

GURNEY TESTIFIES HE URGED INQUIRY

Tells of Second Thoughts,
Fearing Leak to Press

Special to The New York Times

TAMPA, Fla., July 2—Former Senator Edward J. Gurney testified today that in mid-July of 1973 he wrote a letter to Elliot L. Richardson, then the Attorney General, to ask for an investigation of a campaign fund-raising operation conducted in Mr. Gurney's name.

However, Mr. Gurney said, after having the letter hand-delivered to a liaison person in the Justice Department, he had second thoughts about it and had it returned to him unopened before it reached Mr. Richardson.

The former Republican Senator from Florida, who did not seek re-election after his indictment last year on charges of bribery and conspiracy, said that after he wrote the letter he became concerned that its contents would be leaked to the news media while the Watergate hearings were being televised nationally.

"My effectiveness on the [Senate] Watergate Committee would have been totally destroyed," Mr. Gurney said.

Mr. Gurney testified about the letter during his second day on the witness stand at his trial in United States District Court. He and three co-defendants are charged with multiple felonies in connection with campaign funds raised in Mr. Gurney's name from Florida builders in the 1971-1973 period.

Mr. Gurney, who is 61 years old, said that it was not until the summer of 1973 that he learned, through an internal investigation conducted by an aide, James N. Allison Jr., that funds had been raised illegally from builders in exchange for favors with Federal housing agencies.

Any public knowledge about fund raising irregularities linked to him, Mr. Gurney said, would have been an "embarrassment" to the Nixon Administration, the Republican party, the Senate and the Watergate Committee. Eventually, in late August, 1973, Mr. Gurney said, he telephoned Henry E. Peterson, the Deputy Attorney General in charge of the Justice Department's Criminal Division, and asked for an investigation of the fund raising.

Mr. Gurney's former administrative assistant, James L. Groot, who has pleaded guilty to conspiracy in the case, testified earlier that Mr. Gurney destroyed the letter to Mr. Richardson after it was returned. But Mr. Gurney testified today that it was Mr. Groot who destroyed it.