

MEMO

To: Interested Parties

From: Dave Chase, Tim Ryan Campaign Manager
Brandon Hall, Media Consultant/Left Hook

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Re: JD Vance

Summary

On Labor Day of 2022, Tim Ryan's campaign had driven J.D. Vance's approval rating down to a pathetic 35% in Ohio. We achieved this by highlighting three facts about Vance:

1. Vance believes women should stay in violent marriages for the sake of their kids
2. Vance called rape "inconvenient" while justifying his extreme position on choice.
3. Vance claimed he moved back to Ohio to help solve the opioid epidemic. He started a fake charity that paid for polling, campaign advisors and travel to launch his political career while illegally taking a tax write off.

Without a \$40 million bailout from Senator McConnell's SuperPAC post Labor Day, he would not be a Senator today.

As JD Vance emerges as Donald Trump's most likely VP choice, this memo serves to outline the flaws we saw in JD Vance and the lessons learned from the 2022 Senate race. In that race, Tim Ryan ran an exceptionally strong campaign built on his positive brand as well as an effective narrative painting JD Vance as a fraud with a deeply disturbing world view. JD Vance was in deep trouble until Mitch McConnell's SuperPAC swept in and saved his ass. While JD Vance is effective at selling whatever narrative is politically convenient at the moment, he is a complete fraud who has dangerous views toward women's role in society.

The New Right

JD Vance is not a MAGA true believer. He once called Trump "[America's Hitler](#)" and prior to his entry into the 2022 Republican Primary was very much a Never Trumper. He fits into the growing New Right ideology along with his mentor Peter Thiel and biggest cheerleader Tucker Carlson. Vance and Carlson [both share a personal disdain for Donald Trump that is not big enough to stop them from kissing Trump's ass](#) to move their agenda forward. They see Trump as a means to an end, piggybacking on Trump's populist appeal to push for their New Right

policies. They are MAGA committed, but not MAGA at their core. Ultimately they have a more sophisticated, dangerous plan for changing the country.

Vance's vision is of a right-wing populist nationalist movement. Vance believes the Republican Party's focus on tax cuts "failed to address a very real social crisis among the Republican base,"¹ thinks "[universities are the enemy](#)," [believes women should stay in violent marriages](#), [doesn't care what happens in Ukraine](#), [says rape is inconvenient](#), and thinks programs like Social Security and Medicare "[provide disincentives and reasons not to work](#)." JD Vance wants to use the government to social engineer a society in which all families look like the Norman Rockwell painting his family did not.

Thiel, for his part, takes a [conservative libertarian view of the world](#) in which he "no longer believes that freedom and democracy are compatible" and that "since 1920, the vast increase in welfare beneficiaries and the extension of the franchise to women — two constituencies that are notoriously tough for libertarians — have rendered the notion of 'capitalist democracy' into an oxymoron."

These men have an agenda that doesn't have the same appeal to white working class voters as Trump's Make America Great Again, but it's an agenda that they are hellbent on implementing even if it means joining forces with Trump.

Understanding JD Vance

Vance is the product of a broken home. His father left when he was young and his mother struggled with drug addiction. He was largely raised by his grandparents who, while they stayed married, weren't exactly what Norman Rockwell had in mind. In one instance Vance details in his book, his alcoholic grandfather came home drunk and Vance's grandmother poured gasoline on him before lighting him on fire.

Many in elected office come from troubled homes and difficult childhoods but Vance's childhood left an impression on him that is clear in his worldview. The line from his upbringing to his view that [women should stay in violent marriages for the sake of the kids](#) is bright and clear.

Enter Peter Thiel who Vance met at a lecture at Yale Law School in 2011 that he describes as "[the most significant moment of my time at Yale Law School](#)." Thiel, who would go on to hire Vance, fund his venture capital firm and [spend \\$15m getting Vance through the Republican Senate Primary](#). There is little question Thiel's role as a mentor to Vance informed Vance's disturbing worldview.

Thiel, Carlson and Trump Own Vance

¹ [The Californian, J.D. Vance Op-Ed, 7/29/16]

Vance only won the 2022 Republican primary because he was bankrolled by Peter Thiel — who put \$15m into a SuperPAC and orchestrated a Trump endorsement for Vance — and had Tucker Carlson using his audience to champion Vance at every turn.

The Thiel SuperPAC did all the things a campaign would normally do and communicated through [a secret but technically public website](#) to the Vance campaign. The head of the PAC told Politico they were “[carrying much of the load that the Vance campaign couldn't](#).” He also underlined the importance of Carlson, “Tucker was really, really important. It meant that our guy had a platform to go and talk to primary voters in Ohio — and small-dollar donors nationwide.”

The PAC's strategy was to keep Vance alive against better funded opponents long enough to earn Donald Trump's endorsement. The problem they had was Vance's views on Trump, which they summed up in [a 177 page research book](#) saying, “Vance said he was a “Never Trump guy,” “never liked him,” “will never vote for Trump,” “loathed” Trump, called Trump's election “terrible for the country,” and described him as “dangerous” and “reprehensible.””

Despite Vance's anti-Trump past, [Thiel brokered a meeting with Trump](#) early on in the campaign and then it was Vance's job, largely on Carlson's show, to close the deal by effusively praising Trump. For his part, Trump ate it up and in his endorsement event [said](#), “J.D. is kissing my ass. Of course he wants my support..”

With Trump's endorsement, Vance went from 4th place to 1st. Thiel, Carlson and Trump had given Vance what he needed to win: “[funding, media attention and a late surge of momentum](#).”

Defining JD Vance

By Labor Day in 2022, Tim Ryan's internal polling showed him leading JD Vance in the general election 51-47 in a state that had voted for Trump by 8 points. Ryan brought Vance down to a 35 favorable, 50 unfavorable rating, **the worst of any elected official in Ohio**.

Ryan's campaign defined Vance as an out-of-touch fraud beginning on primary night — within minutes of the AP declaring Vance the winner, Ryan was out [with a spot](#) that used a clip of JD Vance calling the United States a joke. The spot also pushed back Vance's attempt to paint himself as a working class fighter for Ohio families — in fact Vance is a venture capitalist who left Ohio for San Francisco to make money from the very companies he decries as bad for Appalachia. Ryan continued the economic attack with ads focusing on clips of [Vance's lies on trade deals](#) and saying that [manufacturing jobs are never coming back to Ohio](#).

Vance claimed he moved back to Ohio to start a nonprofit focused on ending the opioid epidemic — that couldn't be further from the truth. Starting in the summer, Ryan's ad arc walked voters through the sham nonprofit Vance set up that [paid his political advisor and for polling](#) without funding a single addiction program. In fact, all the nonprofit did was [hire a spokesperson for big pharma](#) who called oxytocin a “godsend.” Ryan used validators like [veteran Dale King](#) who's company hires those recovering from opioid addiction in his business and the [mother of](#)

[an opioid victim](#) to drive home Vance's craven use of opioid addiction as a political stepping stone.

Outside of paid media, Tim Ryan reaffirmed the narrative for reporters with a drumbeat of content focused on portraying Vance as a fraud. From [stunts pointing out Vance's recent move from California](#) to [his book trashing Middletown Ohio](#), to content about his [wealthy out of state homes](#) or [profiting from outsourcing](#), or [clips pointing out](#) how often he [flip flops on positions](#), Ryan relentlessly used what Vance said to define him as a fraud.

Women Should Stay in Violent Marriages

The biggest hit Ryan landed on Vance during the race is [a clip the Ryan campaign pitched to reporters of Vance discussing his views on marriage](#). Vance argues people should stay in violent marriages for the sake of their kids. [Vice first reported on the clip](#) and set off a firestorm of press. Vance tried to argue his words were being taken out of context but that argument never took hold as the full clip is clear what Vance meant.

Here is an excerpt from a polling memo conducted by Tulchin Research on JD Vance on behalf of Senate Majority PAC (acquired post campaign) discussing an ad attacking Vance's view on violent marriages that the PAC never ran:

The Key Takeaway from the Focus Groups:

*We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to pick up a U.S. Senate seat in Ohio, a state that has been moving away from Democrats in recent years. J.D. Vance is a particularly weak candidate with unique vulnerabilities. **In fact, the women's attack against Vance in the form of the "Oh Really" ad is one of the most devastating attacks we have ever tested**, and it effectively moves voters permanently away from Vance, including Republican women. If we can get sufficient resources behind that ad and that line of attack and get enough voters in Ohio to see it, we believe we can disqualify Vance from getting elected, even in Ohio, and help elect Tim Ryan to the U.S. Senate.*

"Oh Really" – The Clear Winner

- *This ad was by far the most effective attack against Vance and should be the dominant focus of our communications efforts moving forward. Across nearly every group, the reactions to this ad were palpable, visceral, emotional and powerful. Once shown, the ad often took the air out of the room and put respondents into a visible state of shock. While this was especially true in the women's groups, even multiple respondents in the men's group were clearly struck by the content.*
- *The verbal reactions to this ad were extremely visceral and emotional with respondents describing it as "extremely hard to watch" and that it made them feel "sick," "awful," "disgusted" and "horrified." There was also a consistent recognition across these groups*

that this ad went beyond “politics as usual” and, as one respondent noted, took things to “a whole other level” because of just how “abhorrent” and “indefensible” they were.

“How do you defend those quotes? How do you defend telling a woman to stay in a violent relationship? it’s indefensible.” (Cleveland man)

“I’m absolutely disgusted by those statements. They make me sick to hear.” (Cincinnati woman)

- *“I’m sorry but I just can’t get past the quotes from the last ad. I mean how can anyone actually think that?” (Cincinnati woman)*

The Ryan campaign had committed to hitting Vance on his sham non-profit and didn’t have the resources to deliver both hits and [defend Ryan](#) against McConnell’s \$40m in attacks on TV. The Ryan campaign signaled for outside groups to amplify the attack on Vance for his views on violent marriages, but help never came from national Democrats. Mitch McConnell’s spending effectively bailed Vance out. [The public polling](#) shows exactly how effective that McConnell spending was, taking a consistent lead from Ryan and running up a lead for Vance.

Should Vance become Donald Trump’s VP nominee, his statements insisting women should stay in violent marriages must be re-litigated in the press and Trump must be held accountable for choosing someone with such craven and disturbing views on marriage and violence.

Conclusion

Vance is a strong choice on paper for Trump. He normalizes Trump and most of all he is an excellent salesman. Make no mistake though, JD Vance’s world view is sinister and his tactics even more sophisticated and effective than Donald Trump’s. He views Trump and MAGA as a means to an end to rebuild the Republican party in the view of Peter Thiel and Tucker Carlson.

Democrats cannot allow Vance to be the palatable envoy to the moderate portions of the Republican Party for Trump or build his own brand to carry the Republican party towards this New Right ideology. Tim Ryan’s U.S. Senate race illuminated the path to dragging Vance’s favorabilities into the gutter and Democrats must attack him quickly to ensure voters know exactly who JD Vance is and what he believes.