



Technology firms consider ditching U.S. for Canada

Companies wary of Trump's changes to H-1B visa program

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USA TODAY

President Trump's imminent executive order that would place restrictions on the H-1B visa program is Silicon Valley's loss, but could be Canada's gain.

Sunil Sharma is convinced so.

His company, Extreme Venture Partners, next week plans to announce a new fund that will help up to five start-up founders and their families move to Toronto and Waterloo, Canada, and invest \$100,000 in each if they are accepted to the VC's accelerator.

"Tech start-ups are a world-wide phenomenon and not limited to Silicon Valley," says Sharma, who said the companies would be headquartered in Canada but maintain operations in their country of origin. "This was an issue before the current restrictive travel ban and imminent H-1B plan."

Across the country, in western Canada, a group of co-founders have formed a company, called True North, to help American companies quickly create subsidiaries in Canada and shift workers to a new business complex in Vancouver. They're offering \$6,000 in round-trip expenses to U.S. companies to make their case.

Another organization, Go North Canada, urges natives to return home and extols the virtues of Canada as a tech destination.

The USA's northern neighbor — home to tech companies Rogers Wireless, IMAX, Hootsuite and Shopify — is making its strongest pitch yet for tech talent at a time when American companies recoil at Trump's first actions in office. Executives, companies and VCs are dangling money, gleaming new facilities, broadband access for all, and promises of economic stability and free

health care — the latest moves by a region that for years has harbored dreams of skimming talent.

What a difference a presidential election makes. For years, Canada could not compete with Silicon Valley on salary or facilities. If one wanted to make it in tech, they trekked to California, where the vast majority of career opportunities awaited.

But with Trump's initial actions, and more to come, expatriates of Canada and other nationalities are turning their eyes northward. They're considering comparable pay, universal health care and diversity in the workforce — as well as the ability to share facilities with other start-ups, according to tech CEOs and venture capitalists in Canada.

Business-management software start-up Fulfil.IO plans to relocate its headquarters in Mountain View, Calif., to Toronto this year because of H-1B visa constraints and in an effort to be closer to all of its customers throughout the U.S. and Canada, says company CEO Sharoon Thomas, who is from India.

"There is a big opportunity here," says Ryan Holmes, CEO of Hootsuite, a 1,000-person company in Vancouver that designed a platform for managing social media. "We have seen a number of people reach out because of concerns over diversity" prompted by Trump's travel ban and potential cuts to the H-1B program.

Canadian tech companies are being flooded with dozens of resumes from engineers, operations, marketing and others in the U.S.

Influitive, a business-to-business marketing firm in Toronto, says it's receiving 30 resumes a day. It recently landed a director of finance and operations who opted for Toronto instead of San Francisco.

"Absolutely, it's our chance to

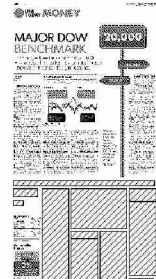
pick up tech talent in a highly competitive environment," says Darryl Ballantyne, co-founder and CEO of LyricFind, a lyrics licensing service in Toronto. "It is often difficult for us to match salaries in U.S. because of the cost of living there." More than 1,000 Canadian tech companies — including LyricFind, whose co-founder is of Moroccan descent — sent an open letter to Trump opposing his travel ban.

Executives from Shopify, an e-commerce company based in Ottawa, this week signed an open letter to the Canadian government to offer immediate entry visas.

"Canada is a country where the best talent from around the world can move here and do their life's work," Shopify Chief Operating Officer Harley Finkelstein said. "My dad was an immigrant when Canada let in 40,000 Hungarians into the country during the Hungarian revolution in 1955. Our family is here because of Canada's inclusive policies and warmth."

Says Parsable CEO Yanda Erlich, a former Google and Microsoft employee: "This has been a conversation in the office. We could move employees who are foreign born from U.S. offices to Vancouver. It gives us flexibility and them some comfort."

Contributing: Elizabeth Weise in San Francisco





SHAROON THOMAS FOR USA TODAY

CEO Sharoon Thomas says Fulfil.IO is moving to Toronto.