

TEXT OF THE INTRODUCTORY ADDRESS delivered by **AN DR. I. Ó MUIRCHEARTAIGH**, Pro-Vice-Chancellor, President, National University of Ireland, Galway on 29th June, 2002 on the occasion of the conferring of the Degree of Doctor of Laws, *honoris causa*, on **WILLIAM M. BULGER**

A Sheansailéir, agus a mhuintir na hOllscoile,

Cuirim ós bhúr gcómhair inniú duine de mhór-fhigiúirí na haoise seo i bpolaitíocht Mhasachusetts i Stáit Aontaithe Mheiriceá. Fear is ea é go bhfuil préamhacha láidre sa tír seo aige, agus fear is é go bhfuil an-chuid bainte amach aige i réimsí polaitiúla agus sóisialta a chomhshaoil féin.

To quote from the American CBS television programme, 60 Minutes, which presented a feature on William Bulger, "In Massachusetts, when they say Mr. President, they don't mean George Bush. They mean William (Billy) Bulger, one of the most successful Irish-American politicians of his generation". Billy Bulger was President of the Massachusetts State Senate from 1978 to 1996, making him the longest-serving holder of that office in the history of the state, and since 1996 he has been President of the University of Massachusetts system — a confederation of five campuses catering for some 55,000 students.

Billy Bulger grew up, and still lives, in South Boston, an area with a deeply Irish ethnic tradition, and indeed one which has strong connections with the West of Ireland, and with Connemara in particular. At the age of 14, Billy Bulger made a fateful decision not to follow most of his friends down the road to South Boston High School, a place where sports was king, and books stayed in lockers overnight. Rather, he took the streetcar across town to Boston College High School, a more academically oriented institution, leading him to a decade of serious study.

On graduation from Boston College High School in 1952, President Bulger enrolled at Boston College. His undergraduate career was interrupted when he joined the United States Army in 1953. He returned to Boston College in 1955, and completed his undergraduate degree in English in 1958. He then entered Boston College Law School, from which he received his Doctor of Jurisprudence degree in 1961.

With his South Boston background, and his commitment to education, Billy Bulger became a street-smart classical scholar, a man who can straddle two vastly different worlds — local politics on the one hand, and the highest level of government and social activity on the other. This dichotomy shows itself in oblique ways, such as when he might be too erudite for his audience. But he is deeply sensitive to this. An example: wishing to use a quotation from Seneca, the Roman philosopher, on one of his campaign posters, he realised that Seneca would not be a household name among his constituents. And so he used the quotation, but attributed it to the Irish poet John Boyle O'Reilly!

He would go on to become one of the pre-eminent politicians of his time, a state representative known — indeed renowned — for his wit and rhetoric, and a Senate President known for hard-nosed leadership. Despite his scholarly background, he had, or developed, an instinct for raw power and the legislative process, that kept him a force at the State House for almost two decades.

He was first elected to the Senate in 1970, representing the First Suffolk District. Prior to serving in the Senate, he served in the House of Representatives from 1961 to 1970. Throughout his legislative career, Billy Bulger played a pivotal role in issues that shaped the physical, cultural and social landscape of Massachusetts.

During the 1960s, he led efforts to write the first child abuse reporting laws in the state, and during the following three decades continued to focus much of his attention on the plight of children. He was one of the architects of groundbreaking education reform law that reduced the funding inequities between rich and poor communities. During the 1980s, he made funding of public libraries top priority (describing books as the bastion of civilisation) and also advocated the expansion of childhood nutrition services and fuel assistance programmes. President Bulger led the Senate through its debate on welfare reform in the early 1990s, often reminding lawmakers that "after we have eaten, we can forget that there is such a thing as hunger".

Billy Bulger has always been deeply distrustful of the media, and of the Boston Globe in particular. At one of the famous St. Patrick's Day breakfasts which he hosts, he recalled receiving a phone call from the editor of the Boston Globe on his first day in office as Senate President. "Looks like a nice day, Mr. President" was the editor's opening remark. "Never mind your trick questions!" was the President's response. To another reporter he is reputed to have said "If you write one good word about me, I'll demand a retraction".

At the same, or some similar St. Patrick's Day breakfast, President Bulger welcomed the Parish Priest of St. Augustine's. In welcoming the pastor, he emphasised, in a remark that will have some resonances here in this country, the importance of that parish in local politics. "You never know the result of the election" he said "until the votes are counted from St. Augustine's Cemetery." Indeed, on another occasion he was heard to say "I want to be buried in St. Augustine's Cemetery, so that I can remain politically active after I am dead!".

His unusual background of scholarship and mean streets has produced a paradoxical politician who defies the ready labels of his trade. He is a doctrinaire conservative on social issues, but a tax-and-spend liberal on anything involving the urban poor. He is a reserved man, who is transformed by a microphone into a stand-up comic. He is an urban populist who champions the arts and education. He is as compassionate with elderly constituents as he was confrontational with State House opponents.

Given his devotion to scholarship and learning, it was a natural progression for Senate President Bulger to be appointed twenty-fourth President of the University of Massachusetts, assuming office in January 1996. Under his leadership, the five-campus University has seen dramatic increases in private support, alumni activity, research funding and in the academic scores of incoming freshmen. Interestingly, in this high-tech era, in a progressive State such as Massachusetts, President Bulger's inaugural address was a defence of the importance of the humanities in education. "The Humanities provide the ennobling grace essential to our lives". And he finished his address with the statement "it is for life — not merely for a living — that we must prepare our students".

On a personal level, Billy Bulger is a family man, who married his first real girl-friend, Mary Foley, in July 1960. Mary's mother, Sarah, came from Carna and it is therefore a particular pleasure for us today to welcome Mary back to her roots, agus fáiltimid freisin roimh muintear Charna agus muintir na Gaeltachta ar fad atá anseo inniú chun gradam duine dá muintir féin a chomóradh. It has been a long journey since Mary's mother, Sarah Foley or Sorcha Ní Chualáin as she would have then been known, left Carna — probably passing

the gates of this University on her way - for an uncertain future in the New World. No doubt she would be very proud today to see her daughter and her daughter's husband being honoured in a University which now has an outreach centre, Aras Shorcha Ní Ghuairim, in her native parish. Bill and Mary have nine children, one of whom, Brendan, a champion Irish fiddler, is with us today. We welcome you all back home.

Is mór an onóir dúinn-ne anseo in Ollscoil na hÉireann gradam a bhronnadh inniú ar fhear ioldánach, ar scoláire den scoth, agus ar pholaiteoir chruthaitheach. William Bulger is an exceptional person, a man devoted to scholarship, an outstanding politician, but above all, a man of the people. Today, we welcome and honour one of our own, President William Bulger.

PRAEHONORABILIS CANCELLARIE, TOTAQUE UNIVERSITAS:

Praesento vobis, hunc meum filium quem scio tam moribus quam doctrina habilem et idoneum esse qui admittatur, honoris causa, ad gradum Doctoratus in utroque Jure, tam Civili quam Canonico, idque tibi fide mea testor ac spondeo totaeque Academiae.