

# **Rick Snyder: World-class talent is key to Michigan's future**

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Much like the unique geography that defines Michigan as a state, our rich history of welcoming immigrants has shaped us culturally and economically.

Michigan is wonderfully diverse thanks to the Scandinavian influences on our Upper Peninsula, the Dutch and Hispanic contributions to West Michigan and the African-American, Asian, Middle Eastern and Polish imprints on Southeastern Michigan.

One of the best examples of cultural enrichment is right here in East Lansing, at Michigan State University. The thousands of foreign-born students and faculty at MSU help make it a dynamic, progressive community. And many of those go on to become entrepreneurs who contribute greatly to our economy.

Michigan traditionally has been a “melting pot” for different cultures, and that has been one of its greatest strengths. From this diverse make-up, some of the most successful businesses were born. Dow Chemical was founded by a Canadian national and has gone on to become the third largest company of its kind in the world. Masco, a company that manufactures products for the construction industry, is a Fortune 500 company started by a Turkish-born industrialist. And retail giant Meijer got its start as a small thrift store by a native of The Netherlands, and has grown to become the 25th largest retailer in the U.S.

Between the late 1990s and the mid-2000s, nearly 20 percent of new businesses were started by foreign-born entrepreneurs, and a third of new high-tech companies were launched by immigrants. We want to increase this trend, and my administration has been aggressive in encouraging immigrants, particularly those with advanced academic degrees, to choose Michigan. With the help of the Michigan Economic Development Corp. and the state Department of Civil Rights, the Global Michigan Initiative is helping to recapture the entrepreneurial power of immigrants.

However, because immigration laws are enacted at the federal level, it is important that Michigan work with Washington to overcome barriers to success. For example, a key program that provides international investors the chance to live here by investing in Michigan’s economy and creating jobs is set to expire next month. That’s why I have formally petitioned the secretary of the Department of Homeland Security to renew the EB-5 program and make it permanent.

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