Mr. President, I have

enjoyed this colloquy and would yield

further, but I know there are other

Senators awaiting their turn to speak.

On September 26, I spoke at length in

this Chamber about the important

issue before us. I voiced my concerns

and the concerns of a great many

Vermonters—in fact, a great many

Americans from whom I have heard. I

spoke about the President’s plan to

send Americans into battle to overthrow

Saddam Hussein.

Many Senators have also expressed

their views on this difficult decision.

As I prepared to speak 2 weeks ago, I

listened to Senator BINGAMAN urge the

administration to seriously consider a

proposal for ‘‘coerced inspections.’’

After I finished speaking, Senator

JOHNSON voiced his support for providing

the President with the broad authority

he seeks to use military force

against Iraq.

The opportunity and responsibility

to have this debate is one of the cornerstones

on which this institution,

and indeed this country is built. Some

have suggested that expressing misgivings

or asking questions about the

President’s plan to attack Iraq is somehow

unpatriotic. Others have tried to

make it an election year issue on

bumper stickers or in TV advertisements.

These attempts are misguided. They

are beneath the people who make these

attempts and they are beneath the

issue. This is an issue of war. An issue

of war should be openly debated. That

is a great freedom of this Nation. We

fought a revolution to have such debates.

As I and others have said over and

over, declaring war is the single most

important responsibility given to Congress.

Unfortunately, at times like

this, it is a responsibility Congress has

often shirked. Too often, Congress has

abdicated its responsibility and deferred

to the executive branch on such

matters. It should not. It should pause

and read the Constitution.

In the Senate, we have a duty to the

Constitution, to our consciences, and

to the American people, especially our

men and women in uniform, to ask

questions, to discuss the benefits, the

risks, the costs, to have a thorough debate

and then vote to declare war or

not. This body, the Senate, is supposed

to be the conscience of the Nation. We

should fulfill this great responsibility.

In my 28 years in the Senate, I can

think of many instances when we

asked questions and took the time to

study the facts. It led to significant

improvements in what we have done

here.

I can also remember times when Senators

in both parties wished they had

taken more time to carefully consider

the issues before them, to ask the hard

questions, or make changes to the legislation,

despite the sometimes overwhelming

public pressure to pass the

first bill that came along.

I know following the Constitution is

not always politically expedient or

popular. The Constitution was not designed

to be politically expedient, but

following the Constitution is the right

course to take. It is what we are sworn

to do, and there is no question that

having this debate, which really began

some months ago, has helped move the

administration in the right direction.

Today, we are considering a resolution

offered by Senator LIEBERMAN to

authorize the use of force. Article I of

the Constitution gives the Congress the

sole power to declare war. But instead

of exercising this responsibility and

voting up or down on a declaration of

war, what have we done? We have chosen

to delegate this authority and this

burden to the executive branch.

This resolution, like others before it,

does not declare anything. It tells the

President: Why don’t you decide; we

are not going to.

This resolution, when you get

through the pages of whereas clauses,

is nothing more than a blank check.

The President can decide when to use

military force, how to use it, and for

how long. This Vermonter does not

sign blank checks.

Mr. President, I suppose this resolution

is something of an improvement.

Back in August the President’s advisors

insisted that there was not even

any need for authorization from Congress

to go to war. They said past resolutions

sufficed.

Others in the administration argued

that the United States should attack

Iraq preemptively and unilaterally,

without bothering to seek the support

of the United Nations, even though it

is Iraq’s violations of U.N. resolutions

which is used to justify military action.

Eventually, the President listened to

those who urged him to change course

and he went to the United Nations. He

has since come to the Congress. I commended

President Bush for doing that.

I fully support the efforts of Secretary

Powell to negotiate a strong,

new Security Council resolution for the

return of weapons inspectors to Iraq,

backed up with force, if necessary, to

overcome Iraqi resistance.

Two weeks ago, when the President

sent Congress his proposed resolution

authorizing the use of force, I said that

I hoped his proposal was the beginning

of a consultative, bipartisan process to

produce a sensible resolution to be

acted on at the appropriate time.

I also said that I could envision circumstances

which would cause me to

support sending U.S. Armed Forces to

Iraq. But I also made it clear that I

could never support the kind of blank

check resolution that the President

proposed. I was not elected to do that.

I commend Senator DASCHLE, Senator

HAGEL, and others who tried hard

to work with the administration to

craft a bipartisan resolution that we

could all support.

But while the resolution that we are

considering today is an improvement

from the version that the President

first sent to Congress, it is fundamentally

the same. It is still a blank

check. I will vote against this resolution

for all the reasons I have stated

before and the reasons I will explain in

detail now.

Mr. President, there is no dispute

that Saddam Hussein is a menace to

his people and to Iraq’s neighbors. He

is a tyrant and the world would be far

better without him.

Saddam Hussein has also made no secret

of his hatred of the United States,

and should he acquire a nuclear weapon

and the means to deliver it, he would

pose a grave threat to the lives of all

Americans, as well as to our closest allies.

The question is not whether Saddam

Hussein should be disarmed; it is how

imminent is this threat and how should

we deal with it?

Do we go it alone, as some in the administration

are eager to do because

they see Iraq as their first opportunity

to apply the President’s strategy of

preemptive military force?

Do we do that, potentially jeopardizing

the support of those nations we

need to combat terrorism and further

antagonizing Muslim populations who

already deeply resent our policies in

the Middle East?

Or, do we work with other nations to

disarm Saddam, using force if other options

fail?

The resolution now before the Senate

leaves the door open to act alone, even

absent an imminent threat. It surrenders

to the President authority which

the Constitution explicitly reserves for

the Congress.

And As I said 2 weeks ago, it is

premature. I have never believed, nor

do I think that any Senator believes,

that U.S. foreign policy should be hostage

to any nation, nor to the United

Nations. Ultimately, we must do what

we believe is right and necessary to

protect our security, whenever it is

called for. But going to war alone is

rarely the answer.

On Monday night, the President

spoke about working with the United

Nations. He said:

I could not agree more. The President

is right. The status quo is unacceptable.

Past U.N. resolutions have

not worked. Saddam Hussein and other

Iraqi officials have lied to the world

over and over and over. As the President

points out, an effort is underway

in the U.N. Security Council—led by

the United States—to adopt a strong

resolution requiring unconditional,

unimpeded access for U.N. weapons inspectors,

backed up with force if necessary.

That effort is making steady

progress. There is wide acceptance that

a new resolution is necessary before

the inspectors can return to Iraq, and

this has put pressure on the other nations,

especially Russia and France, to

support our position.

If successful, it could achieve the

goal of disarming Saddam without putting

thousands of American and innocent

Iraqi lives at risk or spending tens

of billions, or hundreds of billions, of

dollars at a time when the U.S. economy

is weakening, the Federal deficit

is growing, and the retirement savings

of America’s senior citizens have been

decimated.

Diplomacy is often tedious. It does

not usually make the headlines or the

evening news. We certainly know about

past diplomatic failures. But history

has shown over and over that diplomatic

pressure cannot only protect our

national interests, it can also enhance

the effectiveness of military force

when force becomes necessary.

The negotiations are at a sensitive

stage. By authorizing the use of force

today, the Congress will be saying that

irrespective of what the Security Council

does, we have already decided to go

our own way.

As Chairman and sometime Ranking

Member of the Foreign Operations Subcommittee

for over a decade, I have received

countless letters from Secretaries

of State—from both Democratic

and Republican Administrations—urging

Congress not to adopt legislation

because it would upset ongoing negotiations.

Why is this different?

Some say the President’s hand will

be strengthened by Congress passing

this resolution. In 1990, when the

United States successfully assembled a

broad coalition to fight the gulf war,

the Congress passed a resolution only

after the UN had acted. The world already

knows that President Bush is serious

about using force against Iraq,

and the votes are there in Congress to

declare war if diplomatic efforts fail

and war becomes unavoidable.

More importantly, the resolution

now before the Senate goes well beyond

what the President said on Monday

about working through the United Nations.

It would permit the administration

to take precipitous, unilateral action

without following through at the

U.N.

Many respected and knowledgeable

people—former senior military officers

and diplomats among them—have expressed

strong reservations about this

resolution. They agree that if there is

credible evidence that Saddam Hussein

is planning to use weapons of mass destruction

against the United States or

one of our allies, the American people

and the Congress would overwhelmingly

support the use of American military

power to stop him. But they have

not seen that evidence, and neither

have I.

We have heard a lot of bellicose rhetoric,

but what are the facts? I am not

asking for 100 percent proof, but the

administration is asking Congress to

make a decision to go to war based on

conflicting statements, angry assertions,

and assumption based on speculation.

This is not the way a great nation

goes to war.

The administration has also been

vague, evasive and contradictory about

its plans. Speaking here in Washington,

the President and his advisors

continue to say this issue is about disarming

Saddam Hussein; that he has

made no decision to use force.

But the President paints a different

picture when he is on the campaign

trail, where he often talks about regime

change. The Vice President said

on national television that ‘‘The President’s

made it clear that the goal of

the United States is regime change. He

said that on many occasions.’’

Proponents of this resolution argue

that it does put diplomacy first. They

point to section 4, which require the

President to determine that further

diplomatic or other peaceful means

alone will not adequately protect the

national security, before he resorts to

military force. They say that this ensures

that we will act only in a deliberative

way, in concert with our allies.

But they fail to point out that the

resolution permits the President to use

unilateral military force if he determines

that reliance on diplomacy

along.

Unfortunately, we have learned that

‘‘not likely’’ is a wide open phrase that

can be used to justify just about anything.

So let us not pretend we are

doing something we are not. This resolution

permits the President to take

whatever military action he wants,

whenever he wants, for as long as he

wants. It is a blank check.

We have the best trained, best

equipped Armed Forces in the world,

and I know they can defeat Iraq. I

hope, as we all do, that if force is used

the Iraqi military surrenders quickly.

But if we have learned anything from

history, it is that wars are unpredictable.

They can trigger consequences

that none of us would intend or expect.

Is it fair to the American people, who

have become accustomed to wars

waged from 30,000 feet lasting a few

weeks with few casualties, that we not

discuss what else could happen? We

could be involved in urban warfare

where large numbers of our troops are

killed.

And what of the critical issue of rebuilding

a post-Saddam Iraq, about

which the Administration has said virtually

nothing? It is one thing to topple

a regime, but it is equally important,

and sometimes far more difficult,

to rebuild a country to prevent it from

becoming engulfed by factional fighting.

If these nations cannot successfully

rebuild, then they will once again become

havens for terrorists. To ensure

that does not happen, do we foresee

basing thousands of U.S. troops in Iraq

after the war, and if so, for how many

years? How many billions of dollars

will we spend?

Are the American people prepared to

spend what it will take to rebuild Iraq

even when the administration is not

budgeting the money that is needed to

rebuild Afghanistan, having promised

to do so? Do we spend hundreds of billions

in Iraq, as the President’s Economic

Adviser suggested, while not

providing at home for homeland defense,

drought aid for farmers, education

for our young people, and other

domestic priorities?

Who is going to replace Saddam Hussein?

The leading coalition of opposition

groups, the Iraqi National Congress,

is divided, has questionable support

among the Iraqi people, and has

made little headway in overthrowing

Saddam. While Iraq has a strong civil

society, in the chaos of a post-Saddam

Iraq another dictator could rise to the

top or the country could splinter along

ethnic or religious lines.

These are the questions the American

people are asking and these are

the issues we should be debating. They

are difficult issues of war and peace,

but the administration, and the proponents

of this resolution, would rather

leave them for another day. They

say: vote now! and let the President decide.

Don’t give the U.N. time to do its

job. Don’t worry that the resolution is

a blank check.

I can count the votes. The Senate

will pass this resolution. They will give

the President the authority he needs to

send United States troops to Iraq. But

before the President takes that step, I

hope he will consider the questions

that have been asked. I hope he considers

the concerns raised by former

generals, senior diplomats, and intelligence

officials in testimony before

Congress. I hope he listens to concerns

raised privately by some of our military

officers. Above all, I hope he will

listen to the American people who are

urging him to proceed cautiously and

not to act alone.

Notwithstanding whatever disagreements

there may be on our policy toward

Iraq, if a decision is made to send

troops into battle, there is no question

that every Member of Congress will

unite behind our President and our

Armed Forces.

But that time has not yet come.

Based on what I know today, I believe

in order to solve this problem without

potentially creating more terrorists

and more enemies, we have to act deliberately

and not precipitously. The

way the United States responds to the

threat posed by Iraq is going to have

consequences for our country and for

the world for years to come.

Authorizing a U.S. attack to overthrow

another government while negotiations

at the United Nations are ongoing,

and before we exhaust other options,

could damage our standing in

the world as a country that recognizes

the importance of international solutions.

I am afraid that it would be what

the world expects of a superpower that

seems increasing disdainful of international

opinion or cooperation and

collective diplomacy, a superpower

that seems more and more inclined to

‘‘go it alone.’’

What a dramatic shift from a year

ago, when the world was united in its

expressions of sympathy toward the

United States. A year ago, the world

would have welcomed the opportunity

to work with us on a wide agenda of

common problems.

I remember the emotion I felt when I

saw ‘‘The Star Spangled Banner’’ sung

by crowds of people outside Buckingham

Palace in London. The leading

French newspaper, Le Monde, declared,

‘‘We are all Americans.’’ China’s Jiang

Zemin was one of the first world leaders

to call Washington and express

sympathy after September 11.

Why squander the goodwill we had in

the world? Why squander this unity? If

September 11 taught us anything, it is

that protecting our security involves

much more than military might. It involves

cooperation with other nations

to break up terrorist rings, dry up the

sources of funding, and address the

conditions of ignorance and despair

that create breeding grounds for terrorists.

We are far more likely to

achieve these goals by working with

other nations than by going it alone.

I am optimistic that the Administration’s

efforts at the U.N. will succeed

and that the Security Council will

adopt a strong resolution. If Saddam

Hussein refuses to comply, then force

may be justified, and it may be required.

But we are a great nation, with a

wide range of resources available to us

and with the goodwill of most of the

world. Let us proceed deliberately,

moving as close to our goal as we can

by working with our allies and the

United Nations, rather than writing a

blank check that is premature, and

which would continue the trend of abdicating

our constitutional authority

and our responsibility.

Mr. President, that trend started

many years ago, and I have gone back

and read some of the speeches the Senators

have made. For example, and I

quote:

Do these speeches sound familiar?

They were not about Iraq. They were

spoken 38 years ago when I was still a

prosecutor in Vermont. At the end of

that debate, after statements were

made that this resolution is not a

blank check, and that Congress will always

watch what the Executive Branch

is doing, the Senate voted on that resolution.

Do you know what the vote

was? 88 to 2. It passed overwhelmingly.

In case everyone does not know what

resolution I am talking about, I am

talking about the Tonkin Gulf resolution.

As we know all too well, the Tonkin

Gulf resolution was used by both

the Johnson and Nixon administrations

as carte blanche to wage war on Vietnam,

ultimately involving more than

half a million American troops, resulting

in the deaths of more than 58,000

Americans. Yet, even the Tonkin Gulf

resolution, unlike the one that we are

debating today, had a sunset provision.

When I came to the Senate, there

were a lot of Senators, both Republicans

and Democrats, who had voted

for the Tonkin Gulf resolution. Every

single Senator who ever discussed it

with me said what a mistake it was to

write that kind of blank check on the

assurance that we would continue to

watch what went on.

I am not suggesting the administration

is trying to mislead the Congress

about the situation in Iraq, as Congress

was misled on the Tonkin Gulf resolution.

I am not comparing a possible

war in Iraq to the Vietnam war. They

are very different countries, with different

histories, and with different

military capabilities. But the key

words in the resolution we are considering

today are remarkably similar to

the infamous resolution of 38 years ago

which so many Senators and so many

millions of Americans came to regret.

Let us not make that mistake again.

Let us not pass a Tonkin Gulf resolution.

Let us not set the history of our

great country this way. Let us not

make the mistake we made once before.

I yield the floor.