

Candidate backed by Trump and fascist congressmen wins Ohio Senate primary

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The choice of ex-president Donald Trump won the Ohio Republican primary for an open US Senate seat Tuesday. J. D. Vance, hedge fund capitalist and author of the wretched anti-working class memoir *Hillbilly Elogy*, finished atop a five-candidate field with 32.2 percent of the vote.

Vance defeated four other candidates, all of them extremely wealthy. Three of them had sought the Trump endorsement, only to have the former president decide that the celebrity of the best-selling author outweighed his past denunciations of Trump during the 2016 campaign. Trump announced his support on April 15, at a time when Vance's campaign was sinking, and had raised only \$911 in the first two weeks of the month.

The primary contest was a remarkable demonstration of the two factors that dominate the politics of the Republican Party, and the big business two-party system as a whole.

The first was the flood of cash expended by all the major candidates, to a degree previously unheard of even by the standards of American capitalist politics. Some \$80 million was spent, mostly on television advertising, in a single state. Twenty years ago, that sum would have paid for a national presidential campaign.

Vance was sustained in the race for months by the billionaire former owner of Paypal, Peter Thiel, who pumped \$13 million into his campaign. The Club for Growth, a major Wall Street lobby, spent \$12 million to back the campaign of former state treasurer Josh Mandel, who finished second, with 23.9 percent.

State Senator Matt Dolan, a member of the billionaire family that owns the Cleveland Guardians baseball team (formerly the Cleveland Indians), spent \$11 million, finishing third with 23.3 percent, while former Republican Party state chair Jane Timken, of the family that founded the steel and roller-bearing company, had similar resources. Although endorsed by retiring Senator Rob

Portman, she won only 5.9 percent, finishing fifth.

Investment banker Mike Gibson, who postured as a "blue collar" candidate, self-financed his campaign to the tune of \$14 million and took the lead briefly in pre-election polling until Trump's endorsement of Vance. He then faded to fourth place, with 11.9 percent of the vote.

These vast outlays were in support of candidates who had little popular support. Timken had already been an unsuccessful US Senate candidate. Mandel was a two-time loser for that position. Dolan and Gibson were largely unknown, distinguished only by their wealth. Vance himself was well known as a celebrity author of a book about growing up in Appalachia, but he was dismissed by Republican Party officials because of his bitter denunciations of Trump during the 2016 campaign.

The second factor driving the US two-party system is the transformation of the Republican Party into an openly fascistic political formation under the personal, authoritarian rule of the ex-president. Trump's domination of the party received its first real test in electoral politics Tuesday, and there are several more such contests in the course of May.

This was expressed in the transformation of Vance himself. He silenced his anti-Trump rhetoric after the 2016 election, and he quickly became a rabid supporter of the new administration's economic nationalism and attacks on immigrants and refugees. The cynicism with which he adopted the new posture as a warrior for MAGA (Make America Great Again), prostrating himself before a president he had once characterized as "cultural heroin," evidently endeared him to Trump, who recognized a kindred soul in this millionaire huckster with zero principles.

Besides Vance, Mandel, Timken and Gibson all visited Mar-a-Lago and kissed the ring, seeking to obtain Trump's endorsement, but in vain. They all nonetheless

claimed to be the best representatives of Trumpism. Mandel, a conventional budget-cutting advocate of austerity policies when he was state treasurer, rebranded himself as a ferocious culture warrior who was “Pro-God. Pro-Guns. Pro-Trump.”

Of the five Republicans, only Dolan would concede that Democratic Joe Biden had won the 2020 presidential election, although he pledged to support Trump if he were the Republican presidential nominee in 2024.

The embrace of Trump’s “stolen election” lies was combined with increasingly deranged political rhetoric. Vance claimed that the Biden administration had deliberately opened the US-Mexico border for the purpose of encouraging the importing of illegal drugs into supposedly pro-Trump states like Ohio, where the opioid epidemic has been devastating deindustrialized working class areas for two decades.

“If you wanted to kill a bunch of MAGA voters in the middle of the heartland, how better than to target them and their kids with this deadly fentanyl,” he said in a recent interview. “It does look intentional. It’s like Joe Biden wants to punish people who didn’t vote for him. And opening up the floodgates to the border is one way to do it.”

At one point, Vance campaigned with two fascist Republican members of Congress, Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia and Matt Gaetz of Florida. Meanwhile, Mandel campaigned with his most prominent endorser, Texas Senator Ted Cruz.

The stage is now set for a general election campaign of unparalleled reactionary filth, with the rival capitalist candidates seeking to outdo each other in anti-Asian racism.

The Democratic Party nomination for the Ohio Senate seat was won by Representative Tim Ryan, a conservative Democrat from the Youngstown-based congressional district that has been hit harder by deindustrialization than any other.

Ryan staged a brief and largely unnoticed campaign for the Democratic presidential nomination in 2020. He seeks to reproduce the campaigns of Democratic Senator Sherrod Brown, also of Ohio, who has sought to combine economic nationalism and vaguely left-populist rhetoric, but in Ryan’s case there is much more nationalism and much less populism.

According to an analysis published by the *Wall Street Journal*, Ryan has run more than 4,000 TV commercials assailing China since he entered the race, the second most of any congressional candidate, Democratic or

Republican. A recent ad has Ryan declaring, “It is us versus China. America can never be dependent on communist China.”

His campaign vilified China to the point that the AAPI Victory Fund, a Political Action Committee which seeks to mobilize Asian-American and Pacific Islander voters, issued a statement calling a Ryan ad “rife with sinophobic rhetoric” and warned that such language was dangerous in view of the rising number of hate crimes against Asian Americans.

Two other results in Ohio primaries for seats in the House of Representatives confirmed the further shift to the right in capitalist politics.

In the 7th District in northeast Ohio, between Cleveland and Canton, former Trump White House aide Max Miller won the Republican nomination, after the withdrawal of incumbent Anthony Gonzalez, one of the ten House Republicans who voted for Trump’s impeachment last year. Miller had Trump’s endorsement and was effectively unopposed.

In the 11th District in Cleveland, incumbent Shontel Brown defeated former Bernie Sanders campaign co-chair Nina Turner for the Democratic nomination. Brown defeated Turner last year for the vacancy created when Marcia Fudge was nominated as Biden’s secretary of Housing and Urban Development.

Turner challenged her again, but this time the Congressional Progressive Caucus endorsed Brown. Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez endorsed Turner (Ocasio-Cortez only on Monday, the day before the primary) but they did not campaign for her, as they had in last year’s race. Brown won easily in an extremely low turnout for a contested primary.



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