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Political Science

On Appreciating Congress: The People's Branch
Louis Fisher
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The Constitution recognizes Congress as the most important branch of government, this book reminds us, because through elections it allows all citizens to participate directly in the political process. Louis Fisher was employed at the Congressional Research Office from 1970 to 2006, has written nineteen books, and is a highly regarded specialist on constitutional law at the Law Library of the Library of Congress. This book, like the others in the publisher's On Politics series, is a brief investigation of an aspect of government aimed at the general reader, and it makes a strong case for the restoration of Congressional authority, which since World War II has been eroded by the executive and judicial branches.

Fisher includes many examples of how a weakened Congress has compromised the important system of checks and balances designed to prevent power from being concentrated in any of the three branches. Notable examples include how presidents Truman, Johnson, and Bush took the country into wars without congressional oversight, resulting in tragic losses of lives and enormous budget deficits. As Alexander DeConde states in *Presidential Machismo*, "The great danger to constitutional government lurks in executive machismo because it breeds contempt for law and could lead to tyranny." Since World War II, respected academics—Henry Steele Commanger, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Richard Neustadt—have written influential books that call for strong presidents who lead as Congress follows. A contrite Schlesinger later wrote *The Imperial Presidency*, which condemned Richard Nixon for running roughshod over Congress while indulging in illegal excesses.

The author also includes a very good discussion on judicial rulings that were harmful to civil and individual rights and were eventually overturned by congressional legislation. These include legislation that recognized conscientious objectors, allowed women to practice law before the Supreme Court, and approved the first equal accommodations law passed by Congress in 1875. It was overturned by the Supreme Court and did not become law until the

Civil Rights Act was passed in 1964.

Fisher mentions that party interference with Congress has harmed government. This argument could have been expanded to include how excessive partisanship and no places for moderates in either party are self-inflicted wounds that have alienated the public and led to the increase in independent voters. Overall, Fisher provides a compelling call for returning Congress to its place of eminence.

Karl Helicher