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Trump Picks J.D. Vance as 2024 Running Mate

Ohio senator could help boost the GOP ticket's appeal in Midwest battleground states

By *Alex Leary* [Follow](#) and *Vivian Salama* [Follow](#)

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MILWAUKEE—Former President Donald Trump named Sen. J.D. Vance of Ohio as his running mate, ending months of theatrical buildup and settling on a much younger partner who could help appeal to working-class voters in critical Midwest battleground states.

If Trump is elected, Vance, who turns 40 in August, would be one of the youngest vice presidents in history and one with just two years of elected experience. He is a figure closely associated with the style and views of Trump's conservative, populist movement.

Trump, making the announcement on his social-media platform on the first day of the Republican National Convention here, said that his new running mate would “be strongly focused on the people he fought so brilliantly for, the American Workers and Farmers in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin, Ohio, Minnesota, and far beyond.”

The former president, with a bandage on his right ear, made his first major public appearance since Saturday's shooting, walking into Milwaukee's Fiserv arena to a live performance of “God Bless the U.S.A.” (also known as “Proud to Be an American”) by singer Lee Greenwood.

Trump and his new running mate shook hands and took a pair of seats in the front row of a VIP box.

Chants of “U.S.A.” filled the arena. Then “fight, fight, fight”—the words Trump used after Saturday's assassination attempt.

The vice-presidential pick comes amid widespread calls for unity following the shooting at Trump's rally in Pennsylvania. Trump suffered a gunshot wound to his ear, one rallygoer was killed and two others were critically wounded. The gunman was fatally shot by a Secret Service sniper.

Vance was among the early voices to cast blame on the left, calling it “not just some isolated incident,” despite the motives of the shooter not being understood.

“The central premise of the Biden campaign is that President Donald Trump is an authoritarian fascist who must be stopped at all costs. That rhetoric led directly to President Trump’s attempted assassination,” Vance wrote, prompting some to call for him to be disqualified from consideration for Trump’s running mate.

Trump’s campaign called for ratcheting down the rhetoric, and the former president has said he has revised his nomination acceptance speech for Thursday to focus more on unity and less on attacking President Biden.

The selection of Vance raises questions about the electoral advantage he brings to a campaign that is already highly energized by the attempt on Trump’s life. Given how closely Vance aligns with Trump, he could be less effective with independents and moderate Republicans. Vance’s addition to the ticket also raised concern among some national security officials over the future of aid for Ukraine, given he is viewed as even more hard-line on the issue than Trump.

But many in Milwaukee lauded the choice.

“Trump needs a vice president with innovative ideas and the ability to articulate them to every single American voter and Senator J.D. Vance fits that mold perfectly,” said House Speaker Mike Johnson (R., La.). “It is time to unite our nation and we are eager to grow our House majority and get to work with this ticket to restore America’s greatness once again.”

Earlier on Monday, Vance and his wife, lawyer Usha Chilukuri, made an appearance on the convention floor, shaking hands with delegates as country singer Merle Haggard’s “America First” blasted over the speakers in the arena. Trump officially became the party’s presidential nominee, for the third time, as states’ delegates formally backed him at the convention.

Given Trump can only serve one more term, Vance was seen as an early strong contender for the 2028 election.

“He’s a young guy. He is clearly now the future of the party, and this is a good thing,” said Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican.

Vance met with Trump on Saturday at Mar-a-Lago in Florida and they talked for about 45 minutes, though the job wasn’t offered then, according to a person familiar with the conversation. Ultimately Trump felt the most chemistry with Vance among the contenders, this person said, and Trump liked his back story.



J.D. Vance with his wife, Usha Chilukuri, at the convention Monday. PHOTO: GABRIELLA DEMCZUK FOR WSJ

While the GOP came a step closer to solidifying its ticket, the Democrats are still scrambling over theirs. Biden is straining to quell tremendous pressure on him to withdraw from the race following his disastrous June debate, which exacerbated voter concern over his age and fitness for office. Biden, 81, has insisted he will remain at the top of the ticket, along with his running mate, Vice President Kamala Harris, leaving many Democrats worried about the prospects in November.

The latest Wall Street Journal poll showed Trump, 78, opening a 6-point lead over Biden among voters nationally, with 80% saying that the president is too old to run for a second term—up from 73% in February. Trump also has held persistent—although sometimes slight—leads in battleground states likely to decide the outcome.

For months, a dozen or so leading contenders for the vice-presidential nod had made public auditions for Trump. Many, including Vance, defended him on national television, showed up to court with him at his Manhattan criminal case and touted ties to major donors.

The list was diverse by race, gender and geographic location. Toward the end, Vance, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum and Sen. Marco Rubio of Florida emerged as front-runners, separating from the likes of Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, Rep. Elise Stefanik of New York and former Housing and Urban Development Secretary Ben Carson.

Trump went with Vance, the one most representative of America First populism and a potential heir to Trump's Make America Great Again movement. Trump was impressed by his credentials: service in the Marines, a Yale Law School degree and ties to wealthy Silicon Valley donors.

In Vance, Trump gains a loyalist seen as an effective messenger. Vance came to national prominence with his memoir, "Hillbilly Elegy," about growing up in working-class America.

He was once a vehement critic of Trump, but now says he was wrong.

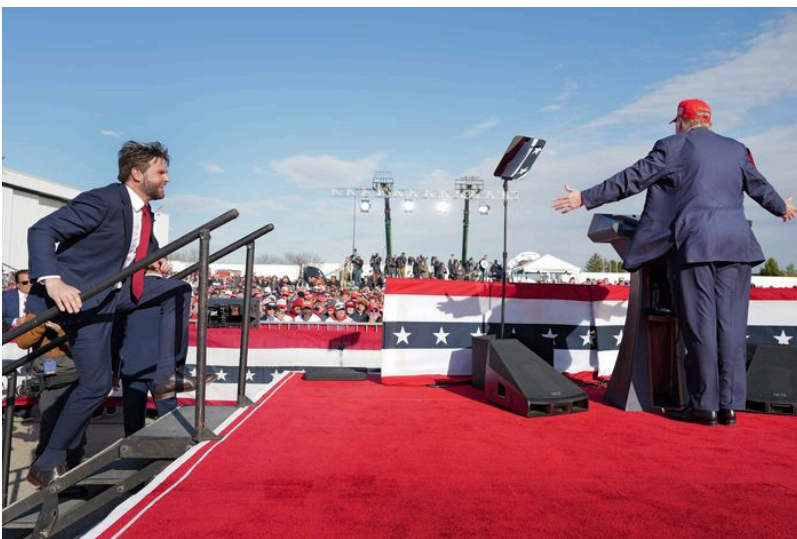
“I go back and forth between thinking Trump is a cynical asshole like Nixon who wouldn’t be that bad (and might even prove useful) or that he’s America’s Hitler,” Vance wrote privately in a Facebook message in 2016 that later became public. Vance also called himself a “Never Trump guy,” and criticized Trump’s rhetoric about immigrants.

Democrats, including Biden’s campaign, in the weeks before Vance was picked began highlighting that criticism and are expected to home in on it going forward.

Harris reached out to Vance and left a message to congratulate him on his selection—and to express her hope that the two can meet in the vice-presidential debate proposed by CBS News, according to a Biden campaign official.



Sen. J.D. Vance with Sen. Tommy Tuberville (R., Ala.) at a press conference across the street from Manhattan criminal court in May. PHOTO: STEFAN JEREMIAH/ASSOCIATED PRESS



Vance as he was introduced by Trump at a March campaign event in Ohio. PHOTO: SCOTT OLSON/GETTY IMAGES

Vance later worked in venture capital in San Francisco, where he formed relationships with technology entrepreneurs. Vance has helped bring some of them closer to Trump.

Vance in 2022 won a U.S. Senate seat representing Ohio—thanks in good part to a Trump endorsement. He has cut a staunchly populist profile in Washington, railing against foreign engagement and trade deals. And he has formed a friendship with Donald Trump Jr., which gave him an inside track in the selection process.

Supporters say Vance could help Trump double down on his dominance with white working-class voters, especially in the “blue wall” states of Wisconsin, Michigan and Pennsylvania, which helped propel Biden to victory in 2020.

Despite his full embrace of MAGA, Vance has taken some bipartisan steps in office, including work with Democrats on railroad-safety legislation in the aftermath of a train derailment in East Palestine, Ohio, and supporting policies aimed at the working class.

Trump has said he wants a running mate who won't make mistakes, looks the part and will help him win. He has also said he doesn't think the running mate factors much into voter choices.

“The first quality has to be somebody that you think will be a good president because if something should happen, you have to have somebody that's going to be a great president,” Trump said on Fox News in February.

In 2016, Trump waited three days before the GOP convention to officially announce Mike Pence as his running mate, a choice meant to bolster him with Midwestern and evangelical voters, a core of the party's conservative base.

Pence was the opposite of Trump's flamboyant style, but proved himself a reliable lieutenant until he rejected Trump's attempts to pressure him into helping stop Congress from certifying Biden's win the day of the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the Capitol. Pence hasn't endorsed Trump's re-election bid.



Vance hosted a town hall in Troy, Ohio, in 2022. PHOTO: ANDREW SPEAR FOR WSJ

Biden and his re-election campaign quickly disparaged Vance as someone who would promote Trump's agenda, asserting that Trump and Vance will support a nationwide ban on abortion and support cuts to Social Security, while also denying the results of the 2020 election.

"A clone of Trump on the issues," Biden said Monday, leaving the White House for an NAACP convention in Las Vegas. "I don't see any difference."

Vance and his wife met while they were law students at Yale. They have three young children together, two boys and a girl.

Before entering politics, Vance worked as a lawyer in D.C., often mingling with conservative reformers and occasionally writing for National Review.

"He has this incredible story...It is a story that was told in his book of growing up on the other side of the tracks," said Sen. Steve Daines (R., Mont.), chair of the National Republican Senatorial Committee. He said Vance would appeal "to hard working and working class Americans."

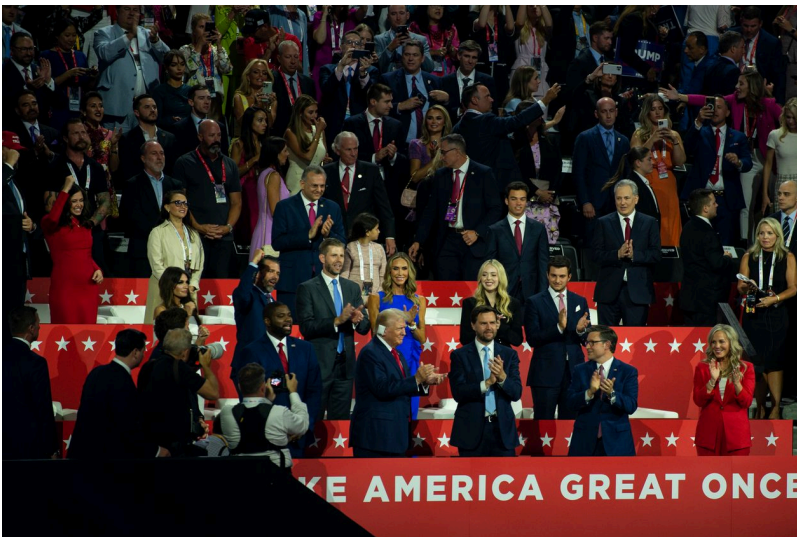
Vance began courting Trump after the former president left office, beginning with a spring 2021 meeting at Mar-a-Lago accompanied by the venture capitalist Peter Thiel. Vance once worked for Thiel, who pumped tens of millions of dollars into his candidacy. Vance was the lone senator who opposed a North Atlantic Treaty Organization-backed no-fly zone in Ukraine, and his comments caught the eye of Trump's eldest son Donald Trump Jr., according to a mutual friend of both men.

When Vance began attacking the GOP's "neocon" wing, Trump Jr. began defending him in public and advocating for him behind the scenes, including with his father. Within a few

weeks, Trump Sr. had endorsed Vance, ensuring his victory in the May 2022 primary. Trump Jr. and Vance have become close personal friends, both men have said.

He has also made his mark in the Senate with his work on the Ukraine war, where he has been the ringleader of opposition to further U.S. funding, pitting him against many traditional Republicans who sided with Democrats on the issue of U.S. support. In closed-door Republican caucus meetings, the freshman senator held his own in debates with pro-Ukraine counterparts such as Sen. Mitt Romney (R., Utah). Vance's dogged and relentless agitation against the funding came as an unpleasant surprise to GOP Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.), who strongly supported it and appeared to view Vance's opposition as ungrateful.

Vance shares Trump's flare for provocation, something that was evident in his first campaign ad that advisers said Vance wrote himself. "Are you a racist? Do you hate Mexicans?" Vance asked in the ad. "The media calls us racists for wanting to build Trump's wall." The text on-screen identified him as an "America First Conservative."



Donald Trump receives a long ovation at the convention Monday while making his first major public appearance since Saturday's shooting. J.D. Vance stands next to him. PHOTO: GABRIELLA DEMCZUK FOR WSJ

—Ken Thomas, Lindsay Wise and Siobhan Hughes contributed to this article.

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