

Mother Jones

Eric Cantor Loses GOP Primary. Wait, What!?

By: [Tim Murphy](#)
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Buckle your seatbelts, K Street: Rep. Eric Cantor (R-Va.) is looking for work.

On Tuesday, in the biggest political upset of recent memory, Cantor, the House majority leader who was considered next-in-line to be House speaker, lost his Republican primary by double digits to David Brat, a college professor he'd outspent down the stretch by a factor of 12.

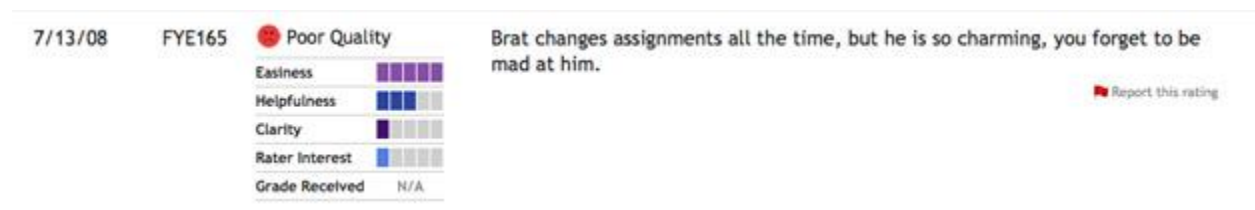
It was never supposed to be close. After Cantor flooded the district with nearly \$1 million in advertising and direct mail, a leaked internal poll showed the incumbent with a 34-point lead over Brat. Cantor became the first majority leader to lose a primary in 115 years.

So who is Brat?

- **A libertarian economist—but not a Randian.** Per Betsy Woodruff's January profile in [National Review](#):

He chairs the department of economics and business at Randolph-Macon College and heads its BB&T Moral Foundations of Capitalism program. The funding for the program came from John Allison, the former CEO of BB&T (a financial-services company) who now heads the Cato Institute. The two share an affinity for Ayn Rand: Allison is a major supporter of the Ayn Rand Institute, and Brat co-authored a paper titled "An Analysis of the Moral Foundations in Ayn Rand." Brat says that while he isn't a Randian, he has been influenced by *Atlas Shrugged* and appreciates Rand's case for human freedom and free markets.

According to his Rate My Professors page, he is "SOLID," "humorous," and "hot":



- **An immigration hardliner.** For months, the only interesting thing about the race was its impact on Cantor's public comments on immigration reform. Brat considered Cantor a sellout for tepidly supporting some sort of comprehensive immigration reform, and Cantor responded by taking credit for killing the entire thing and alleging that Brat secretly had the support of "[liberal](#)" reform advocates. Voters [received](#) mailers bragging that "CONSERVATIVE REPUBLICAN ERIC CANTOR IS STOPPING THE OBAMA-REID PLAN TO GIVE ILLEGAL ALIENS AMNESTY." With Cantor's defeat, you can bet Republicans who so much as hinted at supporting an immigration overhaul are hearing footsteps.
- **A debt-ceiling denialist.** A top Brat critique of Cantor is that he supported raising the federal government's debt ceiling—however reluctantly. As Brat told [Slate's Dave Weigel](#) last month, "My commitment is not to increase spending; to have a spending bill where you don't increase it. Cantor's voted for 10 of the last 15 debt ceiling increases. I just don't buy the idea that you are truly put in the position of backing the debt ceiling increase the last minute, that you had no choice."
- **A dragon slayer.** With the primary victory, Brat will almost certainly head to Congress next fall representing a deep-red central Virginia district. Cantor is prohibited by Virginia's "sore loser" law from appearing on the ballot as an independent candidate in November. Brat just needs to get past Democrat Jack Trammell, a colleague at Randolph-Macon College who runs the school's disability services and, according to his Amazon author page, [is currently writing a vampire novel](#).

Cantor, who has been dubbed a "rising star" [going back to 2001](#), will almost certainly land on his feet. There's already a helpful Craigslist posting for "[Experienced House Republican Seeking New Opportunity](#)." Serious offers only.