Mr. Speaker, the United

States is both blessed and burdened with

enormous power. We have a responsibility to

our constituents, to our country, and to the

world, to ensure that the United States wields

this power wisely.

That’s why I rise today in support of an

amendment offered by Representative SPRATT

of South Carolina, which recognizes the threat

posed by Iraq and ensures that Congress

deals with this threat appropriately. This

amendment challenges the United Nations to

live up to its responsibilities by forcing Iraq to

abide by its commitments to the international

community. It places value in multilateral action,

but also recognizes the reality that sometimes

the United States must be prepared to

act alone. This is an amendment that each of

us can support with a clear conscience.

The amendment encourages the President

to continue working with the U.N. to craft a

tough Security Council Resolution that leaves

no room for Saddam Hussein to delay or impede

weapons inspections on his territory,

under the threat of immediate multilateral

force.

Should the U.N. shirk or fail in its duty, Congress

should then consider, in an expedited

fashion, the authorization of force to be used

against Iraq. That way, we will vote with the

full knowledge that all diplomatic efforts have

indeed failed. It is at that time and at that time

alone, that we, as Members of Congress entrusted

with the solemn and terrible duty to

send our young men and women to war,

should be called upon to cast that vote. In

short, Congress should vote to authorize force

when and only when there is no other option.

We are fortunate to have before us the opportunity

to craft a sensible and responsible

policy for the United States, one that reflects,

I believe, the very reasonable view of the majority

of Americans. Americans are not hungry

for war. We do not seek conflict, but neither

do we shrink from our responsibilities. We will

go to war only when we must—but not a moment

before.

But now Congress is faced with a vote on

a resolution that asks us to authorize a war

that may not be necessary at this particular

time. That’s not how Congress has dealt with

issues of war and peace in the past, and

there’s no reason to violate that precedent

now. A premature authorization of force is inconsistent

with the traditions of the Congress

and the character of this nation.

Mr. Speaker, we can and must act to deal

with the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. But

Congress should not grant this authority prematurely,

nor should we seek to do so. The

Spratt amendment treats this matter with the

gravity and circumspection it deserves. I urge

my colleagues to consider carefully the alternatives

before them, to vote yes for the Spratt

amendment, and no on the majority resolution.

The question is on the amendment in

the nature of a substitute offered by

the gentleman from South Carolina

(Mr. SPRATT).