

Mrs. Graham Links White

By Morton Mintz
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The chairman of the Washington Post Co. has sworn that challenges to the television licenses of two Florida Post-Newsweek stations were filed, in her belief, as "a part of a White House-inspired effort to injure the . . . company in retaliation for its Watergate coverage."

"There were many undesirable consequences resulting from the filings," Katharine Graham said in an affidavit filed in a Federal Communications Commission proceeding concerning one of the stations, WPLG in Miami.

The affidavit, filed Friday by Covington & Burling, the Washington law firm representing WPLG, was an outgrowth of an NBC "Today" show interview with Mrs. Graham last July 30.

Interviewer Barbara Walters, inquiring whether the White House had taken specific action against the company because of The Washington Post's Watergate in-

vestigation, asked if there had been "any pressure" in connection with the company's broadcast properties.

"Yes, of course," Mrs. Graham replied. "We had, right after the election was over, two stations with four challenges, which is some sort of first . . ." Three of the challenges were aimed at WJXT, the Post-Newsweek station in Jacksonville, and the fourth at WPLG.

"All the people challenging" the renewals sought by the stations were Nixon administration supporters or sympathizers, Mrs. Graham said. She noted that no competing applications had been filed against any of the other commercial TV ownerships which were simultaneously seeking renewal. These numbered 32.

The Miami challenger, Tropical Florida Broadcasting Co., petitioned the FCC last month to enlarge the issues to include the interview and an inquiry into the basis of Mrs. Graham's "charge," her motivation in making it, and the effect of

her conduct on WPLG's comparative qualifications.

Tropical Florida attached to the petition an affidavit from its president, Cromwell A. Anderson, saying that the challenge "was not and has not been encouraged in any way by the Nixon administration or any person connected therewith. . . ." Anderson categorically denied that the application "resulted" from The Post's role in Watergate, and said that none of the stockholders in his firm has ever communicated with the administration in connection with the challenge.

Post-Newsweek lawyers, in a reply, emphasized that Mrs. Graham "had made no 'charges' against anyone," but had responded to spontaneous questions.

They also stressed that Tropical Florida had offered no explanation as to what the "Today" issue has to do with the case.

"The Anderson affidavit is most significant for what it does not say," in that it "does not disclaim involve-

ment in the application by persons not officially connected with the administration," the lawyers said. Yet, they said, "there are prominent Floridians with close ties to the administration that easily come to mind as possible links."

In support of the reply, the attorneys submitted affidavits from Barbara Walters and Mrs. Graham about the interview, which was excerpted by NBC from a three-hour taped session.

Miss Walters said that the invitation to the publisher to appear on "Today" was entirely her own, that neither she nor anyone else from NBC had rehearsed any questions with Mrs. Graham, and that "I decided what questions to ask. . . ."

Mrs. Graham, explaining her response to Miss Walters' question about "any pressure," listed several specifics she had given during the long taped session.

She recalled having said that the president of the group challenging the Jacksonville station was George Champion Jr., "a chief Florida fund-raiser for the President's re-election committee," and that a former counsel to the committee, Glenn Sedam Jr., "had been involved in at least one of the initial meetings" of the Jacksonville group.

In Miami, the Tropical Florida group "included a number of close friends and former business associates of the President," Mrs. Graham said.

Although former Sen. George Smathers (D-Fla.), "a friend of the President, was not a member of the group, his brother was, as

House, TV Fights

was his law partner, Cromwell Anderson," Mrs. Graham continued.

She also cited reports in various news media about the desire of the White House to retaliate because of Watergate coverage. "For example, Time magazine on Nov. 27, 1972, had quoted a White House source as saying, 'The whole idea was to screw The Washington Post,'" she said.

"I was aware of John Dean's testimony before the Senate Select Committee that the President had ordered him in fall 1972 to maintain an enemies list and that The Washington Post was on that list," the publisher added.

In light of subsequent disclosures, she believes "even more strongly" today than in the past that the license challenges were "part of a White House-inspired effort . . ."

Mrs. Graham listed the

following "undesirable consequences" resulting from the challenges:

"A drop in the price of the company's stock, a large increase in our legal fees, a great burden in preparing to defend our past performance before the FCC, and unfortunate distractions of our officials and employees from the important business of operating their television stations."

"These consequences" are likely to continue as long as the license challenges are alive, and it could take years for the cases to be completed," Mrs. Graham said in the affidavit.

"All of this was foreseeable at the time the challenges were filed, and was undoubtedly perceived as 'pressure' or retaliation by those who, in my opinion, had inspired the filing of the challenges."