Mr. Speaker, we face today

one of the most important questions that can

ever come before us as Members of Congress:

whether to authorize the use of force,

and commit the men and women of our armed

forces to defend liberty and to protect the

United States, at the possible cost of their

lives—and the lives of many in a country far

from our shores.

It is an issue Americans care deeply about.

I have received hundreds of calls during the

past few weeks, and many of my constituents

are raising similar and very serious concerns.

They are suspicious of the timing of this debate.

They see political overtones to it, and

question whether this vote is being used as

political purposes.

Many are worried about the precedent of a

preemptive and unilateral attack, and how that

precedent might be used by other countries

looking to justify aggressive and hostile acts.

Others have expressed doubts about the

Bush Administration’s handling of foreign policy.

They point to the Administration’s abysmal

record on a series of international efforts, including

the Kyoto Protocol, the Biological

Weapons Convention, and the Anti-Ballistic

Missile Treaty with Russia. The Administration

has created its own credibility problem by consistently

going its own way instead of being

the leader of a world coalition.

Many callers have told me they don’t see

evidence that Saddam Hussein poses a current

threat to the United States. They think terrorism

by Al Qaeda is a greater and more immediate

danger, and that Iraq is a diversion

from our failure to capture Osama bin Laden.

And over and over I’ve been told that war

should be a last resort. Unfortunately, to many

of my constituents, the Administration has created

the perception that war with Iraq is our

first and only resort.

All of those concerns have been on my

mind as I’ve deliberated on this vote. I’ve

spent the good part of these last few weeks

listening to experts from this Administration,

from the Clinton Administration, and from nonpartisan,

independent organizations. I’ve tried

to sort out what we know to be true and what

we just suspect to be true. And I’ve tried to

evaluate our best course when faced with the

uncertain but potentially catastrophic threat

that Saddam poses and the unpredictable horror

a war can bring.

Eleven years ago, in the face of Saddam’s

aggression against Kuwait, I voted reluctantly

to oppose the use of force. I thought then that

more time should be given to diplomacy, and

to the enforcement of sanctions against Iraq.

But once Congress acted, there was no question

of the commitment of all of us to the success

of Desert Storm. The liberation of Kuwait

was effected; our casualties were thankfully

quite small; and stability was, for an extended

period of time, restored to the region.

To be certain, many of us thought, and fervently

hoped, that the crushing military defeat

suffered by Saddam would result in his overthrow.

Other monstrous dictators—such as

Milosevic in Serbia—have crumbled in the

face of far less of an onslaught. It is a mark

of Saddam’s cunning and ruthlessness that he

survived the upheavals in his country that did

unfold after the Gulf War, that he is still in

power, and that he is still able to oppress his

people.

Whether one agrees or disagrees with the

Administration’s policy towards Iraq, I don’t

think there can be any question about

Saddam’s conduct. He has systematically violated,

over the course of the past 11 years,

every significant U.N. resolution that has demanded

that he disarm and destroy his chemical

and biological weapons, and any nuclear

capacity. This he has refused to do. He lies

and cheats; he snubs the mandate and authority

of international weapons inspectors;

and he games the system to keep buying time

against enforcement of the just and legitimate

demands of the United Nations, the Security

Council, the United States and our allies.

Those are simply the facts.

And now, time has run out. It has been four

long years since the last U.N. weapons inspectors

were effectively ejected from Iraq because

of Saddam’s willful noncompliance with

an effective inspection regime.

What Saddam has done in the interim is not

known for certain—but there is every evidence,

from the dossier prepared by the Prime

Minister of Britain, to President Bush’s speech

at the United Nations, that Saddam has rebuilt

substantial chemical and biological weapons

stocks, and that he is determined to obtain the

means necessary to produce nuclear weapons.

He has ballistic missiles, and more are

on order. He traffics with other evil people in

this world, intent on harming the United

States, Israel, other nations in the Middle

East, and our friends across the globe.

We know Saddam quite well. We know he

kills a lot of people, even in his own family.

We know when he gives his word it cannot be

trusted. We know he is a shameless propagandist.

We recall that he held women and

children hostage for a time in Baghdad as

human shields in 1990 to try to deter armed

attack to liberate Kuwait. We know what he

does to his own people in the north and south

of his country and what he did to his neighbors

in Iran and Kuwait.

We also know that Saddam is the patron

saint of the homicide bombers in Israel. He

pays their families when their youth go to kingdom-

come from the streets of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.

And Iraq, under Saddam, is one of

only seven nations designated as a state

sponsor of terrorism because of his aid and

training of terrorists, according to the U.S.

State Department.

Wehter he is tied in with al-Qaeda is still

subject to debate, but they share an intense

hatred for the United States, Israel, and our allies,

and in their willingness to attack civilians

to achieve their purposes.

In a perfect world the Iraqi people would

have been able to seize their destiny and liberate

their country. In a perfect world the U.N.

resolutions calling for Saddam’s disarmament

would have been properly enforced.

But this is not a perfect world, and so today

we struggle with how best to achieve that disarmament.

That is our objective—our debate

today is over the right means to that necessary

end.

Eleven years ago, the United Nations Security

Council approved a resolution calling for

the liberation of Kuwait, and the disarmament

of Saddam. This occurred before we voted in

Congress to authorize the use of force against

Iraq in January 1991.

Eleven years ago, in other words, we in

Congress were voting to endorse the consensus

reached in the United Nations over

what the world should do to repel Saddam’s

aggression in the region and provide the basis

for an Iraq that could not threaten its neighbors

via war or weapons of mass destruction.

Today, the order is reversed and it is the

Congress that is voting first on a resolution of

war. And that is being done in the hope that

it will help force a consensus in the United Nations

so that the world—not just the United

States—can pursue these issues on the

soundest possible basis, with the strongest

degree of support from as many nations as

possible.

This is why we have to get this resolution

right. And this is why I strongly support the

substitute, which emphasizes action by the UN

and the international community. It outlines the

importance of working with a coalition, and before

American lives are placed at risk, exhausting

all other options through diplomacy

and unfettered inspections. We should do all

we can to secure a Security Council endorsement

for an invasion of Iraq, and possibly to

avoid a war by forcing Saddam to abide by

the UN requirements for disarmament.

War must always be a last resort. In my

view, Saddam has nearly brought us to that

point. We have tried containment and sanctions

over the last ten years, and both have

failed. Sanctions hurt the people of Iraq and

Saddam did not care about them. Inspections

have failed because he has frustrated the inspectors

and eventually forced them out of his

country four years ago.

We’ve tried surgical strikes on his facilities

and no fly zones over large parts of his territory.

He has responded by continuing to try to

obtain weapons of mass destruction. He has

turned the humanitarian efforts to allow oil

sales for food into a $2 billion pot of money for

weapons.

In light of all this, if the UN does not act, it

not only leaves Saddam unchecked but it undermines,

perhaps fatally, the purpose of having

or supporting a UN in the first place.

If the UN does not or cannot act, the substitute

does nothing to compromise the ability

of the Congress to authorize the use of force

to protect America’s interests—unilaterally if

necessary—if we believe it necessary at a

later time.

Under the substitute, we sacrifice none of

our sovereignty—none—and maximize every

opportunity for diplomacy and consensus. The

substitute correctly recognizes that should we

reach the point of last resort, that is the time

for Congress to declare war.

For all those reasons, I urge the House of

Representatives to adopt the substitute and

hope it will be the course we follow. It is the

better choice and is the one most of my constituents

and other Americans support.

It is possible, however, that the substitute

will be defeated. The question, then, is whether

to support the Resolution President Bush

has sent us, as modified through negotiations

with Representative RICHARD GEPHARDT, the

House Democratic Leader.

Although I disagree deeply with much of

President Bush’s domestic policies and some

aspects of his foreign policy, I agree with his

conclusion that we cannot leave Saddam to

continue on his present course. No one

doubts that he is trying to build a nuclear device,

and when he does, his potential for

blackmail to dominate the Persian Gulf and

Middle East will be enormous, and our efforts

to deal with him be even more difficult and

perilous. The risks of inaction clearly outweigh

the risks of action.

Despite my misgivings about the President’s

approach, I believe it’s essential that Congress

send the strongest bipartisan signal of unity

possible so the U.N. will act. Some have even

suggested that taking the threat of force out of

the equation might undermine that result.

In a post September 11 world, it is important

we speak with one voice and send one message—

particularly when the lives of our men

and women in the armed forces are at stake.

And it is important that we not send a confused

signal to Iraq, so that there be no doubt

about our resolve.

Mr. Speaker, the goal I want is decisive

U.N. action and the effective disarmament of

Iraq. The substitute achieves that goal and

should be approved. But if it is defeated, I believe

supporting the President’s proposal

brings us closer to realizing that goal than defeating

the Resolution.

For that reason, Mr. Speaker, I will support

the President’s resolution if it is before us.