

Clinton Woos Silicon Valley Execs With Tech Agenda

(CBS 5 / AP / BCN) SANTA CLARA Democratic presidential hopeful Hillary Rodham Clinton sought to woo Silicon Valley campaign contributors and voters Thursday with an ambitious plan to create more high-paying jobs and maintain U.S. dominance as an "innovation superpower" in the technology sector.

The senator from New York spoke at the Santa Clara headquarters of Applied Materials, a manufacturer of nano-technology and extremely small electronic components. She outlined her 9-point "innovation agenda" to spur research and create a premier science, engineering, technology and mathematics workforce.

Clinton said she's already trying to increase the number of so-called H1B visas aimed at highly educated workers. Silicon Valley companies use H1Bs to sponsor thousands of software engineers from Russia, India, China and other countries, but many must return home when their temporary work permits expire.

"If you think you have a skills shortage now, project it out a decade and we're going to be in real trouble," Clinton said to applause from more than 200 executives attending the half-day CEO Summit by the Silicon Valley Leadership Group.

"We need to guide immigration reform to attract and retain foreign-born students who want to work in the United States," she said, observing that the globalization of the economy in the 21st Century poses special challenges.

"Globalization has lifted more people out of poverty around the world than any other innovation in recent history," Clinton said.

However, she said, many Americans have "a deep sense of anxiety" about globalization because "they have seen their wages stagnate" and "they fear that our prosperity will not be shared."

Making sure all Americans prosper in a global economy will require a sharp break from current government policies, according to Clinton.

"I believe that we ought to hit the restart button on the 21st Century," Clinton said.

If elected, Clinton said, her administration would provide financial support to schools that encourage girls and minorities to study "STEM" subjects: science, technology, engineering and math.

She joked that Silicon Valley and Hollywood should team up to create a reality TV show about a computer programmer or structural engineer.

"We have so many kids who want to go into forensics because they see it on TV—please, let's give real sex appeal to STEM!" Clinton said to laughs.

Clinton's agenda includes plans to increase federal research and development budgets 50 percent over the next 10 years at the National Science Foundation, the Department of Energy's Office of Science and the Defense

Department. She would triple the number of NSF fellowships and create an award structure to encourage working engineers and scientists to teach classes and mentor students in public schools.

Clinton called, too, for major budget increases for the National Institutes of Health, and said she would

provide tax incentives to increase the number of U.S. homes with broadband Internet connections.

She would also establish a \$50 billion "Strategic Energy Fund" that would create a research agency focused on reducing the threat of global warming.

Clinton received the first applause of her speech when she said that her R&D windfall and energy agency would be "paid for in part by closing the tax subsidy and loopholes that the oil companies enjoy."

"It's almost impossible to imagine we're still subsidizing the companies that have had the largest profits in the world," Clinton said.

According to the Wall Street Journal, big oil firms will also be asked to make major new contributions to alternative energy sources either through investment or through a federal fund.

Meantime, Clinton criticized President Bush for ignoring scientific facts on global warming.

"A culture that values innovation requires a government that values facts," said Clinton, who also took issue with the Bush Administration's technology spending priorities.

"Under the Bush Administration, spending on basic research has declined four years in a row," Clinton said.

The senator—who spent the morning raising money at a private fundraiser—largely avoided the subject of the Iraq war, and she left after her afternoon speech without taking questions from reporters. Her support of the war drew protesters at another private fundraiser Thursday evening.

Executives attending Clinton's speech said she hit the right tone with Silicon Valley power brokers. Executives in the nation's technology hub—where 53 percent of all engineers are foreign-born -- are acutely worried that many workers will return to India, China and other countries developing homegrown tech sectors.

"We are clearly on common ground," Adobe Systems Inc. CEO Bruce Chizen said after Clinton's 45-minute speech and brief question-and-answer session, where the subjects of immigration reform and alternative energy dominated.

Carl Guardino, CEO of the Silicon Valley Leadership Group, said that Clinton is part of a new wave of presidential candidates that are coming to the region looking for more than campaign contributions.

"Silicon Valley is traditionally the ATM machine for candidates where they come solely for withdrawals. When they engage with the leadership group about policy they are making a deposit," Guardino said.

He emphasized that the organization doesn't endorse candidates and has invited all presidential hopefuls to address members. Republican candidate John McCain spoke to an SVLG forum several weeks ago.

But Guardino noted that Clinton—whose husband was president during the late '90s economic boom that richly rewarded Silicon Valley tech workers—may enjoy an affinity with technologists.

"She has a passion for delving into policy in great detail, and that resonates well with CEOs," Guardino said. "We know we can go into breadth and depth when we talk to her about issues affecting technology."