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PeaceJam Welcome

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• Good evening, welcome to Western Michigan University this evening to hear the kick-off event of the 2009 Great Lakes PeaceJam Conference. In addition to all of you who are here tonight to hear Jody Williams speak, there are hundreds of young people--high school students--from throughout Michigan, Ohio, Indiana and Illinois here for the weekend. They will spend their time here tackling the most critical issues of this or any time--peace and nonviolence.

• For seven years, Great Lakes PeaceJam has partnered with WMU to provide an annual conference where high school and college students learn from a Nobel Peace Prize winner. Six Nobel Peace Prize winners have visited WMU as a result, enriching the lives of students and the Kalamazoo community. WMU is the only university within a four-state region to annually host Nobel Peace Prize winners as part PeaceJam.

• I am grateful to Great Lakes PeaceJam for its partnership with us, and I'm enormously thankful to those who are funding this annual project. They include the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Fetzer Institute, Kalamazoo Community Foundation and the Irving S. Gilmore Foundation.

• The young people with us this weekend will spend two days working with our speaker tonight--someone who turned her sense of justice and compassion into tangible benefits that are helping preserve the health and safety of men, women and children around the world. I can think of no person better suited to inspire the students who will hear her message over the next two days.
• Three years ago, Jody Williams was a guest essayist for the popular National Public Radio Project, "This I Believe." She expressed her core personal philosophy this way.

“I believe that worrying about the problems plaguing our planet without taking steps to confront them is absolutely irrelevant. The only thing that changes this world is taking action.”

I believe that words are easy. I believe that truth is told in the actions we take. And I believe that if enough ordinary people back up our desire for a better world with action, we can, in fact, accomplish absolutely extraordinary things."

• On a very personal level, I'm looking forward to hearing from someone who has accomplished truly extraordinary things. As a citizen and educator, I'm delighted that Jody Williams' message will be shared with young people who will also have the opportunity to lead extraordinary lives.

Thank you for being here and enjoy your evening with us.