

Gurney to Remain on Panel

The administrative assistant for Sen. Edward J. Gurney (R-Fla.) said yesterday that despite Gurney's absence from the last eight public sessions of the Senate select Watergate committee and several private sessions, Gurney does not intend to resign from the committee and "doesn't intend to slack off."

James N. Allison Jr., Gurney's administrative assistant, said that Gurney had been absent from the committee meetings because of conflicts with sessions of the Senate Judiciary Committee, which was considering the nomination of William B. Saxbe as Attorney General, and other matters that "were a little bit more pressing" than the Watergate hearings.

The Washington Post reported Tuesday that Gurney has ceased to be an active, functioning member of the Watergate committee, having missed the last eight public sessions, private meetings of the committee in recent months and declining to preside at private interviews with



SEN. EDWARD J. GURNEY
... absence explained

witnesses when requested to do so by the staff.

The public sessions that Gurney has missed span the period from Oct. 31 until Nov. 15, when the hearings were recessed indefinitely. "I think the overall pattern of the committee is that there has not

been as much of a significant nature going on since Oct. 31 as there was before," Allison said.

Allison denied that Gurney's absence from the committee hearings had anything to do with a Justice Department probe into allegations that Florida builders secretly contributed large sums of money to Gurney and expected preferential treatment from the Federal Housing Administration. Gurney has denied knowledge of such fund-raising activities.

Allison said yesterday that Gurney, who could not be reached for comment, does not expect to be indicted. Gurney, Allison said, has offered to appear before two grand juries in Florida and expects to be called sometime in late January. In any case, Allison said, the investigation has not affected Gurney's time.

Gurney has attended at least one executive session of the committee members since Oct. 31, Allison said.