

Never has so much been made of fifth place. Riley Gaines and the politics of grievance. |

Opinion BY TODD KELLY SEPTEMBER 25, 2023

“(For) \$25,000; Your support fully funds an entire event on Riley’s campus tour to inspire conservative students there to take a stand for truth. You’ll receive an invitation to attend the event you sponsored along with a private meet and greet with Riley.” From The Riley Gaines Center at the Leadership Institute

“ A fool and his money are soon parted” Dr. John Bridges

Gaines is the University of Kentucky champion swimmer who tied for fifth in the 200 freestyle at the 2022 NCAA swimming championships. Lia Thomas, a trans woman, also finished fifth. Never has so much been made of a non-podium tie. Thomas won the 500-yard freestyle at the same meet. She competed in men’s events in 2017-2018 and began testosterone suppression and hormone replacement therapy in 2019.

Gaines is staging an itinerate protest and she does have a legitimate complaint, a complaint though, that has exceeded its decent limit. Thomas was a good male swimmer and is now an elite woman swimmer and the NCAA will resolve questions of fair gender competition whether it wants to or not. Although Thomas is not the same, hormonally, as she was in 2017, her birth physiology confers an advantage in a women’s field. There are dignified responses to this now-permanent fact of athletics but Gaines’ identity pointing is not one of them. Gaines has endured violence and censorship for her views. This should stop and the people that tried to hurt her should be held accountable.

Subtlety in a demagogue may lead to their insolvency so please stand with Riley Gaines for truth, but don’t forget the \$25K. She joins Stephen Miller, Kyle Rittenhouse, and indicted co-conspirators Rudy Giuliani and Jenna Ellis in the Grifting Off Of Grievance sweepstakes. Gaines and the Institute have realized the income potential of combining gender bigotry with anti-vax mongering. On Aug. 23 at the annual Jefferson County Lincoln Day Dinner in Louisville, she plied the crowd with tales of bravery and defiance. According to a published account, she said: “You can’t make me get that vaccine, and that was the first time I learned to say ‘no’ for myself to authority figures like that.” No comment from Gaines on the human misery that the COVID-19 vaccine continues to alleviate throughout the planet. The same account quoted her as saying, “What they’re asking us to do, deny man and woman, is the essence of humanity. Not to be grim, but that should be really chilling,” she said. “They want to control how we think. They want to control what we say. They want to control how we feel. And what that is, open any textbook ... that’s Marxism.” That’s a mouthful of incoherence but I think the point is that she has support plans for under \$25K.

Riley Gaines is young and is taking some bad advice. According to Common Dreams, The Leadership Institute, despite its 501(c)(3) non-profit status, has a total revenue since 1974 of \$274 million. It currently has revenue of over \$16.9 million a year and a full-time staff of 70. According to its website; “The Institute teaches conservatives of all ages how to succeed in politics, government, and the media.” It looks like Trump University with culture dust-up training. The so-called institute’s “alumni” include Rep. Jim Jordan and Trump TV lawyer, Tom Fitton.

Riley Gaines and Lia Thomas are Generation Zers and have much more in common than their physical differences. The cultural tenor of the country is shrill and getting shriller and leveraging a fifth-place swimming tie into LGBTQIA2S+ animosity is a bad idea.