

Trump's Vice President

Attempting to heal the Republican Rift

Laurence Nardon & Delaine Tubbs

The announcement of Mike Pence as Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump's running mate on July 15 was decidedly lackluster, if not downright awkward. Far from his normal persona of self-assurance to the point of hubris, Trump seemed uncomfortable and even nervous throughout, shifting plans and issuing contradictory statements in the days leading up to his running mate's finalization.

As Pence's name began to circulate last week, Trump signaled his malaise by insisting that the leaks were not a "final, final decision", revealing his inability to confidently stick to Pence. Trump cancelled his first joint event with Pence scheduled for Friday, citing a desire to pay tribute to the victims of the attack in Nice, France the day prior; regardless, Trump drew attention back to himself and announced his choice on Friday evening anyway, via Twitter. Insiders reported that Trump sought assurance from advisors that Pence was the man for the job, even as Trump's campaign fielded a last-minute appeal from New Jersey Governor Chris Christie.

The selection of Pence represents Trump committing himself to the Republican Party and its unification. Alliance building is Trump's strategy, but drawing in Republicans is risky as it requires shunning others. A polarizing candidate is what Trump feels his campaign needs but comes with the unease of sacrificing his ability to say or do whatever he pleases, Trump's characteristic trademark.

A staunch conservative

Trump and Pence had no personal or professional relationship prior to an aggressive push for Pence's candidacy in the past weeks. They appear to have little in common personally and politically. Regardless, Pence has been vigorously auditioning throughout the summer for Trump's vice presidential pick, attending rallies in his home state of Indiana to promote Trump and attack his rivals.

Dr. Laurence Nardon is head of the North American program at Ifri. Delaine Tubbs is a student at Rice University in Houston, Texas studying Political Science and Policy Studies.

The opinions expressed in this text are the responsibility of the author alone.

ISBN : 978-2-36567-606-9

© All rights reserved, Paris, Ifri, 2016.

How to quote this publication:

Delaine Tubbs, "Trump's Vice President" *Chroniques américaines*, 21 July 2016.

Ifri

27 rue de la Procession
75740 Paris Cedex 15
Tél. : +33 (0)1 40 61 60 00
Email : accueil@ifri.org

Website:
www.ifri.org

Pence, who has in the past flirted with the idea of running for president himself, is best known for his political career that began in 2001 when he was elected to represent Indiana in the House of Representatives. He served six terms in Congress, where he sat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee and had a short stint in party leadership, acting as the Republican Conference Chairman. In 2012, Pence left the House to run for governor of Indiana, a position to which he was elected for a four-year term in 2013.

As much as Trump is a Brooklynite, Pence is a Hoosier. He was born and raised in Columbus, Indiana and remained in the state to attend university and later to earn his juris doctor degree at Indiana University. Before his national political career took off, Pence practiced private law and in 1988 and 1990 ran unsuccessfully for Congress. Following his bids for Congress, he became president of the Indiana Policy Review Foundation, a conservative, free-market think tank. In 1994, he began hosting a political radio show which gained him the name recognition in Indiana for his conservative thinking that allowed him to win a vacant Republican seat in the House of Representatives in his 2000 bid.

The impact of a vice president

Pence seemed a surprising pick to many. His crafted persona of a humble and careful Midwesterner seems a stark contrast to Trump's usual dynamism and ruthlessness. Those who know Pence regard him as a calculated and smooth communicator, but he lacks recognition on the national stage. A recent poll reveals that 88% of Americans do not know Pence or do not have an opinion of him [\[1\]](#).

Yet, this very lack of excitement or reputation gives Trump and his campaign a tremendous opportunity to frame and market Pence to the public in the coming weeks. It also provides Trump's presumed presidential opponent, Democrat Hillary Clinton, a similar opportunity to brand and pitch her own image of Pence. Whereas, 69% of voters say that running mates will affect their decision "at least some," whichever party's message prevails with voters may affect how millions behave come November 8 [\[1\]](#).

How can Pence help Trump?

Though it is too soon to tell how Pence will be received by the general American populace, both campaigns are placing their bets on certain strategies. Trump certainly chose Pence over other favorites, such as former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie, to make up for tensions with his party and voters alike.

First, Pence can increase Trump's favor with Republican elites who have remained distant. Though Trump has bashed "the establishment," he needs party leaders on his side. His weak national campaign needs elites to rally support, and Trump will certainly need a healthy relationship with Capitol Hill if he finds himself in the Oval Office. Trump is certainly betting on Pence to solidify the peace that has eluded him: "It was party unity. I'm an outsider. People I wasn't necessarily getting along with are loving this pick."

With his history in the House, Pence has established relationships and is well regarded as a *principled* conservative. Pence came into the House 15 years ago in the same class as current Speaker of the House Paul Ryan, who happens to be one of Trump's least enthusiastic supporters. The two were regarded as "conservative warriors" for their ideologically-driven voting records that favored deregulation, reduced spending and free-markets.

Trump is already experiencing positive windfalls in these circles for choosing a consistently conservative running mate. Ryan praised Trump last week, remarking that Pence "comes from the heart of the conservative movement." Other Republican high-ups including Senate and House Majority Leaders Mitch McConnell and Kevin McCarthy have also signaled their approval. Senator Jeff Flake of Arizona captured the Republican Party's relief by describing the selection of Pence as the "best choice Donald Trump's made so far."

Trump is also hoping that Pence will have a similar effect on donors. Because Trump has not relied on typical campaigning tactics (such as paid advertising) and is able to self-fund, his campaign has failed to raise large funds. Many corporations and longtime Republican donors have rebuffed Trump for his inflammatory politics. These donors include David and Charles Koch, billionaire conservative brothers who also oversee networks of hundreds of other donors. The

Koch brothers decided to keep themselves and their money out of the 2016 presidential campaign and likened the choice between Clinton and Trump to the choice between “cancer or a heart attack.”

Pence, though, has a positive history with the Koch brothers and other prominent Republican backers; their organization and its dollars helped Pence to push free-market legislation and tax cuts through the Indiana Legislature. Still, neither donors nor powerful networks have announced plans to change their funding strategies.

But, Trump wants voters to focus not on the *politics* of Pence but on his *policy*. He said this weekend, “The main reason I picked him was the incredible job he did in Indiana.” Trump is likely attempting to shore up support amongst socially conservative evangelicals that have been skeptical of Trump’s stance on issues such as gay rights and abortion.

Pence is seen as a religious family man with traditional values. One of his most well-remembered lines is, “I am a Christian, a conservative and a Republican, in that order.” He wrote legislation to defund Planned Parenthood and other family planning clinics before such rhetoric was mainstream amongst Republicans.

He also has a fiscally conservative record to brag about. In Congress, Pence opposed spending hikes, such as Medicare expansion. As governor, he passed massive tax cuts. Pence had the good fortune of being governor when the whole nation was recovering economically. Nevertheless, Trump and Pence will cite that, under his administration, unemployment declined by more than three percentage points, and the state has one of the strongest labor force growth rates [\[2\]](#). Overall, Pence can point to the policy experiences that Trump’s resume lacks, assuaging voters who see Trump as lacking substance.

How can Pence hurt Trump?

Trump is hoping that Pence will balance the Republican ticket and make up for his shortcomings. However, the ways in which Pence complements Trump may actually highlight the presidential candidate’s weaknesses and provide opponents with new ammunition.

Trying to assure Republican leaders and voters alike, Trump chose a socially conservative Republican who has Tea Party inclinations. In doing so, Trump pushed his ticket further to the right and tied himself to controversial conservative policies.

Though Pence is not well known nationally, he was launched into the national spotlight in May 2015 following Indiana's passage of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, legislation widely criticized as the legalization of discrimination against the LGBTQ community. In nationally broadcasted interviews, Pence struggled to articulate exactly what the act did and repeatedly declined to answer whether or not the law would allow businesses to refuse service to gay individuals. Days later, Pence approved a "clarification" to the act that left many evangelicals feeling betrayed.

The act turned into a lose-lose situation for Pence in which he earned a reputation as right-wing bigot while also distancing himself from his loyal evangelical base. One of his only instances of national attention portrayed him as an awkward mix of bullish and backtracking. Clinton and her campaign are sure to focus their narrative about Pence on issues pertaining to LGBTQ rights, as well as his attempts to restrict abortion and dismiss climate change. Shortly after his selection, Clinton's campaign stated that Pence is "the most extreme pick in a generation."

While Trump may win over some skeptical conservatives, he does so at the cost of moderates and independents. Alienating these demographics, though, is particularly troubling for Trump who has bet on courting disillusioned liberals, especially Bernie Sanders supporters. Shifting right, therefore, represents a loss of some of the largest groups of uncaptured and unconvinced voters.

However, Pence's attributes may not even succeed in wooing conservatives, because their obvious differences will only serve to highlight the gulf in the Republican Party between Trump and the more principled establishment. Their first appearances together featured Trump digressing away from Pence and interrupting his running mate whenever Pence spoke. The pair has since been dubbed an "awkward marriage" [\[3\]](#).

Trump and Pence come from different worlds socially, economically and culturally, but their differences are substantive as well. Pence ardently supported the Iraq invasion, a move that Trump touts as

evidence of poor judgment in Clinton's case. Trump has promised to protect social security; Pence voted against expansion of Medicare and other social welfare programs. Trump wants to stop the "rape of our country" by erecting walls physically and with tariffs and legislation. Pence supported fought for free trade and voted for treaties like NAFTA that reduced tariffs; in 2014, he said on Twitter "Trade means jobs, but trade also means security." Trump called for banning Muslims from entering the United States. In response to this announcement in December, Pence tweeted that Trump's "Calls to ban Muslims from entering the U.S. are offensive and unconstitutional."

The stark discordance between the two politicians will force the campaign to substantively address some of Trump's most controversial ideas. They also may prompt Pence to waffle on his convictions, though changing one's mind is an act that Trump has made impermissible for his political opponents.

Can Pence undo Trump's divisiveness?

For Trump, the selection of a running mate posed a choice between attempting to bridge the gulf in the Republican Party or to commit to his own populist message. Pence's addition to the ticket shows that Trump's strategy is to attempt unite his party.

Yet, the reach may simply be too far and rather than being reconciliatory, reveal the vastness of the chasm. The Republican National Convention in July cemented Trump's nomination, but the party is far from unified. The event saw revolt on the convention floor, an attempted coup by Never Trump diehards and faintly veiled disdain from prominent Republicans. Ironically, the Trump Pence ticket manages to represent all of these divisions that plague the party as its leaders desperately attempts to reunify the Grand Old Party.

Therefore, the choice of a less bombastic, relatively unknown candidate deviates from Trump's norm and is a huge gamble. What dividends it will pay will only be revealed in the coming weeks as both Trump and Clinton cement their narratives and create an image for both of their picks and counterparts. Still, the fraying of the Republican Party may preclude Trump from pivoting to a positive, reconciliatory message leaving the Trump Pence 2016 ticket to crumble into an agglomeration not of the pair's strengths but rather of the two's weaknesses.

[1] www.cbsnews.com

[2] www.wsj.com

[3] www.fortune.com