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## **Silicon Valley Leaders Target Donald Trump's Travel Restrictions**

**Executives worry order will affect their companies' employees, say ban violates personal and company principles**

By Jack Nicas

Leaders from across the technology industry criticized President Donald Trump's temporary ban on foreign nationals from seven Muslim-majority countries, ending weeks of cautious engagement with the new president, whom many in Silicon Valley opposed.

[Alphabet](#) Inc.'s Google, Apple Inc., [Facebook](#) Inc., [Microsoft](#) Corp., Uber Technologies Inc. and other companies expressed concern about the immigration order's effect on their employees, with some executives saying the ban violated their personal and company principles.

The ramifications of tighter immigration rules stretch from finance to [meat packing](#) to [construction](#). In Silicon Valley, which relies on skilled foreigners to fill key roles, the order resonates with prominent founders, executives and engineers, many of whom were also foreign-born.

Microsoft Chief Executive Satya Nadella, who was born in India, said the company will continue to be an advocate on the issue. "As an immigrant and as a CEO, I've both experienced and seen the positive impact that immigration has on our company, for the country, and for the world," he said [Saturday in an online post](#).

Apple Chief Executive Tim Cook said in an email to employees that his company has contacted the White House to explain the "negative effect" the restrictions will have on workers. Mr. Cook, who visited Washington last week, said he spoke to officials there about Apple's belief "in the importance of immigration—both to our company and to our nation's future."

Mr. Trump on Friday signed an executive order that, for at least 90 days, [bans people from seven nations](#)—Iran, Iraq, Libya, Somalia, Sudan, Syria and Yemen—from entering the U.S. The order indefinitely bans Syrian refugees from the U.S. and suspends the broader refugee program. Mr. Trump said the order was intended to keep out "radical Islamic terrorists."

The broader impact emerged Saturday. Any passport holders of those seven countries [can't enter the U.S. under the ban](#), even if they [hold a passport from another country](#), such as the U.K. or Canada. U.S. citizens aren't affected.

Politicians and [civil-rights advocates quickly criticized the move](#) as religious persecution. In the world of business, Silicon Valley emerged as a leading voice against the policy.

In an email to staff Friday, Google Chief Executive Sundar Pichai said the new order affected at least 187 Google employees, including one who had to rush back to the U.S. from overseas to avoid being blocked from the country. Mr. Pichai asked any affected employees abroad to contact the company's global security team.

Google Chief Executive Sundar Pichai spoke at a press conference in New Delhi on Jan. 4. In an email to his staff Friday regarding the new travel restrictions, Mr. Pichai said it was 'painful to see the personal cost of this executive order on our colleagues.' Photo: Tsering Topgyal/Associated Press

"We're upset about the impact of this order and any proposals that could impose restrictions on Googlers and their families, or that could create barriers to bringing great talent to the U.S.," Mr. Pichai said in the email, a copy of which was reviewed by The Wall Street Journal. "It's painful to see the personal cost of this executive order on our colleagues."

A spokesman for venture capitalist Peter Thiel, [Mr. Trump's biggest supporter in the tech industry](#), said late Saturday that "Peter doesn't support a religious test, and the administration has not imposed one."

Brad Smith, Microsoft's president and legal chief, said Saturday in an email to staff posted online that the company had contacted 76 employees who are citizens of the banned countries and was working to identify others who might be affected by the policy.

"Microsoft believes in a strong and balanced high-skilled immigration system," Mr. Smith said in the email. "We believe that immigration laws can and should protect the public without sacrificing people's freedom of expression or religion. And we believe in the importance of protecting legitimate and law-abiding refugees whose very lives may be at stake in immigration proceedings."

Facebook Chief Executive Mark Zuckerberg wrote on his Facebook page Friday that [he was "concerned" by the order](#). "We need to keep this country safe, but we should do that by focusing on people who actually pose a threat," he wrote.

Aaron Levie, chief executive of digital-storage firm [Box Inc.](#), said Mr. Trump's move is "totally infuriating" and "morally wrong." He said he was investigating how to get involved personally to help fight the order.

Beth Galetti, [Amazon.com Inc.](#)'s vice president of human resources, sent an email to staff Saturday, recommending U.S.-based employees from countries listed in the restrictions refrain

from traveling outside the U.S., adding that employees should contact Amazon for contingency plans if they are already outside the borders for travel.

“As we’ve grown the company, we’ve worked hard to attract talented people from all over the world, and we believe this is one of the things that makes Amazon great—a diverse workforce helps us build better products for customers,” Ms. Galetti said in her email.

[International Business Machines](#) Corp. declined to comment. [Oracle](#) Corp. didn’t respond to a request for comment.

The tech industry relies on skilled foreigners to create new startups and fill engineering roles. Foreigners [founded more than half of U.S. startups valued at more than \\$1 billion](#), **according to a recent study by the National Foundation for American Policy**, a nonpartisan think tank focused on immigration issues.

The Internet Association, a tech trade group representing Google, Facebook, Microsoft and others, said [Mr. Trump’s executive order had troubling consequences](#). “Internet companies in particular thrive in the U.S. because the best and the brightest are able to create innovative products and services right here in America,” the group said.

Apple Inc. Chief Executive Tim Cook attended a meeting with President-elect Donald Trump and other technology-industry leaders in New York on Dec. 14, 2016. Mr. Cook, in an email to his employees, said he spoke to officials in Washington last week about ‘the importance of immigration—both to our company and to our nation’s future.’ Photo: Evan Vucci/Associated Press

The tech industry is also lobbying in Washington regarding expected changes to the work-visa programs for skilled foreigners, which Silicon Valley is dependent on for employees. For instance, 77% of full-time graduate students in electrical engineering and 71% in computer science at U.S. universities are international students, said Stuart Anderson, head of the **National Foundation for American Policy**.

In fiscal 2013, the U.S. issued nearly 274,000 skilled-worker visas, known as H-1B visas. Citizens from the banned countries received 1,220 of those visas, including 810 to Iranians, 280 to Syrians and 53 to Libyans, according to government data compiled by Ron Hira, a Howard University political-science professor who tracks immigration trends. The 2013 data is the most recent complete data Mr. Hira analyzed.

Microsoft and Google employed the most H-1B visa holders from those countries that year, with 31 and 15, respectively, according to the data.

Many tech executives were guarded following Mr. Trump’s election, and even tried courting his administration in recent weeks, despite their opposition to him during the campaign. Shortly after the election, [executives from across Silicon Valley met with Mr. Trump](#) in New York to discuss issues pertinent to the industry.

Eric Schmidt, chairman of Alphabet, visited Trump Tower again weeks after the summit of tech leaders. Apple's Mr. Cook recently had dinner with Ivanka Trump and her husband Jared Kushner, a senior adviser to the president, two people familiar with the trip said.

Several executives, including [Tesla Motors](#) Inc. Chief Executive Elon Musk, IBM Chief Executive Ginni Rometty and Uber Chief Executive Travis Kalanick, are serving on groups advising the Trump administration.

—Rolfe Winkler, Tripp Mickle and Jay Greene contributed to this article.

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