Mr. President, as I go

out among my constituents, the one

question I always get asked in these

present times is: Are we going to go to

war with Iraq?

For a while my answer was, that is

up to Saddam Hussein. It depends on

how he acts and what he does, as to

whether or not we are going to go to

war with Iraq.

But what he does now is fairly clear.

The position he has taken is fairly

clear. He made the comment to an

Egyptian journalist, that has been repeated

now around the world:

Time is working for us.

He has made it clear that he is not

going to change. There will be no disarmament

of Iraq from within. There will

be no genuine cooperation with the inspectors.

So I think my earlier answer

probably is no longer correct. The decision

now lies with President Bush: Will

we go to war or won’t we?

In that circumstance, the President

is being bombarded on all sides with

editorial comment and punditry, with

firm, solid recommendations, yes and

no, depending on the ideological status

of the particular pundit. They can

make those firm recommendations

from the safe, secure position of knowing

that they will not have to be acted

upon and that they will not be held accountable

if their recommendation is

followed and the result is not successful.

The President faces what is clearly

the most agonizing and difficult decision

of his Presidency. I pray for him

and urge other Americans to pray for

him as he makes this decision.

I want to lay down what I see as the

challenge here. I do not think it is an

easy question. I do not think it is

clear, one way or the other. The truly

Presidential decisions never are. If the

decisions were easy, they would be

made before they got to the level of the

President. If the action was clear,

smart people at lower levels of Government

would take it. It is only when the

decision is agonizingly close and the

options not clear on either side that it

ends up ultimately on the President’s

desk in the Oval Office and becomes his

decision and his decision alone.

This is what I see. Saddam Hussein is

going through the motions of cooperating

with the inspectors, and there

are those who say: Let that process

play out. We have him contained. As

long as there are inspectors in the

country, there will not be any effort to

use weapons of mass destruction. Let’s

just let that play out.

Then there are those who say: He has

violated the resolution of the United

Nations. The legal position is absolutely

clear. If the United Nations and

the United States are going to be taken

seriously around the world, we must

now take military action and we cannot

wait any longer.

I am sure those legal arguments with

respect to Resolution 1441 in the

United Nations are valid. I don’t argue

with them. But they don’t change the

practicality of the situation, that an

attack on Iraq—even if it is justified

under the legality of the United Nations

resolution—might still prove to

be a mistake. The solidity of the legal

position with respect to Resolution

1441 is a legitimate question for Colin

Powell to raise with his fellow diplomats,

but it does not ease the agony

of the necessity of making the final decision

in the Oval Office.

I believe that Saddam Hussein is cooperating

with the investigators for

one reason and one reason only; that is

that American troops are massing on

the border. He knows American military

power is sufficient, if unleashed,

to bring his regime down and probably

end his life. He is taking every step he

can to try prevent that.

Those who say let this play out,

leave the status quo and let it go forward,

don’t appreciate the difficulty of

America keeping those troops on line,

keeping those troops on the border,

keeping those airplanes on alert so

that he will continue to try to satisfy

the inspectors. We cannot continue to

do that for an extended period of time.

It is not fair. It is not possible, given

the lives and other challenges faced by

these young people. At some point and

at some point relatively soon, the

President is going to have to make a

decision to either move in or stand

down. And the ultimate question here

is not what is the legality of U.N. Resolution

1441 or what is the relevance of

the United Nations in the world community.

The ultimate question here is,

What will be the result if he moves forward,

and what will be the result if he

stands down, he, in this case, of course,

being President Bush.

We have heard a lot of talk. That is

not the right term. That implies something

less than seriousness. We have

heard a lot of analysis about what

could happen if he moves forward.

Some of the scenarios are very encouraging;

some are frightening. We don’t

know in advance which ones would

come true. We have had less analysis

placed on the question of what would

happen if the President orders the

troops to stand down and start to come

home. We do have some historic precedent

for this. I remember going to the

room in the Capitol on the fourth floor

and hearing Madeleine Albright describe

the situation in Iraq, in terms

eerily familiar to the terms we are currently

hearing from Secretary Powell.

I remember walking out of that briefing

in room 407 and saying to myself:

We will be at war with Iraq within 3

days.

Then President Clinton made the decision

that we would stand down.

American troops were not at the forward

edge they are now, so that decision

was not as difficult in terms of the

logistics, as it would be for President

Bush now. But at the same time, the

progress being made then was not as

good as it is now. President Clinton,

for whatever reasons—good, bad, or indifferent—

decided to stand down and

the result has not been one with which

the world is pleased.

Now, if we stand down, the result ultimately,

in my opinion, would be more

devastating for world peace, long term,

than if we move forward.

I know how agonizing that decision

must be for the President. I will look

forward to listening to him discuss it

with us tonight. I hope he will outline

for us what would be the consequences

if we stand down, in terms of American

credibility—credibility that is not just

saving face in some kind of psychological

way, credibility that is essential

to keeping the peace in the world.

What would happen to those countries

that are urging, hoping, praying for

Saddam Hussein to be gone, if they

said the Americans got this far, they

came this close, and then they turned

around and left? That means we cannot

depend on the Americans ever again.

We can’t trust their word ever again.

What would be the consequences of

that? I think they would be serious.

I remember a couplet I learned as a

child. I never quite understood what it

meant until someone in my later years

explained the historic context. It is

just a child’s rhyme, but it was based

on a historic event. It said:

The King of France went up the hill

With twenty thousand men;

The King of France came down the hill,

And ne’er went up again.

There was even a tune that went to

it. I will not duplicate Senator

D’Amato and sing on the Senate floor.

But that is where we are.

The King of France went up the hill

With twenty thousand men;

The king of France came down the hill,

And ne’er went up again.

The United States of America, acting

on a 15-to-nothing resolution out of the

Security Council of the United Nations,

as well as an overwhelming vote

in this Chamber and in the other body,

has marched up the hill and told Saddam

Hussein he must disarm. Now

there are those who say because he has

stopped producing these weapons, as

long as these troops are at his border

we can afford to turn around and

march down again.

It is, as I said, an agonizing decision.

It will be made by the President of the

United States. He will not ask my advice,

for I have no expertise in these

matters. But my constituents do ask

me about it because I represent them

in this body.

I think having marched up the hill,

having taken the United Nations Resolution

1441 at its face value, and having

stood the troops there, that has produced

the results we have had so far.

We cannot now back down.

I wish the President well. As I said,

he is in my prayers, and I hope that of

all Americans, as he makes this most

momentous decision. The consequence

is: What happens if we do? And what

happens if we do not?

I wish the President well as he makes

that analysis. I have confidence in this

President and his instincts that he

will, in fact, ultimately make the correct

decision.