilwoman Catherine E. Pugh, who lost a bid for City Council president this year.

"Pete's passing creates a huge hole in the legislature," said Kweisi Mfume, president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and a former state delegate. "There's going to be a great deal of speculation over the next several days: What does this mean for Baltimore? Who's in the line of succession?"

But like many political leaders, Mfume did not want to engage in speculation.

"It's a little difficult for me right now," he said, "because of the weight of this moment."

Sun staff writer Ivan Penn contributed to this article.