

LA Costco worker filmed standing up to anti-mask provocateur Ricky Schroder wins wide support

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Ricky Schroder, a wealthy former child celebrity turned far-right provocateur, filmed himself harassing a Costco worker in Los Angeles on Saturday after the worker refused to admit him to the store without a mask.

Schroder posted the video to his social media accounts where it has been viewed by millions of people— but the popular response was not what he might have hoped for. The overwhelming majority of comments have been sympathetic to the worker, who kept his cool while Schroder repeatedly interrupted him and sought to intimidate him into letting him enter the store without a mask.

The encounter between Schroder and the Costco worker is doubtless characteristic of encounters that are now taking place at grocery stores and other workplaces around the country in the wake of the abrupt withdrawal of the masking guidelines by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) last Thursday.

The CDC announcement, a politically motivated decision that has been widely denounced by epidemiologists, is an attack on front-line workers and a gift to the far-right, which has been consolidated over the past year around demanding “freedom” from all coronavirus-related health precautions and safety measures.

The CDC’s decision has unleashed these far-right forces on front-line workers, who have no way of ascertaining whether the belligerent individuals that are barging into their workplaces without wearing masks have received the vaccine or not.

The Los Angeles Costco location in question has retained the mask mandate for the time being, notwithstanding the CDC guidance, in compliance with state and local regulations. But Schroder seemed to think that the CDC had provided him with a license to go anywhere he pleased without wearing a mask.

In the video, Schroder approaches the worker who told him he could not come in and demands that the worker state on video the reason why he was not admitted.

The worker, whose name tag identifies him as “Jason,” calmly replies, “In the state of California and the County of Los Angeles—and at Costco—there has been no change to our mask

policy.”

Schroder, who is not wearing a mask, repeatedly and aggressively interrupts, “Haven’t you seen the news? Nationwide! Costco! They said you don’t need to wear masks!”

The worker replies, still calmly, “Actually, that’s not accurate.” At one point, the worker begins to acknowledge that the mask mandate may be lifted in the future, prompting Schroder to launch into an incoherent rant: “Oh, if they allow us? If they grant us that? Our kings? The people in power? You’re going to listen to these people? They destroyed our economy! They’re destroying our culture! They’re destroying our state! And you’re just going to listen to their rules?”

The worker shrugs and replies, “Well, what we are going to do is follow the guidelines—” Schroder interrupts again and turns the camera back on himself, showing himself wearing a baseball cap with a black-and-white American flag with a blue stripe, an emblem of pro-police and right-wing extremists.

Schroder announces that he is “getting a refund” from Costco. He goes on to demand that everyone “get a refund” and cancel their membership, “until they remove this,” referring to the mask requirement.

Schroder posted the video on Instagram with the caption: “Boycott Costco till they act like a Free American Company... not (China),” using an image of the national flag of China. But the video found a wide audience sympathetic to the worker who was filmed, with viewers praising his calm demeanor and circulating the video using the hashtag “#CostcoJason.”

One characteristic comment on YouTube, expressing disgust for Schroder’s conduct, was: “Not only do some people need a mask, but they also need a muzzle!” Another commenter wrote, “Put on your mask Ricky.”

One commenter noted, “You bullied a service worker and then posted a video about it on social media. You got what you wanted. You got your refund. You’re not being heroic. You’re not standing up for your rights. You’re being a bully. You’re no different than any other petulant customer that gets precisely what he wants but still isn’t satisfied and then calls the manager. Jason is the hero here, because he stood up to YOU.”

He stood up to the bully. I strongly urge you to delete this video, for whatever good it will do, and then give Jason a sincere apology for your abysmal behavior.”

The top comment on Schroder’s Facebook page reads: “Wow! Not surprising that a man who was arrested for punching his girlfriend is also a total ***** to retail employees. On the bright side, it’s the most viewed thing you’ve done in 30 years.”

Schroder, 51, is a wealthy television actor who starred in the *Silver Spoons* sitcom (1982-86), and later made appearances on the television dramas *Scrubs* and *NYPD Blue*. He was arrested in 2019 for punching his girlfriend in the face.

He has since emerged as an alt-right celebrity, reportedly providing a six-figure sum last year to the bail fund for Kenosha shooter Kyle Rittenhouse, who has become an icon for fascist and white supremacist groups. Prominent Trump supporter and My Pillow CEO Mike Lindell also reportedly contributed a large sum to the \$2 million bail fund.

The backlash against Schroder’s video was so overwhelming that he later felt compelled to post an “apology”—which consisted mainly of Schroder not apologizing but attempting to justify and defend his conduct. In the “apology” video, he doubled down on his claims that “independence from medical tyranny is more important than hurting people’s feelings.”

This encounter at a Costco in Los Angeles, together with countless similar encounters to which front-line workers are being subjected around the country, is the direct responsibility of the Biden administration and the CDC.

There is mass support for health and safety measures to combat the COVID-19 pandemic, as evidenced by the overwhelming negative response to Schroder’s video. But a minority of far-right extremists is being utilized to bully the working-class majority into accepting the “herd immunity” policy that favors the profit interests of the wealthy over human lives.

The far-right in the United States was specifically mobilized during the pandemic around demands for an end to all coronavirus-related health and safety measures. These demands represent the class interests of the most rapacious sections of the financial oligarchy, which is determined to crush all organized resistance among workers to the policy of “herd immunity” and mass death. These far-right forces were implicated in the plot to kidnap and assassinate the governor of Michigan and were utilized as shock troops in Trump’s failed coup attempt on January 6.

Schroder’s social media history is a long list of conspiracy theories and tropes popular with right-wing and fascistic groups such as the Boogaloo Boys, the Proud Boys, and the Oath Keepers.

Schroder provided his full-throated support for Trump’s efforts to overturn the 2020 elections. “God Willing,” Schroder declared in a series of semi-literate posts on social media last December, “on January 20th I will be in Washington DC to

Celebrate President Trumps [sic] Inauguration.” Schroder denounced the Biden inauguration as a “Communist” event.

“The Biden/Harris/Obama/China/Corporate Alliance will not take Power,” he continued. “We do not give it to them We retain it.”

Schroder has also suggested that the coronavirus was created by the Chinese government to thin the population, issued inflammatory rants directed against the “Black community,” and supported the pro-police “Back the Blue” campaign.

With their decision last week to end masking guidance, the Biden administration and the CDC have effectively unleashed the Schrodgers of the world upon front-line workers, whose efforts to remain safe in their workplaces have only been made more difficult. With state and local governments arbitrarily lifting health and safety restrictions, and with employers lifting their mask policies, workers are left to fend for themselves against right-wing provocateurs like Schroder who make a point of barging into businesses without wearing masks.

In a statement issued May 14, Costco President and CEO Craig Jilenek indicated that the mask requirements would remain in place only where state or local requirements mandated them, such as Los Angeles, but would be lifted elsewhere. In other words, if the mask-less Schroder had turned up in a different state, management policy would have been to bow to his demands. Similar modifications to policy are being adopted at workplaces around the country.

Under these circumstances, it is all the more imperative that workers form their own rank-and-file safety committees to adopt and enforce their own health and safety policies in the workplace—and to tell the Schrodgers of the world they cannot come in without a mask, no matter what the government, management, or the CDC says.



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