

Trump chooses right-wing Indiana governor as running mate

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Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump announced Friday his selection of Indiana Governor Mike Pence as his vice-presidential candidate. Trump and Pence were to appear at a joint press conference Saturday before traveling to Cleveland for the Republican National Convention, which opens Monday.

The choice was announced the day after the last significant resistance to Trump's nomination within the Republican Party collapsed. The rules committee of the Republican National Convention, meeting in Cleveland Thursday, voted by 87-12 against a measure that would declare delegates to the convention "unbound," and therefore free to vote against Trump even if he had won their state primary or caucus.

Trump opponents among the convention delegates had hoped to get 28 votes for the resolution, which would have been enough to force a vote by the full convention on a minority report from the rules committee. As it developed, they were unable to attract even half that many votes.

The selection of Pence came after a protracted period in which Pence, former House Speaker Newt Gingrich and New Jersey Governor Chris Christie were vetted, privately and publicly, as potential running mates for the real estate and casino mogul.

Press reports, citing sources within the Trump family and his closest aides, said that Christie's nomination was effectively vetoed by Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law. While US Attorney in northern New Jersey, before he became governor, Christie prosecuted Charles Kushner, Jared Kushner's father, for fraud and sent him to prison.

Christie was also widely opposed in Christian fundamentalist circles because he was deemed insufficiently militant in his opposition to abortion,

same-sex marriage and other social issues.

Campaign chairman Paul Manafort and other top Republican Party officials evidently favored Pence over Gingrich as a safer and more reliable alternative, carrying less public and private baggage than the former Speaker, a failed candidate for the Republican presidential nomination in 2012 who is now 73 years old.

Pence held an Indiana congressional seat for 12 years, from 2000 to 2012, before leaving Congress to seek and win a term as governor of Indiana in the 2012 election. He faced uncertain prospects in his reelection bid, virtually tied in the polls with Democrat John Gregg, whom he narrowly defeated four years ago.

In Congress, Pence was aligned with the ultra-right faction of congressional Republicans, serving as chairman of the Republican Study Committee, the main grouping of conservative Republicans. He challenged John Boehner for the top position in the minority Republican caucus in 2006, and was badly beaten, before winning the third-highest position, as chairman of the House Republican Conference.

His political views were typical of the Christian fundamentalist right: support for militarism and the war in Iraq; hostility to domestic social spending and public education; furious hostility to abortion and gay rights. He voted for the war in Iraq in 2002, then opposed the bailout of Wall Street in 2008-2009 on free market grounds.

Pence gloated in 2005 that Hurricane Katrina had cleared the way for "free market" solutions in New Orleans and the Gulf Coast generally; toured Baghdad with Senator John McCain in 2007 and hailed the "progress" being made in US-occupied Iraq; instigated a bipartisan letter in 2010 demanding tougher sanctions on Iran; and introduced legislation in 2011 to cut off

funding for healthcare services for women provided by Planned Parenthood and other organizations that also perform abortions.

By 2012, however, as Republicans aligned with the Tea Party faction became dominant, Pence found himself outflanked on the right. He eventually decided to leave Congress and return to statewide politics in Indiana, which would provide a better basis for eventual participation in presidential politics. He was widely mentioned as a possible contender for the 2016 nomination but ultimately decided against it.

A critical episode in derailing a Pence presidential bid came in March 2015, when he signed into law the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, a state law that allowed businesses to discriminate against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender individuals in the name of their professed religious principles. After heavy pressure from corporations concerned about possible consumer backlash, Pence backed and signed a revised bill that caused some Christian fundamentalist groups to denounce him.

Pence oversaw the largest tax cut for corporations and businesses in Indiana's history, and defended the state's right-to-work law, passed under his predecessor Mitch Daniels, against court challenges.

He also drew fire from right-wing groups by agreeing to implement the expansion of Medicaid under Obamacare, albeit with a raft of punitive provisions, including one allowing the state to kick low-income adults off Medicaid for six months if they failed to pay premiums, as well as requiring recipients to pay into health savings accounts as a condition of eligibility.

It is doubtful that Trump was particularly concerned, or even aware of, many of these issues. Pence's main attraction, according to some reports, is that he has close ties to the network of right-wing lobbies and funding groups run by billionaires Charles and David Koch. One top Pence adviser, Marc Short, was president of Freedom Partners, a major vehicle for the Koch brothers. Matt Lloyd, his deputy chief of staff, was director of communications for Koch Industries, the brothers' principal holding company.

The Koch brothers are the most important funders of Republican candidates, but they have stayed on the sidelines in the presidential campaign, and have yet to express any interest in supporting Trump, whose campaign is trailing Democrat Hillary Clinton in

fundraising by a huge margin.

The other "attraction" of Pence is that he is unlikely to steal the limelight from Trump, as Christie or Gingrich might have occasionally done. And he proved willing to engage in the flattery that seems mandatory for any Trump supporter, declaring at a rally Tuesday night in Indiana, that Trump "is like no other leader in my lifetime since Ronald Reagan." This is evidently regarded as the highest possible praise in Republican circles, although for millions of working people it amounts to the greatest possible condemnation.



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