Mr. Speaker, at its heart this debate tonight is not about

Saddam Hussein. That debate is finished.

We know that he is a tyrant and

a thug. The debate tonight is about

what our vision of America in this new

age of new threats should be, and the

one thing we should all agree on is

America is the greatest Nation on

Earth because it has always hued to

certain principles. It has always

matched the might of its Armed Forces

with the force of its principles. It has

never resorted through trial and tumult

and storm to shortcuts even in times of difficulty.

And there are three principles that

we should think about tonight: number

one, it is an American principle that

we engage the international community

in a system of mutual security

and international law; number two, it

is an American principle that countries

do not engage in first strikes absent

international accord or truly imminent

threat; number three, it is an American

principle that the United States

Congress is the group that makes the

declaration of war. And unfortunately,

Mr. Speaker, this resolution violates

every single one of those basic tenets

of American democracy.

They have put some legislative lipstick

on it. They put some nice fuzzy

language around it. But ultimately it

violates this rule: no Congress should

give any President a blank check to

start a unilateral, ill-timed war, to let

him start a war for any reason at any

time with or without any allies. And in

doing so, these principles are violated.

Let me address the first one, the

basic principle that America stands for

international cooperation, and this has

been a bipartisan principle for decades

in this country. Republican and Democratic

Presidents alike have worked

with the international community to

develop international law, international

support systems; and we have

led the Nation in doing so.

We have led the Nation, because a

world where countries can strike one

another without international support,

without a true imminent threat, is a

law of the jungle. This Nation, even in

today’s threat, should lead the world

forward to international law, rather

than backward to the law of the jungle.

This concept is more important after

September 11 than less, and it is more

important because of what the generals

have told us, General Hoar, General

Zinni, General Clark. We need to heed

their advice, because what they have

told us is simple and alarming.

They have told us that if we engage

in a unilateral attack in the Middle

East, it has the capacity of supercharging

Osama bin Laden’s recruitment

efforts. There is no victory in the

destruction of one tyrant while breeding

10,000 terrorists. It is true that a

unilateral attack that inflames the

Middle East has the capacity of reducing

our security rather than increasing

it. This violates an American principle.

Second, we have a principle of honoring

our troops. We do not owe Saddam

Hussein any more time. We do not

owe Saddam Hussein anything. But we

owe the soldiers and sailors and our

sons and our daughters who we would

send into the streets of Baghdad the ultimate

effort to go the last mile to see

if we can resolve the disarmament, and

the total disarmament of weapons of

mass destruction, before war. We owe

our soldiers and sailors to make war

the last option, not the first step.

I got a letter from a mother from

Wenatchee, Washington, this week

making one plea to me that when I

took this vote, to say that she understood

her son could be involved in a

sacrifice at the cause of liberty, but

not until every option is exhausted,

and every option has not been exhausted.

That is why we should pass

the separate resolution, which will call

for the President to go to the United

Nations, get a tough, certain, guaranteed

disarmament effort, and get this job done.

Third, we are a people who keep our

eye on the ball. We have a principle in

this Nation of not becoming distracted,

and we do not know why we should

take our eye off the ball, off the threat

of al Qaeda, which 1 month ago was

listed as a high threat of repeated terrorist

attacks in this Nation, and go

put our precious resources in dealing

with what the CIA yesterday said was a

low threat of terrorist activities. It

does not make sense to the American

people to do that.

So for those purposes and those principles,

international cooperation, honoring

our troops, and keeping our eye

on the ball, Mr. Speaker, we should reject

this resolution and pass the Spratt

amendment. This is the American way.