Mr. Speaker, on September 11, the world watched with horror the terrorist attack on the United States. Congress

acted by granting President Bush authority to mount a strong response.

Congress appropriated money to rebuild New York and the Pentagon and

roused popular support for the President as we took each step against terror. Congress and the President jointly

exercised their constitutional responsibilities.

Our efforts required and received the support from the community of responsible nations. The strong backing of

our allies was a reassuring sign that our international partners stood beside

us as we faced this new danger. The President now wants to reposition our efforts from fighting a war on

terrorism to fighting a war against

Saddam Hussein, to reposition our longstanding national policy of containment and deterrence to a policy of

unilateral preemption. Over the last few weeks Members of Congress have

questioned the President on this change of focus. Sadly, some in his

party have said that to question the President is unpatriotic. I disagree. To

question the President sends an unequivocal message to those who would

attack America that our democratic system is alive and well.

Like many of my colleagues, I held a series of town hall meetings in August

across my district. Virtually without dissent I heard New Mexicans express

their strong concerns about a possible war with Iraq. From Gallup to Santa

Fe to Clovis, it was clear that the overwhelming majority were opposed to a

unilateral invasion by the United States. Some told me they believed the

President should involve the Congress

in a decision to go to war. Others were concerned about getting support from

our allies around the world. Others were concerned about the rush. Not

surprisingly, I have continued to hear

from my constituents, and their questions need to be answered.

I am pleased that President Bush has

taken the initial steps to seek the approval of both the Congress and the

U

United Nations before engaging in preemptive strikes on Iraq. I firmly believe that Congress has a vital role to

play and a constitutional responsibility to act on matters of national security. However, I also believe there

are several questions that must be answered before we rush into war.

Was Iraq involved in the September 11 attack on the United States? I have seen no evidence that it was. A tough

and strong war against terrorism in response to September 11 does not reasonably extend to launching a war

against Iraq. Indeed, attacking Iraq may be a distraction from the war

against terrorism, not a continuation.

Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein are natural enemies, not allies. The al Qaeda

terrorist movement is based on the belief that secular regimes in the Arab

world are antithetical to the fundamental teachings of Islam.

Does Iraq pose an immediate and independent threat to the United States and our allies? The President

has identified the key threat from Iraq as its development of weapons of mass

destruction and the potential for Iraq

to transfer these weapons to the terrorist groups it sponsors. I agree with

this concern. However, what weapons of mass destruction does Iraq now have

at its disposal? Does Iraq now have the capability to deliver and use these weapons against the United States?

The answer is we do not know. Without

reinserting the U.N. weapons inspectors, we may never know.

Why do we not allow the inspections process to take place? Why do we not

allow the United Nations to work its will? The first resolution the President

sent to Congress would allow him to

use all means he determines to be appropriate, including force. Giving the

President a blank check to act alone will increase the danger of unilateral

military action by others in the future. It will undermine our broader foreign

policy goals. It will divert much-needed resources from our pressing domestic needs.

The President has submitted a second draft resolution. Although it is an

improvement, I still have serious reservations. While I am confident that

the leadership of both parties can work

together to draft a more balanced resolution, we need more diplomacy, we

need more information, and we need more international allies. I have no

doubt that our military can defeat Saddam Hussein in a war. My doubts lie in

what happens after we remove Saddam from power. Without the backing of the

international community and, most

importantly, the Arab world, the aftermath will be uncertain and precarious.

Other questions must be answered before we vote. How much will the war

cost? How many American soldiers will be seriously wounded or lose their

lives? How many innocent Iraqi civilians will perish?

I am disheartened that we appear to

be following this course. If we take politics out of this decision, our voice will

be stronger. I believe that we should not vote on this before this election.

We should take politics out of it, and I

think if we do that, our message to the world will be clearer. The decision is ours.