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[www.cdt.org](http://www.cdt.org)

1634 I Street, NW  
Suite 1100  
Washington, DC 20006

P +1-202-637-9800

F +1-202-637-0968

E [info@cdt.org](mailto:info@cdt.org)

## **CENTER FOR DEMOCRACY AND TECHNOLOGY GALA REMARKS (TECHPROM)**

**NUALA O'CONNOR**

**March 5, 2014**

Thank you so much, and thank you for being here tonight.

When I sat alone in my office at the Department of Homeland Security 10 years ago, \*this\* is definitely not what I had in mind. I don't just mean this--this beautiful dinner, this wonderful community of advocates and technologists and companies and policy leaders. I mean this world, this time, this reality that we now find ourselves in.

When I spoke with my beloved boss Tom Ridge—who is here with us tonight-- as we were setting up this new department, we described our mission not only as protecting the people and the places of this country, but as protecting liberty for all people—the liberties that define America for Americans and for the entire world. Our mission was to not only protect Americans but the American way of life -- freedom of thought and speech and association.

In the days and weeks and months following 9/11, we did not know the size and shape of the threat. We did not know whether or how swiftly terrorists would strike us again. We cried, we mourned, and then we tried to build and rebuild.

These threats were real. These threats are still real. There are people who want to harm us because we are a certain color, a certain religion, citizens of a certain nation. It is so. It has always been so. I have known it because I have lived it in my childhood and now we are all living it.

But it is not right that the answer to this threat is to turn inward on ourselves. The solution is not to compromise our liberties and our ideals. The answer to these threats may well be found in technology, but it is not to be found in the wholesale collection and analysis of our thoughts and deeds.

It simply cannot be that the default setting for the technology in our daily lives is that all of our data — all our most personal thoughts and transactions and communications -- end up in the hands of the government.

We can do better. We must do better.

But now is not a time for despair.

Now is a time for courage.

Now is a time for optimism.

Now is a time for action.

Never before has there been the opportunity to use technology to improve the lives of so many, so quickly. Technological advancements -- from big data to micro devices -- can enhance healthcare delivery and save lives, improve educational outcomes and prepare a 21st century workforce, increase our energy efficiency and save our planet, and help a busy working mother stay in contact with her children whether in the office or across the globe. Technology's advance and the ubiquity of information hold the promise of equality, access, and freedom of expression, thought, and association.

But we must be mindful of our choices, thoughtful about our resources, and focused on outcomes that serve the planet. I believe that with great thought and with great care -- that this country and the world can achieve great things while still protecting our fundamental liberty and humanity.

Technology can be a key driver of that vision, and the speed of change it enables is breathtaking. Necessity truly is the mother of invention, and I was reminded of that last week while I was in Silicon Valley. I had the great joy of meeting some of the most interesting minds working in technology, including Nico Sell. Some of you may know Nico, the co-founder of Wickr. And for those of you who don't know what Wickr is, it's basically self-destructing email.

Nico is an amazing person, a force of nature as our mutual friend called her, and, like me, a mom of young children. Nico said to me, "You know, I invented Wickr for my children. And for their privacy." The Nico Sells of the world are going to help us find the answers to these big questions.

But Silicon Valley alone doesn't hold the keys to getting these issues right. There are—despite some concern to the contrary--public servants in Washington and Brussels and around the world who are trying to do the right thing. My good friend Becky Richards is here tonight. Many of you know that she recently took on a new job, as chief civil liberties and privacy officer of the NSA. She mentioned recently that a lot of people think that the job is nearly impossible. Well, I don't think that job is impossible, and neither does she. I think she is just the right combination of smart, forceful, and practical to get that job done and make some real change at a time that that agency is under much scrutiny. I applaud her service, and her courage. We may not always agree, but there will always be a place at our table for her, and for all people of good will who are trying to do the hard work of solving the big issues.

And that next solution, that next invention, that next new thing—the idea that reshapes the way we live or work or play or relate to each other—may not come out of Silicon Valley or Washington, DC. The next new thing may be in the brain of some little girl in Mogadishu or Kiev or Belfast. And the power of the internet is going to help her invent that next big thing. Or it will help realize her dream of being a doctor or a scientist or an artist or even the next Bill Gates.

But without full access to information she will not have complete knowledge, and we will not benefit from her contribution. We will miss out on the best of human potential. And that's why I'm glad there are great minds like Elliot Maxwell—who is also here with us tonight-- thinking about the internet's power to reshape learning and the academy and the free and global dissemination of knowledge. Open access to the internet is a foundational principle for CDT. Greater access to knowledge is a foundation of democracy. Equal access to information is the

very disrupter that will lead us to the new ideas. And those new ideas will change the world and change our daily lives.

Every day, CDT is the convener of the dialogue around the technology in our daily lives. We want to find practical solutions to the hardest questions facing our society, and help find the appropriate role for technology to advance those solutions. We talk, yes, and we write and we think, but we will get things done. We believe technology can be used to help solve big societal issues, but there must be responsible rules in place. In those dialogues, CDT stands for democracy, CDT stands for solutions, and CDT stands for the individual.

Many have described some of these issues—surveillance in particular—as a fight. And yes, this is a fight we are willing to take on, and rest assured that this is a fight that we are going to win. But it is not a fight against each other. It is not a fight against government's legitimate use of technology for limited, critical missions, including keeping our children safe from harm. This is not a fight against companies engaging in reasonable business practices and creating innovative technologies that serve their customers. This is a fight for the autonomy, the individuality, the creativity that comes from the quiet spaces. The spaces when you are alone with your thoughts. We must develop a sense of our digital self: of our self and our data as sacred. We must create the boundaries—the curtilage—around our personal space, where we can exercise the same autonomy and individual freedom that we can experience in the offline world. This is a fight for the freedom to be yourself, in all its quirky and unique and flawed glory.

CDT's role in Washington and in Brussels and in Silicon Valley — and in the global professional and personal dialogue -- is to tackle the hard questions and to develop solutions. Solutions that work for companies and governments and most importantly for individuals. We believe those solutions must be informed by a deep understanding and even a love of technology, and that is a role that we play, in concert with technologists from companies and government and academia around the world. This is the work that CDT is here to do, and it is the hard work and often messy work of democracy. CDT is a place where this community – our community of advocates, technologists, government, and industry -- all people who love technology and believe in its power to do good -- can come together and be heard respectfully.

I am here before you tonight, following the leadership of our wonderful Leslie Harris, our beloved Jerry Berman, our esteemed board, chaired by Deirdre Mulligan, and the scores of current and former CDT staff members, who are simply some of the finest minds working on these issues. With their leadership and dedication, CDT has grown from a scrappy startup to a leading voice in the global dialogue.

Here at CDT we together can create solutions that make this world a better place. ALL ARE WELCOME AT OUR TABLE. Thank you for coming to our table tonight, and thank you for coming to our table tomorrow, to do the hard work that democracy requires.

Thank you for your support of the Center for Democracy & Technology. It's been 20 wonderful years, and we have proven that we are here to stay.

And I can promise you, we are just getting started.

Thank you.