

JD Vance's Tucker Test: Could Silence on Carlson Haunt Him in 2028?

When U.S. Vice President JD Vance walked into a room filled with skeptical Jewish Republicans in Las Vegas, Nevada, earlier this week, the most important part of his appearance may not be what he said. It may be what he didn't say.

There's no doubt Vance deserves some credit for showing up at the Republican Jewish Coalition's National Leadership Summit. After all, this was not exactly friendly territory.

Many people in that room have serious questions about his approach to Israel, Iran and, probably most importantly, his longtime friendship with Tucker Carlson. Vance knew that and went anyway.

By most accounts, he helped himself. He received standing ovations as he arrived and departed. RJC board member and former George W. Bush White House Press Secretary Ari Fleischer called it progress.

"I think the vice president really answered a lot of questions, and really made the Republican Jewish Coalition really comfortable," Fleischer said.

But when the conversation turned toward the podcast world, that's where things got dicey. RJC National Chairman Norm Coleman gave him the opening directly.

Coleman specifically named Tucker Carlson, Megyn Kelly, Joe Rogan and Nick Fuentes and asked Vance how he draws the line when influential podcasters platform antisemites.

Vance responded, "I recognize a lot of people in this room might disagree with things that Tucker Carlson or Megyn Kelly

or Joe Rogan has said,” but then quickly moved away from Carlson and spent most of his answer explaining the difference between Rogan and Fuentes.

Vance technically said Tucker Carlson’s name, but he did not tell the room where he disagrees with Carlson. It doesn’t take a rocket scientist to figure out that if (when) Vance runs in 2028, politically this will increasingly become a problem.

For JD Vance, it’s beginning to look like Tucker or bust.

That may not be entirely fair. Politics is usually more nuanced than that.



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Vance has known Carlson for years and clearly considers him a friend. Nobody should demand that a politician publicly humiliate a longtime friend simply to satisfy a political constituency. But Vance doesn’t need to throw Tucker Carlson under the bus. He does, however, need to draw a line.

What specifically has Carlson said about Jews, Israel or antisemitism that Vance rejects? Does he object to Carlson’s decision to interview Nick Fuentes? Where exactly does Vance believe Carlson has gone too far? For a man widely viewed as the Republican presidential frontrunner in 2028, they are crucial questions that could make or break his political career.

Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley framed the choice in stark terms on [Twitter](#): “Right is right. Wrong is wrong. In life, you must choose a side. You are either with the Tucker Carlson wing of the country, or you are with the pro-Israel wing of the country. You can’t be both.”

Indeed, that’s the political reality Vance is running into.

Congressman Randy Fine, one of the most outspoken Jewish Republicans in Congress and not considered a big fan of Vance, told me the VP's appearance was a meaningful first step.

"I think it was great that he went; I think he made some progress with the group, but there's a lot of mistrust and damage there and a long way to go. But I think it took a lot to go into the lion's den to answer some questions. And hopefully this is a first step for him in rehabilitating a very, very damaged relationship," he explained.

Fine, however, was considerably tougher when the conversation turned to how Vance handles Carlson as we march towards 2028.

"I think that J.D. Vance's relationship with Tucker Carlson is very disturbing to many of us," Congressman Fine told me. "Now, we've all had long-term friends that we've known for many, many years. But imagine you have a childhood friend that you've been friends with for a long time, and then all of a sudden he becomes a racist and starts using the N-word (a racist slur)," Fine said.

"Well, it's okay at that point to say, you know what? You've changed, and I don't want to be affiliated with you. And the fact of the matter is, to Tucker Carlson today, there's no resemblance to the Tucker Carlson of 5 or 10 years ago. He's a deranged, mentally unwell, deeply evil Jew hater. And I think that the fact that JD Vance won't disavow him is very troubling to a lot of people. We can't hold someone responsible for their friends of long ago, but we can hold someone responsible for their friends of today."

To be fair to Vance, he certainly didn't duck antisemitism more broadly. He offered one of his clearest explanations yet of how he thinks about the subject, arguing that "the core of antisemitism, to me, is the idea of blood libel."

"The idea that because of your genetics, because of your blood, because of your ancestry, you are guilty of a crime

that you never committed," Vance explained.

He then connected his Christian faith directly to rejecting collective ethnic guilt. "I think that blood libel, which is at the root of antisemitism, is the exact opposite of the Christian gospel. And because of that, I believe the gospel is actually the solution to this."

Additionally, Vance was unequivocal about Israel's strategic importance, calling it "one of our most important alliances in the world and certainly our most important regional alliance."

He argued that Republicans must make a new case for Israel to younger Americans based on real American interests, pointing specifically to cooperation between Israel and the United States on missile-defense technology.

That sort of approach is a good one. Now, the VP needs the right approach to handling the problem with Tucker Carlson.

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