

# University compiled dossier on Rawlings

**Morgan State:** The school collected ammunition for its clashes with the powerful lawmaker over money, autonomy.

By ALEC MACGILLIS  
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SUN STAFF

As Del. Howard P. Rawlings struggled with cancer this year, Morgan State University officials compiled a secret dossier about the influential Baltimore

Democrat to use against him in future legislative showdowns.

The research on Rawlings, who died three weeks ago, was intended to aid Morgan State in its long-running battle with the powerful chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, say people familiar with the project, who requested anonymity for fear of reprisal by university officials.

Rawlings was a graduate of the historically black university but had long criticized it for what he viewed as poor management and under-performance. On several occasions, he had blocked Morgan's efforts to gain more autonomy



GENE SWEENEY JR.: SUN STAFF

**Del. Howard P. Rawlings was widely known to be dying of cancer when the background investigation was made.**

— a push the university plans to renew in the coming legislative session.

Sources familiar with the project say Morgan's general counsel, Julie Goodwin, acting at the direction of President Earl S. Richardson, [See Morgan, 6A]

# Rawlings was graduate, critic

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spent much of the late winter and spring researching Rawlings' career and his dealings with Morgan and then collected the findings into a thick dossier.

The intent was to find information that could buttress Morgan's position in its clashes with Rawlings, the sources said.

They said Goodwin, who earns \$99,336 a year, conducted much of the work during regular business hours, often from home.

U.S. Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, a Baltimore Democrat and member of Morgan's Board of Regents, expressed outrage when told by *The Sun* of the research, which he said he did not know about. Any use of state funds to pay for research into Rawlings was particularly dismaying, he said, considering that Morgan recently dismissed hundreds of students for lack of financial aid to help them.

"I would be appalled that the university would be spending a dime on such an effort, when we are literally having to let young people go — dismiss them — because we don't have the funds," said Cummings, the chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus. "If that happened, I find that totally obnoxious."

## Response to criticism

Morgan State officials acknowledged this week that they had been developing an in-depth response to Rawlings' criticisms but denied that it amounted to an investigation.

Richardson declined several requests this week for an interview, agreeing to comment only through a university spokesman. The spokesman, Clinton R. Coleman, said, "There is no investigation, and there has been no investigation of Delegate Rawlings."

Likewise, Morgan officials deny the existence of a secret dossier.

"There is no document that attempts to summarize any investigation by this university," Coleman said. He said any work done by the university in relation to Rawlings was intended only to compile, in detailed form, Morgan's account of its fraught dealings with the lawmaker and to rebut his criticisms of the school.

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Out of respect for Rawlings, Coleman said, the university does not want to go into further detail about his criticisms or its planned response to them.

Goodwin, the general counsel, said yesterday that she could not answer questions about the project because any work she does for the university is covered by attorney-client privilege.

She added, "I can, however, say that to the extent that any of the lines of inquiry suggest that I have acted outside of the scope of my duties, I need to emphasize that that couldn't be further from the truth."

The assistant state attorney general assigned to Morgan State, Mark Davis, said through a spokeswoman that he was aware of Morgan's research into Rawlings, but he declined to discuss it further.

Davis "looked at some of the information early in the process but has no comment," said a spokeswoman, Jamie St. Onge.

Documents reviewed by *The Sun* show that the research project included sending an intern to Annapolis in March to pull Rawlings' disclosure forms at the state Ethics Commission. Also in March, Morgan requested from the Internal Revenue Service the tax forms of a civil rights organization with which Rawlings was associated, documents show.

The dossier, a small portion of which was obtained by *The Sun*, included an account of how Rawlings allegedly pressured Morgan in 1992 to purchase a civil rights museum in exchange for getting greater autonomy.

The documents indicate that Morgan's research was being done at the same time that Rawlings' illness — widely known for more than a year — was visibly progressing and causing him to miss hearings in March and April.

Asked about the dossier this week, Stephanie Rawlings Blake, Rawlings' daughter and a Baltimore city councilwoman, said her father had known of the project and was upset by it.

"It wasn't concern that they would find anything," she said. "He was appalled that they were looking, that President Richardson believed this was a good use of the institution's money."

Kathryn M. Rowe, an assistant attorney general who provides legal advice to General Assembly members, said Rawlings contacted her in the spring, after he learned of the research.

"His question was, 'Was that illegal?'" Rowe said. "My answer was that it was something that an auditor could look at."

"Ordinarily, state funds would be spent for a public purpose, and it wasn't completely clear from the facts I had that this was a public purpose," Rowe said. "It wasn't clear this was illegal. It was a gray area."

## Not authorized

Six Morgan regents who returned calls from *The Sun* all said they were unaware of any research on Rawlings.

"The board had questions about [Rawlings] and why he was going after Morgan all the time, but we never authorized anything," said regent Francis X. Kelly, a former state senator. "I, for one, would not want to pursue anything when the man was sick and dying. ... I would never want to do anything to hurt his reputation."

Rawlings, who was 66 when he died, had a complicated history with his alma mater. As Appropriations chairman, he was credited with boosting funding for the college, which has seen a burst of building projects in the past 15 years. Morgan named one of its two high-rise dormitories after him.

But Rawlings sparked the ire of Richardson and other Morgan officials by repeatedly questioning the university's management. In 1999, Rawlings demanded that Morgan undergo an audit before it could acquire more independence.

Morgan is a public institution that receives \$48 million a year in state operating funds, but, along with St. Mary's College of Maryland, chose not to be part of the state's 11-campus university system. While it has gained greater authority, in some areas, including construction, it must still seek state approval for many purchases. The system's schools have less state oversight, though they must get some approvals from the system's central office.

Tempers flared again in the spring of 2002 when Rawlings

delayed planning funds for a new Morgan library, saying the university hadn't done necessary testing of the site.

With Richardson's tacit approval, hundreds of students went by bus to Annapolis to confront Rawlings about the delay, chanting, "Rawlings, stop stalling!" Morgan canceled classes for the day to make the protest possible.

Also last year, Rawlings dismissed as a "victim mentality" Morgan's claim that it received less funding because it was a historically black college.

In January, Rawlings called a hearing to look at why Morgan wasn't making more use of its new \$45 million performing arts center or getting more out of a \$14 million upgrade of its football stadium.

When Rawlings died last month, his relationship with Morgan was invoked by supporters as symbolic of his career. He supported the institutions that served his constituents, they said, but demanded accountability from them and was not afraid to flex political muscle to get it.

The portion of the Morgan dossier obtained by *The Sun* describes one alleged example of Rawlings' pressure.

In 1992, the document alleges, Rawlings told Richardson that Morgan could win more autonomy if it purchased the Lillie Carroll Jackson Museum, which Rawlings wanted to see preserved. The museum, in the 1300 block of Eutaw Place, was the home of the late civil rights pioneer and matriarch of Baltimore's Mitchell family.

The report includes references to attachments backing up its account. It alleges that Rawlings "made good on his threat" and delayed new powers for Morgan when officials there hesitated about taking over the museum.

Morgan eventually agreed to buy the museum "after being subjected to immense pressure and intimidation," the passage alleges. Morgan acquired the building in 1996 with \$118,000 in state funds, but it has sat unused since then.

The purpose of other aspects of the research is unclear. On March 31, documents show, Morgan wrote to the IRS re-



AMY DAVIS : SUN STAFF

**Earl S. Richardson, president of Morgan State University, denied through a spokesman that there was an investigation.**



ANDRE F. CHUNG : SUN STAFF

**U.S. Rep. Elijah Cummings, a member of Morgan's Board of Regents, said he wasn't informed of the project.**

questing the tax forms of the Southern Education Foundation, an Atlanta civil rights group where Rawlings once served on a study committee.

Sources familiar with the research said the inquiry was done to find out whether Rawlings had received any payments from the group that he hadn't reported.

Lynn W. Huntley, the organization's president, said that any honoraria Rawlings might have received would have come to a few hundred dollars, below the \$5,000 threshold for payments the organization was required to list on tax forms.

## Intern dispatched

On March 6 and March 11, documents show, a University of Maryland law student with an internship in the general counsel's office went to Annapolis at Goodwin's direction to pull Rawlings' financial disclosure forms for the years 1988 to 2001. Contacted this week, the intern declined to comment about the purpose of obtaining the forms.

Several Morgan regents said this week that the research might have been justified, depending on its purpose.

Regent Martin R. Resnick, the owner of Martin's Caterers, said a report might have been helpful if it sought to explain what was behind Rawlings' criticisms of the university and to present Morgan's side of its disputes with him.

But the research was inappropriate, he said, if it was intended to force approval of Morgan's legislative requests.

"If I thought the information there was to be used as a means to get something the university

would not be able to get ordinarily, that would bother me," said Resnick. "But if it was trying to find out why there were problems between the university and [Rawlings], I would have no problem with it."

## 'A defensive act'

Rabbi Murray Saltzman, who left the board this summer after retiring to Florida, said the project might have been justified as a response to Rawlings' criticisms.

"I can understand a defensive act like that, since [Rawlings] claimed to have done investigations of the university and was making all kinds of charges that didn't seem appropriate or informed or accurate," said Saltzman, formerly of the Baltimore Hebrew Congregation.

But critics said the research was inappropriate, especially given that Rawlings was very sick.

"The fact that they did it when my father was ill goes to show you what type of person is running the institution," said Stephanie Rawlings Blake. "But whenever [the university] did it, it shows a lack of integrity. If I were a student, or an alum, I would be embarrassed."

Cummings said Rawlings' concerns about university oversight should have been handled head-on, rather than through opposition research intended to discredit him.

"At first blush, I just don't think that's an appropriate way to deal with these kinds of issues," Cummings said. "I think Pete Rawlings had legitimate concerns about Morgan from time to time. But this is no way to address those concerns."