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SENATOR GURNEY WITH DAUGHTERS SARAH STONER (LEFT) AND JILL HOLT
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'Ordeal Over'

Gurney Innocent Of Perjury Charge

Orlando Fla.

A federal jury found former Senator Edward Gurney innocent yesterday of a charge of lying to a 1974 grand jury about a massive political shakedown scheme.

The verdict by the jury of eight men and four women, who deliberated an hour and 18 minutes, ended three years of investigation and prosecution for the 62-year-old Republican, the first senator indicted in office in 50 years.

Gurney had been charged with lying to the grand jury about his knowledge of a scheme in which his subordinates collected more than \$400,000 in Gurney's name by promising builders favors with the Federal Housing Administration.

"I have a feeling of great relief that this long ordeal is finally over, a feeling of great satisfaction that we've beaten these mean, vicious people from the government," a smiling Gurney told reporters immediately after leaving the courtroom.

"They destroyed a United States senator, blackened my name and besmirched my character," said the bitter ex-senator about the Justice Department.

Gurney said the prosecution had been carried out "on flimsy evidence gotten from plea-bargainers," referring to his one-time fund-raiser Larry Williams and others who testified for the government.

Gurney gained national prominence as a tough-questioning defender of former President Nixon during the Watergate hearings.

Asked if he thought Watergate had anything to do with his prosecution, the tall, gray-haired Gurney told reporters on the steps of the federal building that "I can only conjecture about Watergate ... I expect it probably did."

Gurney was charged with lying to a 1974 federal grand jury in Jacksonville when he said he didn't know until mid-1973 that his fund-raiser, Williams, was paying expenses of his field offices and staff from an illegal political slush fund.

The charge was the last one remaining from the scandal that sent four men to prison.

The scandal halted the political career of Gurney, who decided not to seek re-election in 1974 after the charges were made.

The perjury case centered on the activities in 1971-73 of Williams, who testified for the government that he pressured Florida builders for some \$400,000 in Gurney's name. He said they paid in exchange for favored treatment from FHA offices in the state.

Williams, 32, of Orlando, had told the trial jury that he told Gurney everything about his activities since Gurney hired him in 1971.

In the end it all boiled down to the jury believing the former senator over his former fund-raiser.

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