

D.C. Taxi Strike Leaves Travelers

More Than Half of City's 7,000 Cabs Suspended Service in One-Day

By Hamil R. Harris
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Hailing a taxi became doubly difficult in downtown Washington yesterday as thousands of drivers pulled their cabs from the streets to protest new regulations imposed by Mayor Marion Barry.

Swarms of anxious travelers gathered at curbside to vie for the taxis still plying city streets. People who traveled up to thousands of miles arrived at National Airport and Union Station to discover that covering the final city blocks would pose the biggest challenge in their journeys.

Novell B. Sullivan, chairman of the D.C. Taxicab Commission, estimated that more than half of the city's 7,000 taxis were out of action yesterday.

The controversial regulations announced two weeks ago are designed to put better-trained drivers on the streets in newer, air-conditioned cabs equipped with meters that would replace the current fare system, under which rates are based on the number of zones a ride entails.

Unyielding to the protest, the mayor yesterday criticized taxi drivers for dressing poorly, speaking badly and lacking manners.

"Cabdrivers need to dress more profes-

sionally," Barry said at a news conference. "Some of them look like they are going on a picnic. Drivers need to be able to speak English."

In a later interview, the mayor admitted that the drivers "need to show a little more courtesy" to their passengers.

Barry said that the city would help drivers find private financing to replace cabs that are more than six years old and that hearings would be held so drivers could voice their complaints. Organizers of yesterday's 12-hour strike said they considered Barry's latest comments a declaration of war. They promised more protests, and yesterday

at the Curk *Protest, Official Estima*

they picked up paperwork at the D.C. Department of Elections and Ethics to launch a referendum against the mayor.

"The mayor wears a warm-up suit to the office. Don't tell us about a dress code," said Nathan Price, chairman of the D.C. Professional Taxi Cab Drivers Association. "Ninety-five percent of the drivers stay at home, people were stranded at National Airport, Union Station—and this was an appetizer."

Caught in the middle of it all was Gilbert, who took off on Delta Shuttle Flight 1741 from New York's LaGuardia Airport.