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MARKETPLACE

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HEADLINE: Why candidates need millions of dollars in contributions

ANCHORS: DAVID BRANCACCIO

BODY:

DAVID BRANCACCIO, anchor:

With all this attention to campaign finance, it's important not to lose sight of why candidates need all that money to get elected. MARKETPLACE commentator Martin Kaplan has helped run presidential campaigns and even wrote and produced "The Distinguished Gentleman," an Eddie Murphy movie highly critical of our system of money and politics. He's currently associate dean at the Annenberg School for Communication at USC.

MARTIN KAPLAN (Commentator; Associate Dean, Annenberg School for Communication, USC): Well, a campaign has several parts. One part is known as free media. It's the media you get because you are a candidate and because the media have a public interest obligation to cover you. What has happened to that idea is excuse me, are you nuts? You have to have an FBI investigator to find stations who give people free media just because they are candidates. So free media just about doesn't exist. Earned media, the next part of the campaign, is when you make news. The problem is that nowadays stations are even bailing out of carrying news because it's not profitable anymore. And when news is carried, the idea of covering politics is usually considered ratings poison.

BRANCACCIO: So what they do then is the third category.

KAPLAN: Paid media. You have to buy the stuff. And, in fact, in the 2000 election cycle, somewhere between \$750 million and \$1 billion went to local stations for paid ads. The candidates are buying their time. They are bombarding us with their messages. And for stations, it's fabulous because it's become a profit center. When cold cream and soft drinks are not buying ads, the candidates have to because it's their only way. Basically, 80 percent of the advertising budget of a campaign goes into television ads.

BRANCACCIO: Now the civics teachers listening in on this, Marty, will be saying to themselves, I think, 'Why is it that I can't get people to be more proactive about this, to actually seek out political intervention to make an informed decision on Election Day?'

KAPLAN: It's because we have an attention economy and we suffer from a kind of information sickness. In a given day, we are bombarded with 5,000 to 10,000 messages

from billboards to radio to television to magazines. And in that context, politics has a hard time of getting our attention. Marketers know that the way you get our attention is by using sex or novelty or fear. And it's in that mix that politics has to compete. So they basically use fear--fear of the other person, fear of not going for your person--and the combat and theater, the entertainment quality to keep us paying attention. It just isn't enough to care about civics and democracy anymore.

BRANCACCIO: And the people competing for our attention have plenty of money to buy these ads.

KAPLAN: Yes. A politician has to be as savvy as a new movie opening or a new product being promoted. Movies have enormous marketing budgets behind them; so do products. And politicians, in order to get our attention, have to be just as well-funded as anything else in the age of entertainment.

BRANCACCIO: Marty, thank you very much.

KAPLAN: Pleasure.

BRANCACCIO: Martin Kaplan is also director of the Norman Lear Center at USC.

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