Madam Speaker, the American people

understand separation. They understand the tragedy, the human tragedy,

of moving families, women and children, and the elderly away from their

homes.

One of the things that American people are good at is coming to the

aid of those who cannot help themselves. The tragedy in Kosovo over the

last weeks and months has developed into an enormous tragedy, like the

13-year-old girl

who was moved from her home, started out with her family, came to a

fork in the road, and her father and brother went in one direction and

she and her mother went another. They came to an encampment or a camp

area and she was separated from her mother.

The American people understand that a sustained air strike is

imperative if we are to relieve the pain of separation and the crisis

that is going on in the former Yugoslavia. This weekend I spent time

with my constituents, many of whom expressed extreme concern about this

crisis, questioning, of course, what we should do, but being supportive

of the idea that Americans had to do something, as we failed to do in

Rwanda and Burundi. I think now we are aware that ethnic cleansing, the

murder of innocent civilians, has to stop and cannot be tolerated by

the world family.

This weekend I joined the clerical community of my city and and

prayed for peace. In fact, we have made this week in Houston a week of

prayer, and we have asked for the respective institutions of religious

concerns to offer up prayers or callings for peace. We did that this

weekend, and I enjoyed and welcomed the opportunity to worship at the

Wheeler Avenue Baptist Church this past Sunday, along with members of

the Muslim community and other faiths, in calling upon and praying for

peace.

I believe that as we sustain these air strikes, we should still be

calling for return to the peace table. Although we must stand firm in

what we require of Mr. Milosevic, and that is, of course, to allow the

refugees to return to their homes, to remove the Serbian troops from

that area, and to allow for peacekeeping troops to go into that area,

we, part of the NATO allies, must not silence our voices from asking

for return to the peace tables.

Seven hundred thousand have been removed from Kosovo. We now hear

tell of the possibility of enormous atrocities, the killing of very

many. But I believe that it is extremely important that we do not give

up on the sustained air strikes, that we stay focused and unified; that

the American people must be educated and informed about how we need to

proceed.

Nothing should be excluded or precluded, but we certainly should not

move precipitously into the use of ground troops. We have to recognize

the importance of bringing along a unified position against Mr.

Milosevic. And certainly we must continue to press for the release of

the POWs, three young men who should not have been taken in the first

place, who were part of a U.N. peacekeeping operation, who have been

taken inappropriately and wrongly by the Serbians.

I would simply say that the American people can rise to the occasion.

They have always come to the aid of those in need. This conflict is a

serious conflict, and any determination on using ground troops should

be one that is done with the support and cooperation of the American

people. NATO must remain unified.

I would ask that our NATO allies would engage all of us in the

ultimate decisions that are made, and that we, as part of the NATO ally

operations, be unified in our discussions so that there is not

division, but there is unification and unity.

Most of all, I say, we must protect the children and families. We

cannot afford to have the elderly march miles and miles and miles,

tormented by being removed from their homes and getting finally to the

border and dropping dead, which has happened to many of those refugees

who have been sent from their homes. We cannot have the fathers and

husbands and brothers being killed randomly, such that they are not

even having a decent burial.

America is doing the right thing in joining with its allies in this

sustained air strike, and we must stand united together as we move to

make determinations, Madam Speaker, that will help bring peace to that

region.

But I do say and call upon the national organizations of religion to

call for a week of prayer, and also to call for a return to the peace

talks so we can have peace in the Balkans.

Madam Speaker, I rise to address the ongoing situation in Kosovo.

After 20 days of an intensive air war on Yugoslavia, I am pleased that

the campaign is beginning to see results.

In its 20th day, the air war has produced results. Serb troops are

beginning to feel the weight of the NATO air strikes. The air war has

been successful in hitting both command and control structures and

inflicting damage on Serb troops in the field. I feel that this body

must stay the course and make Milosevic capitulate the NATO's terms. We

must ensure that Milosevic pays a heavy price for his present policy of

repression against the Kosovar Albanians, to alter his calculation

about continuing on this course; and seriously, diminish his military

capacity to exert his will over Kosovo.

This House has sent an invaluable message to Milosevic that

aggression does not pay. In using air power we signal our willingness

to establish a lasting peace in the region.

Many in this House were critical of the President when he sent our

troops to Bosnia for peacekeeping operations. But today I feel that

this was one of the best votes I ever made. Bosnia today is a nation on

the way to recovery. Its people both Muslim and Christian live in peace

and security and this is in thanks in no small part to the men and

women of our armed forces. It takes courage to make tough decisions and

stand by one's convictions. We as a nation must be willing to stand

against oppression and horrible atrocities being committed in the

Balkans.

If this House fails to stay the course it would be interpreted as a

vote of no confidence for our foreign policy in the Balkans. It would

send confusing signals about our national resolve to persevere to

friend and foe alike.

The conflict in Kosovo has caused great human suffering and if left

unchecked this conflict threatens the peace and stability of Europe.

Already there is evidence of massive graves in Kosovo and I fear that

they contain many of the missing ethnic Albanian men.

Tension in this ethnic Albanian region has been increasing since the

government of Yugoslavia removed Kosovo's autonomous status. Belgrade's

decision came without the approval of the people of Kosovo, which has a

population consisting of 90% ethnic Albanians. Several human rights

groups report of Serbian forces conducting abductions and summary

executions. These reprisal killings and the continued human rights

violations confirm many of our fears.

The United States and its allies have taken concrete steps to ensure

that this continued violence in the Kosovo region does not spread to

Albania, Macedonia, Greece, and Turkey. We must continue the sustained

airstrikes to protect the people of Kosovo from this siege of terror by

Milosevic.

Madam Speaker, I urge my colleagues to stay the course in our effort

to provide a peaceful multi-ethnic democratic Kosovo in which all its

people live in security.