

New York Mayor, CEOs Lobby for Immigration Reform

By SARA KUGLER FRAZIER Associated Press

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NEW YORK — Chief executives of several major corporations, including Hewlett-Packard, Boeing, Disney and News Corp., are joining Mayor Michael Bloomberg to form a coalition advocating for immigration reform - including a path to legal status for all undocumented immigrants now in the United States.

The group includes several other big-city mayors and calls itself the Partnership for a New American Economy. It seeks to reframe immigration reform as the solution to repairing and stimulating the economy.

Bloomberg and Rupert Murdoch, chairman and CEO of News Corp., appeared together today on Fox News to discuss the effort.

"We're just going to keep the pressure on the congressmen," Murdoch said. "I think we can show to the public the benefits of having migrants and the jobs that go with them."

Bloomberg added, "Somebody has to lead and explain to the country why this is in our interest."

The CEOs said today in statements that their companies - and the nation - depend on immigrants.

"It's our great strength as a nation, and it's also critical for continued economic growth," Walt Disney Co. Chairman and CEO Robert Iger said in a statement. "To remain competitive in the 21st century, we need effective immigration reform that invites people to contribute to our shared success by building their own American dream."

The group says it intends to make its point to policymakers by "publishing studies, conducting polls, convening forums and sponsoring public education campaigns."

The tactics are similar to those used by Bloomberg's coalition of mayors who support gun control.

Bloomberg has for years criticized the federal government for its immigration laws, proposing in 2006 a plan that would have established a DNA or fingerprint database to track and verify all legal U.S. workers.

The billionaire mayor, a former CEO of the financial information company Bloomberg LP, also said at the time that all 12 million undocumented immigrants in the United States should be given the opportunity for citizenship, saying that deporting them is impossible and would devastate the economy.

Lawmakers who wanted to deport all illegal immigrants were "living in a fantasy world," he said.

He has recently taken up the fight again, declaring this week that U.S. immigration policy "is national suicide."

"If you want to solve the unemployment prob in America, you have to open the doors to immigrants who will come here, create businesses, because when the tide comes in, everybody's boat rises," Bloomberg told reporters today. "We need more immigrants, not less."

William Gheen, president of the Americans for Legal Immigration Political Action Committee, which supports strict immigration laws, called the CEOs "traitors" and said he and his supporters are discussing a possible boycott of the companies involved.

"What is it with these billionaires who want to betray Americans that have made them who they are?" Gheen said. "This country club doesn't seem to care about anything but their money and power. Millions of Americans are unemployed and underemployed, and they want to turn millions of illegals into voters."

The business and mayoral coalition's main immigration goals are to secure the borders, develop an easy system for employers to verify work eligibility, hold companies accountable for breaking the laws and improve the use of technology to prevent illegal immigration.

It also wants more opportunities for immigrants to join the U.S. work force and a path to legal status for all undocumented immigrants.

ImmigrationWorks USA, a national federation of businesses that support immigration, welcomed Bloomberg's group to the effort. Tamar Jacoby, the organization's president and CEO, said the coalition's main contribution would likely be the extra attention and power it can bring to the debate.

"I don't know that they're going to be in the trenches everyday organizing grass roots, following the policy process," Jacoby said. "It's more a 30,000-foot approach - these big names adding their muscle to the push to get this on the table."

Bloomberg spokesman Jason Post said no money has been spent on the effort yet, and he could not say whether the group will be a standard nonprofit, a political action committee or a group known as a 501(c)4 nonprofit, which can operate outside the more strict limits governing political action committees.

The business leaders in the coalition employ more than 650,000 people and make more than \$220 billion in annual sales, combined.

The effort marks Bloomberg's return to national issues after he spent 2009 campaigning for a third term, focusing mostly on New York City's municipal concerns.

The Republican-turned-independent spent about two years testing the waters for an independent 2008 presidential run, but ultimately he gave up the idea.

By recruiting business leaders and mayors into a national-issue coalition, he is highlighting his background in running a city and running a business, which could be seen as an early move to dust off his presidential aspirations.

He denied that today, saying he is not running for president.