

**Remarks from Nuala O'Connor, CDT President & CEO
CDT's Annual Dinner
April 20, 2017**

So you've met my daughter. She's spectacular, as are my other two children. And of course I'm totally biased.

But it is true that Nora – and many members of her generation – are already far more savvy than I was about the world at their age.

They are aware of the power and peril of technology, and they are awake – mad woke, as they say – to the politics of this time. As I think all parents in the room will agree, no amount of personal success compares to watching your children thrive and grow into good human beings.

But tonight there's another family member on my mind.

You see, I've just returned from New Jersey, where my family celebrated my dad's 80th birthday this past weekend. You can't know me very long before I tell you about my dad.

I can tell you stories about how he literally walked down Wall Street to find a job in finance.

He has courage. And optimism. And spark. So that's my dad (SLIDE).

That picture was taken in 1959 in Ireland, not long before he emigrated to the United States in search of a new life, new prosperity, and new freedoms.

Every year I give a lot of thought to what I'm going to talk about at Tech Prom, to respect you and your time, and to honor my colleagues at CDT and their great work.

But this year, more than ever, because I'm talking about my family, I want to honor their story and respect their privacy.

So I made a point of talking to them about this and I learned that my parents have some strong opinions on immigration and citizenship and democracy.

And that in fact we don't always agree. But there are some things I do know, and there are some things on which we do agree.

I know my parents left behind everything they knew – family, friends, culture, community – to give their family, their children, a better life. They were certainly leaving behind the start of the



Troubles, in search of greater physical safety. But they were also in search of a society where success – economic, political, social – would not be predetermined and limited by religion or other characteristics.

We agree that while countries have a right to determine their borders, they also have an obligation to respect the dignity of visitors and potential immigrants.

And this is where it gets interesting. Because as my dad and I are having this great conversation, my mom, who was standing nearby in the kitchen says “yes, and remember the dignity of their own citizens.” And then she went a step further and said, “you know, for many years when we were first here we had to go to the post office every December and register.”

“And they called us aliens.”

And she said: “You know I never liked that word.”

Words matter. And dignities – and indignities – the small and the large – matter.

That’s some of the lens through which we look at things at CDT. Whether you consider it the language of fundamental human rights, or human dignity, or civil rights, it is the respect for the individual and their primacy in relation to government or institution.

Whether the boundary of self has been violated or enhanced – online or off – through the use of technology. And how we treat the marginalized or underrepresented in our new devices and designs. How we give voice to – and hold space for – the least among us. That is how we will be judged.

And while a lot of discussion of this concept has centered on government, companies have a role to play here too.

As one airline recently learned, people know and understand what indignity looks like when they see it. While it may be quite a bit less obvious online, digital dignity – respecting the boundary around self, the rights to control one’s own data and one’s own digital manifestations – the right to your digital dignity – increasingly is a necessary part of corporate or civic responsibility in the digital age.

And this is where CDT comes in.

Through our work, the Center for Democracy & Technology is not only a voice for democratic values in design, we are an advocate for the individual.



And here are a few of the things I'm most proud of in our advocacy this past year.

CDT responded to calls for increased intrusion into devices, social media, and other accounts with a clear NO.

We convened a coalition of groups in technology and immigration and civil rights space to push back against increasing calls for comprehensive device searches at the border.

I note that this work began last summer in response to proposals from a previous Administration, just to be completely clear. We think this is a bad idea under any Administration.

From our deeply researched and thoroughly analyzed papers and letters, to our #NoPassForGov online campaign, CDT engaged a diverse coalition and fostered conversation and awareness. Certainly, every country has a right to secure its borders and boundaries. But we can and must do that with compassion, and with profound respect for human dignity.

People asking to enter any country are at a vulnerable moment in their lives. We absolutely can, and should, set strong boundaries. We can also respect their digital dignity. It costs us nothing to be kind.

I'm incredibly proud of our energized privacy team led by Michelle DeMooy, who you also met earlier. This team has also done some amazing work on algorithmic targeting and decision making.

Their work – building tools that stress-test outcomes for unintended bias, and recommending new factors and filters to consider when designing new devices and systems – can help companies and organizations build values into their design in a lasting way.

The CDT privacy and open internet teams also worked on the various stages of the FCC rulemaking on ISP privacy. Whether industry or government, when it comes to the collection of personal data, if a relationship with the individual is comprehensive and unavoidable, and if there are serious consequences to the decisions made with that data, then the greater the need for scrutiny, transparency, and accountability in that transaction.

Seen through the eyes of digital dignity, providing control and accessibility to individuals is an essential element of a digital relationship.

We look forward to partnering with all who wish to see genuine privacy protections online.

One of our busiest teams is our global free expression team. While the issues of free expression look very different here in the United States than they do elsewhere in the world, the opportunity to use the internet as a platform for free speech is essential to our construct of digital dignity.



This team's work also has the hardest fact patterns. Whether revenge porn or the right to be forgotten, whether countering violent extremism or hate speech, this team's work has touched on difficult and heartbreaking stories. And while we remain an ardent advocate of the free flow of information and freedom of expression for all, we also recognize that there are responsibilities and consequences for individuals and institutions alike.

And lastly, I'm so proud of our most technical work. Both our work advocating for the protection of white hat hackers who will make the world a better and safer place, and also our proactive efforts to make the entire internet more secure by encouraging complete adoption of HTTPS across the web.

And we have developed new tools on our website to educate and empower internet users to take more control of their cybersecurity. And most fundamentally, in years past and in the years ahead, our steadfast advocacy for end-to-end encryption.

This includes our work in opposing any proposal aimed at weakening encryption or mandating backdoors into our personal technology, ever.

These issues – privacy and free speech and encryption –are all at their core about the individual.

The dignity of the individual is at the heart of the work we do here at CDT. I am so proud of the impact of our organization. And I have never been more certain that CDT is essential to shaping an inclusive, digitally empowered, democratic world.

In this time of fractious discourse, we bring together differing viewpoints and vantage points, experiences and expertise, with the shared commitment to deploying technology in service of democracy.

This year, bringing people of differing perspectives and beliefs together seems both harder and more necessary than ever. But we must have the hard and important conversations that will shape our shared future.

We saw some of what that future holds early in this program, in the beautiful images of confident, empowered young people in the video from our honorees at Teen Vogue, and in the poise, wisdom, and global awareness shown by Nina and Nora.

And as I said before, I am in awe of where they are at in their ages and am filled with hope for the world that they will someday lead.



Our job, the supposed grownups in this room, is to make sure we set an example they can be proud of and to shape digital and political systems that include and elevate all voices.

We owe them at least this.

Whatever your politics and perspective on the last year, it seems that one takeaway for many is that democracy is not a spectator sport, and that civic engagement is required at all levels of government.

We in this room also know that technology has a role to play in shaping the world around us, including our own participation in our democracy. Thank you for joining with us as we continue our work in service of your digital dignity and in service of the democracy around the world.

Thank you.