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Rick Snyder to lobby Congress for federal immigration reform for talented immigrants: 'It's the right thing to do'

By Nathan Bomey

(Related story: [Rick Snyder unveils proposals to redesign Michigan's workforce development programs](#))

Michigan Gov. Rick Snyder said today that he would jump into the national debate over U.S. immigration law, describing the recruitment of talented immigrants as an economic opportunity for the state.

Snyder said he would become actively involved in a lobbying effort to convince Congress to allow more entrepreneurial immigrants and foreign students who graduate with high-tech degrees from U.S. universities to stay in the country.

In an address this morning at Delta College south of Bay City that was live streamed online, Snyder acknowledged his immigration position "has some controversy."

"I'll get feedback on that," he said, "but it's the right thing to do."

It's a particularly notable move for Snyder, a Republican who has largely declined to share opinions about national political issues since becoming governor Jan. 1.

"We're setting a different course than most of the rest of the United States," Snyder said. "I'm proactive on immigration — legal immigration for advanced degree people. They come and get a fabulous Michigan education, and we have a federal environment that basically says now that we've educated you, you've got to leave."

He added: "They like being here, they're being successful here, we should keep them here. They're creating companies and they're going to create jobs."

Snyder, who has discussed his intention to encourage more legal immigration to Michigan [on several previous occasions](#), today outlined a few specifics of his initiatives. As a founder and previous chairman of economic development group Ann Arbor SPARK, Snyder spent time on several initiatives trying to attract more immigrants to Washtenaw County companies.

Today, he:

--Said he would work with Michigan's congressional delegation to eliminate the federal government's cap on H1-B visas for foreign immigrants who earn a master's degree from a U.S. university. He also called on the U.S. government to "permanently raise the cap" on other "immigrant professionals." Snyder called federal caps on H1-B visas "arbitrary" and said they "fail to recognize the harm done to local economies when states are forced to send away talent they have spent years developing."

--Called on Congress to create a way for foreign students who earn graduate degrees in science, technology, engineering or math (STEM) to earn an "education green card" that would allow for permanent residency in the U.S.

--Said he would lobby the U.S. to make permanent the EB-5 Immigrant Investor Regional Center program and amend the corresponding requirements so that the person could stay in the U.S. by investing \$500,000 in a startup and create at least five jobs here.

"We cannot afford to lose these valuable members of our talent base to overseas competitors after years of development," Snyder said in a [14-page address](#) delivered digitally to the state Legislature.

--Said he's directing the Michigan Economic Development Corp. and Michigan Department of Civil Rights to create a "Cultural Ambassadors" program to recruit and retain talented immigrants for the state. He cited major Michigan companies like Dow Chemical, Meijer and Masco as examples of how immigrants create jobs in the U.S.

Snyder's proposals drew swift praise from Michigan's [Alliance for Immigrants Rights & Reform](#), which distributed a press release through the liberal group Progress Michigan applauding the announcement.

"On immigration, Gov. Snyder gets it," said Ryan Bates, the alliance's director, in a statement. "The best and the brightest come from all across the world to study at our incredible universities. Let's keep these talented young people here so they can build companies and raise their families. Business people from all across the world are knocking at America's door—let's make it easier for them to invest in Michigan and create jobs."Â

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