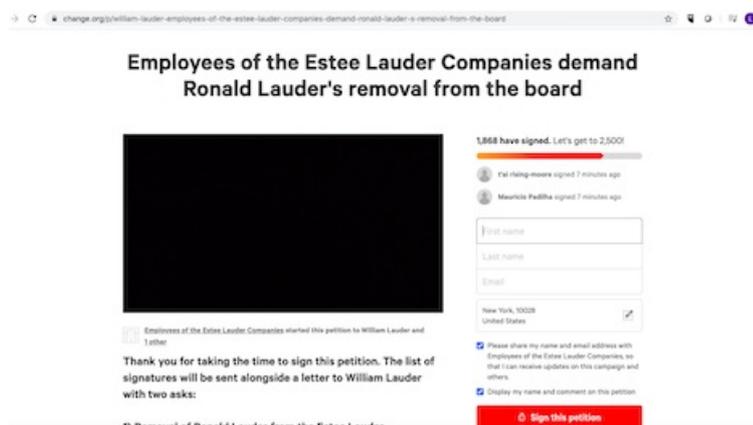


BEAUTY

Cancel culture: Ronald Lauder gets caught in name-and-shame game for Trump support

June 5, 2020



A Change.org petition is pressuring Estee Lauder Cos. to remove Ronald S. Lauder from the board of directors for his support to President Trump. Image credit: Change.org

By MICKEY ALAM KHAN

A petition on Change.org asking for Ronald Lauder's removal from the board of beauty products giant Estee Lauder Cos. has already gathered nearly 4,000 signatures.



The interesting thing is: the ask is from Estee Lauder Cos. employees cross at Mr. Lauder's \$1.75 million donations in support of President Trump. The petitioners are upset that Estee Lauder Cos. has committed to donate only \$1 million to the African American community, now deeply aggrieved over repeated police brutality toward the group.

"This total does not match, or exceed Ronald Lauder's personal donations in support of state-sanctioned violence," the petition said.

In addition to the ouster of Mr. Lauder, the petitioners want **Estee Lauder Cos.** to up its donation to African American causes fivefold to \$5 million.

The **petition's goal is to get 5,000 signatures** from company employees to force Mr. Lauder out.

Holding to higher standards

Here is what the letter to Estee Lauder Cos. executive chairman William Lauder says:

Dear Mr. William Lauder,

I am sending you this message on behalf of a collective of Estee Lauder Companies employees, and allies to the Black community. Along with this letter we have included a petition for the removal of Ronald Lauder from the board of the Estee Lauder Companies.

Thank you for participating in this morning's NOBLE Town Hall. Unfortunately, many of our questions were not answered due to limited time. Considering your vocalized support of the Black community, we feel confident and hopeful that you will respond now.

As you know, Ronald Lauder's personal investments have been made public. In 2018, Ronald Lauder made a \$1.6 million personal donation to the National Horizon Super PAC in support of Donald Trump. In 2017, Ronald Lauder made a \$100,000 personal donation to the Trump campaign. In 2016, Ronald Lauder made a \$50,000 personal donation to the National Horizon Super PAC. In 2012, Ronald Lauder made a \$250,000 personal donation to the National Horizon Super PAC. Ronald Lauder joined the Este Lauder Companies board in 2016, which means he has made personal donations of at least \$1,750,000 in support of Donald Trump while working for this company.

During this morning's NOBLE Town Hall, you informed us that the Este Lauder Companies will be making a donation of \$1,000,000 in the interest of the Black community. This total does not match, or exceed Ronald Lauder's personal donations in support of state sanctioned violence.

As you consider this petition, we hope that you will also consider and answer the following questions:

- Do you think having Ronald Lauder represent the Este Lauder Companies in leadership and by public example, will be perceived as damaging to any statement or PR action the Este Lauder Companies makes now in support of the Black community?*
- How does Ronald Lauder's public support of Donald Trump, both financially and in calling him a "man of intelligence" on record, not imply support from the Este Lauder Companies, or make us complicit in Donald Trump's agenda?*
- Do you consider the state sponsored violence and racism at the hands of United States police related to your current motivation to declare solidarity with the Black community? If not, why?*
- When deciding to protect Ronald Lauder's position on the board, did you plan to have the Este Lauder Companies make a public statement to our consumers? If not, why?*

The public believes (and your employees believe) that supporting a company by purchasing its products is akin to supporting the leadership of that company and their values.

Ronald Lauder is a visible supporter of both Donald Trump, and the Este Lauder Companies. Ronald Lauder's involvement with the Este Lauder Companies is damaging to our corporate values, our relationship with the Black community, our relationship with this company's Black employees, and this company's legacy.

Below are our final questions to you, Mr. Lauder:

Are you willing to increase the company's total donations in the interest of the safety and health of the Black community to \$5,000,000?

If not, why?

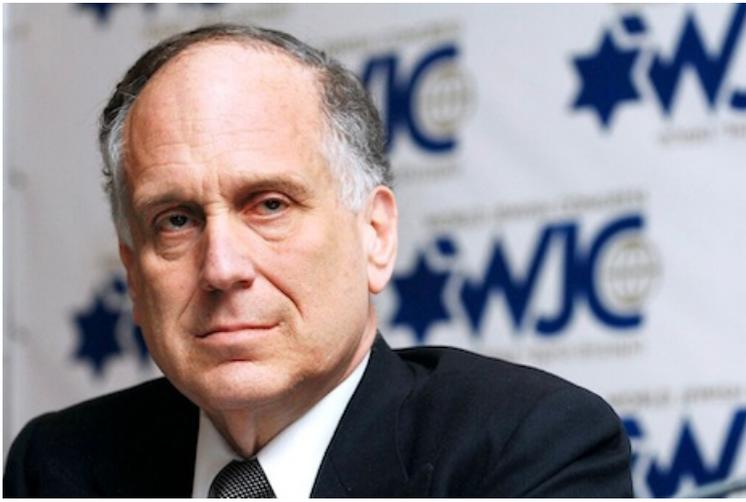
Will you remove Ronald Lauder from the board of the Este Lauder Companies, in an act of solidarity with the Black community and victims of police violence?

If not, why?

Thank you for taking the time to read this, we all look forward to your response.

Best Regards,

Your Employees



Ronald S. Lauder

Work forces

Mr. Lauder is a Republican, former ambassador to Austria, president of the World Jewish Congress, cofounder of New York's Neue Galerie dedicated to Austrian art, father to beauty entrepreneur Aerin Lauder and an open supporter of Mr. Trump.

For those watching, Mr. Trump has deeply polarized the United States with his response to the ongoing protests against the death of George Floyd a few weeks ago in Minneapolis police custody. Republicans have largely called for law and order, and Democrats for curbing police violence against African Americans.

Mr. Lauder and his family, including elder brother Leonard A. Lauder, are committed philanthropists, donating to causes ranging from art and culture, museums, religious charities, health, and diversity.

Most recently, Estée Lauder Cos. donated millions of dollars to hometown New York for COVID-19 medical relief even as the company suffered severe losses for lost sales over global lockdowns.

The past few days have seen several companies step up to the plate and throw their support behind anti-racism efforts and police brutality toward African Americans.

In fact, never before have luxury brands and retailers taken such a naked stance on social issues that have roiled the United States in the form of peaceful protests and the accompanying acts of hooliganism and vandalism that took advantage of the situation.

Even leaders of luxury marketers have shown solidarity toward the marches and the cause that underlies them.

What is emerging, though, is the increased power of employees to force employers to stand up and be counted or, as it is in Mr. Lauder's case, hounded out.

In essence, this pandemic coupled with the protests against police violence has empowered the collective employee voice to be as powerful as the board of directors' ability to chart the course for the company.

Some companies and leaders can resist more than others.

Mark Zuckerberg, cofounder/CEO of Facebook, resisted employee, media and public calls to censor Mr. Trump's incendiary posts on the social network.

Facebook rival Twitter had no compunctions adding footnotes or hiding Mr. Trump's posts for allegedly violating their guidelines protecting against instigating violence.

Mr. Zuckerberg took a swipe at Twitter by saying he did not want Facebook "to be an arbiter of truth."

The reality is, he did not want Facebook and its social media properties to be treated as publishers, legally responsible for content on their platforms.

As Mr. Zuckerberg feared after Twitter's editorializing, Mr. Trump issued an executive order withdrawing Section 230 protections dating back from 1996 protecting Internet platforms from being treated as publishers.

Of course, that order will be challenged in court and likely overturned.

But the point is, Twitter listened to its employees and Mr. Zuckerberg did not. And he could afford to stand resolute

because absolutely nobody can remove him as CEO of Facebook, given his commanding control of voting shares in the company.

That is not the case with Mr. Lauder. His company like Facebook is public, and while the Lauder family owns quite a lot of stock, they cannot afford to ignore external voices, forget that the current pushback is from a section of its own workforce.

THE LITMUS TEST is out. Will Este Lauder Cos. capitulate to its disgruntled employees' demands? And if it does, is employee activism crossing that fine line into vigilantism? Is the cancel culture staking more claims?

An even bigger question is, should the company founders, management, board members and executive ranks share the same political views as their employees or consumer market?

Increasingly, the public expectation to that question is yes. Values have to align across the board, from leaders to customers.

Ironically, that stance comes at the cost of free speech. Support for contrarian causes will either go underground or there will be a litmus test for association with a company: our values or yours.

Este Lauder Cos., in its statement responding to the petition, made a choice.

"Our employees are the heart and soul of this company," the company said. "This week, several employees asked whether a single member of the Lauder family and our board represents the views of our company. The answer is no.'

"While we respect everyone's right to make their own political decisions, no single individual represents the views of our company. As a company, we stand firm on the values in which we were founded: respect, equality and inclusion."

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