

# Competition for Rawlings' job heats up

## Busch to choose next appropriations chairman

By IVAN PENN  
SUN STAFF

Competition for the chairmanship of the House of Delegates Appropriations Committee grew more intense yesterday as new candidates emerged and prominent officials worked to influence the selection.

Del. Talmadge Branch, a Baltimore Democrat and a member of the powerful committee since 1994, joined the list of those seeking the post, and other lawmakers pushed Del. Frank S. Turner, a Howard County Democrat, as a candidate.

"You don't find a lot of people who really understand the budget," said Branch, who has served on the capital budget subcommittee as vice chairman of the pensions oversight committee and vice chairman of the

health and human resources subcommittee. "My experience has only been on the Appropriations Committee and having been mentored by Pete Rawlings."

Branch and Turner join presumed frontrunners Del. Maggie L. McIntosh, a Baltimore Democrat who is chairwoman of the House Environmental Matters Committee; Del. Adrienne A. Jones, a Baltimore County Democrat and the speaker pro tem; and Del. Norman Conway, an Eastern Shore Democrat and vice chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

House Speaker Michael E. Busch's advisers are urging him to move quickly to fill the chairmanship, which was left vacant with the death last week of Del. Howard P. Rawlings, a Baltimore Democrat. Some lawmakers expected Busch, who plans to be away on vacation next week, to make a decision as early as today.

Busch did not return phone calls yesterday.

Making the right choice is a crucial move for Busch. The appropriations chairman guides the House through the budget process and plays a significant role in legislative leadership.

Also, committee chairmen are the speaker's lieutenants in Annapolis. They help shore up votes on legislation and ensure the speaker retains his post during the annual elections.

Even during services for Rawlings yesterday, there was prodding for Busch to make his decision carefully.

"I can hear Pete now saying to those of you ready to go into session in Annapolis, 'Do the right thing,'" said the Rev. Frank M. Reid III. "To Busch and others thinking about putting someone in his seat, 'Do the right thing.'"

Because Rawlings was black, African-American lawmakers want Busch to replace him with another African-American. That

would favor delegates Jones, Branch and Turner.

Del. Obie Patterson, chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus, said he hopes the speaker will delay filling the chairmanship until after the caucus meets tomorrow morning, when the group plans to decide on a candidate to endorse.

Because Rawlings was one of two African-Americans to hold chairmanships in the House, the caucus wants Busch to appoint another black lawmaker to replace him or to lead another committee, Patterson said.

Lawmakers said yesterday that it is believed that McIntosh would be appointed chairwoman of appropriations and Jones would be picked to lead McIntosh's old committee, environmental matters.

Although Conway has been widely viewed as a loyal, rural Democrat who votes with the party when other rural Democrats have sided with the GOP, the pressure is on Busch to retain a Baltimore lawmaker and two African-Americans in chairmanships.

That would leave Conway, who has been Rawlings' vice chairman since 1995, on the sidelines.

Outside the church after Rawlings' funeral, Conway deflected questions about his ambitions. "It's the speaker's call at this point. He will have to decide on the individual he feels will do the best job," he said.

*Sun staff writers Michael Dresser, David Nitkin and Howard Libit contributed to this article.*