

EX-G.O.P. AIDE TELLS OF GURNEY REBUFF

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TAMPA, Fla., May 14 (UPI)—

A witness testifying at the bribery-conspiracy trial of former Senator Edward J. Gurney said today that he told the Senator in May, 1971, that Larry Williams, a political fund-raiser, was twisting the arms of Florida builders to get political contributions.

The witness, L. E. Thomas, who was chairman of the Republican party in Florida at the time, said that Mr. Gurney had brushed him off.

Mr. Gurney and four co-defendants are on trial for allegedly raising a \$233,000 political fund by promising builders favors from the Federal Housing Administration if they would contribute to a fund for Mr. Gurney. In addition to Mr. Gurney, those charged include his former aides, James Groot and Joseph Bastien, and two former F.H.A. officials, Ralph Koontz and K. Wayne Swiger.

Mr. Thomas said he went to Mr. Gurney's office May 5, 1971, to make him aware of allegations of fund-raising misdeeds by Mr. Williams. He said he had asked Mr. Gurney if he was aware of the complaint by Phil Emmer, a Gainesville builder, in which he alleged Mr. Williams tried to shake him down for a contribution to Mr. Gurney.

"I don't think he answered me," Mr. Thomas said adding that he repeated the question.

"Senator Gurney stood up," Mr. Thomas said. "I was an enlisted man in the service and I know when a commissioned officer does that it means you're through. He said, 'I don't have time to be worried about things like that. If you have anything to say you take it up with James Groot.'" Mr. Thomas said that Mr. Groot later told him: "We know all about it. We're perfectly capable of handling it."