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## Mary Kramer: State right to lure college-educated immigrants

A couple of months back, New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg suggested on a Sunday TV talk show that Detroit could carve a new and prosperous path if it threw up a big "open house" shingle for new immigrants.



If the federal government could "wave a magic wand ... you pass a law letting immigrants come in as long as they agreed to go to Detroit and live there for five or 10 years," Bloomberg said. "You would populate Detroit overnight because half the world wants to come here."

Detroit Mayor Dave Bing dismissed the idea.

I'm not sure Gov. Rick Snyder has -- either for Detroit or the state. Snyder has launched a work group to create a "Global Michigan" initiative to attract college-educated immigrants.

With jobs so scarce, it may seem crazy to add more people to compete for the jobs that are out there. But studies have shown that college-educated immigrants are an economic engine because of their track record for entrepreneurship and innovation.

Steve Tobocman, a former state lawmaker from Southwest Detroit, is part of Snyder's work group. In a study funded by two philanthropic groups and the **Detroit Regional Chamber**, Tobocman found that 44 percent of all engineering master's degrees and 62 percent of engineering Ph.D.s awarded in Michigan in 2009 were awarded to people born outside the United States.

Researchers at **Duke University** have watched this phenomenon for years. A 2007 paper analyzing census data found that those most likely to start engineering and technical companies hail from India, Asia, Japan and Germany.

Starting companies means adding jobs. And that's the whole idea in this state, right?

Tobocman says that Michigan ranks seventh overall nationally for the total number of new immigrant business owners in all fields and that his analysis showed that immigrants were nearly three times as likely to start a business between 1996 and 2007 as native-born residents.

No wonder the governor is latching onto this idea.

Last December, *Crain's* reported on the little-known EB-5 program -- a visa program for immigrants wealthy enough to invest at least \$500,000 in U.S. companies. A couple of Southeast Michigan companies had benefited from those investments.

The EB-5 process is cumbersome, and wealthy people may not want to go through it. But what if Michigan had a streamlined process to work closely with the **U.S. State Department** to bring more investment -- and talent -- to Michigan?

Global Michigan sounds like the right idea.

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