

Fox pulls plug on JFK docu

BY J. MAX ROBINS

NEW YORK — The Fox weblet had reserved a choice prime time berth in the upcoming all-important May sweeps for a hard-hitting documentary into alleged ties between John F. Kennedy and the Mafia. But that was before News Corp. chairman Rupert Murdoch, who keeps a vigilant eye on Fox's news programming, had a chance to regain control of his beloved New York Post newspaper.

Now the Fox JFK/Mafia project is on hiatus. Early in March, Fox News president Van Gordon Sauter had commissioned the New York-based independent production company Globalvision to produce the JFK/Mafia documentary.

Sauter knew Globalvision had produced "Beyond 'JFK'" — a documentary exploring the charges made in Oliver Stone's film about the Kennedy assassination — and had been able to get it done in a scant two months.

Sauter was asking Globalvision for another quick turnaround. Ev-

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MONDAY

APRIL 12, 1993

Murdoch aims to appease, regain Post

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eryone involved expected a spate of JFK specials in the fall, to mark the 30-year anniversary of his assassination, and this was a way to get a jump on the pack.

But in the week of March 29, when it became clear Murdoch would once again gain the reins of the Post, Sauter notified Globalvision that the JFK/Mafia project was on hold at least until the fall, according to a Fox source.

By that time, Globalvision was already in production. The company had signed up New York Post columnist Jack Newfield, who produced a "Frontline" docu on the alleged mob connection to the JFK assassination, and Marc Levin, a veteran producer for Bill Moyers, who recently produced a documentary on the mob for HBO.

Globalvision president Rory O'Connor declined comment.

Attempts to reach Fox executives were unsuccessful.

It appears from the timing of the decision to suspend production on the JFK/Mafia project that Murdoch doesn't want to do anything that might anger his longtime adversary, Sen. Edward Kennedy — at least, not until he receives the requisite waiver from the Federal Communications Commission that

would put the Post back in the News Corp. empire. A Democrat-dominated FCC is expected to decide whether to give Murdoch the waiver sometime in the next 60 days.

It was Kennedy who thwarted Murdoch's efforts to obtain a permanent waiver from the FCC's cross-ownership rule, which prohibits ownership of a TV station and a newspaper in the same city.

Murdoch got a temporary waiver on the rule when he bought the Metromedia station group in May 1985. The deal included stations in New York and Boston, where he owned the Boston Herald paper.

Kennedy got Sen. Ernest Holling to insert a rider into an appropriations bill on Dec. 22, 1987, prohibiting the FCC from granting any waivers to its cross-ownership rule. The bill passed and Murdoch was forced to sell the Post in 1988 to developer Peter Kalikow. Murdoch challenged the legislation and the D.C. Court of Appeals overturned it, but the ruling came too late to save the Post.

For Kennedy, this must have been sweet revenge. The Massachusetts senator had long been the subject of attacks from the Murdoch news machine.

At the time of the forced sale of the Post, Murdoch in the New York Times called Kennedy's ac-

tions "liberal totalitarianism." Murdoch told biographer William Shawcross that the loss of the paper was "a nightmare."

Ever since then, the Boston Herald and supermarket tabloid the Star have continued to make Kennedy a favorite target. He has been repeatedly manhandled by Murdoch's Twentieth TV syndicated magazine show "A Current Affair." Senior correspondent Steve Dunleavy, author of a scandal-laden bio of the Kennedy clan, has made Teddy-related stories a specialty. "My guess is you won't see Dunleavy doing a number on the Kennedys during sweeps," said a Fox insider.

But now the conservative media tycoon and the liberal senator appear to need each other. Odds are Murdoch will receive a waiver from the FCC, but it's not a sure thing. At least one group, the Hispanic Media Coalition, has already vowed to fight Murdoch's attempt to receive a waiver.

Kennedy has let it be known that for the time being he won't oppose Murdoch's attempt to sidestep the FCC cross-ownership rule. Perhaps the senator, who faces a tough re-election bid in 1994, believes if he doesn't fight Murdoch, he will be granted a respite from the wrath of the Murdoch news machine. So far, that appears to be the case.