

One Venture Capitalist's Personal View On Innovation and Immigration

When [Shervin Pishevar](#) first got the call about an award, he thought it was a scam.

Then Alejandro Mayorkas, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services director, called him and he realized it was true. Pishevar, a managing director at venture firm Menlo Ventures, received an award last week from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Service naming him an 'Outstanding American by Choice,' an award honoring immigrant entrepreneurs. "The director of immigration contacted me and I realized what it was," Pishevar says. "I called my parents. It was really cool. A beautiful ceremony."

Mayorkas gave the award to five immigrant entrepreneurs, including Pishevar and [Michael Moritz](#), the renowned venture capitalist at Sequoia Capital. The ceremony included a citizenship ceremony for others. Pishevar said it was an [emotional moment](#) for him when he gave a speech accepting the award. "We were all immigrants at some point, we're a nation of immigrants," Pishevar said.

A number of entrepreneurs and venture capitalists have supported the "[Startup Visa](#)" campaign that advocates legislation to enable entrepreneurs who would create jobs in this country to gain visa status. Pishevar was among the main creators of the group.

Pishevar, who is an immigrant from Iran, believes the U.S. should recruit top entrepreneurs globally to come to the U.S., providing a sort of [MacArthur](#) award for immigrants. "Instead of being passive, you go around the world and recruit," Pishevar says. "As Michael Moritz says, if you take the immigrants out of Silicon Valley, you don't have Silicon Valley anymore. We should be sending immigration officers to find brilliant, talented people to become Americans. We're in an arms race for talent."

Pishevar, who has invested either personally or through Menlo Ventures in companies such as Uber, Aardvark, Gowalla and Klout, says he often comes across visa problems with his and other investors' startup entrepreneurs. While he tries to help them, he believes a more comprehensive plan is necessary.

While not everyone in Silicon Valley is a supporter of such immigration policies, Pishevar says he wants to be involved for personal and professional reasons. (Moritz has [gotten involved](#) in other political issues in the San Francisco area.) "It's important to me," says Pishevar, who has supported Barack Obama for president. "I just feel like we in Silicon Valley have buried our heads for too long. We need to realize that things start to impact how we can get things done if other parts of the country are not doing as well."

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