

Gurney Cleared Of Bribery, Four Other Charges

Judge Rules Mistrial on Two Counts

TAMPA, Fla., Aug. 6 (UPI) — Former Sen. Edward J. Gurney (R-Fla.), the staunchest defender of President Nixon on the Watergate committee, was acquitted today of five felony charges at his bribery-conspiracy trial. A mistrial was declared on two charges, including the key conspiracy charge.

The jurors declared themselves unable to reach agreement on the conspiracy charge and on a charge of making a false statement to a grand jury.

The jurors found Gurney innocent of bribery, receiving unlawful compensation and three counts of lying to a grand jury.

"I adjudge you to be not guilty," said U.S. District Court Judge Ben Krentzman of the five counts upon which the jurors agreed. "As for offenses one and eight, I declare a mistrial."

The jurors, who deliberated 10 days, acquitted two other persons of conspiracy charges.

They could not reach a verdict on a conspiracy charge against a fourth defendant, former Gurney aide Joseph Bastien, and the judge declared



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a mistrial on that charge. The jurors acquitted Bastien of a charge of receiving unlawful compensation.

On July 10, 1974, Gurney became the first U.S. senator to be indicted since the Teapot Dome scandal of the 1920s. He and his associates were charged with conspiring in a \$400,000 influence-peddling scheme involving the Federal Housing Administration that allegedly put more than \$233,000 into a political slush fund for Gurney.

Foreman James Baker said five of the jurors voted to convict Gurney on the conspiracy count and seven voted not guilty. On one count of lying against Gurney, the split was nine for conviction against three for acquittal. Baker said the jury was also divided, 9 to 3, in favor of conviction on the conspiracy charge against

Bastien.

"The first thing I want to do is express great thanks to everyone who has believed in me all over the country," Gurney said.

"The next thing I want to say is thank heavens for the jury system. The trial is over. I have a good feeling. I am extremely relieved that it is over.

"This was a fine jury. It got me out of the clutch of the U.S. Department of Justice."

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GURNEY, From A1

The jurors acquitted two suspended FHA officials, Ralph Koontz and K. Wayne Swiger, on charges of conspiracy.

Gurney's two daughters were sitting in the spectators' section. When the verdicts were read, the husband of Sarah Gurney Stoner gave her a hug as she began to dab her eyes.

Gurney remained emotionless and looked straight ahead as the judge polled the jurors. Later, standing in the hot sun outside the court, he said he did not think the government would take him to trial again.

"If they couldn't prove a case after plea negotiations with all the key witnesses and certainly some perjury, I don't think they will try it," Gurney said.

Chief prosecutor Harvey Schlesinger had no comment. Swiger blew kisses with both hands to the jurors as they boarded a bus, saying, "Thank you, thank you."

"The power of the government is overwhelming, but thank God for honest jurors," said Koontz. "Some of their ordeals must be the same as the accused."

Gurney, 61, resigned his Senate seat in December. He had withdrawn his bid for reelection after his indictment on July 10, 1974.

He plans to take a vacation and possibly write a book about the trial, saying, "This would make one of the best books in the history of jurisprudence."

Asked if he planned to resume a political career, Gurney said, "It's an option."