Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight

with a heavy heart but with determined resolve.

A member of Congress faces no more

important debate than authorizing the President

to use military force.

Just over a year ago, Mr. Speaker, the eyes

of the world were opened to the depths to

which evil men will descend in order to put

fear in the hearts and minds of peace loving people.

In the post-September 11th world, Americans

now understand that there are those who

have no regard for human life, and that they

will kill the innocent in untold numbers to

achieve evil goals.

We now also know that sometimes our Nation

must act to prevent that which may happen

in the future.

Which brings us to Saddam Hussein and

Iraq’s pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

Saddam has a unique brand of state-sponsored

terror that threatens the world like no other.

Unchecked, he pursues chemical, biological,

and nuclear weapons and has demonstrated

the capacity to use them.

Among dictators and despots, his record

stands by itself: he has brutally murdered and

repressed his own people, he has used chemical

weapons against his neighbors and his

countrymen including women and children, he

has launched unprovoked attacks on other nations,

he sponsored an assassination attempt

on former President Bush, he harbors terrorists

including members of Al Qaeda, and he

defies the will of the United Nations and the

international community by refusing to disarm

and continuing to develop every conceivable

weapons of mass destruction known to man.

That is why it is critical that the United

States asserts its unique leadership role in the

international community and put an end to

Saddam’s pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.

Now is the time to work within the United

Nations Security Council to move a tough

Resolution calling for the complete disarmament

of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction

under threat of force by a global coalition.

It must be the policy of the United States to

exhaust all forms of diplomacy within the

United Nations and other appropriate forums

before considering any other course of action

relative to disarming Iraq.

And if that diplomacy fails, then we must act

with the broadest coalition of nations as possible

to force the disarmament of Saddam’s

weapons of mass destruction.

Mr. Speaker, the strategy that Secretary

Powell briefed me on that we are pursuing

with the U.N. Security Council is precisely the

reason why I am such a strong supporter of

the Alternative being offered by John Spratt of

South Carolina.

The Spratt Alternative authorizes the use of

U.S. military force in pursuit of a Security

Council-sanctioned effort to disarm Iraq, by

force if necessary.

That is what Secretary Powell and the Administration

are pushing for within the U.N.

right now and that is what the Congress

should be supporting.

This alternatives makes clear that if the Security

Council fails to take action that Congress

will act immediately to vote on authorizing

the President to use unilateral, if necessary,

force against Iraq to disarm.

We are also considering the underlying resolution

that provides the President with the authority

to use force in accordance with United

Nations Security Council Resolutions and unilaterally.

It is a significantly broader authorization

than the Spratt Alternative. However, changes

have been made including: (1) support for and

prioritization of U.S. diplomatic efforts at the

U.N.; (2) limiting the scope of the authorization

to Iraq only; (3) requiring presidential determinations

to Congress before the president

may use force; (4) and requiring the President

to consult with and report to Congress

throughout this process.

I had hoped that there would have been

more opportunity for the House to improve on

the underlying resolution during the course of

this historic debate.

However, I was deeply encouraged by the

President’s words Monday night when he said,

‘‘Approving this resolution does not mean that

military action is imminent or unavoidable.’’

Likewise, I was deeply encouraged by my

meeting yesterday with Secretary Powell in

which he spelled out in detail our strategy for

action within the U.N. Security Council.

I take both President Bush and Secretary

Powell at their word. In the coming days,

weeks and months, I plan on holding them to

their words.

As a Ranking Member of the House Armed

Services Committee, I’ve seen the bravery of

our men and women in uniform.

In fact, I was able to visit many earlier this

year in Afghanistan and I was struck by their

determination to secure the peace for that nation

thousands of miles from home.

It pains me that more families may be missing

their loved ones soon.

Nevertheless, let there be no doubt that

Saddam Hussein’s unfettered pursuit of weapons

of mass destruction are a real and growing

threat to the United States and the international

community, and that whatever course

others may take—America will defend herself.