

# Rawlings misses budget debate

House panel chair 'resting' from cancer treatments

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Normally he would be there, rising from an aisle chair that places him in the thick of the action, ready with a dry quip or authoritative speech to defend an unsavory budget cut.

But yesterday, the seat of Del. Howard P. Rawlings, the Baltimore Democrat who is chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, remained empty. Rawlings, who is receiving his latest course of treatment for cancer, remained home yesterday as the House of Delegates debated the budget he put together.

"It's killing him today not to be here for the budget," said Del. Talmadge Branch, a Baltimore Democrat who is on the Appropriations Committee. "He's home, resting."

Branch and other lawmakers said that Rawlings, 66, has been receiving chemotherapy for bladder cancer that has spread elsewhere. He has appeared to be in poor health lately, and when colleagues asked how he is doing, his stock reply was a reserved "I'm here."

Rawlings did not return phone messages for comment, but his son Wendell, who answered a call to the delegate's home, said, "He's doing fine."

The House was to debate the budget at 4 p.m. Wednesday, but Rawlings — who attended the chamber's morning session — was not up to the task, so discussions were delayed. When a driver came to pick him up at home yesterday morning, Rawlings had decided not to come to Annapolis, said House Speaker Michael E. Busch.

Del. Norman H. Conway, vice chairman of the Appropriations Committee, received a call shortly before 8 a.m. telling him he would have to present and defend the \$22.6 billion budget.

When Rawlings was receiving chemotherapy during the legislative session last year, he agreed to let his doctor talk about his condition for an article. Dr. Martin J. Edelman of the University of Maryland Greenebaum Cancer Center said that Rawlings had re-

sponded well to treatment and that a tumor in his lung appeared to have shrunk entirely.

"I'm optimistic that at least for a period of time, he could go without further treatment," Edelman said at the time.

That period, he said, could be a year or more but Rawlings' chance for a relapse-free recovery was probably about 1 in 20.

Rawlings has remained in the middle of the session's most substantial issues. He is a strong advocate for slot-machine gambling, which puts him at odds with Busch. He is also advocating higher taxes to pay for education and other state needs. He worked through last weekend putting the finishing touches on a budget that includes major cuts to higher education and increased taxes on businesses and on property.

"Let me tell you, if Chairman Rawlings is too sick to be here for the budget, he's really sick," Busch said.

"I think he'd be proud of his committee," Busch added. "The sign of a great leader is that the people you work with step in and fill the void."