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"As you advance investment in traditional infrastructure based in concrete and steel, we urge also investing in technology infrastructure," the groups wrote. | AP Photo | AP Photo

Tech asks Trump to use tech jobs for economic growth

By **TONY ROMM** | 11/30/16 06:00 AM EST

NEW YORK — A collection of 17 organizations representing tech giants like Apple, Facebook, Microsoft and Google is urging President-elect Donald Trump to engage Silicon Valley, tap private-sector expertise for key government posts and preserve some of the digital efforts that started during the Obama administration.

On the campaign trail, Trump for months had talked extensively about protecting coal plants, preserving manufacturing jobs and penalizing companies that shift their workforce overseas — and he rarely discussed tech issues. Now that he's headed to the White House, the leading lobbying groups for the Valley's top brands are asking the president-elect to take a much broader view of the economy as he crafts his incoming team.

"As you advance investment in traditional infrastructure based in concrete and steel, we urge also investing in technology infrastructure," wrote groups including the Information Technology Industry Council and the Internet Association, which together represent large Valley players like Apple, Facebook, Google, Microsoft, Twitter and Yahoo.

"Such investments that enable new advances can be an avenue to prosperity and international competitiveness just as much as rebuilding roads and bridges will contribute enormously to our economy," they wrote.

The new letter, obtained first by POLITICO, reflects Silicon Valley's urgent need to try to reboot its tenuous relationship with Trump, after a campaign season in which many executives and engineers blasted the GOP candidate for his rhetoric while donating heavily to his opponent, Hillary Clinton. Its other signers include TechNet, the Computers and Communication Industry Association, the Consumer Technology Association and BSA | The Software Alliance, which represent large companies, as well as Engine, Silicon Valley Leadership Group and 1776, which work with startups.

With the letter, the trade organizations also offered Trump's transition team a nine-page memo articulating the ideal candidates that his administration should tap for coming vacancies across the federal government. Broadly, they urge Trump to keep many agencies and tech programs intact while adding experienced tech voices at the highest levels of government.

Within the executive branch, for example, tech groups stressed the need for tech policy experts on the White House's National Economic Council and the National Security Council, particularly those who understand the "open internet" and the role of data in trade. They said the Office of Science and Technology Policy, meanwhile, "has been, and should remain, a critical point of coordination for public-private partnerships on research and technology issues." Some have questioned whether Trump might scale back, or possibly eliminate, OSTP.

The letter writers further urged the Trump administration to preserve many of the Obama administration's programs at the Commerce Department, including its work to staff "digital attaches" in foreign capitals, and they asked him to appoint a chief data officer who can work on issues like the U.S.-EU Privacy Shield, a major, still evolving agreement that allows tech companies to store Europeans' data in the United States. As Trump prepares to staff his Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, meanwhile, the tech industry called for the creation of a new high-level position there focused on digital trade, citing the fact foreign governments increasingly seek to limit how and where U.S. companies store their citizens'

data. And they called for experts in emerging fields like the sharing economy at the Treasury and Labor departments.

For his part, Trump already has taken some early steps to engage the tech industry. Soon after his Election Day victory, for example, Trump tapped Peter Thiel, a Facebook board member, PayPal co-founder and top Valley venture capitalist, to join his transition team. In recent days, he's met with the likes of Safra Catz, the co-CEO of Oracle, and called Apple CEO Tim Cook, whom Trump publicly criticized during the campaign.

Despite his outreach, however, Trump hasn't tempered his rhetoric on issues like immigration reform. He tapped Sen. Jeff Sessions (R-Ala.), an adamant opponent of an update to the nation's immigration laws for highly skilled workers, as his candidate for attorney general. Sessions, like Trump, also has blasted Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg in particular for seeking to employ more foreign engineers and scientists.

Trump's other appointees — like Rep. Mike Pompeo (R-Kan.), selected to lead the CIA — do not appear to share Silicon Valley's unwavering commitment to encryption. Other nominees for agencies that more directly touch the tech industry have not yet been announced.

In their letter, ITI, the Internet Association and other groups do not mention their pursuit of reforming immigration proposals for high-skilled workers. And while they note the importance of privacy — and stress the need for tech to have a voice in national security conversations — they don't directly mention encryption, either.

Instead, they tried to strike a more conciliatory note, urging Trump to focus on areas like corporate tax reform, one of the few issues on which Silicon Valley and the next president see eye-to-eye.

"We recognize a critical early step in achieving your goals of moving the country forward in a productive way will be identifying the right people for critical positions," they wrote. "We would welcome the opportunity to meet with your leadership team to discuss our policy and personnel ideas in greater depth."