

Texas Republicans host neo-Nazi Nick Fuentes, fascist killer Kyle Rittenhouse

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On October 8, the *Texas Tribune* reported that officials of Republican-aligned political action committees (PACs) hosted a multi-hour meeting on October 6 near Fort Worth, Texas with Nicholas J. Fuentes, leader of the “America First” groypers and an admirer of Adolph Hitler.

Joining Fuentes at the meeting was fascist killer and right-wing celebrity Kyle Rittenhouse. In November 2021, Rittenhouse was acquitted of murdering two Black Lives Matter protesters while injuring a third in Kenosha, Wisconsin in 2020.

Fuentes, 25, is well-known for his fascist politics. He helped organize the deadly Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia in 2017, which ended with a neo-Nazi ramming his car into a group of counter-protestors and murdering Heather Heyer. Following the fascist rampage, then-President Donald Trump defended the Nazis, claiming there were “very fine people” on both sides.

Throughout Trump’s presidency, Fuentes and his followers supported the aspiring dictator, including in his failed coup. In November 2020, Fuentes, along with *InfoWars* founder Alex Jones, led a “Stop the Steal” rally at the Georgia state capitol. On January 6, 2021, Fuentes and his followers were photographed outside the Capitol in Washington D.C. Last November, Trump invited Fuentes and fellow antisemite Kanye West (now known as Ye) to dine with him at his home in Mar-a-Lago, Florida.

For killing anti-racist protesters three years ago, Rittenhouse has been richly rewarded by the fascist right. He has been courted by the Trump family, favorably interviewed by former Fox News commentator Tucker Carlson, and is a regular “special

guest” at Talking Point USA conferences.

Since his acquittal on murder charges, Rittenhouse has become more active in Texas. The Rittenhouse Foundation registered with the Texas Secretary of State’s office in July, ostensibly as a firearms rights group. Earlier this year, Rittenhouse attended a rally in Conroe, Texas, slightly north of Houston, which was also attended by members of the Proud Boys militia group.

Friday’s meeting between Fuentes, Rittenhouse and Republican politicians and operatives was held in an office-building that serves as the headquarters for Pale Horse Strategies, a far-right consulting firm owned by Jonathan S. Strickland, a former member of the Texas state legislature.

In choosing the name Pale Horse, Strickland, a Christian nationalist, was making a specific reference to an apocalyptic “end time” prophecy. In the Book of Revelation, the pale horse is the personification of death:

And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

Since retiring from the state legislature in 2021, Strickland has led the Defend Texas Liberty political action committee, which is a major donor to Republicans, including Texas Attorney General Ken

Paxton and Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick. Before presiding over Paxton's recent impeachment trial, in which Paxton was acquitted by his fellow Republicans on charges of corruption and unfitness for office, Patrick received \$3 million in loans and donations from Defend Texas Liberty PAC.

Since 2020, Defend Texas Liberty PAC has spent over \$9.4 million on political campaigns in Texas, virtually all of the money going to Republicans and far-right "non-partisan" candidates. In 2023 alone, Defend Texas Liberty PAC has paid Pale Horse Strategies over \$800,000, the *Texas Tribune* reported.

Both Strickland and Matt Rinaldi, chair of the Republican Party of Texas, have received generous financial backing from a small group of West Texas oil billionaires, including Tim Dunn and the brothers Farris and Dan Wilks. These men have donated over \$100 million to various campaigns, political groups and media companies to push their extreme right-wing views. Previous beneficiaries of the Wilks' largess include Ted Cruz and the right-wing propaganda outfits *The Daily Wire* and PragerU.

On October 6, the *Texas Tribune* reported that Rinaldi entered the Pale Horse office building after Fuentes was already inside. In an interview with the paper, Rinaldi claimed that he was merely using an adjacent conference room and did not know that Fuentes was in the building.

"We were just borrowing a conference room," Rinaldi told the *Tribune*. Asked if he would condemn his associate Strickland and Pale Horse Strategies for hosting a racist Nazi, Rinaldi refused, telling the paper he would "disavow" Fuentes, but was "not going to make assumptions."

The *Texas Tribune* reported that Fuentes acolyte Ella Maulding, who has previously praised Fuentes as "the greatest civil rights leader in history," was "observed for several hours at the Friday meeting with Fuentes." Maulding, per the *Tribune*, moved from Mississippi to Fort Worth, Texas earlier this year to work as a "social media coordinator" for Pale Horse Strategies.

At one point during the seven-hour meeting between Fuentes and Strickland, reporters saw Maulding

recording a video for the Texans for Strong Borders PAC. Chris Russo, the founder of the Texans for Strong Borders PAC, was photographed by *Texas Tribune* reporters driving Fuentes to and from the building.

Seeking to provide political cover for the increasingly fascist Republican Party, Dade Phelan, speaker of the Texas House of Representatives, issued a public statement following the initial report condemning the meeting. Phelan called on those who have received money from Defend Texas Liberty to donate it to charities, and specifically called on Patrick to "lead the way in redirecting these funds."

Phelan is concerned that such an open association with a known Nazi will provoke opposition from the working class. For his part, Patrick has called on Phelan to resign, saying, "For anyone to try to use these invectives for their own political gain is below contempt. I am calling on Dade Phelan to resign his position before the House gavels in this afternoon."

The divisions within the GOP between the the "MAGA" elements and the old-line Republicans, led by the Bush family, have not lessened since Paxton's acquittal. But whatever their disagreements, neither faction defends the democratic rights of the population and both are willing to "break bread" with fascists.

Texas has long been a stronghold of the far right, but following January 6, 2021 and the refusal of the Democratic Party to hold Trump and his co-conspirators accountable, the most extreme elements have been emboldened. On July 8 of this year, members of the fascist group Patriot Front marched through downtown Austin near the state Capitol. This group notably held a march in Washington, D.C. earlier this year in which police protected them from counter-demonstrators.

Patriot Front has frequently targeted LGBTQ people, disrupting drag shows and Pride events. In 2022, 31 members of the group were arrested in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho for conspiracy to riot at an LGBTQ parade.



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