

# Editorial: Don't let Cantor's defeat stop immigration reform

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By the Editorial Board

The shocking defeat of House Majority Leader Eric Cantor is quickly being cast as the [final nail in the coffin for immigration reform in Congress this year](#).

That's a shame – not the least because that's precisely what the tea party and other conservative groups wanted when they rallied behind upstart challenger David Brat, who easily beat Cantor in Tuesday's Republican primary in Virginia's 7th District.

It's not like Cantor was "soft" on immigration. In fact, he has helped block consideration of a bipartisan Senate package passed last year that included a path to citizenship for the 11 million undocumented immigrants already here. Rather, he merely expressed willingness to consider piecemeal steps, such as legal status for those brought here as children.

But even those small fixes to our badly broken immigration system go too far for some conservatives. Brat, a little-known college professor who was vastly outspent, pilloried Cantor as favoring "amnesty" for illegal immigrants, not letting the facts get in his way.

Progress on immigration reform was going to be extremely difficult even before Cantor's loss. Now, reform foes are trying to send the message that crossing them is political suicide.

Some Republicans had started to become more open on the immigration issue, realizing that our country is becoming more diverse and their party's long-term future hangs in the balance. They should not falter now.

Republicans need to recognize that Cantor's district in the Richmond suburbs is by no means representative of the entire country. Immigration reform advocates point out that Sen. Lindsey Graham, who was also attacked for supporting some changes, easily won his primary Tuesday in South Carolina, a very conservative state.

There are other plausible reasons why Cantor lost. He didn't take Brat seriously enough, lulled into complacency by early polls that showed him cruising to victory. He appeared too cushy with the Washington establishment and didn't pay enough attention to his own constituents, focused on raising money for fellow House Republicans in his bid to rise to House speaker.

While Cantor doesn't have to give up the seat he first won in 2000 until January, [he announced Wednesday that he will step down as House majority leader on July 31](#). He threw his support behind Rep. Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield, the third-ranking House Republican, to succeed him in the post. [McCarthy has also voiced support for incremental changes](#), including limited legal status for some undocumented immigrants; his role on the issue will only grow.

To no one's surprise, tea party conservatives are crowing over Cantor's loss. Some Democrats, including House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi of San Francisco, are also gleeful, arguing that it shows that the Republican Party is tilting too far to the right.

Yet, if part of the fallout is that immigration reform is stalled indefinitely, that is a steep price to pay.

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