Mr. Speaker, casting a

vote over whether to authorize military

action may be the most difficult

decision a member of Congress is asked

to make. It certainly is for me. No

matter who the opponent or what the

circumstances, the consequences of a

collective ‘‘yes’’ vote likely will be the

loss of life. But failure to act holds the

potential of even more terrible outcomes.

Such a vote presents an excruciating

moral dilemma.

For the past year, our nation has

been engaged in a great civic debate.

How do we protect our nation from

those who would do us harm? How can

we ensure the safety of our children

and grandchildren here and around the

world? Should we take action against

potentially hostile nations? These are

questions without simple answers.

President George W. Bush asked Congress

to grant him the authority to

take military action against Saddam

Hussein and his regime in Iraq as part

of our war on terrorism. No member of

Congress takes such a request lightly.

We may have different views and concerns,

but each of us deals with this

issue very seriously and solemnly.

On such issues, persons are often

characterized as hawks or doves. I am

neither. Instead, I seek to be wise as an

owl. I listened to the concerns voiced

by many of my constituents. I wrote

President Bush informing him of their

concerns and seeking answers to their

questions and mine. I studied Saddam

Hussein and his past actions. I sought

and received extensive briefings from

National Security Adviser Condoleezza

Rice, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld,

the Central Intelligence Agency

and others. And, because of my scientific

background, I also received a

detailed scientific briefing from civilian

officials at the Pentagon about

Saddam Hussein’s weapons capabilities.

This information has convinced me of

several things. Saddam Hussein continues

to have dangerous, warlike ambitions.

He is Hitler-like in his methods

of repression, especially in gassing

his own people. He has thumbed his

nose at the United Nations by evicting

inspectors and using the UN’s ‘‘oil-for-food’’

program to fund weapons rather

than feed his impoverished people.

Saddam Hussein continues, in violation

of the U.N.’s sanctions and the

peace agreement he signed, to develop

and produce chemical and biological

weapons for war and terror. Most troubling,

he continues to develop nuclear

weapons and may be as little as a year

or two away from success. As a nuclear

physicist, I know the destructive force

of nuclear weapons. If a weapon of the

type he is developing was detonated

over Calder Plaza, the blast would devastate

all of Grand Rapids and the near

suburbs, a firestorm would consume

the rest of the suburbs and a lethal

dose of radiation would envelop much

of the downwind area. All told, upwards

of 300,000 people would be killed.

Saddam Hussein’s regime poses a very

real threat to the safety of the United

States, the safety of his own people

and, indeed, the safety of the rest of

the world.

Early in this debate, I thought President

Bush and his advisers were seeking

to strike Iraq preemptively. But I

found they view that as a final alternative,

not a first step. The Bush Administration

continues to work with

the U.N. and our allies to build a coalition

and seek a peaceful end to this situation

through inspections and disarmament.

However, we must grant the

President the power to take action

against Iraq because Hussein will not

acquiesce until he faces a superior

force. We may have to put troops on

Iraq’s border before he will comply, but

I hope, along with many others in Congress

and the Administration, that

military action ultimately will not be

necessary.

I abhor the idea of the U.S. making a

preemptive strike. Our philosophy has

always been to take the first punch before

we act. But when the first punch

can destroy a city and kill hundreds of

thousands of people, we must consider

ways to stop that first punch.

I commend President Bush for his recent

speeches in which he more clearly

stated his intentions and reasons for

requesting this resolution. I also commend

him for working with Congress to

craft a resolution that is not as broad

as his original proposal and meets

many of the concerns raised by Congress

and our constituents. The legislative

process has worked in structuring

the approach and limiting action to

only Iraq.

And so, after many days and weeks of

thoughtful and prayerful consideration,

I’ve decided to support this resolution.

In this case, I’ve concluded not

acting is more dangerous than acting.