



“We Want to Be Toronto.”

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INTRO: The dialogue about diversity in Michigan is often about getting white folks to do the right thing. Groups here and elsewhere around the rustbelt are saying it's not just right it's good... for your economy. Michigan Now's Chris McCarus reports.

At the turn of the last century, one third of all Michiganders were born overseas. Michigan was at the height of its power. These days, only about 6% of the population is foreign born. And jobs are hard to find. Vincent Chin was a Chinese immigrant in Detroit, beaten to death with a baseball bat in 1982, because unemployed Chrysler workers thought he was a Japanese guy who represented those that made them unemployed.



Rebecca Zhang, an intern with the City of Cincinnati and Daniel Rajaiah, the mayor's external affairs director in Southwest Detroit, January 29, 2015. They were part of an ongoing exchange of rustbelt cities trying to increase immigration.

Steve Tobocman is the founder of Global Detroit. He says there is no good reason to oppose immigration here now.

“It was news to almost all of us involved, even those who worked on immigration, that 32.8% of high tech firms in the state have been created by the foreign born. 62% of Ph.D.'s in engineering were going to international students. I think a lot of those facts are well known among the cultural elites and it's created more comfort.”

In other words, the governor and corporate leaders know that immigrants come here and create jobs. Mostly, they don't come here and take jobs. And local workers might be more comfortable and not as angry at random foreigners. For the last several months, Global Detroit has gone on exchange trips with other pro-immigration groups from Minneapolis to Philadelphia, Cleveland, Indianapolis and most recently Cincinnati. They compared notes and best practices. What's working to lure immigrants. What's not.

Rebecca Zhang is from Wuhan, central China. She's been in Cincinnati for a year and a half.

“I think here can give people more freedom, more fairness to give them opportunity to start their own business.”

I myself, not knowing Chinese or Chinese culture, didn't know if she meant here as in America in general, Cincinnati or Detroit where she was recently for an overnight visit. But I should listen and study if I want a job. Michigan's foreign born are three times more likely to start a business. About the same for foreign born in Ohio. Rebecca Zhang could have a job to offer me soon.

Brian Wright visited Detroit with Zhang. He's the international student coordinator at Cincinnati State Community College.

"Then of course the welcoming aspect of working with the receiving communities of individuals who never left Southwest Ohio to connect them with the immigrant and international population. Those people who never left Southwest Ohio do they need some work? I think they do. I think we all need some work. There's the issue of cultural competency. To have a more ethical engagement with the other and broaden their perspective."

Last year, Michigan's governor chose Bing Goei to start something called the Office for New Americans. Goei was 11 when he came from Indonesia. He settled in Grand Rapids where he now owns five flower shops.

"I buy the healthiest plants that I can buy. But if I plant that in soil that's not prepared to receive the plant that plant will die. You can have the smartest, most entrepreneurial immigrants but if you don't create the soil in your cities, your universities, your businesses, that immigrant person will not flourish. And sometimes we get too quick in saying let's just bring him in here. Let's just bring him in here. They're the solution to our problems."

In 1990, just 4 percent of Michiganders were foreign born. That's above 6% now. But the national average is 13%. Some American cities have almost 50% foreign born residents. Why should you care? Do you or your neighbor need a job? Do you want tax revenue for the city budget. Sterling Heights is now 24% foreign born. Troy is 27% and Hamtramck is 44%.

Steve Tobocman says "we want to be Toronto. It was a grey, boring ugly step child of Detroit. I had relatives. We'd go there. It was very un-cosmopolitan. Detroit seemed very more happening. We certainly had better music. And look where we are now 40 years later. They're a huge growing economy, close to 50% foreign born and we're lagging the national average and really struggling."

Olivia Chow is a Chinese-Canadian who served in parliament and ran for Mayor of Toronto. I've been trying to get her on the phone but she's apparently still busy in the immigrant city of 10 million. Her website says: "Let's build a city that doesn't leave anyone behind. Every person, in every neighborhood, counts."