

Start-up floats solution to tech visa problem

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Body

Getting a visa to live and work in the U.S. can be hard, even for highly skilled immigrants and foreign entrepreneurs looking to start businesses.

A California start-up company may have found a way to alleviate the time-consuming process of obtaining those hard-to-get visas. The company is planning to anchor a ship capable of holding 1,000 people off California's shore - far enough away to be in international waters, but close enough to Silicon Valley so occupants, using easier-to-obtain tourist visas and short-term business visas, can hop a quick ferry ride to meet with tech employers and investors on shore.

Max Marty, a 27-year-old who founded the start-up, Blueseed, came up with the idea after seeing so many of his classmates at the University of Miami's business school head back to their home countries after failing to secure work visas.

"I thought: 'This is terrible. These people could be here adding a lot of value,'" says Marty, who seeks to raise at least \$10 million for the venture. "There's a lot of job creation and job growth that could be happening if this situation were changed."

Marty's proposal comes amid deadlock in Congress over reforms to the nation's immigration system.

The House of Representatives on Tuesday passed a bill that would end the practice of giving out the same number of visas for high-skilled immigrants to all countries. That would make it easier for engineers and technology experts from India and China, who are aggressively pursued by U.S. companies, to enter the U.S.

The bill would not increase the total number of those visas, about 140,000 a year. Despite its bipartisan support in the House, the bill has been blocked in the Senate by Sen. Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa. Grassley says it would do nothing to "better protect Americans at home who seek high-skilled jobs during this time of record high unemployment."

Angela Kelley of the Center for American Progress, which supports a revamped immigration system to allow more highly skilled foreign workers into the country, says Blueseed's plan demonstrates why reform is needed.

Others say the project shows how far U.S. companies will go to displace American workers. Bob Dane of the Federation for American Immigration Reform, which favors reduced immigration, said money would be better spent paying better salaries to retain the "cream of the crop" of American high-tech workers.

Blueseed got a big jolt last week when Peter Thiel, co-founder of the online payment service PayPal, announced he would invest in the project and lead the company's search for funding. Thiel has been a strong proponent for other "seasteading" projects that aim to create autonomous ocean communities.

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"**Tech** innovation drives economic growth, and we need more of both," Thiel said in a statement. "Many innovative people have a really hard time getting **visas**, and Blueseed will help bring more innovation to California with a **solution** that is itself as innovative as it is clever."

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