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## **MARKETPLACE**

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HEADLINE: Marty Kaplan of the Annenberg School of Communication talks about the disagreement between NBC News and Congressman Henry Waxman over a tape of election night coverage

ANCHORS: DAVID BRANCACCIO

BODY:

DAVID BRANCACCIO, anchor:

The nexus between the business of the media and politics, we think of Marty Kaplan, associate dean of the Annenberg School of Communication at the University of Southern California. Hello, Marty.

Mr. MARTY KAPLAN (Associate Dean, Annenberg School of Communication): Hello, David. Welcome back.

BRANCACCIO: Thank you. There's a spat, as I understand it, between NBC News, owned by General Electric Corporation, and a senior California congressman, Henry Waxman, a Democrat. This thing started when, in--in February?

Mr. KAPLAN: On Valentine's Day there was a hearing at which Congressman Waxman asked Andrew Lack, the president and CEO of NBC, to supply a tape that he'd heard an urban rumor about prepared by the advertising and promotional arm of NBC News of their election night desk. And apparently, according to this rumor, the head of General Electric, Jack Welch, was seen on these tapes at that desk hissing and cheering as various returns came in, and allegedly trying to influence the outcome of NBC's call of the winner.

BRANCACCIO: In the direction of George W. Bush.

Mr. KAPLAN: As it turns out.

BRANCACCIO: Now what emerged was there is an internal tape at NBC of the internal workings of the newsroom during that time. But NBC vociferously denies

that Chairman Welch in any way influenced the editorial process.

Mr. KAPLAN: Yes. Andrew Lack was polite at the hearing and said, 'Of course I'll give you this tape.' But then, unfortunately, when he was asked to supply it, he probably was caught between a boss and a hard place, and my guess is that the tape itself, if it were supplied, could conceivably be embarrassing.

BRANCACCIO: And so he's refusing now to give up the tape, and Congressman Waxman really wants that tape.

Mr. KAPLAN: Yes, indeed, and so they've now swapped quite a few 'Dear Congressman Waxman,' 'Dear Mr. Lack' letters, growing increasingly testy, and now raising the issues of First Amendment protection. After all, isn't the news-gathering operation of a major network immune from these kind of congressional probes?

BRANCACCIO: Yet this internal tape is not a news interview tape. It's apparently a promotional tape that NBC would use.

Mr. KAPLAN: Yes, indeed. I mean, after all, the heads of these Multimedia conglomerates--election night is like the Super Bowl, and who wouldn't want the boss to be hanging around the skybox? So there's no shock that the corporate owners would be around in the midst of all this stuff. The question is, is there a kind of explosive cocktail when you mix that kind of camaraderie with the issues of who gets to call an election and in what timing because, of course, as it turns out, election night, in many ways, did turn on who called what for whom when. We had John Ellis at Fox, a Bush family relative--John Ellis, a Fox news executive, apparently in contact with the Bush campaign, and their call for Bush had implications, and the ways in which the other networks calling it for Gore or for Bush affected the narrative of that night, giving the election to one person, taking it away, giving it to the other one. Who owns it? Who doesn't have it? These things did have a huge impact on the public relations battle which then was waged in Florida.

BRANCACCIO: Congress has not had much success over the years subpoenaing tapes from news organizations.

Mr. KAPLAN: That's correct. On the other hand, Congress has been hugely successful in raising enormous amounts of money for the broadcast networks. The Commerce Committee, which Congressman Waxman is one of the most upright and ethical members of, is known around Washington as the 'honey pot,' because more lobbyists give more money to that committee than to any other committee of Congress, and that includes the broadcast operation. So imagine that they're just a bit miffed that their investments in trying to rent the committee have not paid off in being let alone on the oversight front.

BRANCACCIO: All right, Marty, thank you. Marty Kaplan is also director of the Norman Lear Center at USC. It should be noted that NBC's owner, GE, is one of the underwriters of MARKETPLACE.

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