Mr. Speaker, decisions involving war

and peace are by far the most difficult

and agonizing as they potentially involve

putting America’s sons and

daughters in harm’s way. That is why I

focused heavily on the Iraq resolution

for weeks, attending every possible

briefing from the CIA, National Security

Council, Joint Chiefs, and the

State Department. I have examined the

classified data made available by our

intelligence officials.

I have also listened to the people of

Minnesota. I realize there are people of

goodwill and good conscience who will

disagree with my conclusion.

My fundamental principles approaching

this resolution are several:

First, the highest responsibility of

the Federal Government is to keep the

American people safe.

Second, the greatest danger to our

national security is terrorists with

weapons of mass destruction.

Third, diplomacy should always be

exhausted and proven unworkable prior

to the use of force.

Fourth, war should always be the last option.

Consistent with these beliefs, my

oath of office, and my conscience, and

based on all of the briefings and classified

data I have seen, I have decided to

vote for this bipartisan resolution for

several reasons.

First, Saddam Hussein’s weapons of

mass destruction and links to terrorists

pose a clear and present danger to

our national security.

Second, this resolution is the last

best chance for a peaceful outcome

with Iraq, because diplomacy not

backed by the threat of force will not

work with Saddam Hussein.

Third, this resolution puts maximum

pressure on the United Nations to enforce

its own resolutions and on Saddam

Hussein to comply.

Fourth, this resolution requires the

President to exhaust all possible diplomatic

efforts and certify that diplomacy

is unworkable prior to the use of force.

I am hopeful that diplomacy backed

by the threat of force will work to get

the United Nations weapons inspectors

back into Iraq to disarm Saddam Hussein’s

weapons of mass destruction. As

history has taught us, diplomacy without

the threat of force does not work with dictators.

Since September 11, the world has

changed. Protecting our national security

now means preventing terrorists

from getting weapons of mass destruction.

Our highest duty is to assure that

no weapons of mass destruction are

used to harm the people of the United States.

The overwhelming evidence is that

Iraq continues to possess and develop a

significant chemical and biological

weapons capability and is actively developing

a nuclear weapons capability.

Moreover, declassified intelligence reports

document ties between al Qaeda

and the Iraqi government, including

the presence of senior members of al

Qaeda in Baghdad. We also know from

high-ranking terrorist prisoners at

Guantanamo Bay that Iraq has provided

training to al Qaeda in developing

chemical and biological weapons.

In conclusion, I believe the gentleman

from Missouri (Mr. GEPHARDT)

summed it up best when he said, ‘‘Iraq

presents a problem after September 11

that it did not before, and we should

deal with it diplomatically if we can,

militarily if we must. And I think this

resolution does that.’’

Like the gentleman from Missouri

(Mr. GEPHARDT), I believe this resolution

will strengthen our diplomatic efforts

to disarm Saddam Hussein and

enhance the prospect of a peaceful outcome.

I ask all Members to vote their conscience,

as I will in supporting this resolution.