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Why CEOs spurned Donald Trump's business councils, in their own words

Donald Trump disbanded his two business advisory councils as CEOs staged an exodus to protest his response to a white-supremacist rally that turned violent

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US President Donald Trump dissolved the manufacturing group headed by Dow Chemical's Andrew Liveris.
Photo: AP

Houston: President Donald Trump disbanded his two business advisory councils Wednesday as chief executive officers staged an exodus to protest his response to a white-supremacist rally that turned violent.

The latest departures began 14 August, when Merck & Co. CEO Kenneth Frazier left a manufacturing-jobs group, saying he was taking “a stand against intolerance and extremism.” Trump attacked him on Twitter, and as other CEOs departed, the president labelled them “grandstanders.”

By 16 August, with other corporate bosses heading for the exits, Trump dissolved the manufacturing group headed by Dow Chemical Co.'s Andrew Liveris and a strategy and policy forum headed by Blackstone Group's Stephen Schwarzman. Here's a look at how the CEOs responded, starting with the exit of Uber Technologies Inc.'s chief over immigration policy and the June departure of billionaire Elon Musk, who left in protest of Trump's decision to withdraw from the Paris climate accord.

■ 2 February: Uber's Travis Kalanick quit the strategy forum before the first meeting. “Immigration and openness to refugees is an important part of our country's success and quite honestly to Uber's,” he said in an email to

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across America.”

■ **1 June:** Tesla Inc.'s Musk was in the manufacturing and strategy groups and quit both. “Climate change is real,” he tweeted. “Leaving Paris is not good for America or the world.”

■ **1 June:** Walt Disney Co.'s Bob Iger left the strategy forum over climate change. “Protecting our planet and driving economic growth are critical to our future, and they aren't mutually exclusive,” he said in a statement. “I deeply disagree with the decision to withdraw from the Paris Agreement.”

■ **14 August:** Merck's Frazier quit the manufacturing group after Trump responded to the violence in Charlottesville, Virginia, with a statement that condemned hatred, bigotry and violence “on many sides.” Clashes at the white nationalists' rally left three people dead, including a counter-protester and two in a helicopter crash. “America's leaders must honor our fundamental values by clearly rejecting expressions of hatred, bigotry and group supremacy, which run counter to the American ideal that all people are created equal,” Frazier said in a statement. “As CEO of Merck and as a matter of personal conscience, I feel a responsibility to take a stand against intolerance and extremism.”

■ **14 August:** Under Armour Inc.'s Kevin Plank quit the manufacturing group about 12 hours after Frazier. “I love our country & company. I am stepping down from the council to focus on inspiring & uniting through power of sport,” he said in a statement. “Under Armour engages in innovation and sports, not politics.”

■ **August:** A few hours later Intel Corp.'s Brian Krzanich quit the

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divided political climate is causing to critical issues, including the serious need to address the decline of American manufacturing,” he said. “I have already made clear my abhorrence at the recent hate-spawned violence in Charlottesville, and earlier today I called on all leaders to condemn the white supremacists and their ilk who marched and committed violence.”

■ 15 August: The next morning, the Alliance for American Manufacturing’s Scott Paul resigned from the manufacturing group “because it’s the right thing for me to do.” On 16 August, he tweeted a quote from Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel: “We must always take sides. Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”

■ 15 August: At an afternoon press conference in New York, Trump equated neo-Nazis in Charlottesville with the people protesting against them, one of whom was killed after a man drove a car into a crowd of the counter-demonstrators. His remarks started a cascade, with the AFL-CIO’s Richard Trumka and Thea Lee next to leave the manufacturing group. “We cannot sit on a council for a President who tolerates bigotry and domestic terrorism. President Trump’s remarks today repudiate his forced remarks yesterday about the KKK and neo-Nazis. We must resign on behalf of America’s working people, who reject all notions of legitimacy of these bigoted groups.”

■ 16 August: BlackRock Inc.’s Larry Fink quit the strategy forum, saying in a memo to employees that he told Schwarzman of his decision in the past 24 hours. “After the last few days, I concluded that I could no longer in good conscience participate in the Forum.”

■ 16 August: 3M Co.’s Inge Thulin left the manufacturing group “Sustainability, diversity and inclusion are my personal values and also

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have provided me with an opportunity to reflect upon my commitment to these values.”

■ 16 August: Campbell Soup Co.’s Denise Morrison quit the manufacturing group. “Racism and murder are unequivocally reprehensible and are not morally equivalent to anything else that happened in Charlottesville,” she said. “I believe the President should have been—and still needs to be—unambiguous on that point.”

■ 16 August: In the middle of the day, Trump tweeted he was ‘ending’ both groups ‘rather than putting pressure’ on the members. Minutes later, United Technologies Corp.’s Greg Hayes resigned from the manufacturing group. “As the events of the last week have unfolded here in the US, it is clear that we need to collectively stand together and denounce the politics of hate, intolerance and racism. The values that are the cornerstone of our culture: tolerance, diversity, empathy and trust, must be reaffirmed by our actions every day.”

■ 16 August: General Electric Co.’s Jeffrey Immelt, on the manufacturing council, issued this statement after Trump’s tweet. “The President’s statements yesterday were deeply troubling. There would be no GE without people of all races, religions, genders, and sexual orientations. GE has no tolerance for hate, bigotry, racism, and the white supremacist extremism that the country witnessed in Charlottesville last weekend.”

■ 16 August: Johnson & Johnson said Alex Gorsky’s decision to quit the manufacturing group preceded Trump’s tweet: “I believe, very strongly, that hatred and bigotry of any kind have no place in our society.”

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issued this statement: "Every member of the Manufacturing Jobs Initiative condemns racism and bigotry, and there cannot be moral ambiguity around the driving forces of the events in Charlottesville. However, in discussions I had with the White House earlier today, I indicated that in the current environment it was no longer possible to conduct productive discussions under the auspices of the Initiative. And so, as proud as I am of the efforts we were taking on behalf of the American worker, disbanding the Manufacturing Jobs Initiative was the right decision." **Bloomberg**

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