

TV Lights, Invitations, Kisses and Phone Calls

By Jeannette Smyth

Sen. Herman E. Talmadge (D-Ga.) turned down an offer of a \$10,000 honorarium and a free trip to Acapulco for a speech there.

The switchboard at Sen. Edward J. Gurney's (R-Fla.) Northwest Washington apartment building lights up with calls from women wanting to know if the wavy-haired 59-year-old is "unattached and available." (He has been married for 33 years.)

A woman in Dallas wants to marry 77-year-old Sen. Sam J. Ervin Jr. (D-N.C.), who — after 19 years in the Washington phone book — got an unlisted home phone number to avoid the press.

Sen. Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii), who lost his right arm in World War II, says "there's no question" that the Senate Watergate committee hearings are the most difficult influence on his life that he has yet encountered.

The televised coverage of the marathon hearings in the Senate Caucus Room has changed the lives of all seven senators who form the committee. It has brought them fame and glory and high profiles. It has brought unwanted attention, too, attracting mobs they don't quite know how to handle, for example, or increased amounts of do-me-a-favor mail from people who'd never heard of any of the seven before the televised hearings began May 17.

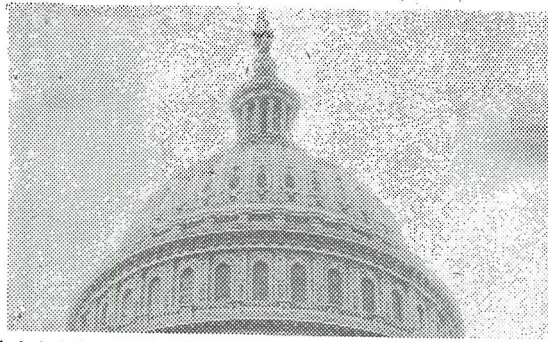
One Ervin aide says they may have to hire a guard to run interference through crowds of journalists and tourists who dog "Uncle Sam's" tracks.

Recently, an aide in Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr.'s (R-Tenn.) office wailed, "If I get one more letter from somebody who wants a job, they can have mine!" (In response, a mischievous colleague dashed off a gag letter, purportedly from the widowed mother of five starving children, and was delighted when the joke was taken seriously.)

The volume of mail for the Watergate senators has increased as much as five times since, early this year. Tourists flock to committee members' offices, wanting souvenirs or autographed pictures.

Speaking invitations from all over the country are coming in. Requests for Ervin, Baker and Gurney have doubled, according to aides, with Ervin's up 100 per cent over last year and Baker's up from 30 or 40 requests a week to 100 requests a week since the televised hearings began. Gurney's appointments secretary says she could book him two major speeches every weekend, as compared to one mediocre groundbreaking every weekend pre-Watergate.

See SENATORS, B13, Col. 1



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SENATORS, From B1

Unsolicited honorarium offers to Ervin and Baker have increased by an average of \$1,000 per speech. Some offer Ervin an honorarium as high as \$5,000. And for the first time, Sen. Joseph M. Montoya (D-N.M.) has signed a contract with a speaker's bureau (Montoya has private real estate income, a spokesman says, and turns his speaking fees over to a New Mexico scholarship fund).

When 6-foot-6 Sen. Lowell P. Weicker Jr., (R-Conn.) went to a Mets-Braves baseball game recently at New York City's Shea Stadium, he outbatted superstars Hank Aaron and Willie Mays "three to one" in numbers of autograph seekers, an aide said.

The television exposure could prove to be a boon in terms of campaign advertising for the four Watergate committee members whose terms expire next year—Sens. Ervin, Inouye, Talmadge and Gurney. And though most staffers insist their man isn't running for national office, at least four senators—Baker, Inouye, Talmadge and Gurney—are urged to do so by letter-writing fans.

People keep writing and phoning to say how happy they are to see that America has "honest"—and "charismatic," "sexy," "adorable"—politicians working for them.

Four Watergate committee members have become the John, Paul, George, and Ringo of Watergate. They are Baker, Inouye, Gurney and Talmadge.

Baker, 47, leads the hit parade with about 100 mash notes and is said to be embarrassed about it. The notes range from that of a lusty 69-year-old who wrote (anonymously) "I could vote for you for President all day, and all night, too!" to the cheeky babysitter from Bardstown, Ky., who penciled "You broke my heart Sen. Baker! I was all set on marrying you (so what if you're 30 years older??) when I found out you were already married."

Baker's wife, Joy, daughter of the late Sen. Everett Dirksen (R-Ill.) is nonplussed. "I got used to it. My daddy had a lot of those," she said.

Sen. Gurney's fans apparently prefer the telephone. He's gotten "quite a few" marriage proposals, he says, asking if he's "unattached and available." Gurney, whose wife is an invalid, seems a little horrified by his new sex-object status. Asked how a gentleman answers questions about availability, his voice flared a little. "I just say I'm not!" he cried.

(Gurney fans should know that he does his own grocery shopping, suffers from war wounds sustained in the Battle of the Bulge with Patton's Third Army, and carries a chair cushion to ease his injured back.)

If Baker and Gurney are taken aback by female adulation, Talmadge

and Inouye are taking it in. Talmadge, 59, who may have been feeling his age after the recent birth of a fourth grandchild, is amazed by the young women who rush up to him in the Capitol subway to give him a kiss. Two days after, it first happened, Talmadge showed up for work in a sports jacket—for the first time in recent memory, according to an aide.

(Talmadge fans should know he keeps getting rather good cigars from TV fans.)

In a recent poll of Atlanta beauty shops, Sen. Inouye, 49, was voted "the sexiest man on the Watergate committee." (Georgia's Talmadge came in second on his own turf. Baker was third. "It's the Oriental mystery," one senator noted.) Asked if he'd heard about it, Inouye simply laughed a long, sexy baritone chuckle and said his wife, Maggie, voted the same way.

But Inouye is not entirely sanguine about the effect of the Watergate hearings on his life. For one thing, a bank of blinding lights for color television faces the senators' table and burns into senatorial retinas day after day. Inouye found he wound up with "horrible headaches" every day. He took to wearing sunglasses until a woman called to say they made him look like "a member of the Yokohama Mafia." He's had a new pair of slightly tinted glasses made, and can still be glimpsed shading his eyes during testimony.

Personal remarks, suggestions and criticisms are common. One woman wrote 42-year-old Sen. Weicker "I love your mod glasses, but please do something about that tie you wear all the time." Others write Sen. Talmadge that he has demolished their stereotype that Southerners are ignorant, or to tell Sen. Baker to get a haircut and contact lenses and to smile more. "When you do, Wow!" wrote a 15-year-old Washington state girl.

Washington hostesses apparently haven't jumped on the bandwagon yet. None of the Watergate senators admits to an increase in social invitations, perhaps because summer is off-season. The senators point out they're too busy to accept anyway, or like Sen. Weicker, like to go to bed early.

"I've been so darn busy," said Sen. Gurney. "I'm not much of a social bug. I don't like parties that much, and I have to save most of my socializing for Florida."

One senator says he's sent his family home, partly because of threatening telephone calls. "I wouldn't want my son to pick up the phone and hear some of that," he said.

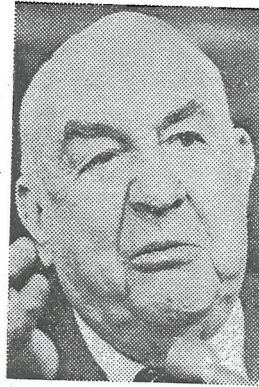
He's not changing the phone number, but a bachelor life of hamburgers and eating out of cans does not amuse him. It's part of the fallout of Watergate.



Sen. Gurney seems a little horrified by his sex-object status.



Sen. Montoya has signed with a speaker's bureau for the first time.



Sen. Ervin has an unlisted number after 19 years in the phone book.