

Influential Texas activist Jonathan Stickland hosted white supremacist Nick Fuentes at office near Fort Worth

The Texas Tribune also observed Texas GOP chair Matt Rinaldi outside the building, but he denied meeting Fuentes and denounced him.

BY **ROBERT DOWNEN** OCT. 8, 2023 5 PM CENTRAL

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FORT WORTH — Jonathan Stickland, the ultraconservative leader of a group that has donated millions of dollars to high-profile Texas leaders, hosted prominent white supremacist Nick Fuentes and other right-wing activists for several hours on Friday.

Acting on a tip, a Texas Tribune reporter and photographer observed Fuentes and others — including [Kyle Rittenhouse](#), who was acquitted of homicide after killing two Black Lives Matter protesters in 2020 — enter a one-story office building in a remote business park just west of Fort Worth, Tarrant County. The building is the headquarters for Pale Horse Strategies, a consulting firm for right-wing candidates that is owned by Stickland. Fuentes arrived around 11 a.m. and left just after 5:30 p.m.

Matt Rinaldi, the chair of the Republican Party of Texas and an ally of Stickland, was also seen entering the building while Fuentes was inside. Reached by phone on Sunday, Rinaldi denied that he had any knowledge that Fuentes was on the premises, and provided screenshots of text messages from Friday morning in which he rescheduled a meeting for 1:45 p.m. at the Pale Horse office with Texas GOP Executive Director Jen Hall.

“We were just borrowing a conference room,” said Rinaldi, who arrived at the office just before 1:45 p.m. and left 45 minutes later.

He said of Fuentes: “I completely condemn that guy and everything he stands for. I would never in a million years meet with that guy.”

Asked if he would condemn Stickland or Pale Horse for hosting Fuentes, Rinaldi responded that he will “disavow Nick Fuentes but I’m not going to make assumptions” based solely on the Tribune’s reporting.

Stickland did not respond to calls and text messages on Sunday afternoon.

Stickland and Rinaldi are major players in an ongoing civil war with the more moderate, but still deeply conservative, flank of the Texas GOP. Both are former state representatives who have attacked members of their own party, like U.S. Sen. John Cornyn and Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan, as insufficiently conservative.

And both have been bankrolled by a trio of West Texas oil billionaires — Tim Dunn and brothers Farris and Dan Wilks — who have given more than \$100 million to a network of campaigns, nonprofits, dark money groups and media companies to push their ultraconservative religious and anti-LGBTQ+ views and oust fellow Republicans from power.

Stickland is also the president of Defend Texas Liberty, a political action committee funded by Dunn and Farris Wilks that is a major donor to Attorney General Ken Paxton as well as Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who received \$3 million in loans and donations from Defend Texas Liberty before presiding over Paxton’s impeachment trial in the Texas Senate.

Patrick and Paxton could not be immediately reached for comment Sunday afternoon.

In November, former President Donald Trump was condemned by leaders of his own party after dining at Mar-A-Lago with Fuentes and Ye, the rapper formerly known as Kanye West, who at the time was embroiled in an uproar over antisemitic statements he made that fall. Numerous Republican leaders condemned Fuentes, including former Vice President Mike Pence, then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Fuentes’ visit to Texas comes as the far-right flank of the state GOP continues to elevate extreme figures, rhetoric and conspiracy theories, and as the party’s internecine conflict continues in the wake of Paxton’s impeachment by the Texas House and eventual acquittal by the Texas Senate. Few figures have been more central to the escalating tension than Stickland and Rinaldi, who have sought to incrementally pull the Texas GOP further to the right by labeling fellow conservatives as Republicans in name only — RINOs — and backing boisterous, far-right primary candidates against those who break with their hardline stances.

It’s a strategy that Fuentes knows well. Since rising to prominence on YouTube in the wake of 2017’s deadly neo-Nazi rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, Fuentes and his followers — nicknamed “groyperers” — have sought to normalize their racist, antisemitic and misogynistic

views by constantly attacking other conservatives, including Charlie Kirk's Turning Point USA, from the far right.

Fuentes, 25, has spoken often about that approach. He has questioned whether the Holocaust happened and said Hitler was “really fucking cool.” He has called for a “holy war” against Jews, “Catholic Taliban rule,” and “killing the globalists.” A “proud incel,” Fuentes has openly fantasized about marrying a 16-year-old because that’s “right when the milk is good.” He has celebrated a growing wave of hatred and violence that he hopes will get “uglier and a lot worse” for Jews and others he deems inferior.

“All I want is revenge against my enemies and a total Aryan victory,” Fuentes said last year.

Despite his well-publicized extremism — and corresponding, ongoing jumps in antisemitic and racist violence in Texas and nationally — Fuentes has not been completely cast out of right-wing circles. Hard-right Republicans, including U.S. Reps. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia and Paul Gosar of Arizona, have spoken at Fuentes’ annual conference alongside avowed white supremacists. Fuentes’ acolytes have also been employed in top echelons of the national GOP: In July, the presidential campaign of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis fired a staffer after it was revealed that he created and then shared a pro-DeSantis video that featured a Nazi sonnenrad.

Other Fuentes followers have made their homes in Texas: Earlier this year, Ella Maulding moved from Mississippi to Fort Worth to work as a social media coordinator for Pale Horse Strategies. Maulding has praised Fuentes as “the greatest civil rights leader in history,” and her social media is replete with references to “white genocide” — a foundational ideology for neo-Nazi and other violent extremist movements.

Maulding was observed for several hours at the Friday meeting with Fuentes, and she spent some time outside recording a video for Texans For Strong Borders in which she called on Texas lawmakers to crack down on immigration when they meet for a special legislative session beginning Monday.

Texans for Strong Borders wants to stem both legal and illegal immigration. Its founder, Chris Russo, was seen driving Fuentes to the Friday meeting at Pale Horse Strategies.

Russo and Maulding did not respond to requests for comment on Sunday.

Fuentes’ meeting comes as Stickland and other right-wing actors attempt to make inroads with young conservatives. In August, the Tribune reported on a new company, Influenceable, that pays Gen Z influencers for undisclosed marketing and political messaging, including pro-Paxton social media posts ahead of his Senate impeachment trial. The company has a partnership with former Trump campaign chair Brad Parscale, who moved to Midland this year

to work with Dunn, according to Texas Monthly. In June, Parscale, Dunn, Maulding and leaders of the company were photographed at a meeting in downtown Fort Worth.

In August, the Tribune reported that Rittenhouse had formed a new nonprofit, the Rittenhouse Foundation, as he continues to ramp up his engagement in Texas politics. The foundation's board includes the treasurer for Stickland's Defend Texas Liberty. And its registered agent is Tony McDonald, a longtime attorney for Empower Texans and other Dunn-financed groups who was recorded in 2020 mocking Gov. Greg Abbott's use of a wheelchair.

After the Tribune reported on Rittenhouse's new foundation, Stickland made clear he was proud of their affiliation, posting a photo of himself with Rittenhouse on social media with the caption "let me end the speculation."

"Most conservative boss out there!" responded Rittenhouse, who in the photo is wearing a hat and shirt for Pale Horse Strategies.

Pale Horse's name appears to be an allusion to the Bible's Book of Revelation, which says that one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, Death, will ride a pale horse as he carries out God's judgment during the End Times.

Campaign finance records show that in 2022, Pale Horse Strategies received more than \$828,000 for consulting and contractor services from Defend Texas Liberty. The same year, the PAC donated more than \$5 million to challengers to more moderate, incumbent Republicans. Most of that money went to Don Huffines, a real estate developer and former state senator who unsuccessfully challenged Gov. Greg Abbott in the Republican primary.

Defend Texas Liberty has also bankrolled some of the most conservative members of the Legislature, including Reps. Tony Tinderholt of Arlington and Bryan Slaton of Royse City. Slaton was ousted from the Texas House in May after House investigators found that he gave alcohol to a 19-year-old aide and then had sex with her.

The PAC continues to wield major influence in Texas politics. After the House impeached Paxton in May, Stickland vowed primary challenges against those who supported removing the attorney general.

Over his political career, Paxton has received nearly twice as much in donations from Dunn and the Wilks brothers than he has from his second-largest donor, Texans for Lawsuit Reform. Paxton had also received more money from the trio of billionaires than any other state politician — until this summer, when Patrick surpassed him.