Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for yielding me the time.

Mr. Speaker, I must preface my remarks

by reminding my colleagues

that as the representative of the people

of the Virgin Islands, who serve in

some of the highest per capita numbers

in our Armed Forces, I do not get to directly

influence this decision because I

am not allowed to cast a vote on the

resolution we are debating today.

Nevertheless, I rise because it is important

that I speak on behalf of my

constituents on this critical issue

which affects them, as it does all

Americans, despite the fact that neither

do we vote for our Commander-in-Chief.

Mr. Speaker, I come to the floor

today with a heavy heart, preferring

that I could do so having sufficient information

to justify the President’s request

so that I could support it. Instead,

I must come to express my opposition

to H.J. Res. 114 which would, in

effect, preauthorize the use of unlimited

military force against Iraq and invest

this awesome authority in one

person, the President of the United States.

As many of my colleagues before me

have stated, the decision that is ours

by the authority bestowed upon us as

Members of Congress by the writers of

the Constitution, the Founders of this

great country, to send our brave young

men and women to war is the most solemn

and serious choice we are ever called on to make.

I hold to the principle that war

should be a last resort. This resolution

makes it the first resort.

The President is asking for authority

to wage a preemptive strike. I have attended

many briefings, and, to date,

nothing has been forthcoming to justify

such an action at this time. The

case has yet to be made that Iraq poses

an imminent threat to our safety and national security.

In adopting H.J. Res. 114 without

amendment, we would be setting a dangerous

precedent, embarking upon a

course which could allow nations to determine,

without international support,

who among their neighbors pose a

threat to their national security and,

upon that assertion, wage a first strike

offensive attack, plunging the world

once again into the dangerous era of

unilateral preemptive use of force by

nations. We should not be charting such a course.

While most Americans share the

President’s view, as do I, that Saddam

Hussein is a dangerous man and the

world would be better off without his

brand of tyranny, we are gravely concerned

about the repercussions of such

a war if we have to fight it alone. The

American people are concerned that,

absent the endorsement of the U.N. Security

Council, a unilateral first strike

by us would lead to more terror at

home and a wider war in the Middle East.

So, Mr. Speaker, taking heed of the

reluctance and the concerns of my constituents

and the American public at

large, I also join with those who hold

that we must exhaust all diplomatic efforts

and fully utilize all options available

to us through the United Nations

first as proposed in the Lee amendment.

Mr. Speaker, the Spratt-Moran

amendment, which I also support,

which closely mirrors the statement of

principles adopted by the Congressional

Black Caucus, authorizes the

President to use military force pursuant

to a new U.N. Security Council resolution

that mandates the elimination

of weapons of mass destruction and

ballistic missiles. The Spratt-Moran

amendment would also provide that if

the Security Council does not adopt

such a resolution, the President should

seek authorization from Congress to use military force.

This threat of force included in the

Spratt-Moran amendment clearly gives

the Secretary of State and the administration

the clout they need and they

seek to pressure Iraq into full compliance.

Mr. Speaker, I remember one of our

colleagues lamenting the possibility

immediately after September 11 that

the Constitution would be the first casualty

of the war on terrorism. It has

unfortunately been gravely wounded,

but the mortal blow would come should

we forfeit our constitutional authority

to declare war and grant unlimited authority

to the President at any time,

and under whatever circumstances he

sees fit, to take this country into war

and too many of our young people to an untimely death.

To relinquish such an important constitutional

authority sets another dangerous

precedent that could endanger

other provisions of the body of laws

that has guided this Nation so well for over 226 years.

Finally, this yet-to-be-justified war

would not only commit thousands of

lives but would also commit resources

that this country needs to improve and

save the lives of people right here at

home. This proposed war, which again

we have not been convinced we need to

undertake now, will undermine the war

against terrorism, our homeland security

and further threaten the very fabric of our society.

Mr. Speaker, let us not take action

that would undermine the constitutional

authority of the Congress. Vote

no on H.J. Res. 114 and support both

the Lee and Spratt-Moran amendment.