

Gurney Blast at Probe

Washington

Senator Edward J. Gurney, President Nixon's staunchest defender on the Senate Select Watergate committee, has called the work of the committee a "travesty" in a private letter to New Hampshire Governor Meldrin Thomson Jr.

"The only concrete contributions we have made have been to force down the stock market, up the price of gold, devalue the American dollar, hurt the economy, and destroy the confidence of people in the American political system," the Florida

Republican said in the October 5 letter. "These are certainly concrete contributions but about as useful as a block of concrete tied around a swimmer's neck."

Although Gurney's staff at first appeared to disclaim the letter, a spokesman said yesterday that a photocopy of it had been found in Gurney's files. The spokesman said Gurney "characterized it as letting off a little steam."

Thomson sent a telegram to the chairman of the Senate committee, Senator Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Dem-N.C.) on September 17, complaining

about the activities of committee investigators in New Hampshire. Thomson also apparently wrote Gurney, although the spokesman for Gurney said yesterday that Thomson's letter could not be found.

In his letter to Thomson, Gurney said, "I have myself been the object of two investigations in Florida by the staff of our very own committee, an action unprecedented in Senate committees as far as I know."

Chief committee counsel Samuel Dash said yesterday that it is "absolutely untrue" that the committee

staff has investigated Gurney. Dash said that one witness who will be called before the committee this week, Miami builder John Priestes, is involved with "a local Senator Gurney matter," but "we did not get to him because of any investigation having anything to do with Senator Gurney."

Gurney acknowledged last week that the Justice Department is investigating allegations that Florida builders secretly contributed large sums of money to him and expected preferential treatment by the Federal Housing Administration in return. Gurney has denied

knowledge of such fundraising efforts.

Priestes is one of seven witnesses to be called this week. The committee resumes its hearings today. The committee will question Priestes on the circumstances surrounding solicitation of a contribution to the Nixon re-election campaign in return for a favor from the FHA, according to sources.

The committee's Republican minority has scheduled witnesses, all of whom are expected to be heard today, as part of the committee's investigations into "dirty tricks."

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