



## Competitive Enterprise Institute to honor transgender woman at annual dinner

By: Sean Higgins, Senior Editorial Writer  
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Deirdre McCloskey, a professor at the University of Illinois at Chicago, is set to be honored by the Competitive Enterprise Institute, a leading Washington, D.C., free market/libertarian think tank, with its annual Julian Simon Award at a major dinner event in June.

CEI advocates for several issues and causes that are associated with the right, like skepticism about climate change, shrinking the size of government and opposing federal regulations like Sarbanes-Oxley. Its scholars and fellows often turn up in conservative publications and on Fox News. Past winners of its annual Warren Brookes fellowship include people like Michelle Malkin, Michael Fumento and the *The Washington Examiner's* own Tim Carney. Liberals often attack CEI, and in 2006 they succeeded in getting ExxonMobil to stop funding the institute.

My point here being that most people would consider CEI a pretty conservative place, although it is actually more libertarian-oriented. It avoids most social issues.

With that in mind, CEI's website for the dinner event — which solicits donations of up to \$25,000 (the “tungsten level”) — describes the guest of honor thusly:

Deirdre McCloskey teaches economics, history, English, and communication at the University of Illinois at Chicago. A well-known economist and historian and rhetorician, she has written sixteen books and around 400 scholarly pieces on topics ranging from technical economics and statistics to transgender advocacy and the ethics of the bourgeois virtues. She is known as a “conservative” economist, Chicago-School style (she taught for 12 years there), but protests that “I’m a literary, quantitative, postmodern, free-market, progressive Episcopalian, Midwestern woman from Boston who was once a man. Not ‘conservative’! I’m a Christian libertarian.” (Emphasis added.)

In addition to her economic works, McCloskey is the author of 2000's “Crossing: A Memoir.” Its Amazon.com entry describes it this way:

We have read the stories of those who have “crossed” lines of race and class and culture. But few have written of crossing—completely and entirely—the gender line. Crossing is the story of Deirdre McCloskey (formerly Donald), once a golden boy of conservative economics and a child of 1950s and 1960s privilege, and her dramatic and poignant journey to becoming a woman. McCloskey's account of her painstaking efforts to learn to “be a woman” unearths fundamental questions

about gender and identity, and hatreds and anxieties, revealing surprising answers.

In the official invite to the event, McCloskey's picture appears just below that of keynote speaker Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky. (That's the invitation above. Please excuse the fuzziness of the image, a result of my continuing to use a now-primitive model cell phone.)

This is not the first time CEI has shown a progressive side on gender politics. It had previously co-sponsored an event with the gay conservative group GOProud at the Conservative Political Action Conference.

When I first called CEI regarding this earlier Thursday, an organizer for the event expressed surprise that I was calling at all, saying it "never occurred" to her that anyone would think there was anything unusual about the institute honoring McCloskey.

In a statement to The Washington Examiner, CEI founder and chairman Fred Smith said:

No one should be surprised that Deirdre McCloskey's work merits CEI's prestigious Julian Simon Award. McCloskey's elucidation of the "Great Fact" of human history — the sustained boom of wealth creation that began in 17th-century Holland and spread to 18th-century England, which enriched not only aristocrats but the great masses of humanity — displays an optimism about mankind and our future that Simon would appreciate.

Simon believed that human ingenuity reaches its fullest potential in a society that both permits and values freedom, innovation, and wealth creation. Like Simon, McCloskey understands that the immediate causes of the Great Fact were the birth of modern capitalism, more widespread property rights, and other liberal institutions, and that these structural changes were made possible by societies' willingness to overcome their innate hostility to commerce, lending, and the bourgeois lifestyle. Indeed, McCloskey deserves the Simon Award not for merely sharing Simon's optimism, but for showing that humanity's flaws can be overcome and for, perhaps better than anyone since Simon, instilling a sense of wonder at what the ultimate resource can accomplish.

In the interests of disclosure, I should note that I first noticed CEI's decision to honor McCloskey because I personally received an invitation to the dinner, which I have often attended in the past. Several people at CEI are friends of mine.

UPDATE: Over at Medaite, Andrew Kirell takes issue with my column, reading all manner of things into it I did not intend and do not believe. How he read all of it into the piece I don't know. Bear with me since this is going to be a lengthy post. There's a lot to respond to.

First off, I simply wrote that CEI was giving an award to a transgender woman, something the institute itself noted twice in the announcement. Plus, McCloskey wrote an entire memoir on the subject, a book I presume that she intended for people to hear about. How it is wrong to note this?

The point of my piece was that it may surprise some people to learn that CEI was doing this, since I think the general perception of it is that it is right-wing. It isn't, of course. It's

libertarian, something Kirell seems to think I don't really know even though I mentioned it in the piece. But I don't how many people outside of the DC bubble know this, so I thought it was worth pointing out.

Mr. Kirell — somehow — alleges in the headline of his piece that I am “baffled” by CEI giving the award to McCloskey. Not so. I wasn't even particularly surprised by it since I was aware of McCloskey's reputation among libertarians as an economist. As I wrote, I know the people at CEI. I even hang out with them from time to time. So this didn't really surprise me.

He then writes:

McCloskey's transgender identity does nothing in the way of discredit her work or make her any less an accomplished and worthy economist; and to breathlessly bring negative attention to it would seem rather strange. Yet Higgins went for it, posting and bolding the ... portions of how McCloskey is described in the award ceremony's invitation.

At no point anywhere did I say that McCloskey's transgender identity discredits her work. Where he got that, again, I don't know. Yes, I bolded the sections of CEI's announcement because that established McCloskey's identity. Otherwise a reader might skip over it. That's all.

Kirell then writes: “Higgins laments that ‘this not the first time CEI has shown a progressive side on gender politics.’” Umm, no, I don't “lament” it. I merely note it to illustrate the fact that this is not out of character for CEI.

He writes:

But apparently McCloskey's transgender-ness baffled Higgins so much that he felt compelled to call CEI and ask for comment. An event organizer reportedly told him it “never occurred” to her that anyone would find something unusual about the institute honoring a woman who happened to be transgender. To libertarians that makes sense but, for whatever reason, Higgins had to get to the bottom of this affront to conservative gender politics.

That is one way of looking at. Another way is that I called to get a quote from CEI because I was writing about it and thought that would be good for the story — an idea that eluded Kirell when he was writing about me, I might add. The point of the passage was to illustrate how CEI itself has no issue with McCloskey's identity. So little that they didn't think even about it. Kirell closes the column by quoting a Facebook post by Cato Institute fellow Tom Palmer calling my piece “ugly, malicious and small minded”, then adding his own thought:

Agreed. And if Higgins is indeed offended by her presence — as the column would suggest — then he should feel free not to show up.

For the record, I am not offended by McCloskey's presence at the CEI event— something I never said in the first place and do believe the piece implies. And, yes, I will probably go the event. Why wouldn't I?

