

WXPost JUL 24 1974
**Sen. Gurney
Drops Out of
Florida Race**

By Ian Glass

Special to The Washington Post

MIAMI, July 23—Edward J. Gurney, Florida's first Republican senator since Reconstruction, said today he will not seek re-election because he wants to clear his name of bribery, conspiracy, and perjury charges.

His decision was received with relief by GOP leaders in this strongly Democratic state. Republican state Chairman L. E. (Tommy) Thomas of Panama City has been the most vocal in suggesting Gurney withdraw from the race.

Clearwater drugstore millionaire Jack Eckerd, one of two Republicans who has filed for Gurney's seat, said he was sure Gurney's decision was based "on what was best for his party, his state and his country."

Paula S. Hawkins, head of the state's Public Service Commission, is favored to win over Eckerd for the GOP nomination for the senator's seat. She was traveling out of state today and was unavailable for comment.

Gurney, a member of the Senate Watergate committee who was a loyal supporter of President Nixon during the committee's hearings last year, was indicted by a federal grand jury in Jacksonville two weeks ago.

The charges stemmed from a \$233,000 secret fund collected on his behalf from builders seeking influence with the Federal Housing Administration.

See GURNEY, A10, Col. 1

GURNEY, From A1

The first U.S. senator to be indicted while in office in 50 years, Gurney has pleaded innocent. On Monday his attorney, C. Harris Dittmar, told U.S. District Court Judge Charles R. Scott in Jacksonville that the indictments should be dismissed because, he said, the grand jury had been illegally impaneled.

Last weekend, while visiting Florida, Gurney indicated the charges had caused him serious trouble and said he was tired of politics.

"This is a Democratic state," he said then, "and to be elected, you need strong Democratic support."

In a statement issued today by his Washington office, Gur-

ney said. "There is no sensible or sound way to conduct a state-wide political race and prepare for, and go through, a major trial." He added that he was innocent of any wrongdoing, "and the first priority is to clear my good name."

Gurney's decision gave decided impetus to Florida Democrats to regain the Senate seat. Eleven had filed by today. Most likely to succeed in gaining the nomination are U.S. Rep. William Gunter or former Secretary of State Richard Stone, with state Sens. Richard Pettigrew of Miami and Mallory Horne of Tallahassee as other major contenders.

Gunter, campaigning in Tampa, said today, "I hope these charges (against Gurney) turn out to be untrue because they tend to destroy public confidence in every office holder regardless of party." Asked how Gurney's withdrawal will affect his race, Gunter said it would have no significant impact.

Stone said, "I'm sorry to hear of Sen. Gurney's withdrawal because I had looked forward to facing him on national issues."

GOP hopefuls Hawkins and Eckerd almost had competition from U.S. Rep. Louis Frey of Orlando, who had seriously considered filing for the seat, then announced last week he wanted to stay in Congress and concentrate on the job of deciding, after listening to the Watergate tapes, whether President Nixon should be impeached. Through a spokesman, Frey said he was not surprised by Gurney's decision.

The 11-count indictment against Gurney named him and six others, alleging efforts to raise campaign contributions as kickbacks from contractors and developers trying to win contracts from the FHA. No date has been set for Gurney's hearing.

The day before the indictments were handed down, Gurney posted his \$2,125 filing fee to qualify for the September primary. His term will end in January and he therefore will be able to vote on the issue if the House decides to impeach President Nixon.