

# Betting Operation Scratched In the Halls of Congress

By NEIL LEWIS

Washington (News Bureau)—Congressmen and their aides can still enjoy cut-rate haircuts, subsidized meals, and a host of other perquisites that abound on Capitol Hill, but one little-publicized fringe benefit—a convenient horse betting and numbers operation—has gone out of business, at least temporarily, as a result of FBI interest.

The once-thriving gambling business was centered in the basement of the Longworth House Office, outside the cafeteria. The chief operator, Augustus (Gus) Burness, was observed over a period of weeks by The News doing a brisk business just a few feet from a U.S. Capitol Police Department headquarters.

Burness, 72, lives in Bowie, Md. He had an arrest record for gambling offenses dating back to 1957.

Always cordial, Burness would set up shop outside the cafeteria entrance where Capitol Police were alertly checking identification cards to make sure that only employes are allowed into the lunchroom at that hour. Many of the uniformed officers and Gus would banter with each other throughout his stay as he openly took money from people while writing down their bets.

News reporters watched Burness and so did two reporters—Lewis Perdue and Ken Cummins of the Congressional News Syndicate. They said that they placed bets themselves and even observed some police officers doing likewise.

Chief James Powell, who heads the 1,140-member Capitol Police force said, when questioned about Burness, "I can only say, in my own case, I never

*(This is the first of a series of articles to be published from time to time on the underside of life on Capitol Hill.)*

knew about it and nobody ever complained about it to me."

Kenneth Harding House Sergeant-at-Arms who is responsible for security in those buildings, said, "I wish to hell somebody had told me about it."

The FBI became interested in the case after agents were alerted by Perdue and Cummins. The U.S. Attorney's office was about to seek a search warrant in hopes of finding out who else might be involved. But two weeks ago, Burness mysteriously closed down his operation, which included runners who collected bets from congressional offices.

Law enforcement officials said that Burness apparently had been tipped off. Powell and Harding were both alerted by the FBI, as well as House Speaker Thomas P. (Tip) O'Neill. Both Harding and Powell deny leaking the information to anyone.

O'Neill's assistant, Gary Hymel, said he received the call himself, told the speaker and no one else.

Powell and Harding said they might question officers to find out how they might have been able to ignore Burness's activities.