

Sen. Gurney Is Indicted For Bribery

By John P. MacKenzie
Washington Post Staff Writer

Sen. Edward J. Gurney (R-Fla.), a member of the Senate Watergate committee, was indicted yesterday on charges of taking bribes from Florida builders in return for favored treatment from federal housing officials.

A federal grand jury in Jacksonville returned a 33-page, 11-count indictment charging Gurney, four aides and political allies and two officials of the Department of Housing and Urban Development with conspiracy and bribery. Gurney was also accused of lying four times before the grand jury that voted the charges.

Gurney, former three-term congressman who is seeking his second Senate term this fall, vigorously denied the charges.

"I maintain my absolute innocence of wrong-doing," he said in a statement. "I have an abiding faith in the American system of justice, and I firmly believe that I will be proved innocent of any wrong-doing in this affair. I intend to fight this move just as hard as I can, and I will be vindicated."

The handsome, 60-year-old senator put the responsibility on Larry E. Williams, his former aide and principal accuser. He blamed himself for being "careless and unobservant and too trusting" when, he said, Williams used his name to extort money from constituents.

Williams, 31, is under a
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prison sentence after pleading guilty to bribery and tax evasion. He is one of the 42 individuals named as unindicted co-conspirators by the grand jury.

Gurney repeatedly denied the charges during the grand jury's 10-month investigation. Last December he said at a press conference that he had been unaware of the political fund-raising that was at the core of the charges and ordered it stopped as soon as he learned of it.

One of the charges in the indictment was that Gurney lied when he made the same denials at a May 13 appearance before the grand jury.

Several of the events depicted in 115 alleged overt acts in furtherance of the conspiracy occurred last summer, when Gurney was in the national spotlight during the televised Watergate hearings.

His questioning, including his dogged cross-examination of former White House counsel John W. Dean III, earned him the reputation of President Nixon's staunchest supporter on the committee.

Gurney is the first senator in 50 years to be indicted while holding office, although several sitting congressmen were indicted during that period. The last incumbent senator indicted was Sen. Burton K. Wheeler (D-Mont.), who was acquitted in 1924 of malfeasance.

The bribery counts carry maximum prison sentences of 15 years and fines up to \$20,



EDWARD J. GURNEY
... vigorous denial



JAMES L. GROOT
... accused in bribes

000 or three times the amount of a proven bribe, whichever is greater.

Money specified in the conspiracy count totalled \$233,160 in payments from builders and developers with pending HUD business to a Gurney aide or to Gurney-related political organizations.

Two bribery counts accuse Gurney personally of accepting a free condominium apartment unit in Vero Beach, in return for favors for John Dye, a developer. One of the false-declaration counts accuses him of lying about that gift.

Accused in three counts of soliciting bribes was James L. Groot, Gurney's administrative assistant from 1971 to 1973. Joseph Bastien, executive assistant in Gurney's Florida office at Winter Park, was accused of agreeing to ac-

cept a bribe in return for getting Williams to put pressure on HUD on behalf of two real estate developers.

The grand jury also said Gurney lied when he testified that his law firm had strict orders not to accept clients with government business and when he denied making a telephone call to tell a HUD official not to award a certain project to a man in Panama City, Fla.

Besides Gurney, Groot and Bastien, the conspiracy defendants are Earl M. Crittenden, former state GOP chairman and Gurney's 1968 campaign chairman; George Anderson, former state party treasurer and Gurney's 1968 finance chairman; Wayne Swiger, director of the HUD office in Tampa, and Ralph Kootz, special assistant to HUD's Florida area director.