



Silicon Valley's lone Trump backer's big bet pays off: Billionaire Peter Thiel is on transition team - fresh from backing Hulk Hogan to destroy Gawker

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He may have made his billions from investing in social media, but when it came to his support for Donald Trump, Peter Thiel found himself isolated among the Silicon Valley glitterati.

Throughout Trump's campaign Thiel, 49, was a lone voice of support for the Republican candidate. They both had fortunes running into the billions of dollars, but otherwise there were few similarities between the two.

German-born Thiel is a secretive, libertarian, gay member of the tech elite; New Yorker Trump is a conservative real estate mogul who doesn't even use email. He has opposed the legalization of gay marriage, although he has attended a same-sex wedding.

Still, Thiel - the first outside investor in Facebook - became an unlikely spokesperson for the Republican candidate.

That loyalty is set to pay off big league after Trump on Friday named him as a member of his 16-strong transition team executive committee - alongside other trusted supporters and three of Trump's own children as well as his son-in-law.

While major tech names such as Apple's Tim Cook and Facebook's Sheryl Sandberg fawned over Hillary Clinton's doomed presidential run, Thiel donated \$1.25 million to Trump's campaign.

He became the first openly gay speaker at a Republican convention. And he defended his candidate to the media, saying the real estate mogul was 'misunderstood'.

'I think a lot of voters who vote for Trump take him seriously but not literally,' Thiel said at a Washington news conference in October.

'What Trump represents isn't crazy, and it isn't going away...We are voting for Trump because we judge the leadership of our country to have failed.'

Thiel was punished by the Silicon Valley elite for his support. Former Reddit chief Ellen Pao severed ties between Project Include - devoted to promoting diversity in the tech industry - and Y Combinator, a startup incubator with which Thiel is involved.

Some called, unsuccessfully, for entrepreneurs to shun Y Combinator and for him to be booted from the Facebook board.

As other tech pioneers signed an open letter denouncing Trump for campaigning on what they called 'bigotry', Thiel walked toward him with open arms.

But his bet has been rewarded and he will now hold serious sway in the new Trump administration.

Thiel says John F Kennedy is his favorite president. But his support of Trump shows that, when it comes to his personal politics, he can be as unpredictable as the president-elect - perhaps one of the reasons he endorsed him.

Thiel, who co-founded PayPal and is worth nearly \$3 billion, believes in a radical form of Libertarianism, whose followers traditionally believe in freedom of speech, freedom of the press and free trade.

Yet those beliefs do not square with his decision to secretly finance the lawsuit by Hulk Hogan against news website Gawker, which he says outed him as gay in 2007. The website said his sexuality was not a secret at the time.

The wrestler won the jury trial and Gawker has been ordered to pay \$140 million. The website filed for bankruptcy, and earlier this month it was agreed Hogan would receive \$31 million in cash plus a share of the proceeds from the sale of Gawker.

At the same time Thiel, who was Facebook's first outside investor, claims he supports the press and has contributed to the Committee to Protect Journalists and has financed activist journalist James O'Keefe.

Libertarians support free trade; Trump wants to hit countries like Mexico and China with sanctions if they do not give America a better deal.

Trump wants to build a wall along the border with Mexico, but Libertarians believe in free movement of labor. As an immigrant - he was born in Germany and moved to the U.S. aged one - Thiel could even fall into Trump's criteria for deportation.

Where Thiel and Trump do crossover is a hatred of political correctness that goes back to his days at Stanford University and led to him writing *The Diversity Myth*, a critique of multiculturalism.

Trump made speaking bluntly one of his main campaign strategies, castigating Clinton for not using the term 'radical Islamic terrorism'.

In some ways, Thiel's beliefs out-Trump Trump: In his 2009 essay for the Cato Institute he wrote that left wing votes from recipients of welfare are threatening the very fabric of America.

He wrote: 'I no longer believe that freedom and democracy are compatible'.

Thiel is also known for his belief that technology could allow humans to live far longer than currently possible, funding projects which are looking into beating aging.

'I believe if we could enable people to live forever, we should do that. I think this is absolute,' he told the Washington Post.

He thinks college is a waste of time and just gets you into debt.

In July he cancelled a scheduled appearance at the annual meeting of the ultra-libertarian Property and Freedom Society in Turkey, which some critics characterized as supporters of white supremacy.

The founder of the group is former Nevada University professor Hans Hermann-Hoppe whose book 'Democracy: The God That Failed' has passages that advocate getting rid of gay people and anyone who believes in democracy in a quest for a 'libertarian order'.

Hoppe wrote that gay people are on a par with 'advocates of parasitism' and should be 'physically separated and expelled from society'.

According to hate-watch group The Southern Poverty Law Center, the group hosts racist speakers who believe immigration is 'forced integration'.

And despite backing Trump for president of the United States, he also has funded a radical proposal to set up new cities floating in the sea on oil-rig like structures which would be libertarian utopias not subject to the laws of any existing nation-state.

He gave \$500,000 to the Seasteading Institute, a nonprofit organization which is looking into building independent cities in international waters in the event of the end of civilization.

Thiel was the first RNC speaker to publicly acknowledge his or her homosexuality - a potentially awkward position given that Trump's soon-to-be vice president signed into law the Religious Freedom Bill, which was criticized by gay activists for allowing people to discriminate against them.

Thiel has tried to square the contradictions in his beliefs by donating to conservative-libertarian organizations - that are also pro-gay.

Another fault line with the Republican party is Thiels' support for legalization of marijuana, something which Republicans have long opposed.

Still, writer Jeff Bercovici said that Thiel could see Trump's candidacy as a 'once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to weaken America's attachment to democratic government'.

An analysis by Bloomberg said that Thiel could regard Trump as a 'disrupter' in a similar way that he has disrupted the tech industry.

Whichever way, Thiel now holds a unique position of power that most of his Clinton-supporting fellows in Silicon Valley can now only dream of.