

Immigration Policies Hit Fashion Jobs

By Erica Orden

February 19, 2011

As models were taking their final turns on the runways of New York Fashion Week, Mayor Michael Bloomberg argued that the country's immigration policies jeopardize New York's status as "the fashion capital of the world," saying they limit visas for designers, manufacturers and, yes, models.

"This industry could easily move overseas again," Mr. Bloomberg said Friday on his weekly radio show. "We have double the number of fashion houses, I think, of any other place in the world. But we could lose this business very easily. We just have to fix immigration."

Processing delays and strict caps on employment visas, the mayor said, raise costs for the fashion industry, encouraging those businesses to move abroad. More than 165,000 people, or 5.5% of the city's workforce, are employed by fashion-related businesses in New York.

Said Mr. Bloomberg: "The designers want to come over here and create jobs here, and we're not letting them in."

The mayor's remarks came as several prominent industry forces, including Diane von Furstenberg, Oscar de la Renta, Saks Fifth Avenue and Brooks Brothers, joined the immigration-reform coalition Partnership for a New American Economy. A group of business leaders and politicians, the coalition's co-chairmen include Mr. Bloomberg, Microsoft Corp. Chief Executive Steven A. Ballmer, Walt Disney Co. President and Chief Executive Robert Iger and Rupert Murdoch, chief executive of News Corp., which owns The Wall Street Journal.

"America was built by immigrants—and if we want to stay the global leader in fashion, then America must continue to welcome immigrants who bring to the industry new ideas, new businesses, and new energy," Ms. von Furstenberg said in a statement.