Mr. President, I have

decided that I will cast a vote tonight

to authorize the President to use force

if necessary to find and destroy any

weapons of mass destruction under the

control of Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

Some of my colleagues have expressed

the ease with which they will

vote to authorize the use of force. For

me it has been very difficult.

When we cast a vote that could send

our sons and daughters to war, it is

deadly serious business. It requires us

to ask tough questions and demand

good answers.

And while I will vote to authorize the

President to use force if necessary, I do

so with reservation because I believe

very strongly that force should be an

option that is used only as a last resort,

after all other diplomatic and

peaceful means have been exhausted.

And, if force is necessary , it ought to

be carried out with a coalition of countries

in whose interest it is to rid Iraq

of weapons of mass destruction.

I want to stress that I would never

have voted for the resolution in the

form that the White House originally

asked Congress to approve. That proposal

asked Congress to give the President

a blank check to use force, with

or without the backing of other nations,

not just to disarm Iraq, but also

to deal with unspecified threats to

American interests anywhere in the region.

However, the Joint Resolution that

Congress will vote on tonight is fundamentally

different from the one the

President sent to us. It was narrowed

substantially in scope through bipartisan

negotiations.

First, this resolution focuses specifically

on the threat posed by Iraq, instead

of giving the President broad and

unfocused authorization to take action

in the region, as the Administration

originally sought. Second, the resolution

expresses the conviction that

President Bush should continue to

work through the United Nations to secure

Iraq’s compliance with U.N. resolutions.

Third, this resolution makes it

clear that the President must exhaust

diplomatic and peaceful efforts before

he can use force against Iraq. And

fourth, this resolution protects the balance

of power by requiring the President

to comply with the War Powers

Act.

I believe it is the right course to go

to the United Nations, extract from the

Security Council the tough new resolution

requested by the President, and

then coercively enforce that resolution

with a coalition of countries who will

not only bear the burden of fighting

along side us if it is required, but who

will also bear the expensive burden of

occupation, peace keeping and nation

building following any military action.

My fervent hope is that the Joint

Resolution we pass tonight authorizing

the President to use force if necessary

to disarm Iraq will spur the United Nations

Security Council to take similar

action. And I hope that the action of

Congress and the United Nations together

will convince Saddam Hussein

to allow complete and unfettered inspections

and to cooperate in the

elimination of any weapons of mass destruction

that he still possesses.

With a backdrop of the September 11

terrorist attacks on the United States

and the clear and present danger to our

country of future terrorist attacks,

coupled with the evidence that Saddam

Hussein is aggressively trying to acquire

nuclear weapons, I finally concluded

that, if we err in this matter, we

must err on the side of our national security

interests. The stakes are too

high, and the consequences too deadly

to do otherwise.

The final point I will make about

this resolution is that our confrontation

with Iraq is dramatically different

from our confrontation with any other

‘‘rogue’’ country. Saddam Hussein has

consistently defied the terms of surrender

to which he agreed at the end of

the Gulf War in 1991. We know that he

lied about his weapons of mass destruction

and hid them from United Nations

inspectors. We know that he secretly

continued to produce chemical and biological

agents. We know that he is still

trying to acquire nuclear weapons.

I’ve been to the Incerlik Air Base in

Turkey where American fighter pilots

fly air cover over the Northern Iraq nofly

zone. I know firsthand that Iraq

continues to fire on our pilots who are

just doing what Saddam Hussein promised

to allow under the terms of the

Gulf War surrender.

I know there are some who say,

‘‘well, let’s not be so hasty. There’s another

way, let’s explore other options.’’

But the fact is we have worked for 10

years without success to force Iraq to

comply with the terms of its surrender

following the Gulf War. So, to those

who say let’s give them more time, I

say this situation is unique. Iraq has

had a decade to comply, and the tyrant

who runs it has demonstrated that he

has no intention of complying without

the threat of the use of force.

I will vote for this resolution because

I think that it is important that we

unite behind our President to deal with

the clear and present danger that Iraq

poses to our national security. But I

want to point out a few concerns about

aspects of this administration’s foreign

policy which I consider to be very troubling.

Recently the Bush administration released

a new 33-page National Security

Policy document that has alarmed

even our closest allies because it declares

that it is America’s new policy

to maintain overwhelming military

might and to use preemptive force

whenever and wherever it suits our national

interests.

Few would deny that the United

States has the right to go after terrorists

or rogue states preemptively if we

are in serious danger of being attacked

by a weapon of mass destruction. So

what in the world was the administration

thinking when it decided to release

this document at the same time

that our diplomats around the world

are seeking the support of the international

community for action against

Saddam Hussein?

In my judgment, this is an example

of the Bush administration’s approach

to foreign policy that has largely abandoned

the successful strategies we’ve

employed for decades to weld together

alliances and coalitions of our allies to

tackle the threats and challenges of an

unstable world.

Another issue that relates to this debate

is America’s role in the international

effort to stop the proliferation

of nuclear weapons.

One of the centerpieces of the debate

about the danger Iraq poses for the rest

of the world is that Saddam Hussein

might soon possess a nuclear weapon. I

acknowledge the danger that would

pose for the region and the rest of the

world, but I want to ask those who are

experiencing seizures over that prospect:

where is their concern about the

larger danger posed by the spread of

nuclear weapons to other countries and

to terrorists?

Year after year, and time after time

those who now appear most alarmed

about the prospect that Iraq would possess

even one nuclear weapon, are the

same people who are unwilling to exert

U.S. leadership in the international effort

to stop the proliferation of nuclear

weapons.

For example, President Bush has appointed

John Bolton to be the Assistant

Secretary of State responsible for

arms control even though Bolton’s

stated position is that he doesn’t believe

in arms control. This administration,

and its supporters in Congress,

have demonstrated a lack of interest in

making any effort to stop the spread of

nuclear weapons.

They oppose the Comprehensive Nuclear

Test Ban Treaty even though a

blue-ribbon panel of the National Academies

of Science recently concluded

that the treaty would significantly enhance

U.S. security by slowing the

spread of nuclear weapons.

And this administration and its supporters

want to deploy a new generation

of ‘‘designer’’ nuclear weapons

that could be used like conventional

weapons. Nothing would do more to undermine

international efforts to stigmatize

countries that aspire to become

nuclear powers.

Perhaps now the prospect of a country

like Iraq acquiring one nuclear

weapon will convince the Bush administration

that safeguarding the nuclear

weapons that exist around the world,

reducing nuclear stockpiles, and stopping

the proliferation of nuclear weapons

to other countries and to terrorists

must be among this country’s top priorities.

There are somewhere in the neighborhood

of 25,000–30,000 nuclear weapons

in the world today. A fair number

of them are not very well controlled,

particularly in Russia, which has thousands

of nuclear weapons in storage facilities

that fall far short of American

security standards. Russia also has

enough highly enriched uranium and

weapons-grade plutonium for 80,000 nuclear

weapons. Much of it is poorly protected

against theft or diversion.

One nuclear weapon in the wrong

hands will make the devastating tragedy

of 9/11 seem like a small incident

by comparison. That is why this issue

is so critical, and it is why I raise it

now to point out the inconsistency of

those who are pushing so hard to use

force against Iraq but who are so unwilling

to exhibit any muscle in dealing

with the broader and potentially

more devastating problem of the proliferation

of nuclear weapons.

So I will vote for this Joint Resolution

because I am convinced it is time

for the United States to assume leadership

in the effort to disarm Saddam

Hussein and make Iraq live up to the

commitments it made after the Gulf

War. But I hope that President Bush

will help prevent further Iraqs by stepping

forward and exerting US leadership

in the international effort to prevent

the proliferation of nuclear weapons

and other weapons of mass destruction.