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TECHNOLOGY

The A-List Turned on Marc Benioff. Now He's Sorry.

The Salesforce CEO apologized for his comments on the National Guard



Marc Benioff MICHAEL SHORT/BLOOMBERG NEWS

By [Sebastian Herrera](#) [Follow](#)

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Quick Summary

- Salesforce CEO Marc Benioff apologized for suggesting the National Guard be deployed to San Francisco, citing local opposition.

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[Salesforce](#) CEO [Marc Benioff](#) [apologized](#) for calling on the National Guard to go to San Francisco after a crescendo of rebukes from the city's political and tech elite he has counted as friends.

“Having listened closely to my fellow San Franciscans and our local officials,” he said Friday, “I do not believe the National Guard is needed to address safety in San Francisco.”

He said his earlier comment came from “an abundance of caution” for Dreamforce, the enterprise

software company's conference in San Francisco, which serves as an annual showcase for the billionaire tech founder's prodigious network of A-list celebrities, CEOs, politicians and spiritual gurus.

At this year's event, which concluded Thursday, actor Matthew McConaughey introduced a performance by Metallica. Former Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg shared a theater with the actor Jesse Eisenberg. Nearby, David Spade performed an hour of standup.

But away from the high-octane schmoozing—and cheerful hyping of Agentforce, the product the company is counting on to keep it relevant in a world of powerful artificial-intelligence services—a controversy over Benioff's rightward political shift had boiled up within his social circle and inside his company.

Benioff, 61 years old, who had cultivated an image as a social progressive, was one of a wave of tech billionaires who embraced President [Donald Trump](#) after his election, and he had become vocal about the need for more policing in San Francisco. Then, on Oct. 10, Benioff went further, calling in a [New York Times](#) interview for President Trump to deploy the National Guard to the streets of San Francisco to fight crime.

Soon after, Trump said he was directing officials to look into the possibility, citing “great support” for it.

“It just didn't make any sense,” said Mark Buell, a philanthropist who worked with Benioff's wife, Lynne, to raise funds for a new park in the city's Presidio.

Benioff rides a Segway at Salesforce headquarters in its early days. BEN MARGOT/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Angel investor Ron Conway, one of the city's best-connected tech investors and a longtime friend of Benioff's, resigned from the Salesforce Foundation's board of directors.

"It saddens me immensely to say that with your recent comments, and failure to understand their impact, I now barely recognize the person I have so long admired," he wrote in an email Thursday that was viewed by The Wall Street Journal. Conway didn't respond to a request for comment.

Laurene Powell Jobs [wrote](#) in The Wall Street Journal criticizing Benioff for acting like his philanthropy to the city gave him a say in policy.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom, whose daughter is Benioff's goddaughter, has been a leading opponent of Trump's use of the National Guard in cities. San Francisco Mayor Daniel Lurie pointed to multi-decade lows in the city's crime rates. "I feel like we have to continue to get the message out that San Francisco is on the rise, and not everybody has heard it," he said.

Salesforce employees and alumni posted an [open letter](#) accusing Benioff of "a troubling hypocrisy."

In an interview on Thursday, Benioff, who now lives primarily in Hawaii and has been registered to

vote there since 2021, said he was responding to a shortage of officers in the San Francisco Police Department that has forced him to hire additional officers from outside San Francisco to provide security at the last three Dreamforces.

“I’m the largest employer here. No one has, I think, given more to the city than I have,” he said. “I think I have the permission to say what I think, and I’m sorry if there’s some people who don’t agree with me.”

Salesforce, which counts government contracts as a big part of its business, has also pitched Immigration and Customs Enforcement on using its services in its efforts to hire more agents. Its ICE pitch was earlier reported by the [New York Times](#).

Benioff’s roots in the city run deep. His grandfather served on the Board of Supervisors; his father ran a chain of dress shops. Marc worked in a jewelry store as a teenager. He bought himself a TRS-80 computer and taught himself to program.

In 1984, while in college, he interned at [Apple](#), where “a bond would eventually form” with co-founder Steve Jobs, who became a mentor Benioff would later tap in launching his own company, Benioff recalled in his 2019 [memoir](#).

Two years later, after graduating from the University of Southern California, he joined [Oracle](#), and quickly rose to become the company’s youngest vice president. After more than a decade at Oracle, Benioff was on sabbatical in Hawaii where, as he has told it, he was swimming with dolphins when he had the idea for a company that would give businesses software tools to manage customer relationships.

He later established the 1-1-1 philanthropic model, which has sought to give 1% of equity, product, and employee time to social causes.

Benioff formed Salesforce in 1999. In 2004, it went public, and by 2009 it had \$1 billion in annual revenue. In 2013, construction began on Salesforce Tower, which now dominates San Francisco’s skyline the way Benioff, who is 6-foot-5, looms over the crowds at Dreamforce. In 2018, he bought Time magazine and in 2021 Salesforce completed its acquisition of Slack, the workplace messaging app, for \$27.7 billion.

Benioff and actress Jennifer Lawrence at the Dinner For Equality which he co-hosted with actress Patricia Arquette in 2016 in Beverly Hills, Calif. MIKE WINDLE/WEINSTEIN CARNEGIE PHILANTHROPIC GROUP/GETTY IMAGES

Meanwhile, Benioff was undergoing a political evolution. During George W. Bush's presidency, he served as the co-chair of the President's Information Technology Advisory Committee and became close friends with former Secretary of State Colin Powell. But in the years that followed, he became known for progressive stances, canceling Salesforce events in Indiana to protest a law that critics said targeted the LGBTQ community and championing Proposition C, a San Francisco ballot measure that created a tax on large companies meant to fund services to fight homelessness.

The Prop C campaign put him into conflict with many of the city's tech company leaders and investors, who predicted it would drive companies to relocate. One company that left was Twitter, after [Elon Musk](#) bought it and renamed it X. In July 2024, Musk [wrote on X](#), "Marc, I think you're great and had the best of intentions, but the crazy gross receipts city tax that you supported makes it impossible for financial companies to operate in San Francisco."

Benioff [responded](#) by agreeing that the measure was out of date and needed to be rewritten: "The world has changed."

Four months later, Trump won the presidency, and Benioff [declared it](#) "a time of great promise for our nation."

Benioff has described himself as non-ideological. His primary focus now, he says, is not on politics but on AI, which he has said is "like electrical current-invisible and augmenting almost every part of our lives." Concerns that ChatGPT and so-called large language models, or LLMs, will be able to replicate and supplant Salesforce's offerings have contributed to a more than 25% drop in the company's share price this year. Uptake of Agentforce, the company's new, marquee AI product,

has been slow: Less than 10% of Salesforce's 150,000-plus customers are using it.

At Dreamforce, the company signaled a shift in tack, indicating it would embrace partnerships with the LLM makers rather than competition. It is betting that customers already roped into its suite of software tools will pay for added automation in Agentforce. Shares jumped after the company said it expects revenue of more than \$60 billion in 2030.

But Benioff said he tries not to dwell too much on the future. He cited the advice of Tibetan monk Lama Tenzin—a friend, of course, who Benioff met with at Dreamforce's mindfulness village.

“Focus on the present moment,” Benioff said. “Come back to the present moment right now. That's all that matters.”

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