Mr. Speaker, last November, I asked Iowans to remember

the victims of Hurricane Mitch \* \* \* and in America's generosity, we

responded with private and public philanthropy. I voted for federal

assistance not only for humanitarian reasons, but also because it is in

our own country's interest that the economics of our trading partners

to the South be salvaged.

Sharing our nation's treasure is a long tradition of United States

humanitarianism. Perhaps the best example was the Marshall Plan to

rebuild Europe after World War II and there are countless others.

We are now facing a man-made disaster with hundreds of thousands of

homeless in the Balkans. Our country is partially responsible for these

refugees, because without President Clinton's go ahead, there never

would have been NATO military action. We should give strong financial

support to Albania and Macedonia to help them clothe, feed and shelter

the displaced Kosovars.

However, there is a big difference between providing humanitarian

financial assistance to homeless victims whether in Guatemala or

Albania and spending the blood of our sons and daughters in a ground

war in the Balkans. One of the lessons we should have learned in

Vietnam is that the public will tolerate loss of life and limb only

when it is convinced that its vital national interest is at stake.

While the American public is rightly concerned about the human rights

violations in Kosovo, few believe that our own country's interests are

at risk.

Vietnam also taught us that military might is only one factor in

determining the outcome. We were much stronger militarily than the Viet

Cong, but they were much more committed. It was their country. We have

an analogous situation in Kosovo, a province of Yugoslavia, which the

Serbs consider the birthplace of their nation.

We are hearing arguments that the credibility of NATO is at stake.

For those of us who remember the Vietnam era only too clearly, these

were the same arguments that got us deeper into a Southeast Asia war.

The lesson we should have learned then was: Unless you are willing to

wade in a swampy pit, don't dig your hole deeper. The consequences of

failing to carry through later will be much worse than not getting more

deeply involved now.

So where do we go from here? First, Congress ought to assert its

Constitutional duty. The Framers assigned the power to enter wars to

Congress only, not the President. Congress should step up to the bar

and not let the President take the risks of war and then either cheer

or castigate depending on the outcome.

I support Congressman Tom Campbell's attempt to get Congress to vote

on a declaration of war. I will vote ``No,'' since our country has not

been attacked by Yugoslavia nor do we have such an overriding national

interest to justify going to war over their own civil war.

If Congress votes for war, then we will have upped the ante a

thousand fold. If Congress votes no, then I would support taking this

to the courts in order to get a cease and desist order on the

executive.

But what about Kosovo itself? Milosevic is indicating that he would

now accept non-NATO international observers in Kosovo. We should

suspend bombing, institute a full UN-sponsored economic boycott, and

resume negotiations. Probably the best that can be achieved is a

partition of Kosovo with the Serbs and their religious and historical

sites on one side and the Albanian Kosovars on the other. A UN

peacekeeping presence will be necessary for generations.

One thing, though, is clear to me. I just completed town hall

meetings in every county in my district. Iowans are very skeptical

about our military involvement in that part of the world. Of the nearly

one thousand people who attended, only a handful were for placing U.S.

ground troops in Kosovo under any circumstances.

Humanitarian aid, yes. U.S. ground forces, no.