

BETTY WILLIAMS

Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen. I get so confused by ambassadors and vice presidents and presidents and well just all the famous people that are here. I hope you have a good day. I went home last night after having listened to some people talk and I agonized. You see I always say my home is where I am today because I'm a citizen of the universe. And in fact the Norwegian Ambassador asked me earlier was I a citizen of America and I said no. He said are you a citizen of Britain? I said no. Are you a citizen of Ireland? I said yes, I suppose I must be. I carry an Irish passport. But the fact is, I'm a citizen of the world because peace work is a thing where one has to work locally and act globally and that's the way I try to do it. My agony last night however went very deep because you see I find it very difficult to stand up anywhere and speak about peace and run all around the forest to try to get to one tree. I find that extremely difficult. And last night while there were many wonderful and great words said, the war in the Persian Gulf was skirted around, it was sort of not mentioned. Well I would be failing in my duty as a laureate, because I take that very seriously, but I'd be failing even greater in my duty as a mother, because I take that even more seriously, if I didn't refer to it today. I married a lovely American a few years ago. If he heard me call him lovely he'd probably drop down dead with embarrassment you know. But I had two Irish children by my

first marriage and I acquired two magnificent American children. I have four in the family now, 2 boys and 2 girls. One of my sons has just finished his doctorate in the silicone chip end of medicine which means he wants to go into replacing hearing and sight and all that good stuff. But before he settles down to do all that kind of thing he's away playing soccer in England for a year. I have a son at the University of Delaware who's not awfully sure yet what he's going to do except he knows that mommy said it would be much better if he took political science and philosophy and worry about business studies a little way down the road. I have two beautiful daughters. Every mother thinks their children are the best. Well I'm here to tell you mine are. It's as simple as that, you know? When I'm going away they laughingly say to me, "Okay mommy, I suppose you're going to raid our closets now because you need a lecture wardrobe?" And I say yes. So I wear their clothes when I go away. So what I'm trying to say to you is, ordinary -- that word ordinary, it kind of upsets me because when our movement started in Ireland the media referred to us as "ordinary housewives." Now I don't know about any of you, but I have never met an ordinary housewife. There's no such animal as an ordinary housewife, so we have to sort of look at what that word ordinary means. I can't walk you through the corridors of power because I don't live there. And I can't walk you through the corridors of diplomacy because I don't want to be there. The only place that I can walk you

through are perhaps the streets of Belfast or where I live now, the streets of Fort Walton Beach, Florida, which is commonly known as the red-neck riviera because we have Edward Air Force Base as our main employer and if you wanted to watch a metamorphoses of the United States of America you would have seen it that day in that one time when war breaks out. Isn't that incredible, it's as if we don't declare it, it just suddenly breaks out, you know? The terms that they have when they declare war [I love this expression] blow my mind. So when I was sitting in Fort Walton Beach -- I work against the death penalty in the United States; I've been at every execution in [Stark?] Prison since they re-started executing people. Mr. Anton? was executed and a very elderly gentleman with a prognosis of cancer and not too long to live, but he was put in the electric chair anyway. So I kind of still if I can stay with the real issues of peace and the real issues of war. You see, I don't see peace as just being an absence of violence. I see peace as being the man next door having a loaf of bread on his table. And I see patriotism as that. I don't see patriotism as a flag-waving, rah rah rah, we are right. I see patriotism as being concerned about those around you who maybe are not just as well off or as the ambassador put it, as lucky. You get lucky. Some people are luckier than others. When I married my fine American and I moved here, I came to America with a kind of sadness because I had to live where my husband lived. In other words we wouldn't have food on the

table unless I moved to America. So I had to live where Jim lived. But I came here with a -- I thought God it's great, I'm going to a country that's democratic; I've never lived in one that's democratic; it's going to be a lovely change. I was here two weeks when I turned on the radio and they announced an execution at Stark Prison, a disk jockey announced it, and then he proceeded to put the sound of a frying pan sizzling bacon on there. And I thought God, that's awful sick. That's awful sick. And when I came here I wasn't looking for sickness, I was looking for health among the people. And I was kind of war weary. So I decided that for the first few months I would sit on my laureates and not do too much. But I'm afraid that didn't work too well for me. You see, I believe that if one's not helping to change what's wrong here, then one's part of the problem. I very deeply believe that. So I became involved in the real issues of the United States. Outside of the corridors of power. I became involved on the streets of Fort Walton Beach when I went into poverty stricken areas where people literally did not have enough to eat every day, and I wondered why this could happen in a country that has democracy. I started to work with people who had compassion in their minds and patriotism in their hearts, and I had to say wait a wee minute. Reverse that. Put the compassion into your heart and let the patriotism be in your mind a little bit. And it's an educational thing all over again. When we developed our group Patriots for Peace, we developed

it because we deeply believe that the vast majority of the United States, the people of the United States, are not for this war. And we deeply believe that when you watch television every night and you're going through a war rally one more time with the commentators and the politicians and etc. and etc. And you look at Dan Rather and you wonder to yourself, I wonder how he ever got the name of being an investigative reporter. You know? I mean because investigation is getting the comments from your government and reading them. Well then I'd say most of the people on television who are investigative reporters should be given some sort of award because that's what they're all doing. There's no real depth going on here to look at the other side of this coin. Well ladies and gentlemen and ambassadors and prime ministers and whatever, there's a room here named after me and I would be very lax in my work if I didn't try to address the young people in this audience. A beautiful student came up to me this morning and said, "Mrs. Williams, your room is being used," because before I left Luther College in 1982 I made the students promise that it wouldn't just be a room where people sat in and read a book. It would be a room that became active in discussion for the real issues in the world and the real issues of peace. Now I want to discuss the war in the Middle East because that today, obviously, is the greatest challenge to those of us who work for peace. The actuality of the war that's happening right now cannot be ignored, however

diplomatically one tries to do it. It cannot be ignored. And you know something, I don't come from the halls of academia either and sometimes I'm kind of glad about that because I've met an awful lot of people who are so educated they're stupid, you know? So consequently I don't get on very well with a lot of small talk or cocktail parties and all that sort of thing. But when I walk the reality of this war I have to walk the reality of the history of Iraq and Iran. I have to look at that history. If I'm going to take a platform anywhere for the word peace I have to know what I'm talking about. There's nothing worse than listening to somebody behind the podium who gives you a little bit of insight and doesn't know the rest. In other words, half a word. You only get half a word. I started a long time ago looking into the history of the Middle East because in my Nobel lecture the Vice President last night referred to Saddam. Well I had a great, tremendous respect for Saddam because what he effectively did was he bypassed the superpowers and went straight to the source. He didn't run all around the forest, he went straight to the tree. Bless him, he paid with his life for that. But one has to look at the realities of the Middle East to see why conflict is there now. When the British invaded Ireland -- we had many invasions -- the Norwegians were our first, the Vikings came, and bless their hearts they've invaded us with peace which is great you know! But anyway, we have Viking forts. You can see them line the west coast of Ireland. They were

our first invaders. Then we had a few of the Danes, a smattering of the Saxons, a little French invasion, a little Spanish invasion, and then we had the British invasion. And I sometimes look at Ireland and say it's been invaded by everybody except men from Mars and then I have to wonder about that too! But the last invaders that we had were the British. And the fatal mistake made by the British government at that time and Cromwell and his men was that they left one Irish Catholic alive to remember. That's all it took. One Irish Catholic alive to remember. Of course now there were more than one Irish Catholic alive to remember. But I'm trying to do a for instance for you. Saddam Hussein to me is a man who's mentally -- well as my daddy would say, his head's full of trap doors and they're all banging. But he's a man who really is kind of schitzzy. But the word evil I can't use. I can't use evil in that term because you see, I see what we're doing as being evil too. And right now living in America for me it's kind of like that beautiful, wonderful story told by Hans Christian Anderson about the king's new suit. Look at the king. The only person who said, "Would you look at the king? He's nothing on!" You have to tell the truth, and everybody in America now is sort of saying, "The king is right, the king is right, the king's new suit's lovely." I'm telling you right now, Mr. Bush, you don't speak for me. And if I'm only one person and I can say that right out loud, surely a lot of Americans will take these blinkers off, look at the

other side of the coin, and stand up and say, "With all due respect, Mr. Bush, you don't speak for me." Because that's what we need to do. That's how the Berlin Wall got taken down. It wasn't governments that took the Berlin Wall down, it was the people who took it down. It wasn't governments that stopped the war in Viet Nam, it was the people of America that stopped it. What we did in Viet Nam was we declared victory and we left. Wow. Well look at the history then that we're dealing with. There was no Kuwait before the year 1922. If you ask the average American in the street, "What party does Saddam Hussein represent?" They'd say, "What?" They don't know he represents the ??? party. They don't know that the ??? party is a Pan-Arab organization that never recognized British colonization. These things that we're cleaning up now were the cause and effect of what happened all those years ago. Last night a representative from the government here said to give the military G.I. Joe the Nobel Peace Prize and I wanted to puke. Give it to the mothers who are waiting for them to come home, maybe, but not to the men. Because if you take a gun up in your hands, there's only two things you can do with it. Maim or kill. And unfortunately now we are dealing with the situation here right now where it's big guns aimed at big guns. I work in another little place in Fort Walton Beach where there are Alzheimer's patients, and I love them dearly. And one of them, Mary, every now and again Mary's very lucid, and it's beautiful to get that ten



minutes that Mary's lucid because what a mind Mary has. And I said to her the last time I went to visit her, I said, "You know, we're at war, Mary?" And she looked at me and said, "Are we? Where?" And I said, "We're at war with Iraq." And she said, "Are we? Why?" And I said, "Mary, it would take me two and a half years to sit and tell you why." Because so-called academic intellectual learned men could not say no and ??? and discuss it until they got it right. They didn't let sanctions work. Five years it took sanctions even to kick in in South Africa. Five months we gave them. Five months. And may God forgive the United Nations for sanctioning this war. May God forgive us all for what we do because I'll tell you something, it's a Pandora's Box that has been opened in the Middle East which long term your children perhaps will suffer in. It's not a thing that's going to be over. Yes, militarily we're going to win it. It's no doubt we've got the smart bombs haven't we? Oh God, they're smart all right. They're real smart. And we've got the leader of the forces who stands up there and quotes Holy scripture. Get God's name out of war. We've got to do that. Get His name out of war. If you're going to go to war, be honest enough not to blame it on God. Or Allah. Or anybody else. You can't take Jesus of Nazareth in your heart and go to war because if any of you can see the simple man called Jesus of Nazareth pressing the button in a stealth bomber than you can say "Yah, he agrees with us." Or if any of you could even see him pulling the

switch on an electric chair, then you'd have a right to say it. But we've got to get His name out of it. Peace work right now is very difficult, but that doesn't mean that it's impossible. What do they say in America? When the going gets tough, the tough get going? Let me see the real American spirit as I see in Luther College today when in the midst of all this horror that's going on around us, we have sane and loving people who were concerned enough to come together today in a cause that seems so intangible: the cause of peace. You can't work for justice unless you work for peace, and you can't work for peace unless you work for justice. When what is happening on both sides of this divide, from the Iraqi end and from the American end, is all called unjust, then maybe we're telling the truth. You see, the man that I loved most in my life was a man called the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King. And I stayed at a house in Bohn in which I slept in the same -- well, I didn't sleep because they gave me the bed and they happened to say to me Dr. Martin Luther King slept in this -- and I couldn't sleep. I was touching the pillows and doing all that kind of thing. And sitting on that bed I remembered Dr. Martin Luther King's words. You know when Dr. Martin Luther King talked about peace, he didn't talk about peace for African-Americans only. He talked about peace for everybody. Everybody. And his words were, "It is no longer a question of violence or non-violence. It is now a question of non-violence or non-existence." Thank you.