



Celebrating the Constitution

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by Abigail Murray

Yesterday marked the 222nd anniversary of the signing of the U.S. Constitution, and NYU celebrated by hosting a birthday party in the Kimmel Center.

But the party, featuring the authors of a book about the failing Congress, was perhaps more like a roast than a celebration.

Hosted by NYU's John Brademas Center for the Study of Congress, the event featured Tom Mann and Norm Ornstein as guest speakers. Mann and Ornstein are coauthors of "The Broken Branch: How Congress Is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track."

Four Tisch students opened the program with a humorous musical skit about the liberties granted by the Constitution. When Mann took his place on stage, he praised the performance, saying it was a hard act to follow.

Mann and Ornstein discussed the balance of powers between the executive and legislative branches of government under President Obama.

"I can't imagine a more energetic, refreshing way to celebrate Constitution Day," he said.

Mann spoke about the current relationship between Obama and Congress.

"President Obama is routinely criticized for being too deferential to Congress; for basically turning over the responsibility of drafting legislation to Congress," Mann said. "The idea that it is always best to draft legislation in detail within the confines of the White House and send it up to Congress is nonsense."

Mann emphasized that Congress is the law-making body and therefore should be the birthplace of laws.

Ornstein began his portion of the program by poking fun at former Vice President Dick Cheney.

"He endorsed the health plan — as soon as he heard there were death panels," he said, inciting laughter from the audience.

Both Mann and Ornstein expressed the belief that the legislative and executive branches would be more effective without political parties as they are today. They believe the Republicans have become an "opposition party," prompting the Democrats to act more like a Parliamentary party.