

TESTIMONY OF RUCHI SANGHVI

BEFORE THE

SENATE COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, SCIENCE AND TRANSPORTATION

May 8, 2013

Good afternoon Chairman Rockefeller, Ranking Member Thune and Members of the Committee. My name is Ruchi Sanghvi and I am honored to be here today as a representative story for the hopes and dreams of millions of people wanting to have the right and privilege of living and working in the US. My testimony today is my own personal story; and I am here in my own capacity and not on behalf of my employer.

I made it through the gauntlet of today's immigration system. For that, I am grateful. I am also particularly grateful for the opportunities that I could have only had here in the United States. But the system that I have experienced leaves much room for improvement. For that reason, I want to begin by thanking the Senators in the Gang of 8 for putting forward a comprehensive, bipartisan plan that aims to fix our nation's archaic and broken immigration system. It's easy to get lost in the numbers, but I know from personal experience that this is a deeply human issue – our current system isn't working for the economy or for families in the United States. I hope that Congress passes a comprehensive immigration bill this year so that President Obama can sign it into law.

I came to America in 2000 as an impressionable and excited college student at Carnegie Mellon University and have been on a roller coaster ride ever since then. I am proud to say I was the first female engineer hired at Facebook, and later started my own company, Cove, which was acquired by Dropbox, where I work today. I'm privileged to work with talented people I respect and learn from every day. I met my husband here in the US and have friends who are like family. I want to give back to the community I've come to know and love in a meaningful way, and I intend to continue to do so in the years ahead. I am tremendously thankful for the opportunities that have been afforded me.

My path, however, has not been easy. I've been an immigrant for the past 12 years. Being an immigrant not only dictates your professional life but your personal life as well. I've had all kinds of visas from F1s, OPTs, CPTs, H1-Bs, and now finally a green card. Things that most people take for granted – such as switching jobs, following your dreams to start your own business, investing in relationships or building a home – are truly a challenge because of the great uncertainty surrounding your long-term status.

Today, I want to talk about some of the roadblocks I had to overcome to get to where I am today – roadblocks that I hope can be addressed in new legislation.

I was raised in Pune, India and, in the fall of 2000, travelled to Pittsburgh to study Computer Engineering at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU). I chose CMU because it was one of the premier institutions in the world for Computer Engineering and Computer Science. After graduating from college, I got a job doing math modeling for a derivatives trading group at a bank in NYC. But when I arrived in NYC, I panicked when I realized I didn't want to work on Wall Street like many of my other college friends. Living in the U.S. on a visa meant I had to search for and secure another opportunity before I could leave the job in New York – a process already stressful enough for any new graduate.

Choosing your profession, your place of work, and where you want to live all seem like fundamental choices everyone should be able to make. But if you are an immigrant on a visa, it's a hard, stressful decision fraught with many uncertainties.

After a few months of arriving in Silicon Valley and starting work at Oracle, a friend of mine told me about a recently launched startup called Facebook. Out of curiosity, I went to check out their offices and, near the entrance, they had a chalkboard with three words: "Looking for Engineers." I was blown away by the energy and intensity of the people working there. On a whim, I decided to apply and got the job – but as I was one of the first Facebook employees on a visa, it took us a few months to understand how to transfer the H1-B over from my previous employer.

As all entrepreneurs know, building the employee base is the lifeblood for any startup. Startups create jobs and then compete for talent to fill those jobs. This was not any different at Facebook -- we dedicated a large amount of time recruiting and attracting the world's best engineers, designers and product managers to come work at the company. I personally spent a lot of time finding, interviewing, evaluating and expanding the Facebook team.

Much like me, there were talented individuals educated at top US universities who clearly would have been able to contribute significantly in our workplace but for the fact that the combination of uncertainty, risk and time required to secure a visa meant that they shied away from startups. The H1-B visa application and transfer process is a black box to many talented immigrants and startup companies – however bright and talented, very few workers on an H1-B are willing to risk joining a startup and even fewer startups are willing to invest the time and energy interviewing applicants on a visa.

After a few years at Facebook, I realized I wanted to be an entrepreneur. I really wanted to start my own company but couldn't do it on my H1-B status. I had to wait for my green card before doing so. All I wanted was permission to follow my passions, to follow the American Dream, but yet again I faced roadblocks because of a broken immigration system.

In early 2011, I finally started my own company Cove. We needed engineering talent and were competing with the likes of Google, Apple, and Facebook. I wasn't going to turn away anyone who was interested in working at Cove, including those on a work permit. I now was in the unique position of applying for H1Bs and work permits for my employees. I consulted

three immigration lawyers and they gave me a two page list of requirements that would help increase the likelihood of securing the appropriate visa for an employee interested in working at my startup. Instead of spending time building the product and the company, I was trying to check off the list of requirements to secure the H1-Bs. Because we didn't have millions of users or millions in funding, I had to apply for bank loans, look for office space and ask prominent VCs and CEOs for letters of recommendation just to prove we were a legitimate startup. The process to apply for a "transfer" alone took 6 months.

As a student, employee, entrepreneur and wife, I've seen firsthand how the broken US immigration system makes it more difficult at every turn for talented, law-abiding people to build their lives in the U.S., serve their communities, and create jobs here.

My tale is not a sad one; it's one of hard work, hope and the opportunities that America offers. I have been able to achieve all that I have despite the immigration system, not because of it. I'm hopeful that if we are to be able to fix the immigration system, there will undoubtedly be many more like me wanting to create value, wanting to create jobs and give back to the community. The fact is that the current system results in more than 40 percent of math and science graduate students leaving the United States after educating them. The economic reality is that 40% of Fortune 500 companies are started by immigrants and their children. And that should not be surprising; the very idea of leaving your home for a new land to pursue a better life is inherently a risky and entrepreneurial activity. A person with this risk-taking mindset is already predisposed to take great chances to do great things. If we made it easier for the world's talent to stay here, we would be creating more opportunities for everyone. Today's economy based on knowledge and ideas can only grow if we add more talented, skilled and hardworking people to it.

Thank you again for the opportunity and privilege to share my story with the Committee. I hope the Congress will find a way to pass comprehensive immigration reform in the near term as the long-term future of our economy depends upon it.