

# Gurney Found Innocent Of Bribery, Perjury

## Mistrial on 2 Charges

Tampa, Fla.

Former Senator Edward Gurney, who cut short a 20-year political career under the cloud of a federal indictment, was found innocent yesterday of bribery, accepting unlawful compensation and three counts of lying to a grand jury.

The federal jury, which deliberated 56½ hours over ten days after sitting through 86 days of testimony in the influence-peddling case, could not reach verdicts on a conspiracy charge and one count of perjury against the 61-year-old Republican, who was former President Nixon's strongest supporter on the Senate Watergate Committee.

The six-man, six-woman jury found co-defendants Ralph Koontz and K. Wayne Swiger, both suspended Federal Housing Administration officials, innocent of conspiracy.

The panel said it was deadlocked on a conspiracy charge against former Gurney aide Joseph Bastien but found him innocent of accepting unlawful compensation.

U.S. District Judge Ben Krentzman declared a mistrial on the unresolved charges.

All four defendants were charged with conspiring to raise an illegal \$233,000 slush fund for an aborted 1974 Gurney re-election campaign. Prosecutors said the defendants sold the former senator's influence with the FHA to Florida builders seeking contracts.

Jury members said the panel split 7-to-5 for innocence on the unresolved conspiracy count against Gurney, 9-to-3 in favor of conviction on a similar charge against Bastien, and 9-to-3 for conviction on the unresolved perjury charge against Gurney.

"Thank God for the jury system that got me out of the clutches of the Justice Department," Gurney said. He refused to speculate on the reasons behind his prosecution, but said it probably came because "somebody wanted to hang a big hide on the wall."

The five-member team of prosecutors left the courtroom declining comment on the outcome of an investigation that started in late 1971 and culminated



AP Wirephoto

EX SENATOR EDWARD GURNEY WITH DEFENSE ATTORNEY  
'Somebody wanted to hang a big hide on the wall'

an unfair burden on us by not proving their case more clearly," said Harold Franklin of Lakeland, a postal employee.

"The proof just wasn't there."

Gurney, the first incumbent U.S. senator indicted since the Teapot Dome scandal of the 1920s, appeared relaxed as the jury filed into the courtroom. He sat with his head resting on his fingertips.

Before dismissing the jurors, Krentzman thanked them for their patience and efforts.

"If there were medals for

distinguished citizenship . . . I would award them to you," he told the weary panel. He praised the jury as "a model for jurors in this country."

Gurney, who decided not to seek re-election to a second Senate term following his indictment last year, said: "The government's had its shot. They never had a case to begin with."

He refused to say whether he would make a comeback in politics.

The case centered around the activities of ex-Gurney fund raiser Larry Williams, who testified as the government's key witness that he collected nearly \$400,000 between 1971 and 1973 by shaking down builders in Gurney's name.

Gurney, who began his political career two decades ago as a city councilman in Winter Park, was first elected to Congress in 1962. After serving three terms in the House, he defeated former Florida Governor LeRoy Collins for the Senate in 1968.

Associated Press