JD Vance sells himself to Silicon Valley

JD Vance's appearance at the *All-In* Summit was easily the most comfortable I've seen him, but then he was with the people he understands best: other VCs.

The *All-In* podcast appearance was what business leaders refer to as a display of synergy. Cohost David Sacks' and Vance's political fortunes are tied together — if Trump wins, Sacks looks like a kingmaker and has a vice president who owes him favors and will take his calls. If Vance loses, remaining close to his *real* community — venture capitalists — gives him a valuable network to tap into for future campaigns.

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Vance has called Sacks "one of my closest confidants." (His other friends include Curtis Yarvin, an anti-democracy software developer, and VC Peter Thiel, about whom, more later.) Sacks has been shoring up influence in the Republican party, first with his flop attempt at coronating Ron DeSantis as the Republican nominee and now with Vance. Besides his fundraising activities, Sacks' *All-In* podcast has also hosted Donald Trump and is a place Sacks routinely rants about his take on politics.

As far as I can tell, the purpose of Vance's appearance on *All-In,* which is also cohosted by fellow Trump supporter and Silicon Valley SPAC king Chamath Palihapitiya, was to explain away the anti-immigrant sentiment coming from the Republican party.

Vance's appearance was almost entirely disingenuous. According to Vance, anything bad you have heard about former President Donald Trump is because the lousy people in the American media have been busily lying about him. "The media doesn't often tell you the truth about Donald Trump," Vance says. "Donald Trump cares more about the details of public policy than almost anyone I've met in public life." If you don't believe him, Vance says, "I just encourage you to listen to what he actually says."

Yes, let's. The same day the video of the *All-In* interview was uploaded to YouTube, Trump debated Vice President Kamala Harris. Asked why he had killed an immigration bill, Trump said the following, "First, let me respond to the rallies. She said people start leaving. People don't go to her rallies, there's no reason to go." He went on to discuss how he had "the biggest rallies, the most incredible rallies in the history of politics." Okay, but maybe I'm cherry-picking! Let's try another one. Asked if he had a plan for repealing Obamacare, Trump replied, "I have concepts of a plan."

Thiel characterized himself as "pro-Trump, pro-JD"

So much for Trump's grasp on public policy. As much fun as I am having quoting Trump, I am less interested in fisking Vance's appearance and more interested in what he's doing on *All-In* in the first place.

Vance has played at being a man of the people, but he owes his place on Trump's ticket to Silicon Valley's billionaires. After all, he is a pet of Thiel, who put forward $15 million for Vance's Ohio Senate campaign. (There were other wealthy donors, too, including Oculus founder Palmer Luckey.) Thiel said he would sit out this race, but Vance has publicly said he is attempting to get Thiel "off the sidelines" and donating into Trump's campaign. (In his own *All-In* appearance, Thiel characterized himself as "pro-Trump, pro-JD" and said that though he is not donating money, he is "supporting them in

every other way possible.”)

In Thiel’s absence, his fellow PayPal mafioso Sacks has aggressively moved into politics. Sacks hosted a $300,000-a-person dinner at his mansion to raise tech money for Donald Trump in July. That room wanted Vance for vice president, and it got him.

If you are wondering why Sacks, who is already rich, might be seeking more wealth and power, it’s worth remembering that VCs are middlemen. They have to periodically raise money for their funds, and that’s easier if they look knowledgeable, impressive, connected. Sacks has now hosted both the Republican presidential and vice presidential candidates on his show, and he’s quite cozy with Vance. These kinds of political ties might make fundraising easier or put him in the room with better founders. Even if Trump and Vance lose, he’s still made a powerful statement.

Halting immigration is key to the Trump campaign

That’s the “connections” side of this equation — but Vance’s real job was the “knowledgeable” part. *All-In* is playing to people who consider themselves tech intelligentsia. They want one of their own to reassure them that despite Trump’s tendency to blurt out nonsense about immigrants eating housepets, he’s a reasonable man like them. Claiming the media is unfairly biased against Trump is the kind of thing that plays in these rooms, where people already believe in an unfair media bias against tech CEOs.

More specifically, the real reason for Vance’s appearance can be found near the middle of the podcast, when he began discussing immigration.

Silicon Valley is full of immigrants, from top (the current CEOs of Google, Microsoft, Adobe, and IBM) to bottom. Immigration is a crucial issue for this group of people. In 2016, when VC Marc Andreessen endorsed Hillary Clinton over

Donald Trump, he said, “The Valley wouldn’t be here, we wouldn’t be doing any of this if we didn’t have the amazing flow of immigrants that we’ve had in the last 80 years. And the idea of choking that off just makes me sick to my stomach.”

Halting immigration is key to the Trump campaign, as evinced by signs reading “Mass Deportation Now” that were held up during the Republican convention. In his previous term, Trump targeted the H-1B program, the visas that many tech workers use to come to the US. Andreessen appears to have settled his stomach about this, as he now endorses Trump and had nothing to say about immigration on his own podcast when he explained his decision. Vance’s job was to reassure anyone who might still be feeling queasy.

Any immigrant should be paying attention to Trump’s mass deportation plans

Vance started by making the Republicans’ anti-immigrant stance palatable to anyone who fears it might be bad for business. “Generally I agree, okay, we’re going to let some immigrants in,” he says. “We want them to be high-talent, high quality people. You don’t want to let a large number of illegal aliens in.”

Per Vance, his ticket is about letting the right kind of immigrants in and keeping the wrong kind out. He reminded the crowd that he is married to “the daughter of *legal* immigrants to this country.” It’s just all the undocumented people that are screwing up America, he says. And all those bad immigrants are going to vote for *Democrats.* No, seriously, here’s what Vance said:

> *When somebody like Chuck Schumer says, “Well, you know, we’re going to have an emerging Democratic majority because we’re going to have all these new immigrants and all the old Americans, well, they’re going to vote for Republicans, but*

> *we're going to replace them with a bunch of new people who vote for Democrats," it's like, that's pretty sick.*

Vance awkwardly tried to downplay the calls for deportation. "You try to take it one step at a time," he says. "But the most important thing – and I think the deportations focus, again, it is important because we're eventually, we are going to deport people – but the most important thing is to stop the bleeding."

Any immigrant should be paying attention to Trump's mass deportation plans. Trump has said he wants to deport 15 to 20 million people; the logistics of this will likely be horrifying. People who are here legally may be picked up by accident and detained or deported. It's awfully convenient for Vance to show up and address an industry full of foreign workers, minimizing the threat. There are shades of his mentor Thiel's famous comment from 2016: take Trump seriously, but not literally.

We've actually had a Trump presidency since those comments, of course. And it suggests Trump should be taken both seriously *and* literally when he talks about choking off immigration. It's something he's already done!

And when Vance says on *All-In* that he would not have certified the 2020 election – "I would have asked the states to submit alternative slates of electors" are his words, echoing past remarks – that's something I am inclined to take both seriously and literally, too. Vance is buddies with a monarchist; his mentor Thiel has written, "I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible." His running mate has said, "Christians, get out and vote, just this time. You won't have to do it anymore!" Vance clearly believes in proximity to power. I'm not sure he believes in much else, democracy included. And that seems to suit his Silicon Valley buddies just fine.

https://www.theverge.com/2024/9/14/24244137/jd-vance-all-in-david-sacks-trump