

# I SPENT A WEEKEND AT A FASCIST YOUTH CONFERENCE SO YOU WOULDN'T HAVE TO



*By Arizona Right Wing Watch*

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The day before, in the snack line, I listened to two teenagers who were giddy in excitement over seeing Rittenhouse, talking about his recent appearance on Louder With Crowder. Rep. Lauren Boebert swooned over Rittenhouse during her speech and later appeared in a photo with him backstage. He was billed as “a VERY special guest” alongside Jack Posobiec, Drew Hernandez, and Elijah Schaffer.

Before walking out, the three large screens played scenes from Tucker Carlson’s special on Rittenhouse. The crowd stood to attention and cheered as Rittenhouse appeared on screen then booed and laughed when his victims, Joseph Rosenbaum, Anthony Huber, and Gaige Grosskreutz came on, including the graphic images of their death and injuries. The clip of Rittenhouse crying on the stand was met with shouts of “we love you Kyle!” He took the stage to flashes of red, white, and blue filling the room as a Kyle Rittenhouse-themed rap song blasted. The screaming was deafening as they chanted his name. A young teenager behind me couldn’t stop repeating “based, based, based.”

AmericaFest was marketed and geared towards teenagers and young adults. Speakers throughout the weekend used their time slot to give life advice to the younger crowd. Tucker Carlson told them it was necessary to start a big conservative family at a young age and make sure they also have kids because continuing your bloodline is one of the most important things to do. Some commentators told the women in the audience to put off education or a career to start having children as soon as possible. And what kind of person should these young conservative women have children with?

“I look up to you,” Elijah Schaffer told Rittenhouse, adding, “Let Kyle be an example.”

The adults on the stage propped the acquitted killer up as a grotesque conservative sex symbol, asking the women in the audience if they wanted to date him. This was met with loud cheers. A young woman held up a DIY sign. It read, “Kyle, kiss me.”

‘Twas the weekend before Christmas when Charlie Kirk and Turning Point USA hosted a massive, sold-out 4-day conservative youth conference featuring 10,000 teens and young adults screaming for Dennis Prager, the Fox News lineup, January 6-plotting politicians, a dancing James O’Keefe, and former active shooter Kyle Rittenhouse in Phoenix, AZ.

AmericaFest was located in the same building where Arizona holds its yearly ComicCon and the layout was eerily similar. It featured an exhibitor hall filled with merch booths and meet-n-greets, except instead of getting a picture with Spider-Man one could get a picture with Jack “Pizzagate” Posobiec or accused child trafficker Rep. Matt Gaetz. Instead of buying an overpriced Street Fighter figurine, you could buy a \$500 bedazzled gun purse or “invest” in Let’s Go Brandon cryptocurrency. Tickets for this mega conference reached up to \$750, with people flying in from all over the country to see their favorite TPUSA-sponsored influencer preaching the benefits of white Christian American hypercapitalism. Hotels in the nearby area offered package deals so the entire downtown area was overrun with 20-somethings in blue and hot pink tailored suits and Trump hats for the entire long weekend.

Mornings opened with prayer sessions in the massive concert hall, led by far-right pastors like Rob McCoy and Jack Hibbs and Christian singer and failed congressional candidate Sean Feucht. Pastor Hibbs peddles coronavirus conspiracies, causing controversy in the past for his anti-vaccine sermons claiming the COVID-19 vaccine is “conditioning you” for the “mark of the beast.” Pastor McCoy’s congregation at Godspeak Calvary Church in Thousand Oaks, California saw a surge in attendance (and presumably positive COVID cases) as they ignored stay-at-home orders to lessen the spread during the deadly pandemic. Christian extremist superstar Feucht launched a “Let Us Worship” campaign in response to coronavirus restrictions on indoor concerts where he held outdoor religious gatherings, occasionally with fascist hate group the Proud Boys providing security, as LCRW previously reported.

Feucht also held “breakout session” panels at AmericaFest. Passing by, I could see former representative, candidate for state senate, and capitol rioter Anthony Kern getting a picture with Feucht before sitting in on his panel.

Religion, and more specifically Christian supremacy, was present throughout the weekend. Lining the street leading up to the conference, men with graphic anti-choice signs handed out pamphlets for AbortionNO. Turning Point Faith was a co-sponsor of the conference and had a large booth with free merch advocating for the merging of politics and religion, speeches throughout the weekend often spread a similar message. Creepy fetus dolls were on display and fetal development commercials played in between speakers, followed by “BUY GOLD! BUY SILVER!” Anti-choice activist Abby Johnson was a speaker, hosted panels on “how to fight abortion,” and also had a massive merch booth for her “Pro-Love Ministries.” Johnson has previously advocated for “household voting” where only the husband can vote and said that it would be “smart” for the police to racially profile her biracial son.

Give Send Go, the Christian supremacist crowdfunding site that platforms white nationalists and other extremist groups also had a merch and prayer booth while the co-founder Jacob Wells joined a reception across the street with an organization with ties to neo-Nazis (more on that later).



speakers and guests such as Jack Posobiec, Proud Boy and street fascist videographer Tomas Morales, several known Arizona white nationalists (Greyson Arnold and “antimasker” Ethan Schmidt), Project Veritas’s James O’Keefe, the co-founder of Give Send Go Jacob Wells, and GOP politicians and candidates from Arizona, Nevada, Oklahoma, Texas, Florida and Virginia. Rep. Paul Gosar was presented with an “America First” award during the ceremony.

Republicans for National Renewal’s leadership team has ties to the now-defunct neo-Nazi group Identity Evropa. Grassroots director for Republicans for National Renewal, Shane Trejo, previously hosted a fascist podcast called Blood, Soil, and Liberty with a member of the white supremacist group. Together they hosted episodes with titles like “Tanner Flake for Fuhrer” in reference to Arizona ex-senator Jeff Flake’s son, Tanner, making news after his online screen name and comments were exposed for having a racial slurs and referenced killing Black people. The guests for the Republicans for National Renewal event were all also in attendance or gave speeches for TPUSA’s AmericaFest.



Day three of the convention was noticeably the busiest despite being on a Monday. Charlie Kirk endlessly bragged about how the arena, capable of seating up to 10,000 was filled to capacity. Kyle Rittenhouse was going to take the stage and his appearance was already the topic of conversation all weekend.

As you would guess from something called “AmericaFest,” the whole grotesque event was draped in American exceptionalism. Speakers walked out to their own USA-themed trap music and pyrotechnics while red, white, and blue strobe lights, video projections of Ronald Reagan, and confetti filled the room. Free shirts, pins, chapstick, pens, stickers, and hats praising American capitalism were given out. Everything good that’s ever happened in the history of the universe was thanks to the American capitalist and it will also solve all the world’s problems, including poverty and climate change—if it exists. Meanwhile, everything bad that ever happened in the world is due to the evil socialist, who they are obviously the frontline warriors against.

Dennis Prager gave the room of mostly white college kids a historical “talking points” on how to respond to “common myths” about the United States. Prager explained to them why America is not, and has never been, systemically racist saying that “Black people would be stupid” to live in the United States if it actually had a racism problem. The crowd nodded in agreement.

He then defended the Founding Fathers for owning slaves by claiming “they weren’t uniquely awful in their time.” The crowd nodded in agreement.

Prager told the crowd that characterizing the United States “racist” is the second worst lie ever told, only comparable to blood libel. The crowd nodded in agreement.

Speaker after speaker explaining how the United States is infallible and non-racist in its entire history — until one man, former Tucson police officer Brandon Tatum talked on the final day. He apologized to the crowd for his past “anti-white racism” and for the sin of once believing that policing is a racist institution. Tatum was one of the only Black commentators featured the entire four days.

More explicit right-wing extremists also used the weekend to schmooze with naive conservatives, potential recruits and Arizona politicians. On Day 2, across the street from AmericaFest, in one of the hotels tied to the event, Republicans for National Renewal held a “It’s a Wonderful Nation” reception co-hosted with the groper-aligned American Populist Union that featured

In the same sentence speakers, like Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene would demand medical choice for vaccines and masks but not abortion. There were calls for so-called “medical freedom” laws and the lust for the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* was palpable. Fake “medical exemption” cards were on sale in the exhibitor hall. Medical disinformation scam group America’s Frontline Doctors had a sponsored booth featuring a literal cardboard shoebox asking for more donations. Medical disinformation and conspiracies about the vaccine were rampant.

Without a mask in sight, Charlie Kirk asked the crowd of thousands if they knew somebody who died from the vaccine and almost every single hand went into the air. Kirk then asked if anyone in the audience had been “seriously injured” from the vaccine. Despite being fine enough to make the journey to AmericaFest, about half the room raised their hand.

The Heritage Foundation and pedophile-linked Family Research Council handed out free pamphlets on abortion and “critical race theory” with tips how to report “examples of CRT in the school or workplace” to fascist propagandist Christopher Rufo. More pamphlets on “religious freedom” were passed out twisting the Biblical scripture to justify why it’s acceptable to discriminate against LGBTQ people and praising Jack Philips for his refusal to bake a wedding cake for a gay couple in the *Masterpiece Cakeshop v. Colorado Civil Rights* case.

Similar brochures were given out on “gender identity” but explicit transphobia was an ongoing theme from many of the speakers as well. Charlie Kirk took the stage multiple times during his event and demonizing trans people was one of his most repeated points. Dennis Prager led the crowd in booing trans athletes and he rejected the term “transphobic” entirely, claiming it’s a “meaningless phrase,” implying that trans men, women, and nonbinary people do not exist at all. The one transgender joke conservatives have repeated countless times this weekend. Nothing can truly describe the pure hate in the crowd any time transgender people were mentioned. There were 10,000 young adults frothing at the mouth and scapegoating a tiny and extremely marginalized community for all of their perceived problems.