



Ayn Randian wingnut goes to Washington: The frightening economic policy of David Brat

If you thought Eric Cantor's politics were chilling, wait until you get to know his Tea Party successor

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House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, the second-ranking Republican in the House, was ousted yesterday in a primary challenge. He is a smarmy piece of work and we can't say we'll miss him. But the swamp creature who beat him! Meet Tea Party activist Dave Brat, who surfed to political center-stage on an anti-immigration wave and aims to bring his special brand of economic hokum to the nation's capital.

Brat, you'll be delighted to hear, is an economics professor at Randolph-Macon College who counts the fantastically nutty Ayn Rand as his intellectual hero. Not another one! Paul Ryan was about as much Randian baloney as we could swallow. But there could be another course coming: As Samantha Lachman reported, the professor gets dough from the banking sector to push Rand's libertarian nonsense on college students:

“Brat has taught classes for a program sponsored by BB&T bank that [aims to spread](#) Ayn Rand's principles to college students. Brat got a \$500,000 grant from the bank to bring the program to Randolph-Macon College and co-authored a paper titled ‘An Analysis of the Moral Foundations in Ayn Rand.’”

We tried to find that paper, which was “presented and published in the proceedings of Southeast Informs, Myrtle Beach, SC, October 6, 2010,” but that publishing venue evidently doesn't quite make the cut for Google scholar and JSTOR, so we can only guess at its contents.

But looking over Professor Brat's [faculty page](#), you get the sense of his, um, intellectual perspective. A sample: “God and Advanced Mammon—Can Theological Types Handle Usury and Capitalism?”

No, we did not make that up. Brat actually attended Princeton Theological Seminary at one time, which is known to be a right-wing hotbed. The moral gymnastics required to defend usury from a Christian point of view are [not too much for Professor Brat](#).

As the *Wall Street Journal* [reports](#), Brat has also mused on the need for a church model that fully supports capitalism, warning that if we don't get on that, a new Hitler will surely rise.

America's big banks and corporate giants are always ready to fund college professors who are willing to embrace discredited economic theories that support their power. That is why BB&T kicked off its program "The Moral Foundations of Capitalism." As John Allison, former chairman of BB&T's board and champion of education privatization, helpfully explains:

"About twelve years ago we re-examined our charitable giving and realized that our contributions to universities were not typically being used in our shareholders' best interest. At the same time, we were studying the question of why the United States had moved from the land of 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness' to the 'redistributive state.' We became convinced that the reason for this transformation was that the Left had taken over the universities and educated future leaders, including teachers, in statist/collectivist ideas.

"A related question occurred to us. Why do free-market principles, which by any objective analysis have won the intellectual argument, continue to be dismissed by most intellectuals? We concluded that the free-market economic arguments were routinely defeated by moral arguments, and those were primarily focused on the distribution of wealth.

"Furthermore, BB&T has used the fundamental ethics expressed in Ayn Rand's philosophy of Objectivism in very successfully growing our business, and we wanted Rand's ideas to be heard in the academic community."

In order to spread Randian nuttury, BB&T has sponsored 68 programs "at most of the major universities in our operating area." The reading list usually features *Atlas Shrugged*. The size of the money pile depends on how vigorously universities agree to promote the quackery, ranging from \$500,000 to \$2 million.

Allison boasts that "many [students] indicate the program is the first time they have heard capitalism defended from an ethical perspective."

BB&T found a willing partner in Dave Brat, who has a position as the "BB&T Ethics Program Director," serving 2010–2020. On the campaign trail, Brat reflected his capitalism-gone-wild brand of Tea Party Republicanism.

Back when Rand (an atheist!) was a celebrity in the 1960s, she was generally dismissed as a loon on par with the likes of fellow novelist L. Ron Hubbard. But today, half a century later, she is the intellectual inspiration of many Republicans who heartily embrace the essence of her creed: there is nothing so divine as getting rich. The Tea Party has made this fringe figure their favorite "thinker." Her philosophy of greed is more popular than ever.

Dave Brat will find a lot of friends in Washington if he wins in the November general election.