Mr. Speaker, today’s

press reveals that the Bush administration

has decided that they can find no

linkage between Saddam Hussein and

al Qaeda, despite some of the offhand

remarks of Secretary Rumsfeld and

Vice President CHENEY to the contrary.

The intelligence agencies, turning all

of their resources to this, cannot find

existing links.

So that means that the President and

his administration will have to make

the case against Saddam Hussein to

this Congress because the authorization

passed by this Congress last fall

was for the President to respond to

those who were involved in the attacks

and those who harbored or sponsored

such attacks. That means a straight-up

debate on the floor of the House of Representatives,

hopefully a free and fair

debate, over the wisdom of the first-

ever preemptive war by the United

States of America against Iraq.

I believe that the burden the administration

has to prove that the United

States should break from all precedents

in more than 200 years of history,

should break from all precedents set

lawfully under the United Nations conventions

since the end of World War II

and actually launch a preemptive war,

is an extraordinary burden. They have

to prove a very real, credible threat by

the Saddam Hussein regime.

Now Saddam Hussein is a despicable

individual. He has murdered tens of

thousands, and all effective opposition.

He has murdered people ethnically, religiously.

He has used weapons of mass

destruction. He has an absolutely horrible

record, and obviously we would

not trust this gentleman one inch.

But the question in this case becomes

what is different today than a year ago

or 2 years ago in terms of Saddam Hussein.

It seems, when asked honestly

and privately, the generals and admirals

at the Pentagon feel containment

is working, that he did not pose a credible

and immediate threat to the

United States of America or its allies

in that region.

So the question becomes then if he is

credibly threatened with a preemptive

war, would he become more of a

threat? Then there is the issue of our

allies. Would any allies support the

United States in this endeavor? Then

there are the questions from 10 years

ago, the same questions that President

Bush’s father had to confront, and

Colin Powell as chairman of the joint

chiefs, which is what if they went to

Baghdad and took out Hussein, what

then? They were confronted with a

long and problematic occupation of

Iraq and further destabilization in the

region. And even with all the allies, including

Arab nations at the time, they

felt it was not worth the risk of doing

that.

Well, the same question needs to be

asked today. In fact, I witnessed on

‘‘Face the Nation,’’ where one Republican

Senator said, ‘‘Well, we don’t

need any allies. We will just go and do

this. We will take them out.’’ And then

he said, ‘‘We will rule Iraq.’’

I do not know who he has been talking

to or what he is thinking, but the

United States being involved intimately

in that region and trying to

rule a country, a very large country, in

an extraordinarily volatile area, is a

recipe for disaster. So they need not

only a credible plan for what if and

how and why; but they need to explain

that, both to Congress, some of it can

be confidentially, but, for the most

part, these should be things that could

be laid out.

Prime Minister Chretien said yesterday

that the President had nothing

new to say. It was just the same rhetorical

sort of ‘‘we have got to remove

him sooner or later,’’ the same thing

we have been hearing from Ms. Rice

and other advisers to the President.

So I have sent a letter to the President,

signed by 17 other Members of

Congress, which lays out a series of

about 20 questions that I believe are

critical that this administration address

before they would undertake to

ask even for authorization for a preemptive

war, the first ever in our history;

and I am hopeful that the administration

will in good faith answer

those questions. Most of them are questions

that could be answered in public,

could be given to the American people,

and could, if they answer them I believe

convincingly, as they have not

thus far, lead to some sort of authorization

from the United States Congress.

But we cannot just sort of have this

shadow boxing and discussion in private.

This is an extraordinary issue, a

constitutional issue, an issue that

breaks with all precedent of this country;

something that needs to be fully,

freely, and fairly debated before the

American people before we commit our

sons and daughters to lengthy involvement

in a war against Iraq and a subsequent

occupation and rebuilding of

that country. We are not doing such a

great job of stabilizing and rebuilding

Afghanistan. One has to question what

we would do with a much larger nation

in a much more volatile region of the

world.