

**Remarks by Gayle King
Presenting The Media Institute's
2021 Freedom of Speech Award
To Norah O'Donnell
October 20, 2021**

Good evening to you. I'm Gayle King from "CBS Mornings." Now, the saying goes that if you actually want to know a person, you must walk a mile in their shoes. But believe me, if you really, really want to take a deep dive into someone's soul, you should sit in hair and makeup with them every morning, say, 4 or 4:30 a.m. for seven years.

Norah O'Donnell and I did that – we caffeinated together through 1,445 episodes (I counted!) give or take a vacation day, and during that time I got to know who she is and what she truly cares about.

At home, Norah is a daughter. She's a wife to Geoff Tracy. She's a mother to Riley, Henry, and Grace. She's a great mom. And she's a friend. At work she is one thing and one thing only: a journalist who devoutly believes that a free, factual, and fiercely independent press is sacred to democracy.

Throughout her very long career and now as a "CBS Evening News" anchor and managing editor, Norah puts her journalistic integrity where her mouth is every single day. I've seen it! In the last year alone, her coverage of the pandemic, the 2020 elections, the storming of the Capitol, and her stunning (and stunning is the word) 18-month investigation into sexual assault and domestic violence in the military has again proven that speaking truth to power for all the world to witness is the number one catalyst to genuine reform.

In fact, Norah's reporting helped convince military and political leaders to publicly support groundbreaking changes in how the military deals with these cases. Congress has even drafted bipartisan legislation to put those changes into law. And I don't have to tell anyone who's listening to this what it takes to achieve bipartisan anything in 2021.

So, I'm not going to run down the entire list of Norah O'Donnell's greatest hits – and there are many – but I do want to point out that her regular interviews with scientists and public health experts throughout this pandemic have educated and calmed millions of Americans, me included. There were many days I would call Norah and say, "What is Doctor Fauci saying today?" and she would know.

Norah was also the first journalist to sit down with Joe Biden when he became president. But the thing that strikes me most about Norah's work is that it's been a godsend to survivors of abuse. In fact, she received not one but two Emmys back in 2018 for her reporting on sexual assault at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

More recently, she got that exclusive interview with Charlotte Bennett – she’s one of the former staffers who alleged sexual harassment by former governor Andrew Cuomo. And because she has always been acutely aware of how a society behaves toward its female population, Norah met with Malala Yousafzai after the fall of Afghanistan to focus attention on the future of women’s rights in a country now ruled by the Taliban.

Norah O’Donnell, I can tell you this, is a consummate storyteller. She knows how to show. She knows how to tell. She asks the hard questions and she keeps asking and asking until she gets answers.

I don’t know how many of you remember that movie from a few years back called “The Post,” where the marvelous Meryl Streep played the remarkable Katharine Graham. Norah and I talked about this movie a lot at the time, and there was a line in the movie that really hit home. One of the characters is explaining why the Founding Fathers felt the need to give the free press protection and she says this in the movie: “The press was to serve the governed, not the governors.”

I love that line. Norah gets that. She serves at the pleasure of the truth. Her only allegiance is to the facts. She shines a light on the places that need to be illuminated and she gives voice to the people who need to be heard.

It’s on behalf of those people that I’m really very honored to introduce The Media Institute’s 2021 Freedom of Speech Award winner. That’s you, Norah O’Donnell. Congratulations and GO YOU!