

Mayor Bloomberg joins Silicon Valley push for high-skill immigration

By Brendan Sasso - 02/25/13 05:20 PM ET

New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg and a coalition of investors and technology company executives announced a new campaign on Monday for immigration legislation.

The campaign, called the "March for Innovation," will culminate later this spring in a "virtual march on Washington" using online tools like Facebook and Twitter to persuade lawmakers.

Bloomberg is joined by AOL co-founder Steve Case, Brad Feld of the Foundry Group, venture capitalist Mike Maples, angel investor Ron Conway, Joe Green of Nation builder and Somesh Dash of Institutional Venture Partners. Joe Trippi, the former campaign manager of Howard Dean's 2004 presidential campaign, developed the group's social media content.

The campaign is part of Bloomberg's Partnership for a New American Economy, a coalition of business leaders and public officials.

The new campaign urges Congress to provide more visas for high-skill workers and foreign entrepreneurs who come to the United States to launch a business. The top graduates in science, technology, engineering and math should be able to gain permanent residency status in the U.S., the group argues.

"The immigration debate in Congress should be an opportunity not only to fix the problems of the past, but also to look forward and create an immigration system that brings the best, brightest, and hardest workers to our shores," Bloomberg said in a statement.

Many technology companies, such as Microsoft, Yahoo and Qualcomm, argue that there are not enough U.S. graduates to fill their high-skill positions. They argue that loosening restrictions on high-skill immigration would boost the economy and help to create innovative new products and services in the U.S.

"Of late, the United States has been turning away many of the innovators and entrepreneurs who are likely to propel us to new economic heights," said Dash, a co-chairman of the March for Innovation.

"Tech leaders and workers throughout the nation are coming together to rally around the need for significant change to our current immigration system."

Skeptics of the immigration push say the tech companies are overlooking qualified U.S. graduates and are taking advantage of foreign workers, who are dependent on their employers for their temporary H1-B visa.

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