

Meet Trump's New Christian Kingpin

Oil-Rich Tim Dunn Has Changed Texas Politics With Fanatical Zeal — The National Stage Is Next

By Tim Dickinson Staff Writer, *Rolling Stone*

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Tim Dunn Stands On The Stage Of His Midland, Texas, Church With A Wry Smile On His Face. He's Preparing To Preach About His Favorite Subjects: Jesus And Peter Parker.

Dunn Is A Fracking Magnate Who Is Also A Member Of The "Pulpit Team" At Midland Bible Church, A Rapture-Forward Congregation That Worships A Stone's Throw From Dunn's Mansion On The North Edge Of Town — Where Dense Suburbs Yield To A Scrub Desert Of Greasewood And Mesquite, Pockmarked By The Seesawing Derricks Of The West Texas Oil Patch.

Tall And Box-Shouldered With A Swoop Of Silver Hair, And A Disarming Drawl, Dunn Is Dressed In A Blue Gingham Shirt, No Tie, And Slacks. He Presents As A Mild-Mannered Billionaire. But Dunn's Message Is Fierce. In A Sermon Titled "The Ultimate Battle," He Sets The Biblical Stakes As A Comic-Book Clash Between Good And Evil: "Satan Wants The Same Thing That Every Epic Villain Wants. Which Is What? *Always*. To Take Over The World!" Invoking Superman's Nemesis, Dunn Declares, "He Is Lex Luthor!"

Born-Again Christians, By Contrast, Are God's Answer To Lucifer And His Legion Of "Demons," Dunn Says. He Describes Their Role As That Of "The Faith Superhero" Who Has Been "Deputized" By Jesus And Must Embrace The "Authority To Reign," Because They Have A Heavenly Mission. God's Purpose? "To Silence Satan, Through Us." But Here, Dunn Cautions The Congregation With A Proverb — Not From The Bible, But From Marvel Comics: "With Great Power Comes Great Responsibility," Dunn Warns, Reciting Uncle Ben's Advice To A Young Peter Parker: "So Is The Theme Of *Spider-Man*. And That's Us, Too."

In Dunn's Theology, The Responsibility Of The "Resurrection-Empowered" Believer Includes Hastening The End-Times. In Another Fire-And-Brimstone Sermon, "Jesus Is Coming," He Preaches, "The Better We Live, The Faster It'll Come." Invoking The Apocalyptic Battles Of Revelation As If They Were Part Of A Biblical Cinematic Universe, Dunn Describes Jesus Returning Astride A "White Horse," Wearing A "Robe Dipped In Blood," And Taking "Vengeance" On "Unbelievers" With His Consuming Fire." Yet These Same Flames Of Judgment, Dunn Insists, Will Refine The Faithful, Like Rare Metals, *To Then Reign Beside Christ, Forever, On A "New Earth."*

Dunn's Comics-Infused Fundamentalism Is Not A Private Matter. It Drives His Engagement In Politics. Dunn Is The *Largest Donor In Texas Politics Over The Past Decade*, Where He's Built A Formidable Political Machine To Warp State Government To His Will. "The Republican Party In Texas Is Not The Party Of A Smaller, Less-Intrusive Government," Says Ken Seliger, A Recent-Former GOP State Senator. "The Religious Right Is Very Strong Right Now — And Still

In Its Ascendancy. And Tim Dunn Is Probably The Best Example Of That.” James Talarico, A Democratic State Representative From Austin, Observes The Same Dynamic, Telling *Rolling Stone*: “Tim Dunn Is Spending His Vast Fortune To Turn His Beliefs Into Law.”

A Notorious Figure In Texas, Dunn Has Not Been A Power Player In Washington, DC. But With \$2 Billion In His War Chest — From The Recent Sale Of His Fracking Business — That’s Changing Dramatically. Dunn Has Staked Millions To Send **Donald Trump** Back To The White House In 2024. And He Has Formed An Alliance With **Trump’s** Former Presidential Campaign Manager And Voter-Targeting Guru Brad Parscale, Who Has Opened Up Shop In Midland. Dunn Is Also Bankrolling A Bevy Of High-Profile Groups That Are Crafting An Extreme 2025 Agenda, One That Seeks To Roll Back Reproductive Rights And *Tear Down The Wall Between Religion And Politics*.

In Dunn’s Worldview, Any Such Barrier Is Bogus, Because — As He Insisted At A 2022 Political Convention — God Guides Government, And “Government’s Job It To Execute Wrath On Evil.”

TIM DUNN WAS Raised In Big Spring, A Hilly Desert Town Some 40 Miles East Of Midland, Which Was Then A Bustling City Of Oilmen And Air Force Families. A Ropey Six Feet Three, Dunn Played Basketball For The High School Steers, Where He Wore A Flop Of Brown Hair And, As A Senior, Nearly Averaged A Double-Double — 10 Points And 10 Rebounds. He Has Enormous Hands That Still Look Like They Could Palm A Basketball.

Dunn Grew Up In A Strict Baptist Home. Attending Texas Tech University, Where He Majored In Chemical Engineering, He Flashed His Conservative Politics, Writing In The Student Paper That The Equal Rights Amendment — Banning Sex Discrimination — Was Crafted To “Hoodwink” The Public, And Would Open A Backdoor To “Homosexual Marriages.”

Dunn Was Reluctantly Religious In His Youth. “I Came To View The Bible As Mostly Bad News,” He Writes In A 2018 Book, Yellow Balloons. “I Saw It As A Book Of Obligation And Condemnation.” By Contrast, Comic-Book Narratives Held Dunn’s Rapt Attention — In Particular, *Spider-Man*: “I Watched The Cartoons And Movies, And I Saw The Broadway Musical Twice,” Dunn Writes. “When Terri And I Got Married” In College, He Adds, “I Would Get Out Of Bed On Saturday Mornings To Watch *Spider-Man* Cartoons With Her.

Dunn’s Oil Career Took Off In Midland, A Sweltering City In The Desert Flats Of West Texas, Halfway Between El Paso And Dallas. Midland’s Claim To Political Fame Is As The Place Where The Connecticut And Kennebunkport Bushes Were Born Again As Texans. The Modest Home That Once Housed Two Future Presidents (And A “Please Clap” Also-Ran) Passes For A Tourist Attraction Here.

Since The Discovery Of Crude Oil In The Region A Century Ago, Midland Has Been The Epicenter Of A Sprawling Environmental Sacrifice Zone — An Industrialized Landscape Of Pipelines, Well Pads, Railroads, And Oil Storage Tanks, Redeemed Only By A Cathedral Dome Of Blue Sky. The Rush To Extract Is So Reckless That Natural Gas, Pumped To The Surface

Along With West Texas Crude, Often Can't Profitably Shipped Or Stored. So Producers Vent It Up A Giant Pipe And Set It On Fire, In A Getup That Looks Like Mordor's Middle Finger. The Ghastly Green-And-Gold Flames Illuminate The Desert At Night, Giving The Basin A Pallid Glow.

Most Of The Riches Pulled Out Of The Ground In This Part Of Texas Find Their Expression In Luxurious Suburbs Of Dallas Or Houston. But Dunn Has Rooted Himself In Midland, Where He Built His Company. CrownQuest Operating, By Making Bold Bets During Bust Times — Buying Up Oil Leases Other Companies Had Soured On. With The Fracking Boom Of The Past Decade — Which Has Transformed The Permian Basin Into The Rival Of Any Oilfield In Saudi Arabia — Dunn's Long-Term Bets Paid Off. A Top Private Producer, Dunn's Operation Was Acquired By Occidental In A \$12 Billion December Deal That Reportedly Netted Dunn At Least \$2 Billion.

Dunn Is A Household Name In The Lone Star State. The Exploits Of His Political Machine Have Spawned Memorable Exposés By The *Texas Tribune*, And Dunn Has Been Profiled At Length By *Texas Monthly*, Which First Unearthed Dunn's Anti-ERA Diatribe. But The Fusion Of Comic-Book Morality And Christian Supremacy That Is Essential To Understanding Dunn's Extreme Beliefs Hasn't Been Reported — Nor Has The Full Scope Of Dunn's New Reach Into National Politics. Dunn Did Not Respond Interview Requests Made By Phone, Fax, Email, LinkedIn, And In Person At CrownQuest. In Fact, A Cone Of Silence Seems To Surround The Billionaire. *Rolling Stone* Reached Out To More Than A Dozen Of Dunn's Allies And

Operatives — Both In Texas And Washington, DC. None Agreed To Speak On The Record.

Befitting A Man Of His Comic-Book Obsession, Dunn's Midland Life Unfolds In What You Can Think Of As A Fortress Of Solitude, Carved Into A Dense Subdivision, Where His Peculiar Moral Code Goes Unchallenged. A Gated Dunn Family Compound Sits Astride A Winding Suburban Lane. The Next Street Over Counts Dozens Of Houses, But Dunn's Street Has Just Five, Including His Own \$2 Million Mansion, And The Homes Of Four Of His Six Adult Children.

A Private K-12 Religious School That Dunn Founded, Midland Classical Academy, Sits Across The Fence Line. Here, Students Are Taught The Western Canon — But Also That Gender Is Fixed, Men Can Only Marry Women, And That “No One Can Enter The Kingdom Of God Unless He Or She Is Born Again.” Catty-Corner To This Complex Is Dunn's House Of Faith. Midland Bible Church Is Expensively Appointed, Sporting A Sunny Reception Hall, An Espresso Bar, And Vaulted Sanctuary With 500 Seats Fanned Before A Wide Stage. Services Feature A Six-Piece Band That's Heavy On The Bass.

Dunn Preaches That Christians Should Live As Spiritual “Exiles” — And Boldly Lead Lives Counter To The Prevailing Culture: “We Want To Focus Our Life On Pleasing God,” He Says In A Sermon, “Rather Than Pleasing Humans.” This Is Particularly True Concerning Sins Of The Flesh. *“Sexual Immorality,” Dunn Insists, “Is A Sin That's Worse Than All The Others.”*

FROM HIS REMOTE Midland Compound, Dunn Projects Extraordinary Power In Austin, More Than 300 Miles To The Southeast. His Ability To Influence Right-Wing Texas Politics Has Been Enabled By Decades Of Aggressive, GOP-Led Gerrymandering, Which Has Carved Out A Stark Mix Of Ruby-Red And Bright-Blue Political Districts, With Very Little Swing Territory. The State Is Structured To Elect A Strong GOP Majority; The Only Question Is What The Ideological Bent Of That Caucus Will Be.

In Most Red Districts, The General Election Is A Formality — A Democrat Won't Be Competitive. The Winner Of The Seat Will be Determined In The GOP Primary, Where Turnout Is Low And The Voters Who Can Be Persuaded To Show Up Tend To Be Right-Wing Activists With Extreme Views. Texas Is Unusual In Having Nearly No Limits On Political Contributions To Candidates. And Dunn Has Invested Millions In Tilting The Playing Field By Backing Hard-Right Politicians Who Will Vote His Interests, While Riling Up Voters With Incendiary Messages That Often Have Little Connection To The Truth. Political Attacks Linked To Dunn Have Alleged That More-Moderate Incumbents Are Variouslly Beholden To Muslims, Homosexuals, Gun Grabbers, Or Nancy Pelosi.

Matt Angle Directs The Lone Star Project, A Political Action Committee That Seeks To Break The GOP's Decades-Long Stranglehold On Texas Government. A Former Executive Director Of The Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Angle Has A Unique Perspective On Both State And Federal Politics. He Calls Dunn "The Most Influential — And Most Underestimated — Destructive Political Force In Modern Texas History."

Dunn First Emerged As A Major Force In Texas Politics In The Tea Party Era; His Money Helped Send Nearly Two Dozen Republican Hard-Liners To The Statehouse In The 2010 Election. Dunn Was Reportedly Exasperated With GOP Leadership In Austin, Where The Then-Dominant, Business-Friendly Wing Of The GOP Often Cut Deals With Democrats To Maneuver Around Uncompromising Conservatives On The Far Right.

In A Now-Infamous 2010 Meeting With Then-House Speaker Joe Strauss, Dunn Demanded That His Incoming Faction Be Rewarded With Committee Chairmanships. He Also Reportedly Shared His Conviction That Only Christians Should Hold Leadership Positions In State Government. Dunn Was Seemingly Unaware That Strauss, Himself, Is Jewish. (First Surfaced By *Texas Monthly* In 2018, The Startling Incident Was Confirmed By Strauss In An Event At The University Of Texas This April. “It Was A Pretty Unsatisfactory Meeting,” He Recalled. “We Never Met Again.”)

Dunn Has Since Established Himself As The Largest Donor In State Politics. Since 2015, He’s Steered More Than \$24 Million In Disclosed Contributions To Politicians And Political Action Committees That Push His Religious-Right Agenda. Dunn’s Undisclosed “Dark Money” Spending Is Also Prodigious, Reportedly Spread Among A Matrix Of Nonprofits. Here, His Fingerprints Are Sometimes Visible Through Board Memberships: He Is A Director Of *Convention Of States Action*, For Example, A Far-Right Group That Ominously Seeks To *Rewrite The U.S. Constitution*. In Speeches To This Group, Dunn Has Overtly Mixed Religion And Politics, Including With The Declaration That “God’s On Our Side.”

Dunn Has A Megadonor Partner In His Texas Operations — A Fellow Oil Billionaire And Zealot Named Farris Wilks, Who Has Spent More Than \$14 Million Over The Same Time Frame. Wilks Is Also A Preacher, Who Heads The Assembly Of Yahweh Near Cisco, Texas, Which Grounds Its Worship In The Old Testament, Eschews Christmas And Easter As “Rooted In Paganism,” And Says Abortion Is “Murder” And Homosexuality Is “A Grievous Sin.”

The Son Of A Bricklayer, Wilks Is As Crude As Dunn Is Refined. Texas Politicos Often Refer To Them With A Moniker Befitting A County Duo — “Wilks And Dunn” — Or A Law Firm — “Dunn And Wilks.” The Exact Contours Of Their Partnership Is Unclear, But Dunn And Wilks Have Wielded Power Through A Rotating Series Of PACs That They’ve Staked With Seven-Figure Checks, Beginning Empower Texans In 2006, Morphing Into Defend Texas Liberty In 2020, And Relaunched This Year As Texans United For A Conservative Majority. (Wilks Didn’t Respond To Interview Requests.)

The Dunn And Wilks Political Machine Has Three Essential Components: The First Is A Think Tank — The Texas Public Policy Foundation, Where Dunn Is The Longtime Vice Chair, Which Develops Far-Right Policy Proposals. Second Is The Massive Campaign War Chest That Backs Politicians Who Vow To Fight For Such An Agenda. The Third Is A Ranking — Published At The Site Texas Scorecard — Which Tracks Votes On Key Bills That Attempt To Turn The Favored Policies Into Law. Christopher Tackett Is A Transparency Watchdog Who Charts The Influence Of Big Money At The Website TX CampaignFinance. He Describes How The Texas Public Policy Foundation Crafts Model Legislation For Dunn-And-Wilks Backed Lawmakers

To Then Push In Austin. “They’re Not Only Helping [Politicians] Get Elected, They’re Writing The Bills,” He Says. “You’ve Got A Couple Of Billionaires Taking Their Individual Voices And Turning Them Into A Chorus.”

Kel Seliger Is A Republican Who Served In The State Senate Until 2023. Dunn Was A Constituent, And Seliger, Who Is Jewish, Clashed With Dunn’s Machine. Seller Compares Dunn And Wilks To Russian Oligarchs Whose Approach To Politics Is “Fundamentally Corrupt.” They Go Beyond The Influence That Often Accrues To Large Donors, Seller Insists, And Have Been “Buying Offices In The State Legislature” And Installing Loyalists Who “Do Exactly What They Say” — Either Out Of Conviction Or Because They’re “Scared To Death About The Texas Scorecard.”

Texas Republicans Who Rank High On The Scorecard Can Expect Election Support. Those Whose Ratings Slip Must Anticipate A Bruising And Expensive Primary Challenge From Even-Further-Right Contenders. “If You Don’t Meet All Of Their Litmus Tests, Then You’re A Liberal,” Seliger Says. (The Self-Described Reagan Republican Is No Squish. His Record Included Championing Texas’ “Castle Doctrine Bill,” Giving Gun Owners The Right To Use Deadly Force To Protect Their Homes. But, He Says, He Never Scored Better Than 60 Percent On The Dunn And Wilks Scorecard.)

Lawmakers Supported By Dunn And Wilks Have Enacted One Of The Nation’s Harshest Abortion Bans, As Well As Laws To Ban Supposedly “Explicit” Books From School Libraries;

To Curb Access To Pornography; And To Replace School Counselors With Religious Chaplains. They've Also Pushed, Unsuccessfully, To Post The Ten Commandments In Public Classrooms, And To Defund Public Education With Private-School Vouchers.

The Cadre Of Dunn And Wilks Loyalists Includes Not Only Rank-And-File Legislators, But Also Statewide Officeholders Like Lt Gov Dan Patrick — A Former Right-Wing AM-Radio Jockey Nicknamed The “Silver Tongued Devil” — Who Has Received \$3 Million In Campaign Cash And Loans From Dunn-Backed Groups; And Attorney General Ken Paxton — A Trumpian Figure Who Has Implausibly Kept Criminal Charges, And An Impeachment Effort By Members Of His Own Party, At Bay. Dunn Has Donated \$775,000 Directly To Paxton. “The Far-Right People Are Running Things,” Seller Insists. “They Are Now The Establishment.”

Republican Insiders Describe The GOP-Run Texas Senate, Where Patrick Is The Presiding Officer, As Fully Under The Sway Of The Dunn And Wilks Machine, While A Civil War For Control Of The House Remains In Full Swing. This Dynamic Was Manifest In The Recent Impeachment Of Paxton On Bribery And Other Serious Charges. Republicans In The House Sent More Than A Dozen Articles Of Impeachment To The Upper Chamber. But The Senate, Where Patrick Managed The Trial, Acquitted Paxton Completely.

In Primary Contests That Culminated In Late May, The Dunn Faction Made Big Strides In Its Bid To Control The House, Replacing 15 GOP Incumbents With Hard-Liners. The Offensive Fell Just Short Of Total Victory. Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan — Who Leads The

Chamber's More-Moderate Wing — Eked Out A Win By Fewer Than 400 Votes, Besting A Challenger Who Had Received More Than \$800,000 From Dunn And Wilks' New PAC.

Even Rock-Ribbed Republicans Weren't Safe From Getting Ousted. Glenn Rogers Is A Cattle Rancher And Doctor Of Veterinary Who Lost The GOP Primary Race For His Rural House Seat, Outside Of Fort Worth. Rogers Made Himself A Target By Voting Against School Vouchers — “They Want To Just Create A State-Supported System Of Religious Schools, Basically,” He Says — And In Favor Of Impeaching Paxton.

The Republican Describes Running Against A Well-Funded Machine That Played Dirty, Blasting Him As Anti-Gun, Despite His Endorsements From The NRA And The Texas Rifle Association. “They Support Some Of The Most Horrific Lies You've Ever Seen, And Character Assassinations. The Truth Just Doesn't Seem To Matter,” Rogers Says. “That's Hard To Understand How Someone That Claims To Be A Christian Can Do That.”

Dunn's Critics In The GOP Say The Billionaire's Ultimate Agenda Is To Impose A “Theocracy” On Texas. Even Coming From Republicans Such Talk Can Sound Hyperbolic — Until You Examine The Logo For Dunn And Wilks' Latest Front Group, Texans United For A Conservative Majority: It Features A Silhouette Of The Texas Statehouse, But Replaces The Goddess Of Liberty Statue Atop The Capitol Dome With A Stark, White Cross.

Dunn's Agenda Is “Quite Frightening To Me,” Rogers Tells *Rolling Stone*. “They Want Texas

Ruled According To Their Version Of Christianity — Rigid Christianity.” Rogers Is Himself A Believer Who Argues That Public Leaders Should Be Guided By Faith. But He Says “That’s Different From Christian Nationalism. Christianity Is About Love. And Christian Nationalism Is About *Power*.”

DUNN DOES NOT Have A Formal Title At Midland Bible, But The Church Website Features Scores Of His Sunday Sermons. Unlike Pastors Who Are Paid For Their Services, Dunn Has Dad-Joked From The Pulpit That He Is “Good, For Nuthin’.”

Dunn Has An Analytical Mind, And He Quotes Scripture — Literally Chapter And Verse — With The Confidence Of A Man Who Has Broken Down And Rebuilt Gospel As It If Were The Engine On A ’67 Chevy. Dunn Balances His Comic-Book Callouts — He Peppers In References To *Batman Begins*, *The Avengers*, And *Justice League* — With A Bookish Theology. He Contends That Society’s Conception Of Heaven And Hell, For Example, Have Been “Polluted With Greek Syncretism” — A Word Describing A Mashup Of Faith Tradition.

In *Yellow Balloons*, Dunn Writes That His Own Religious Awakening Emerged From A Rupture With A Business Colleague, More Than Two Decades Ago. The Friend Had Lashed Out At Him As “Arrogant,” Accusing Him Of Failing To “Acknowledge People” And Relying On “Intimidation To Get Your Way.” Dunn Was Stung By What He Recognized Was The Truth — That He “Would Stomp On People Without Even Noticing.” He Came To Understand Himself As A “Self-A-Holic” Who “Wanted To Be In Control, But Without Taking Responsibility.” For

Dunn, This Was A Literal Come-To-Jesus Moment: “I Realized And Admitted My Failure [And] God Demolished Me,” He Wrote. “The Pain That I Felt During That Period Really Was A Sort Of Death.”

But Rich Men Give Themselves Soapboxes — In The Form Of Self-Published Books Or Speaking Roles At Church — Have A Tendency To Tell On Themselves. And Dunn Is No Exception. From The Pulpit, Dunn Admits To Battling A God Complex. “I Get Tapped On The Shoulder Often. And Jesus Says, ‘Excuse Me, You’re Sitting In My Chair.’” He Describes A Knee-Jerk Petulance: “I Very Effortlessly Can Channel My Inner Four-Year-Old At Any Time.” And He Confesses His Struggle With Megalomania: “‘Be A Tyrant Ruler. You Should Ascend To The Most High’ — I Hear That Voice All Day Long, Every Day.”

Dunn Often Describes How “Annoying” He Finds Fundamental Precepts Of His Faith — As If This Were A Common Experience. The Long List Includes: Attending Church, Being Hospitable, Being Loving And Patient, And “Walking In The Spirit.” While Dunn Writes That The Conflict With His Old Friend Put Him On A Holier Path, He Also Admits That His “Base Nature” Has Not Changed, That His “Instincts Are Still Selfish” — And That “My Personality Profile Is That I Am A J-E-R-K.”

With The Canniness Of An Engineer, However, Dunn Has Solved This Character Flaw By Becoming A Jerk For Jesus. In Dunn’s Through-The-Looking-Glass View, “Niceness” — By Which He Means Tolerance Of Unbiblical Behavior By Others — Is “Cowardice” By Another

Name. And Cowardice, He Preaches, Is An Arch Sin That Will Get You Tossed In The “Lake Of Fire.”

“The Bible Never Calls Us To Be Nice,” Dunn Preaches. In Dunn’s View, Christians “Aren’t Called To Merely Cope With The Evil Of This World. We’re Called To Fight It And To Overcome It.” As A Result, *Dunn Views Imposing The Harsh Constraints Of His Own Faith As The Very Definition Of Christian Love.* WE’RE DOING PEOPLE A HUGE FAVOR,” HE SAYS, “WHEN WE GET IN THEIR FACE. The Negative Reaction Of Those Who Are On A Different Path Is, To Dunn, Affirmation Of His Righteousness: “The More Superhero-Like Things We Do, The More The World Is Likely To... Hate Us,” He Writes.

This Belief Shapes Dunn’s Ideas About How Christians Should Engage In What He Calls The “Darkest Of All Arenas In This World, Which Is Politics.” In A 2019 Speech To A Convention Of Action States Action Summit Titled “The Bible And Politics,” Dunn Declared That Christians Are *Made To Rule And Reign,*” And He Described This Terrestrial Life A A Proving Ground — To See Who Will Take On The Mantle To Govern Alongside Jesus In The “Kingdom To Come.”

Dunn Calls On Believers To Be The “Fragrance” Of Christ In The World. “When We Live According To The Way God Has Asked Us To Live,” He Preaches, “People Smell It. They Sense It.” The Scent Of Dunn’s Political Operation, However, Is Hardly Sweet. In Fact, Much Of It Stinks To High Heaven.

“They Are Serious About Their Theocracy,” Says Angle, “But They Know That In Order To Impose It On Others, They Have To Have Some Pretty Bad Actors — And Some Of Those Bad Actors Are Sinners.” The Incongruously Scandal-Plagued Dunn Political Machine Relies On GOP Operatives And Enforcers Who Have Behaved So Atrociously That Entire Front Groups Have Had To Be Shut Down And Rebranded. “They Keep Embarrassing Themselves,” Says Seliger, Calling The Behavior “Just Indecent.”

For More Than A Decade, Dunn’s Political Donations Flowed Through A PAC Called Empower Texans. However, In 2020, Two Top Empower Texans Operatives Aired An Unedited Version Of A Podcast That Included Profanity-Laced, Hot-Mic Chatter, In Which The Pair Belittled Texas Gov Greg Abbott For Having To Use A Wheelchair — Leading One Prominent GOP Lawmaker To Blast The Dunn Operation As A “Sanctimonious Sewer.”

Empower Texans Was Dissolved That October, Leading To The Rise Of Defend Texas Liberty As Dunn’s Primary PAC. The Rebranding Had The Effect Of Putting Lipstick On A Pig. A Top Texas Lawmaker Backed By The Dunn Machine Was A State Representative Named Bryan Slaton, Who Took \$275,000 In Campaign Cash From Dunn Directly, And More Than \$300,000 From Dunn-Backed PACs. Slaton Fit The Model Of A Dunn And Wilkes Conservative: A ***Former Youth Pastor*** Who Acted As A Far-Right Provocateur In The Statehouse — Including Introducing A Bill That Could Have Punished Women Seeking Abortions ***With The Death Penalty.***

But Last May, Slaton Became The First Member Of The Texas House To Be Expelled In More Than 90 Years — After A State Investigation Accused The Married Legislator Of Taking A 19-Year-Old Aide To His Apartment And Getting Her Drunk To The Point Of “Split Vision.” Slaton Allegedly Had Sex With The Woman, *A Virgin, Repeatedly*. He Then Pressured His Employee To Keep Quiet. House Investigators Judged That “The Only Appropriate Discipline” Was Expulsion. The House Vote Was Unanimous.

Then, Last Fall, A Whiff Of Neo-Nazism Hit Dunn’s Operation. Defend Texas Liberty’s President Was An Operative Named Jonathan Strickland — A Former Pest Control Technician Turned State Legislator Whose Political Career Had Been Propelled By \$214,000 In Contributions From Dunn Directly, And Nearly \$268,000 From Empower Texans. Defend Texas Liberty Worked With Strickland’s Political Consultancy, Pale Horse Strategies. And Strickland, In Early October, Hosted A Long Meeting At His Political Office With Nick Fuentes, A Ferocious Antisemite And Holocaust Denier.

Dunn Is Frequently Characterized As A Puppetmaster Of The Texas GOP. In This Scandal, However, He Became A Ventriloquist. His Mea Culpa Was Delivered By A Politician Whom Defend Texas Liberty Had Staked \$3 Million In Campaign Cash And Loans: Lt Gov Patrick. “I Spoke With Tim Dunn, A Principal Funder Of Defend Texas Liberty PAC, And He Has Told Me Unequivocally That It Was A Serious Blunder For PAC President Jonathan Strickland To Meet With White Supremacist Nick Fuentes,” Patrick Said Publicly.

Defend Texas Liberty Was Promptly Shuttered, But Replaced Within Weeks By A New PAC: Texans United For A Conservative Majority. In Addition To Its Eerie Christian-Cross Logo, The PAC Website Declares That Its Mission Is To Root Out “Democrat-Enabling Lawmakers Who Are Republicans In Name Only (RINOs) And — Evoking **Trumpy** Rhetoric — To Drain “The Austin Swamp.”

FOR HIS EXTRAORDINARY Influence In The Lone Star State, Dunn Has Never Been A Power Player In Presidential Politics. But For 2024, He’s Taking His Operation National. Dunn Now Stands As An Avatar Of The Extreme Oil Wealth And Christian Nationalism That Have Hitched In As Engines Behind The Trump Train.

Dunn Established Himself As One Of Trump’s Newest And Largest Megadonors In December, Cutting A \$5 Million Check To Make America Great Again Inc, A Pro-Trump Super PAC. This Was By Far Dunn’s Largest Federal Contribution. Dunn Has Spoken Rarely, But Admiringly, Of Trump’s Fortitude. In A 2019 Address, He Praised Trump For Having Once Dressed Down A Room Full Of Pastors In A Manner Dunn Found “Very Accurate, Very Prophetic” — “He Said, ‘You’ve Gotten Soft.’”

The MAGA Inc Ads Dunn Is Helping Pay For Reflect His Dark Worldview. One Features A Voice-Over In Which **Trump** Presents Himself As A Demigod Of Cultural Revenge: “I Am Your Warrior, I Am Your Justice,” He Intones. “And For Those Who Have Been Wronged And Betrayed, I Am Your Retribution.”

Dunn Has Also Taken On A New Sidekick In Brad Parscale, A Former Top **Trump**world Operative, Credited With Orchestrating A Massive Campaign Of Micro-Targeted Facebook Ads In 2016 That Helped Trump Topple The Hillary Clinton Juggernaut. Parscale Parlayed That Success Into A Short-Lived Stint As Trump's Campaign Manager In 2020.

Parscale Bought A Home Just Blocks From Dunn's Midland Compound In January 2023, And He's Putting In The Time In West Texas. This Reporter Found Him At Home On A Monday Morning And Spoke To Parscale Through An Electronic-Doorbell Device: "Don't Show Up At My House, Dude," He Said. *"I'm Not Talking To Rolling Stone."*

In A Deal Brokered By Parscale, Dunn Has Invested \$7.5 Million In A Firm Called AiAdvertising, Which Touts Its Capacity To Harness "Rich Customer Data" And A "Generative AI Process" To Deliver "Hyper-Personalized Content." The Technology Holds The Promise To Micro-Target AI-Personalized Political Ads To Voters — In Essence Turbocharging The Online Persuasion Work That Made Parscale Famous.

In Texas Politics, Dunn Has Described Himself In Football Terms, As An "Offensive Coordinator." But It Would Be Fair To Characterize His National Plans For 2024 As A Blitz. Dunn Is Also Backing A Host Of Political Groups That Seek To Craft A Second-Term Trump Agenda.

In 2021, Dunn Signed On As A Founding Director Of The America First Policy Institute. The

CEO Of AFPI Is Brooke Rollins, Who Served In The White House As **Trump's** Domestic Policy Adviser. But Before Rollins Was Trump's Wingman, She Was Dunn's. She Served For Years As CEO Of The Texas Public Policy Foundation, The Drivetrain Of Dunn's Political Machine.

Rollins Has Long Acted As A Spokeswoman For Dunn. In A 2014 Interview, She Defended His Political Influence, Insisting, "This Narrative That He's The Really Bad Guy Behind The Curtain Is Unfair, Because What He's Trying To Do Is Change The Country." Rollins Recently Described To The Wall Street Journal How She Approached Dunn To Help Launch AFPI, Seeking "To Create A National Organization, Similar To What We Built In Texas, That Could Be Ready For A Second Term." (Rollins And AFPI Didn't Respond To Requests For Comment.)

The AFPI Agenda Includes Tearing Down The Wall Between Church And State. In A Document Called "Biblical Foundations: Ten Pillars For Restoring A Nation Under God!," AFPI Insists "Faith And Politics DO Mix In America." It Contends "The Church Is God's Force For Good In The World And The United States" And It Does Not End Where Government Begins."

Rollins Isn't The Only Past Texas Public Policy Foundation Leader Now Seeking To Shape A Second **Trump** Term. Kevin Roberts Succeeded Rollins As Chief Executive Officer Of The Texas Think Tank, And In 2021 Became President Of The Heritage Foundation. Roberts Has Steered The Once Establishment-Conservative Group Away From Market Economics And Headlong Into The Culture Wars — Insisting That The "Radical" Agenda Of The "Gender

Cult” Is An “All-Out Assault On Human Flourishing,” And Arguing That “Movement Conservatives” Can’t Back Gay Marriage Because It “Contravenes Our Understanding Of An *Enduring Moral Order.*”

Heritage Has Notoriously Organized — In Collaboration With Dozens Of Far-Right Groups — An Initiative Called Project 2025, Which Seeks To Drive **Trump’s** Day One Agenda. Its Extreme Priorities Include Imprisoning Porn Producers, Repealing Same-Sex Marriage Rights, And Using The Comstock Act To Prevent The Distribution Of Abortion Drugs By Mail.

Dunn Is Also Reportedly A Significant Donor To A Group Called The Center For Renewing America — Tagline: “For God. For Country. For Community” — Led By **Trump’s** Former Office Of Management And Budget Director Russell Vought. Vought Was A Controversial Appointee Because Of His Stark Dogma, Including An Op-Ed He Wrote Insisting That Muslims “Stand Condemned” Because They “Have Rejected Jesus Christ.” The Original Link Between Dunn And Vought Is Unclear, But According To Vought’s Public White House Calendars, He And Dunn Met Twice At The White House. (Roberts, Vought, And CRA Did Not Respond To Interview Requests.)

Founded In 2021, CRA Is Also Crafting Priorities For A Second **Trump** Term — And CRA’s 2023 Annual Report Describes Vought As An “Indispensable Part Of 2025.” In Addition, Vought’s Outfit Drew National Scrutiny After *Politico* Reported On Internal CRA Documents That *Listed “Christian Nationalism” As A Top Priority For A Second **Trump** Term.* That

Agenda Was Not Laid Out In Detail. However, Vought Posted On X In Early 2023 That He'd Been Developing A "Sound Christian Nationalism" With Former **Trump** Official William E Wolfe, Who Was Then A CRA Visiting Fellow.

Wolfe, In Turn, Helped Edit A "Statement Of Christian Nationalism." It Reads In Part:

"We Deny That Jesus' Kingship And Lordship Are Merely Heavenly Or That His Word Is Only Authoritative Over Confessing Christians."

"We Deny That The Purpose Of Civil Government Is To Establish A Secular, Neutral, Or Godless Order."

"Full Obedience To Christ Today Is An Indisputable Obligation Of All [Governments]."

In An April Op-Ed, Dunn Wrote That Rejects The "Disparagement" That He Is A Christian Nationalist — Which He Called "A Made-Up Label Than Conflicts With Biblical Teaching" And Was Objectionable Primarily Because It Deprioritizes His Identity As A Christian. Dunn Asserted That His Vision Is Not "Authoritarian," Pointing To Americans' "God-Given Free

Will To Believe In Him (Or Not), Pursue Their Own Dreams, *And Make And Bear The Consequences Of Their Own Choices.*”

Dunn’s Critics And Admirers Alike Insist His Sudden Entrance Into National Politics Must Be Taken Seriously. Rollins Has Boasted It’s The Start Of A “100-Year Play.”

Angle, The Lone Star Project Director, Believes Dunn Is Attracted To The No-Holds-Barred Politics That Surround **Trump** — And Remind Him Of Texas: *He Sees, In What **Trump’s** Done To The Republican Party Nationally, Exactly The Type Of Environment He Can Operate In — And Really Start To Dominate.*”

Angle’s Stark Advice For Americans Unfamiliar With The Political Ambitions Of Dunn & Co.?
“DON’T UNDERESTIMATE WHERE THEY’RE GOING. DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THE LENGTHS THEY WILL DO IN ORDER TO CONSOLIDATE **POWER.**”

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