Mr. Speaker, on October 10, 2002, this

Congress voted to give the President of the United States broad powers

to engage in a unilateral first strike war against Iraq without a

clearly demonstrated and imminent threat of attack on the United

States.

Our oath of office as Members of Congress, our constitutional charge,

the mandate laid upon us by the people, does not permit us to delegate

the responsibility of engaging the awesome military power of the United

States.

Our oath of office does not permit us to delegate our

responsibilities in placing our fighting men and women in the field of

battle, and I commend each and every one of them for the sacrifices

they are making for freedom-loving people throughout the world.

Our Constitution places the power to declare war squarely and solely

in the Congress. This issue rises far above partisan politics.

President Lincoln put our congressional responsibility this way, when

he said: ``We cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this

administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal

significance or insignificance can spare one or another of us. The

fiery trial through which we pass will light us down in honor or

dishonor to the last generation.''

I opposed that initial resolution, and I would later oppose because

after all of the information I have seen, and after all I have heard,

neither I nor a majority of the residents of my district, the 7th

Congressional District of Illinois, are convinced that the war is our

only, our best or was our most immediate option.

I was not convinced, and I am still not convinced, that the

resolution would properly guide us to act cooperatively and legally

through the United Nations with the agreement and the involvement of

the international community. In fact, it led us to pursue risky,

unilateral actions in defiance of international law and the United

Nations Charter.

As the American people are attempting to make sense of this complex

situation, it is the duty of Congress to ask some hard questions.

What are we accomplishing by keeping our troops in immediate danger

in Iraq? In my judgment, the answer is not much.

In my judgment, commitment to the peaceful solution of problems and

conflict is an important part of what our democracy should stand for,

and that does not necessitate or demand continuous military presence in

Iraq.

I am a member of the Out of Iraq Caucus, and we need to prepare for

an honorable way out. It is my profound hope that as we press forward,

we will press forward towards the mark of a high calling; that we will

take the high road; that we will take the road that leads to peace and

not to war, the road to peace based on mutual security and

international cooperation.

Let us walk the road to peace knowing that it is also the road to the

rights we have defined in the United Nations Charter for all humankind.

Let us walk the road to peace not because it is the easiest road or the

smoothest road or the shortest road, but knowing that it is the right

road for the American people.

Sometimes in the pursuit of noble and inescapable goals it takes more

courage and more vision not to fight or to fight in a different way. We

can fight by arming, training, and equipping the Iraqi military and

civilian police forces to provide security and protection for the Iraqi

people in their country. We can fight by providing clean water, food,

and medicine to the Iraqis.

This is one of those times when we must take the road that leads to

peace and not down the path to continuous destruction. Let us have the

courage and the vision to find a permanent peace and security, to

remove the presence of terrorism and not just drive it underground.

Surely, if America has a destiny, it is a responsibility to lead the

world to such peace.

This is a time of testing for all of us. Let us not fail this great

test. Let us pursue peace, and not war.