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John A. Tures: Redefining 'conservative'

By John A. Tures

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Dr. David Brat became the most surprising politician in 2014, and perhaps history, as he felled Eric Cantor, a Virginia Congressman who came within a whisker of becoming House Speaker, ironically the beneficiary of a conservative coup attempt against John Boehner.

Dr. Brat accused Cantor of being insufficiently conservative. His website provides a laundry list of charges against Cantor on that subject. But the American Conservative Union ranks Cantor as a 95.07 conservative rating over his political career. Is the ACU wrong, or is Brat?

Like Dr. Brat, I've presented at economics conferences like the Association for Private Enterprise Education (APEE), with at least one or two papers in the same conference as Brat. I've published in the Cato Journal (from the Cato Institute). I've cited data from the Heritage Foundation.

And I've read the articles. Most free market economists have a dim view of government spending on defense. They do not like it when the government regulates social behavior, imposing the morality of the leaders on the population. And they don't believe in government telling business which people they can and cannot hire when it comes to immigration.

If you read Dr. Brat's stand on the issues, he wants a strong national defense, will impose those social regulations on morality, and used immigration reform as a sledgehammer against Rep. Cantor as the number one reason to oust him.

Granted, many of his other positions are consistent with free market economists (on energy, economic growth, civil liberties, reducing federal spending, though his military stand doesn't square with that, unless he is looking into Dr. Ron Paul's idea of privateers and full-scale private militias, which had mixed success when employed in the War of 1812.

I wonder how he feels about knocking legally registered voters off voting rolls (mostly Democrats) for the flimsiest of excuses and requiring a national identity card to vote. Sen. Rand Paul started to complain about that, but backed off on the issue. Sen. Paul still supports restoring the rights of convicted felons to vote.

Of course, there's a Democratic candidate (a sociology professor picked by the Democrats without benefit of a primary because no one else seemed to want to challenge Cantor). There's apt to be a libertarian candidate who supports what free market economists support (I think). There are rumors that Democrats voted for Dr. Brat to get rid of Cantor, figuring the economics professor would be low-hanging fruit in the fall.

Heck, Ben Jones, who played Crazy Cooter, the mechanic on "The Dukes of Hazzard" and was a Georgia congressman for a while, might run. He moved up to Richmond to challenge Cantor a few years back. It would make just about as much sense as what's going on in this country.

Regardless, such an election is likely to scare the daylights out of most Republicans, coupled with seeing Sen. Thad Cochran (a Mississippi Senator first elected in 1978) on the ropes.

But maybe some will want to stick to their principles, like Sen. Lindsey Graham. Remember when he was Tea Party Target #1, guaranteed to lose his seat?

He was renominated, beating out six challengers by getting 56 percent of the vote, avoiding a runoff. The nearest challenger, state Sen. Lee Bright, got 15 percent of the vote. If you can say one thing about Sen. Graham, it's that he's a consistent moderate of the Edmund Burke mold.

"I know that some people are saying he should be more conservative, but what does that mean?" a South Carolina GOP primary voter was quoted as saying in Meg Kinnard's Yahoo News article. "I want a politician who actually thinks about the issues instead of going along with the crowd."

And consistency is something we really will be looking for in the coming weeks.

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