

Money Laundering by Dan Jacoby

Is there a rift between über-wealthy Michael Bloomberg and Ron Lauder? Reports are all over the place, and rumors are flying. Let's try to make some sense out of it, bearing in mind that I have no access to either of the principals.

First, we have term limits in place, and in their current two-term limit, because Ron Lauder spent millions of dollars to create a referendum and shepherd it through, and then turn back an attempt to extend them. If it weren't for Lauder's money, we probably wouldn't have term limits in place, and Michael Bloomberg might not have run, much less been elected mayor.

In both cases, it was Lauder's money that funded the effort, but the voters decided.

Now that billionaire Bloomberg, who has spent a lot of his own money on several campaigns and political fights aside from his own, doesn't want to leave at the end of his two-term limit. He also, apparently, doesn't want to put the question before the voters, fearing, perhaps, that even by spending millions of dollars he wouldn't be able to win.

So he recruited Ron Lauder. Lauder and Bloomberg are old friends (or at least acquaintances), so it's pretty easy for them to pick up a telephone and call each other. Bloomberg got Lauder on board, or so it seemed.

Then it turned out that there was a back room deal. Lauder would come on board, but only if he got to be on a Charter Revision Commission. Now it appears that Lauder doesn't favor a permanent extension of term limits, just an exception for his good friend Michael Bloomberg. Despite the lack of connection by the media, these two bits of news may be very tightly connected.

Michael Bloomberg wants to extend term limits, not because he has any aversion to term limits, or because he feels the limit should be three terms, but because he wants to run again. Ron Lauder wants to extend term limits, but only so that Michael Bloomberg can run again, not for anyone after that. And Lauder will be on a Charter Revision Commission that can put changes to term limits to a referendum.

So ... Bloomberg gets his "permanent" extension and runs again. Then, after the election, the "Lauder Commission" recommends reducing the term limits back to two terms. Then Lauder (and presumably Bloomberg) spend millions of dollars to convince the voters that their way is best.

Disgusting! Or, as some people might put it, Politics!