We in Congress must stand behind the

President in granting him the authority to use

military force against Iraq. The only chance to

prevent war is to be prepared to go to war.

We will not rush to war, but we cannot stand

by while Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction

program poses a growing threat to our national security. Over the past few weeks, many

have voiced a number of questions, including

why we must take action at this moment, how

long our armed forces may be in Iraq, and

what the humanitarian, economic, and political

costs of a military response may be. These

are all valid concerns and questions I have

considered. Ultimately, we must decide whether the threats we face merit the risk of American lives.

The consequences of this vote are

serious, and I have not had to make a more

difficult decision in my 20 years in Congress.

I believe that support for this resolution will

send a strong, decisive signal to Saddam Hussein that his continued violation of U.N. Security Resolutions will not be tolerated.

This vote is evidence that the challenges we

face today are unique in the context of our

history. We as a nation, could not have pre-

vented the horrific acts of September 11th and

I witnessed the destruction firsthand, at both

the World Trade Center and at the Pentagon.

Because of the events of September 11th, we

cannot wait to act on a threat to our nation

and to the American people, lest we allow our-

selves to be victims once again. We are faced

with a situation in which the lessons of history

speak clearly of danger, and we face a threat

unlike any other in history. Iraqi President

Saddam Hussein has proven himself to be a

ruthless and unpredictable enemy, and even

the slightest threat posed by his regime is one

that we are unable to ignore without great risk

to our national security. The world has come

to know a long and terrible list of grievances

against Saddam Hussein, including the brutal

repression and torture of his political opponents, the use of chemical weapons against

his own people, and his tireless pursuit of

weapons of mass destruction. It is this record

of brutality and tendency toward violence that

should focus our attention on Iraq. Intelligence

reports from both the United States and Great

Britain highlight Iraq’s relentless drive to

produce chemical, biological, and nuclear

weapons, and there is mounting evidence that

Saddam Hussein is only 1–5 years away from

nuclear weapons capability. Knowing that containment and deterrence are ineffective

against the Iraqi regime, we have no choice.

Knowing that Saddam Hussein has consistently violated United Nations resolutions we

must act. We must act in a timely fashion to

avoid the possibility that Saddam Hussein will

use these weapons or that he would transfer

these weapons to a terrorist organization such

as Al Qaeda, which would not hesitate to use

them against us. We cannot wait to protect

ourselves until it is too late to do so. Now

more than ever we must be proactive to protect Americans, our country, and our way of

life. In 1991, after the United States and United

Nations had demonstrated a willingness to

peacefully resolve the crisis that followed the

Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and after Saddam

Hussein refused to comply with several U.N.

Security Council Resolutions, I cast my vote in

favor of military action against Iraq. I voted for

the resolution then because I believed that my

support would help demonstrate that Congress, the President, and the American people

stand together against Saddam Hussein’s defiance.

Since the Persian Gulf War, Saddam Hussein has repeatedly demonstrated his disdain

for the authority of international law by defying

U.N. Security Council Resolutions that were

designed to ensure that Iraq does not pose a

threat to international peace and security. Inspections and sanctions have both failed in

the past to address the threat posed by Iraq.

We should work toward a viable U.N. Security

Council Resolution and build an international

coalition to support action to dismantle Iraq’s

weapons of mass destruction. If we do take

military action with such broad support, it will

not set a precedent for preemption, but will

boldly state the necessity for any future disputes to be resolved first through diplomatic

channels. I firmly believe that diplomatic efforts should

precede any military action before we commit

our men and women to fight for peace and

justice. At a recent briefing, Secretary of State

Colin Powell assured me that every effort is

being made to reach an agreement on a U.N.

Security Council Resolution, so that if we act,

we will not act alone. Military power must not

be the basis of our strategy, but should be

one of many options we have at our disposal.

It is my hope that we will do all that we can

to avoid armed conflict, but should we engage,

we will do so to promote peace and protect

our national security.

Our unity in this vote will deliver a message

to the international community that we as

Americans share the belief that the threat we

face is real, and that our cause is just. It is my

hope that this vote is the first step toward in-

creased peace and stability in the Middle East

and a more secure future for the United States

and for the world.

I believe that a strong vote in favor of this

resolution will prompt the American people,

the United Nations, and the international community to join in support of action to neutralize

the threat that is posed by Saddam Hussein

and the proliferation of his program of weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Speaker, a few years ago, when my

youngest daughter, Maggie, was only 5 years

old, she was here with my family for the

swearing-in ceremony for Members of the

House. Members were then casting their votes

for our party leadership, and I tried to test her

by asking her if we were Republicans or

Democrats. ‘‘We’re Americans, aren’t we

Dad?’’ was her reply. This is how I believe we,

as Members of Congress, should view this

vote. All of us want the best for the American

people and I hope that partisanship can be put

aside for the moment, as each of us vote our

conscience. We have come together as a nation since September 11th, and we still must

remain unified in the face of any threat to our

nation. I urge a vote in favor of this resolution.