

# D.C. Police Dispute Clarke's Description of Protest

By Wendy Melillo

Washington Post Staff Writer

The D.C. police department and council Chairman David A. Clarke (D) were at odds yesterday over the police response to a raucous demonstration by police, corrections officers and janitors that disrupted a D.C. Council meeting.

Clarke said Tuesday that it took police about an hour to respond to his 911 call for help after about 300 demonstrators stormed a council meeting to protest salary reductions and a controversial property tax cut that has been debated since fall.

But police officials said that officers posted outside the John A. Wilson Building, where the demonstration began, immediately responded to

Clarke's call and that the protesters left within 30 minutes.

A spokeswoman in Clarke's office said Clarke wasn't available yesterday to respond.

Council member Harold Brazil (D-Ward 6) said he had suggested that the chairman call a recess, but Clarke refused. "He lost control of the meeting," Brazil said. "He had the means at hand with the police saying they could clear the room, or by his calling a recess. It is reprehensible that he would allow that kind of thing to go on."

Inspector D.W. Bostrom, commander of the special operations division, said he and two officers followed the demonstrators when they moved into the Wilson Building about 10:45 a.m.

Bostrom said that when police received Clarke's call at 11:02 a.m., he and the two officers went upstairs.

"When I walked in, there was a lot of shouting and chanting," Bostrom said. "But police can't go in and just clear the chamber. It has to be requested."

Bostrom said that council Secretary Phyllis Jones alerted him that the chairman might want the chamber cleared but that he never received the order. Jones did not respond to telephone messages left at her office.

Bostrom said he conferred with JC Stamps, head of the police union labor committee, who instructed the protesting police officers to leave. Guards and the janitors followed the

officers out about 11:30 p.m., Bostrom said.

"The hour that Clarke said it took us is a lie," said Stamps, who was outside the council chamber during the protest. "As soon as I heard the jeering and disruption, I went in and directed our people out."

Stamps said he was disturbed by both the chairman's and the media's portrayal of the officers' behavior at the meeting. Brazil said that the janitors appeared to be responsible for most of the shouting and that the police officers' protest was orderly.

"We are all upset about the pay cuts, and it is our constitutional right to protest," Stamps said. "It was a public forum, and Mr. Clarke should have listened to us."

Mary Anne Hohenstein, an orga-

nizer with Justice for Janitors, said about 60 members of her group attended the meeting to protest a council plan to cut property taxes for building owners.

"We have been protesting this vote for a long time," Hohenstein said. "And we sympathize with what is going on with city workers."

The council has ordered a 12 percent pay cut for the 21,000 unionized workers under Mayor Marion Barry's control. The pay cut is scheduled to take effect April 2.

Gary Hankins, former head of the police union and a consultant to the union representing corrections officers, said the demonstration could erode city and congressional confidence in police officers.

"I am afraid their activities could expose them to becoming the example that some political leaders think must be made of labor in the District," Hankins said.