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MARKETPLACE

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HEADLINE: DR. MARTIN KAPLAN OF THE NORMAN LEAR CENTER  
DISCUSSES WHY SOME HOLLYWOOD CELEBRITIES ARE IN FAVOR OF  
CAMPAIGN FINANCE REFORM

ANCHORS: DAVID BRANCACCIO

BODY:

DAVID BRANCACCIO, anchor: This is MARKETPLACE. I'm David Brancaccio. Some Hollywood celebrities who've given a lot of money to politicians are banding together to push for limits on the amount of money people give to politicians. Some of the star power for what's called the Creative Coalition comes from William Baldwin, Ben Stiller and Marlo Thomas. The coalition is pushing for campaign finance reform, which stalled once in the Senate, but its champion, Arizona Senator John McCain, is trying again.

Groups as diverse as the American Civil Liberties Union and the Christian Coalition oppose McCain's brand of reform on free speech grounds. But Republican McCain is welcoming the help from Hollywood, comparing it to the classic Frank Capra film "Mr. Smith Goes to Washington."

Dr. MARTIN KAPLAN (Director, Norman Lear Center): Stop me before I contribute again.

BRANCACCIO: That's Dr. Martin Kaplan, director of the Norman Lear Center, and associate dean of the USC Annenberg School for Communication, henceforth to be known as Marty.

Hello, Marty.

Dr. KAPLAN: Hello, David.

BRANCACCIO: Why is Hollywood interested in this issue?

Dr. KAPLAN: Well, for one thing, they're probably fed up with having their pockets picked. Politicians come to California for gold every two years, and who can blame them for being fed up?

But for another--campaign finance reform is, I think, a pretty decent, apple pie, motherhood kind of issue if you care about the conduct of politics in this country. And it's no surprise or shock that people in Hollywood are just as eager to clean up the sewer money as everybody else is.

BRANCACCIO: Also comes as no surprise that the Hollywood community, by and large, liberals.

Dr. KAPLAN: Well, it's said that Hollywood is full of liberals. And, of course, that's why Charlton Heston was given to us by God to disprove the example. But by and large, if you look at the amounts of money that Hollywood gives, two-thirds seem to go to Democrats and a third to Republicans.

But interestingly, you can't truly generalize that way. If you look at individual companies, you can find that in some cases, like DreamWorks, 100 percent goes to Democrats. But if you look at some other entities in the industry, like the Cable Television Association, the National Association of Broadcasters, it very heavily for the Republicans.

BRANCACCIO: Has John McCain, who's been leading the charge toward campaign finance reform--is he embracing this new push from Hollywood?

Dr. KAPLAN: I think he's kind of likening it to a Capra movie. There's something awfully sweet in casting yourself as Jimmy Stewart. Interestingly, he was--along with Senator Joseph Lieberman--one of the people who dumped on Hollywood for spreading images of sex and violence. So there's a--strange bedfellows here.

BRANCACCIO: You've been looking through some data that shows quite graphically that although Hollywood may give a lot of money to politics, it's certainly, by no means, the source of most of the funds for politics.

Dr. KAPLAN: No. In fact, the number one source of givers are lawyers and law firms, especially trial lawyers, and the securities investment industry, the real estate industry, health professionals, insurance. You have to go down to number eight before you hit TV and movies. And of those which are before it, there's a pretty fair spread. Some are very pro-Democratic and some are very pro-Republican.

BRANCACCIO: The Creative Coalition's push is coming a little late. It looks like the move toward campaign finance is beginning to unravel, at least the type of reform as envisioned by John McCain.

Dr. KAPLAN: Well, it's--it's late in the sense that it's about a generation late. McCain-Feingold had many predecessors which never went anywhere, and perhaps this one is dead on arrival, too.

The problem is that it was fine to be for it as long as you wouldn't have to see it passed on your watch. And as long as Democrats were outnumbered, it was safe for them to be for it. But now that it actually might pass, they have to worry about, for example, the protection of their own incumbency and then the fact that many of their constituents, like labor unions, really do object to many of its provisions. Ever since the Supreme Court ruled that money is speech in politics, Democrats ha--and issue advocates have depended on having quite a flow of it.

BRANCACCIO: Well, Marty Kaplan, thank you very much.

Dr. KAPLAN: Pleasure.

BRANCACCIO: Martin Kaplan, associate dean at the Communications School at the University of Southern California. He was also the writer of, and executive producer for, the 1992 Eddie Murphy movie "The Distinguished Gentleman," which includes this scene between Murphy, playing a congressman, and a lobbyist.

(Excerpt from "The Distinguished Gentleman")

"TERRY": How about putting limits on malpractice awards?

Mr. EDDIE MURPHY: Well, you tell me.

"TERRY": Well, if you're for them, I got money from the doctors and the insurance companies. If you're against them, I got money from the trial lawyers. Let's put you down as 'against.'

Mr. MURPHY: Yeah. You know what? Put me down for 'against.'

Terry, tell me something. With all this money coming in from both sides, how could anything possibly ever get done?

"TERRY": It doesn't. That's the genius of the system.

(End of excerpt)

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