

# Nick Fuentes is just the latest white supremacist embraced by Defend Texas Liberty

While Fuentes' unapologetic hate mongering has made him one of the nation's best-known white supremacists, he was merely the latest in a long line of people who have been embraced by Defend Texas Liberty and its close allies.

BY **ROBERT DOWNEN** OCT. 23, 2023    UPDATED: OCT. 24, 2023

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In recent weeks, allies of the deep-pocketed conservative PAC Defend Texas Liberty have sought to downplay a [meeting](#) between the group's former leader, [Jonathan Stickland](#), and prominent white supremacist Nick Fuentes. They've cast the visit as a one-off mistake — and Lt. Gov. [Dan Patrick](#) said he accepted an explanation that it was a “[serious blunder](#).”

Responding to calls for him to return the \$3 million he received from Defend Texas Liberty this summer, Patrick initially said he would not do so because there was “[no hint of any links](#)” between the group and any “antisemitic organizations or other hate groups” when he took the funds in June.

There were, however, ample links.

While Fuentes' [unapologetic hate mongering](#) has made him perhaps the nation's [best-known](#) white supremacist, he was merely the latest in a line of people who have been embraced by Defend Texas Liberty and its close allies despite publicly espousing antisemitic views or partnering with extremists. That includes, among others, Ella Maulding, a social media coordinator for Stickland's consulting firm who has [praised Fuentes](#) as the “greatest civil rights leader in history”; and Shelby Griesinger, the treasurer for Defend Texas Liberty who has claimed on social media that Jews worship a false god and shared memes that depict them as the enemy of Republicans.

Defend Texas Liberty is a political action committee and one of the state's most [influential donors](#) to conservative groups and [candidates](#), including Patrick and Attorney General Ken Paxton. It is a key part of a sprawling network of nonprofits, dark money groups, political

campaigns and media companies that have received more than \$100 million from three West Texas oil billionaires, Tim Dunn and brothers Farris and Dan Wilks, as part of a decadeslong project to push Texas to the far right.

Earlier this month, The Texas Tribune reported that Fuentes, an admirer of Adolf Hitler who has called for a “holy war” against Jews, recently met with Stickland for nearly seven hours at the offices of Pale Horse Strategies, a consulting firm for far-right groups that is owned by Stickland and based just outside of Fort Worth.

While Defend Texas Liberty issued a brief statement denouncing Fuentes, the PAC has not offered any details about the meeting. Last week, Defend Texas Liberty also quietly updated its website to note that Luke Macias, a longtime conservative consultant, had replaced Stickland as president. But the closest thing to an explanation for the Fuentes visit has come from Patrick who said earlier this month that he spoke to Dunn, who told him “mistakes were made” but were being corrected.

Patrick did not respond to a request for comment for this story about the myriad Fuentes acolytes previously and presently associated with Defend Texas Liberty. But on Monday, a day after his office was contacted by the Tribune, he issued a press release announcing that he is investing \$3 million — the same amount that he received from Defend Texas Liberty this summer — in bonds for Israel.

Patrick also said he has been appalled to learn “about the anti-Semitic activities among some in Texas who call themselves conservatives and Republicans.”

“Every Republican group in the state, no matter how small or how large, including our State Party, needs to root out this cancer. Before anyone is hired or appointed to a position of leadership, in addition to their resume and work record, their social media needs to be reviewed,” Patrick said. “Those who are anti-Semitic are not welcome in our party.”

Defend Texas Liberty, Stickland, Macias, Maulding and Griesinger did not respond to requests for comment.

## **Fuentes’ acolytes**

Led until last week by Stickland, a former state representative from Bedford whose political life was bankrolled by the West Texas oil billionaires, Defend Texas Liberty has in recent years emerged as a key player in an ongoing civil war between the Texas GOP’s far right and its more moderate, but still deeply conservative, wing.

Fallout from the Fuentes visit comes as Defend Texas Liberty and its allies gear up for a primary season in which they've promised to spend big against those who supported the impeachment of Paxton, a close ally who has received millions of dollars from the group and its billionaire backers.

But Fuentes wasn't the only antisemitic conspiracy theorist on site at Pale Horse Strategies this month. Among the attendees was Maulding, a Mississippi native who recently moved to Texas to coordinate social media for Pale Horse clients.

Maulding is a well-known follower of Fuentes who has shared photos on social media of the two together. She has posted tenets of the QAnon conspiracy theory and, almost daily, deluges her tens of thousands of followers with screeds about a "white genocide" that she claims is being coordinated by Jews through immigration — a foundational neo-Nazi belief that has for years been used as justification for racist terrorism and violence, including by the gunman who massacred 22 people at an El Paso Walmart in 2019.

"Foreigners are anti-American by default," Maulding wrote on Oct. 10. "Why are we letting them replace us?"

Earlier this month, after a Tribune reporter drew attention to some of her posts on social media, Maulding responded directly to accusations by others that she was being antisemitic.

"If antisemitism means not wanting my race genocided and overrun by third worlders, happily," she wrote on X, formerly Twitter, before again blasting the United States' financial support for Israel.

During the meeting with Fuentes, Maulding spent some time outside the Pale Horse office recording a video for another Defend Texas Liberty-funded group, Texans for Strong Borders. In the video, she called on lawmakers to crack down on immigration during the ongoing special legislative session.

Texans For Strong Borders has emerged as an influential voice in ongoing debates over immigration, including around the Colony Ridge development near Houston that lawmakers were asked by the governor to address in the special session.

The group's founder and president, Chris Russo, was seen chauffeuring Fuentes to and from the meeting at Pale Horse Strategies this month. Multiple people, who asked not to be named to avoid drawing the attention of white nationalists, told the Tribune that Russo has ties to Fuentes' so-called "groyper" movement. Cary Cheshire, the executive director of Texans For Strong Borders and a longtime employee of Defend Texas Liberty-linked groups, was also at the Pale Horse offices while Fuentes was on-site.

Also spotted outside the meeting with Fuentes: Kyle Rittenhouse, who has continued to step up his engagement in far-right Texas politics since he was acquitted of homicide after fatally shooting two people at a 2020 Black Lives Matter protest in Wisconsin.

Rittenhouse released a statement in response to the Tribune's reporting in which he said that he left the Pale Horse offices as soon as he learned Fuentes was present. Citing his Jewish family members who he said were victims of the Holocaust, Rittenhouse also strongly denounced Fuentes' "hideous views."

Rittenhouse did not, however, say anything about his connection to Griesinger, the Defend Texas Liberty treasurer who has said Jews worship a false god, praised Christian Nationalism and shared QAnon conspiracy theories that borrow heavily from centuries-old tropes that have frequently led to Jewish bloodshed, including in the Holocaust.

In August, the Tribune reported that Rittenhouse had launched a pro-Second Amendment nonprofit, for which Griesinger is one of three board members, as he continues to ramp up his involvement in Texas politics.

The registered agent for the Rittenhouse Foundation is Tony McDonald, a longtime lawyer for groups connected to Defend Texas Liberty. McDonald also represented Jim Watkins before a U.S. House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Watkins and his son, Ron Watkins, are the owners and operators of 8Chan, an online forum that has been crucial to the spread of QAnon and has been cited by numerous mass shooters and neo-Nazis as key to their radicalization.

Rittenhouse did not respond to requests for comment. McDonald declined an interview request.

Ahead of Fuentes' arrival at Pale Horse, Rittenhouse was spotted helping a group of young men, some wearing t-shirts for Stickland's last reelection campaign, load and unload furniture from a U-Haul into the back of the office building.

Among them was Konner Earnest, who has quickly made a name for himself in far-right Texas politics. Earnest was still in high school when he founded a student group that hosted Fuentes collaborator Carson Wolf, as well as Vince Dao, the co-founder of a spin-off group from Fuentes' "America First" movement.

Since graduating, Earnest has stepped up his engagement in right-wing politics. Earlier this month, an independent journalist published photos of Earnest at a meeting for the Houston chapter of the European American Community, a new group that claims American citizenship should be based on European ancestry, among other white nationalist ideas.

In an [interview](#) he gave last year to the right-wing website Current Revolt, Earnest said he frequently watches Fuentes' show, praised other far-right figures and said he was working for the 2022 campaign of Don Huffines. Huffines is a far-right former state senator whose unsuccessful challenge to Gov. Greg Abbott last year received millions of dollars from Defend Texas Liberty.

Earnest has also written anti-immigration articles for Texas Scorecard, the media website that has for years been financed by Defend Texas Liberty's [billionaire funders](#). And this year he's made [several videos](#) for Texans For Strong Borders.

"Texas is for Texans, and we won't back down," Earnest said in one [August video](#) for Texans For Strong Borders that was recorded outside of the Pale Horse Strategies office.

## **True Texas Project**

Others with direct ties to Defend Texas Liberty have been open about their extreme views for years, including Julie McCarty, the founder of True Texas Project. The Fort Worth-based organization is a central part of the Defend Texas Liberty network, organizing voter drives, fundraisers and other events to mobilize Tea Party activists and pressure lawmakers from the right. True Texas Project is also [labeled](#) as an extremist group by the Southern Poverty Law Center, in part because of [statements](#) that McCarty and her husband and co-leader, Fred McCarty, have made about immigrants.

In a Facebook post in the aftermath of the El Paso Walmart massacre, she seemed to express sympathy for shooter's belief in the "great replacement theory," a foundational [white supremacist belief](#) that there is an intentional, often Jewish-driven, effort to [replace white people through immigration, interracial marriage and the LGBTQ+ community](#).

"I don't condone the actions, but I certainly understand where they came from," she [wrote](#).

"You're not going to demographically replace a once proud, strong people without getting blow-back," responded Fred McCarty.

True Texas Project's largest funder is Defend Texas Liberty, followed by Dunn and then Empower Texans, a political action committee that was one of the state's most prolific Republican donors until three years ago, when it was dissolved and replaced by Defend Texas Liberty.

Barely three weeks before Fuentes' Pale Horse visit, True Texas Project co-hosted a "passing the torch" event in Dallas that featured John Doyle, prominent far-right podcast host who has

appeared at events alongside Fuentes, as well as Jake Lloyd Colglazier, the leader of a Dallas-based group that advocates for harsh anti-homeless policies.

For years, Colglazier was one of the most prominent figures in Fuentes' fledgling army, using his job as a reporter and fill-in host on Alex Jones' InfoWars to interview white nationalists and elevate dangerous antisemitic conspiracy theorists. On his YouTube show, Colglazier discussed his desire to "spit on George Floyd" and cheered at videos of Black people being killed by police, according to Political Research Associates, which extensively tracked his involvement in the far right.

In 2019, Colglazier, Fuentes and the leader of the neo-Nazi group Identity Evropa were the sole headliners of an explicitly white nationalist conference, where they advocated for pulling the national GOP toward their most extreme views by constantly attacking conservatives from the right on immigration, support for Israel and other issues — a strategy that mirrors Defend Texas Liberty's.

Colglazier's ties to Fuentes appear to have ended some time after the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, after which Fuentes said Colglazier "deserted dissident politics."

In a Monday statement, Colglazier decried what he called an attempt to "revive an old and clearly debunked narrative."

"I have not had any association with Nick Fuentes in nearly 3 years," he added. "Any suggestion to the contrary is simply false."

Like Earnest, Colglazier worked for Huffines, serving as deputy communications director for his Defend Texas Liberty-backed campaign. After Political Research Associates reported on Colglazier's past, Huffines said he would not bend to "cancel culture" by firing him, and argued that it would be impossible to monitor the social media history of every person in his employ. (Months prior, Huffines' son and campaign staffer, Russell Huffines, told a conservative website that Colglazier was "without doubt" his "favorite right-wing e-celeb.")

True Texas Project also hosted Colglazier while he was working for the Huffines campaign, and has repeatedly held events that featured Stickland, Huffines and Texas Republican Party Chair Matt Rinaldi, whose career in the Texas House was bankrolled by Defend Texas Liberty's main funders. Next month, the group is hosting Sen. Rand Paul, R-Kentucky and U.S. Rep. Beth Van Duyne, R-Irving, in separate events.

Asked about the ongoing Fuentes scandal, Fred McCarty said in a Monday email that the controversy is being pushed by "establishment Republicans in Austin" and a Republican consultant who wants Stickland and Defend Texas Liberty "out of the way."

“Defend Texas Liberty doesn't embrace white supremacists, and everyone knows it,” he said. “Stickland's biggest crime, if anything, is being too trusting and having too big of a heart.”

*Disclosure: Facebook and Southern Poverty Law Center have been financial supporters of The Texas Tribune, a nonprofit, nonpartisan news organization that is funded in part by donations from members, foundations and corporate sponsors. Financial supporters play no role in the Tribune's journalism. Find a complete [list of them here](#).*

**Correction, Oct. 24, 2023 at 6:16 p.m.:** A previous version of this story misstated who Tony McDonald represented before a U.S. House committee investigating the insurrection. His client Jim Watkins was interviewed by the House committee.