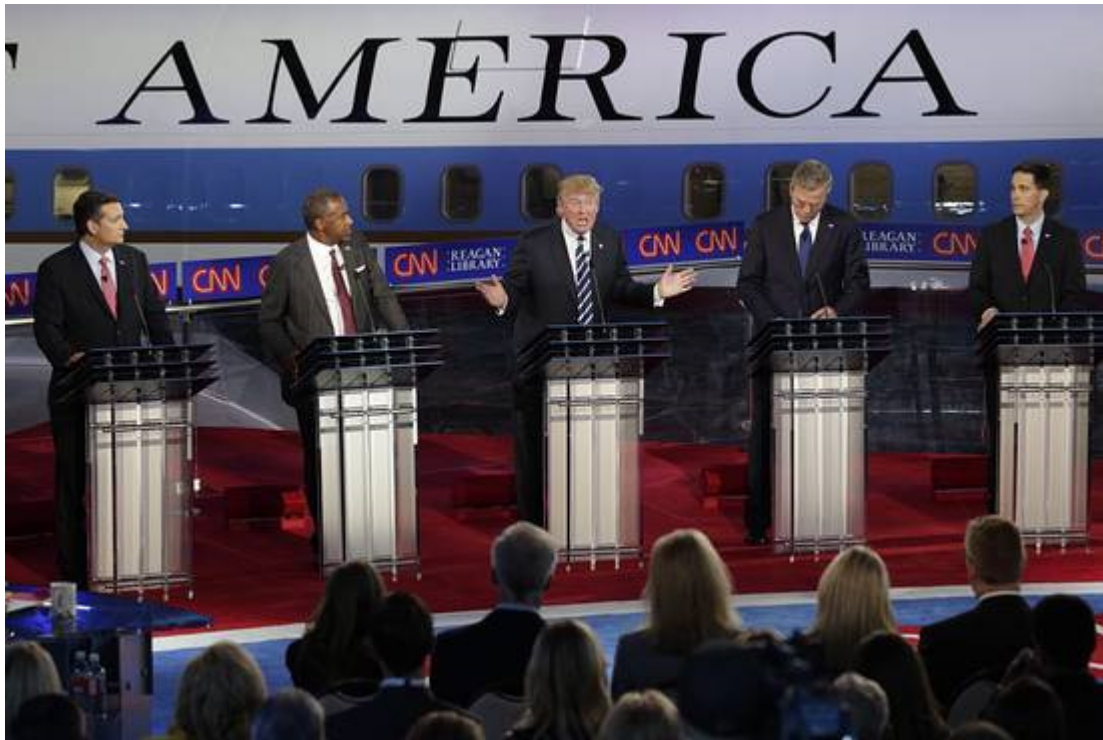


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Silicon Valley Wants High-Skilled Immigration on Campaign Agenda

By Marie-Astrid Langer



Fwd.us, a lobbying group created by [Mark Zuckerberg](#) and other tech founders, is trying to get immigration reform on the agenda of the U.S. presidential campaign.

Not the kind of immigration that has dominated the two Republican debates – the kind of immigration Silicon Valley relies on.

“Attracting entrepreneurs and human capital is critical to the tech community,” said Todd Schulte, president of fwd.us during a conference call on Thursday, strategically timed for the day after the second Republican debate.

Immigration has taken on a negative connotation in the presidential campaign recently, with [Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump](#) calling for immigrants to be deported.

On behalf of the tech community, Mr. Schulte is calling for more high-skilled workers to be able to work in the U.S. “We believe it’s important that the cap should be raised to reflect the needs of today’s economy and market,” Mr. Schulte said. Fwd.us’ other founders include [Microsoft](#) Corp. founder [Bill Gates](#), [Yahoo](#) Inc. CEO [Marissa Mayer](#) and LinkedIn co-founder [Reid Hoffman](#).

Tech companies frequently say that the current immigration system is holding them back, Mr. Schulte said.

Mr. Schulte emphasized that foreign workers are vital for the tech sector because they fill a rising gap in demand for graduates in science, math and engineering. The number of U.S. citizens and lawful permanent residents with graduate degrees in electrical engineering dropped by 5% for PhD programs and by 11% for master’s degrees between 1995 and 2013, **according to a recently published study by the National Foundation for American Policy**, a nonprofit focusing on immigration-related issues.

Silicon Valley is a major user of H-1B visas, which enable companies to hire highly-skilled foreign workers. Last month, Mr. Trump attacked the program ([and called out Facebook](#) Inc. founder Mr. Zuckerberg) because it lowers wages for Americans by hiring cheaper foreign workers, he argued. Mr. Trump also wants job openings to be offered to unemployed Americans first before they can be filled by foreigners.

Mr. Schulte is calling for a reform of the [H-1B visa program](#). In 1990, Congress passed legislation capping the number of employment-based green cards at 140,000 and H-1B visas at 65,000 a year, and they have not budged since. There are 20,000 additional visas for foreigners who obtained graduate degrees from American universities. This year, the H-1B allocation was filled within the first week of applications.

Immigration advocates often criticize the low quotas, saying they present a very small funnel for people who have been educated in the US, resulting in many highly-qualified foreign students leaving.

Mr. Schulte stressed the idea of startup visas for foreigners wanting to start a company in the U.S., a niche not covered by current work-visa-regulation. “We don’t have a visa for entrepreneurs (and) we are trying to fix that right now,” Mr. Schulte said.