Mr. Speaker, ‘‘does this body have the will and resolve to

commit this Nation to a future of

peace, or will we leave for our children an inheritance of uncertainty and

world instability? I do not want to see

our Nation at war, and I pray that this

crisis will be resolved peacefully. But I

cannot in good conscience deny to the President of the United States every

power and tool that he is entitled to in his efforts to resolve this crisis.’’

Mr. Speaker, I spoke these words

right here in this very spot on the floor of the House of Representatives during

my first speech as a Member of this

body. One day later, on January 12, 1991, I cast my first vote, one to give

the President the authority to use the

Armed Forces in removing Saddam Hussein from Kuwait.

As a freshman Member of Congress, I

could not ever have imagined that

more than a decade later this body

again would be faced with the challenge of dealing with Saddam Hussein’s

outlaw regime. But here we are in 2002, and Saddam is once again at the heart of our national security concerns.

The September 11 terrorist attacks

have changed this Nation forever.

Those tragic events increased our appreciation of our vulnerability to terrorist attacks, particularly from weapons of mass destruction. Saddam Hussein has actively developed a deadly biological and chemical weapons program, and he is actively pursuing the

development of nuclear weapons. We

cannot ignore this reality.

What has changed since the last time

I voted to use our Armed Forces

against Iraq has not been a new identification of our enemy, but the reassessment of our national security risk. The

last 11 years have proven that attempting to contain Saddam through an ineffective weapons inspection regime does

not alter his intentions nor force him

to disarm. We must resolve to stand

firm against Hussein’s regime to guarantee security for Americans and the

international community and justice for the Iraqi people.

I commend President Bush for his

consistent consultation with the international community and with the congressional leadership on both sides as

he develops a strategy for confronting

this grave threat. The resolution before

us today is a result of those consultations, and its passage is the United

States government’s opportunity to

speak with one voice in its efforts to

protect American interests at home and abroad.

We cannot expect the United Nations

Security Council to take action to protect not only our interests but the interests of the international community

without sending it a strong signal of our own resolve.

Looking back on the vote that this

House cast to authorize force back in

1991, I can recall how somber my colleagues and I were as we contemplated

the consequences of our actions.

Today, I sense a similar mood in the

House. Whenever Congress votes to authorize the use of the greatest Armed

Forces in the world, it is destined to be

one of the most serious and difficult

votes ever cast by our Members. It is

not a decision we relish, but it is one that we must make.

I pray and hope that the need to use

military force to disarm Hussein’s regime is not imminent. However, I stand

ready to support such an action should

the President deem it necessary.

The famous legislator and philosopher, Sir Edmond Burke from England,

once said, ‘‘All that is needed for evil

to exist is for good men to do nothing.’’

I also recall the words of our great

President Ronald Reagan when he said

‘‘If not now, when? If not us, who?’’

It is time for us to act, it is time to

support our President, and it is time to

tell the rest of the world that the

American people speak with just one voice.