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## Can J.D. Vance help the little guy?

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During his speech accepting the GOP vice presidential nomination, Sen. J.D. Vance could have stuck with platitudes and cheerleading. Instead, he emphasized helping American workers. He called for higher wages and stronger unions. He attacked rapacious [Wall Street capitalism](#).

Through words, intellectual cadence, and audience rapport, Vance was pushing the Republican Party, and possibly a future White House, in a new and different direction. As TV cameras flashed to Donald Trump's reaction, the former president seemed to be sizing up his running mate and possibly nodding to the new player on the stage. What was Trump thinking?

Vance will be a cheerleader, but showed he won't be the type of puppet Trump has favored in the past. Trump's populism is based in cultural antagonism. Vance's brand is rooted in personal experience and family life, and punctuated with views on the law, economics, and social policy.

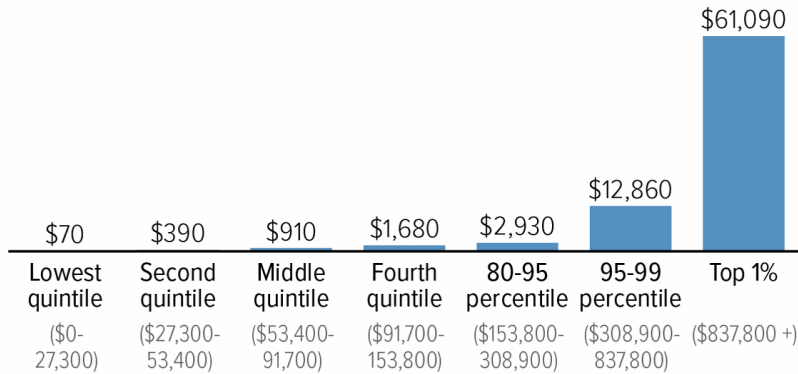
Although vice presidents have little authoritative power, Vance's presence and perspective will make it harder for Trump to straddle the political gap between Republican allegiance to Wall Street friendly neo-liberalism and the party's newly stated commitment to increasing the share of the economic gains for low-to-middle income workers and families.

If he regains the presidency, Trump's first major test in managing this political conflict may occur next year as Congress deals with expiration of 2017 tax-cut legislation that was the crowning achievement of his first administration. Corporations and high-income Americans have enjoyed the lion's share of the Trump [tax cuts](#). In contrast, people in the bottom half got what amounts to 'walking around money.' Revenue forgone by the tax cuts has played a role in driving up the [national debt](#) to levels that make it harder for Congress to

maintain, or contemplate expanding, programs including Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security that benefit working families.

### Households With Incomes in Top 1 Percent Benefit Most From 2017 Trump Tax Law

Average federal tax change, 2025



Source: Table 2, Distributional Analysis of the Conference Agreement for the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, Tax Policy Center

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As vice president, what might Vance be able to do to change how much of the pie goes to people at the bottom? Given the flow of money and influence from Wall Street to Congress and the White House, what could he do? A lot would depend on what Trump himself prioritizes as a chief executive in his last term of office. Trump will not have to raise funds to run again.

Vance already has drawn the ire of big business for supporting higher corporate taxes and working with [Senate Democrats](#) to curb abusive banking and credit card practices. His critics are particularly incensed by his support for strong enforcement of [anti-trust policy](#) at the Federal Trade Commission and Justice Department that could result in lower prices for consumers, more opportunity for small business, and lower profits for large corporations. [The headline](#) of one business publication shouted: “We don’t need a Republican Bernie Sanders.” Others condemn him for taking positions compatible with many in the Democratic Party.

Answering the corporate media attack, [Oren Cass](#), founder of the think tank [American Compass](#), defends Vance as one of the more “thoughtful and

innovative” members of the Senate. The Washington-based group is trying to focus conservatives on building prosperity by supporting the working class, families, and communities rather than through unfettered capitalism and trickle-down economics.

Vance shares Trump’s visceral antipathy toward illegal immigration and is more specific about how it undermines wages. Judging from what he has said in the past, the senator from Ohio would do much more for low-income families including making the [child tax credit](#) more progressive. Describing himself as a natalist, the father of three young children is willing to spend on policies supporting [family development](#).

Vance wants the country to have more babies and families would need more of the national income to raise them. Larger and stronger families would mean more future workers to support Social Security. Like Trump, Vance indicates that he does not want to cut [Social Security](#) benefits for the elderly. As a possible successor to Trump, he might find himself in the White House as Social Security nears insolvency and be a key player in fashioning legislation to stabilize the program. He might be sensitive to the fact that [raising the retirement age](#) is a benefit cut that particularly hurts low-wage workers. That happens because they live harder and shorter lives.

From all accounts, Vance was not Trump’s first choice as running mate. As vice president he will have limited influence over policy. But by allowing a young dynamo to run beside him, Trump has shown leadership in charting a new path for his party and taken a risk in choosing a strong personality and intellect capable of leading the country in the future. He has given the bottom half of the economic pecking order at least a sign that they matter.

These are things the opposing party has not yet done. The ball is in [Democrats’ court](#). What will be their counteroffer to American workers? Meanwhile, the question remains: is the appeal to the working class embodied by choosing J.D. Vance a major shift for the Republican Party – or will it turn out to be a head fake followed by business as usual?

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