

## NBC Election Night Coverage

### Waxman Renews NBC News Assault September 11, 2001

*Election: GE chairman-- also a major contributor to GOP--pushed to have contest called for Bush, Democrat's letter alleges.*

#### Los Angeles Times

By Megan Garvey

Firing another shot in his ongoing feud with NBC, Rep. Henry A. Waxman (D-Los Angeles) released an eight-page letter Monday detailing alleged efforts by then-corporate chief Jack Welch--a major contributor to the Republican Party--to intervene in the network's election night decision-making.

Waxman charged that eyewitness accounts of the evening "sharply conflict" with statements made by Welch and network officials that he had nothing to do with the premature decision to call the presidential election for Republican George W. Bush.

Waxman first broached rumors about Welch's behavior in January, when the heads of the major network and cable news divisions were called before Congress to account for serious mistakes made during the coverage of the 2000 presidential election.

Welch recently retired after a legendary career as chairman of General Electric, which owns NBC. During the hearing, NBC News President Andrew Lack told Waxman that, if any existed, he was "certainly welcome" to internal videotapes made of Welch on election night, only to withdraw the offer days later.

Welch, who attended an election night party at NBC's headquarters in New York, also visited the newsroom, and he has conceded that he cheered for Bush, saying other people cheered for Democrat Al Gore. But in an interview last week with Associated Press to mark his long-planned retirement, Welch said the idea that he interfered with coverage decisions was "pure crazy."

Waxman's letter, sent Monday to NBC Chairman Bob Wright, charges that eyewitness accounts indicate otherwise.

The congressman's summary of the night's events came from interviews with "credible individuals" who were present, he said. Waxman released his findings in frustration over NBC's refusal to turn over the videotapes. Last month, in a move widely criticized by free speech advocates, Waxman had threatened to seek a congressional subpoena for the footage. The latest letter makes no mention of a subpoena, but emphasizes NBC's use of public airwaves as cause for scrutiny.

NBC officials, however, dismissed Waxman's account.

"In an eight-page tome, Congressman Waxman comes up with the shocking revelation that Jack Welch was interested in the result of what was perhaps the most fascinating night in the history of presidential elections," NBC spokeswoman Kassie Canter said. "And that he supported George Bush. Not exactly a news flash."

And, Canter said that Waxman "doesn't dispute" the network's assertion that news decisions that night were "in no way, shape or form the result of Jack Welch's influence."

Waxman said in the letter that Welch's "reported behavior in no way impugns the integrity or independence of Tom Brokaw, Tim Russert or other news reporters at NBC," but that it nonetheless raised "troubling questions."

According to Waxman's sources, Welch spent much of the night at NBC's decision desk, where election returns were projected.

Among their allegations:

- \* Welch and other visitors "distracted" NBC News Director of Elections Sheldon R. Gawiser with repeated questions about how his projection decisions were made.

- \* Welch had access to raw election data that weren't available to news anchors, writers, producers or other on-air reporters.

- \* After instruction about reading the data, Welch later concluded that Bush had won Florida, and shared his analysis with Gawiser. Witnesses told Waxman that "at almost the same time, John Ellis--George W. Bush's cousin and Fox News' senior decision desk official--called both the Florida and the national election for George W. Bush. Immediately after this announcement, Mr. Welch was observed standing behind Dr. Gawiser with his hand on his shoulder, asking why NBC was not also calling the election for Bush."

According to Waxman's sources, "shortly after this," Gawiser called the election for Bush. A similar call was made by all major television news outlets within minutes.

Waxman again called on NBC to turn over the videotapes and to explain the "specific steps" it will take to protect the line between corporate and news activities.

In an internal review conducted earlier this year, NBC officials recommended that the network consider isolating the decision desk and protecting the election analysts from "unnecessary interruptions."