Mr. Speaker,

I rise today to plead for peace. Every

day our great Nation moves ever closer

to war with Iraq. I know many Americans

believe war is unavoidable. I hope

and pray that they are wrong.

It is not an easy thing to disagree

with the administration at a time

when hundreds of thousands of our

brave men and women are poised in the

Persian Gulf. I want to make it clear

that I will support our troops regardless

of what happens, but I cannot, in

good conscience, betray the nonviolent

principles on which I have worked my

whole life. I cannot sit silent when I

believe there is still time to use diplomacy

and let the inspectors do their

job.

While I believe that the hour is late,

it is not too late to stop the rush to

war. It is not too late to embrace

peace. War with Iraq will not bring

peace to the Middle East. It will not

make the world a safer or better or

more loving place. It will not end the

strife and hatred that breed terror.

War does not end strife. It sows it.

War does not end hatred. It feeds it.

War is bloody. It is vicious, it is evil,

and it is messy. War destroys the

dreams, the hopes, and aspirations of

people. I believe, Mr. Speaker, that war

is obsolete.

As a great Nation and a blessed people,

we must heed the words of the spiritual:

‘‘I am going to lay my burden

down, down by the riverside. I ain’t

gonna study war no more.’’ For those

who argue that war is a necessary evil,

I say you are half right. War is evil.

But it is not necessary. War cannot be

a necessary evil, because nonviolence

is a necessary good. The two cannot coexist.

As Americans, as human beings,

as citizens of the world, as moral actors,

we must embrace the good and reject

the evil. To quote Ghandi: ‘‘The

choice is nonviolence or nonexistence.’’

America’s strength is not in its military

might, but in our ideas. American

ingenuity, freedom, and democracy

have conquered the world. It is a battle

we did not win with guns or tanks or

missiles but with ideas, principles, and

justice. We must choose our resources,

Mr. Speaker, not to make bombs and

guns but to solve the problems that affect

all humankind. We must feed the

stomach, clothe naked bodies, educate

and stimulate the mind. We must use

our resources to build and not to tear

down, to reconcile and not to divide, to

love and not to hate, to heal and not to

kill. Let us, in Reverend Dr. Martin

Luther King Jr.’s words, ‘‘take offensive

action in behalf of justice to remove

the conditions which breed resentment,

terror and violence against

our great Nation.’’ That is a direction

in which a great Nation and a proud

people should move.

War is easy; but peace, peace is hard.

When we hurt, when we fear, when we

feel vulnerable or hopeless, it is easy to

listen to what is most base within us.

It is easy to divide the world into us

and them, to fear them, to hate them,

to fight them, to kill them. War is

easy.

But peace is hard. Peace is right, it is

just, and it is true. But it is not easy to

love thy enemy. No, peace is hard. As

my friend and mentor, Dr. King, said

when he spoke about the Vietnam War:

‘‘War is not the answer. Let us not join

those who shout war. These are days

which demand wise restraint and calm

reasonableness.’’ He was right then and

the wisdom of those words holds true

today. War was not the answer then,

and it is not the answer today. War is

never the answer. It is not too late to

stop our rush to war. Let us give peace

a chance.