

OPINION

LETTERS POLICY

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REDBLUEAMERICA | JOEL MATHIS AND BEN BOYCHUK

Cantor's defeat: What does it mean for GOP?

The stunning primary defeat Tuesday of House Majority Leader Eric Cantor has left establishment Republicans scratching their heads and wondering what to do next. Cantor, a seven-term congressman who reportedly spent more than \$167,000 on campaign events at steakhouses, lost to David Brat, an economics professor aligned with local tea party groups who spent just \$122,000 on his entire campaign.

Among House Republicans, Cantor was a prime mover on immigration reform, which Brat criticized as "amnesty." He was also viewed as a pro-business, generally conservative legislator – not necessarily a moderate or "Republican in Name Only."

Does a tea party victory bode well or ill for Republican prospects in November? Is Cantor's defeat significant beyond his own district? Could other Republican incumbents share Cantor's fate? Ben Boychuk and Joel Mathis, the RedBlueAmerica columnists, weigh in.

BEN BOYCHUK

It's always nice to see a well-ensconced incumbent receive a nice thrashing, even if that incumbent happens to share one's political outlook. Eric Cantor, it seems, got what he deserved. "Representative" Cantor forgot whom he was representing.

The second-ranking Republican in the House of Representatives is a bit like the well-travelled husband who took his wife for granted, then is stunned to arrive home one day to find that she's packed up and moved in with her boyfriend.

Cantor took his district for granted. He was, by all accounts, rarely if ever there. Virginia's legislature drew a safe Republican district for Cantor after the last Census, which he carried in the last election by a more than two-to-one margin. But his constituents – the people who actually cast the ballots, as opposed to the lobbyists who wrote his campaign checks – say they neither knew him nor trusted him.

So if you remember the old saw that "all politics is local," then it's really no wonder why Cantor lost.

Now, does Cantor's primary defeat necessarily mean a tea party pick-up

in November? David Brat, the surprise victor, is untested and (for the moment, anyway) underfunded. Political reporters and Democratic operatives – but I repeat myself – are poring over Brat's writings, looking for evidence beyond his tea party sympathies that he is a lunatic, an extremist.

Also, it's worth noting that Virginia has an open primary, which allows for Democrats to vote for Republicans, and vice versa. No doubt David Brat benefited greatly from Democratic voter mischief. He won't be able to count on those votes in the general election.

The truth is, Cantor was a creature of Washington, at a time when voters are losing patience with Beltway shenanigans. Cantor's support for some kind of compromise on comprehensive immigration reform didn't help him, but it wasn't what did him in, either. It was the casual contempt for his constituents – the ones that really matter – that brought him to ruin.

See? Sometimes democracy really does work.

JOEL MATHIS

Three quick lessons to take away from Eric Cantor's defeat:

■ Our politics is screwed up. Maybe Eric Cantor deserved to be defeated – I'm a liberal, remember, so he was never my favorite member of Congress – but turnout for the primary election in Virginia last week was something like 12 percent of the electorate. Which means Cantor was turned out of office by roughly 6 percent of the electorate.

That's astonishing; more so when you realize Cantor might've won re-election easily had he simply survived the primary.

Primaries attract the most committed partisans. The choices they make often look little like the choices we'd otherwise make for ourselves; but we're stuck with their choices. It's not healthy for our politics, our governance, or our collective bile levels. And it can hardly be described as "democracy at work."

■ There's some bit of disagreement whether immigration played a large role in Cantor's loss. But overall, enough people believe that Cantor's

SEE CANTOR, A5

POLITICS | SEN. TOM O'MARA

The politics of heroin?



TOM O'MARA

By the end of this week, the State Legislature should have moved New York well on the way toward putting in place a badly needed response to the growing heroin crisis regionally, and statewide.

If so, it will represent one of the critical actions of this year's legislative session. I hope by now we've all heard the message loud and clear: heroin represents one of the most, if not the most, serious public health and safety crises facing us today, one that the governor recently said is spreading "like fire through dry grass."

Just last week State Police Superintendent Joseph D'Amico added, "Heroin use, heroin sales and related heroin drug overdoses have become a widespread problem that simply must be addressed. A crisis this large must be combated on all fronts."

Combated on all fronts. That's the key phrase. I couldn't agree more with the need for a no-holds-barred response to heroin – like the one just approved by the State Senate.

Last Monday, we said yes to a series of anti-heroin measures that offer an all-out response. The Senate's proposed strategy is the product of our Task Force on Heroin and Opioid Addiction. Over the course of several weeks beginning in early April, the task

force conducted nearly 20 public forums (including one I sponsored at Elmira College), covered thousands of miles and listened to more than 50 hours of testimony. We heard from regional law enforcement officers and leaders, drug addiction counselors, treatment providers, educators, social services and mental health professionals, and other experts – as well as recovering addicts – about the range of complex challenges posed by heroin including addiction prevention and treatment options, drug-related crimes, and other community and public safety impacts.

As a result, the comprehensive anti-heroin strategy I'm co-sponsoring calls for a combination of enhanced awareness and education, more effective prevention and treatment strategies and, equally important, tougher laws and law enforcement.

It's on this last point, however – tougher laws – where politics is injecting itself into the heroin debate. It looks like we're running up against a

long-standing wall of resistance from the Assembly Democratic leadership against getting too tough on criminals – even our worst criminals, like heroin traffickers. Late last week, unfortunately, some Assembly leaders were signaling that they may not be willing to combat the heroin crisis "on all fronts."

Let me make it clear that Assembly opposition to tougher laws – laws that supporters like myself believe could serve as deterrents to heinous crimes like dealing heroin, or, at the very least, deliver an appropriate dose of justice to victims – won't be a deal breaker. It won't prevent the enactment of Senate-approved legislation to strengthen awareness and education, or prevention and treatment. There's clearly some common ground on these fronts, and no one's going to walk away from the agreements we can readily reach.

But the Assembly, in my view, is dead wrong to turn its back on the law enforcement part of the equation. When it comes to heroin – especially today's heroin which is more addictive and deadlier than anything we've encountered before – it's not unreasonable to throw the book at major heroin traffickers, or sellers whose narcotics pushing results in a death.

At least I don't think so. The idea that we "can't

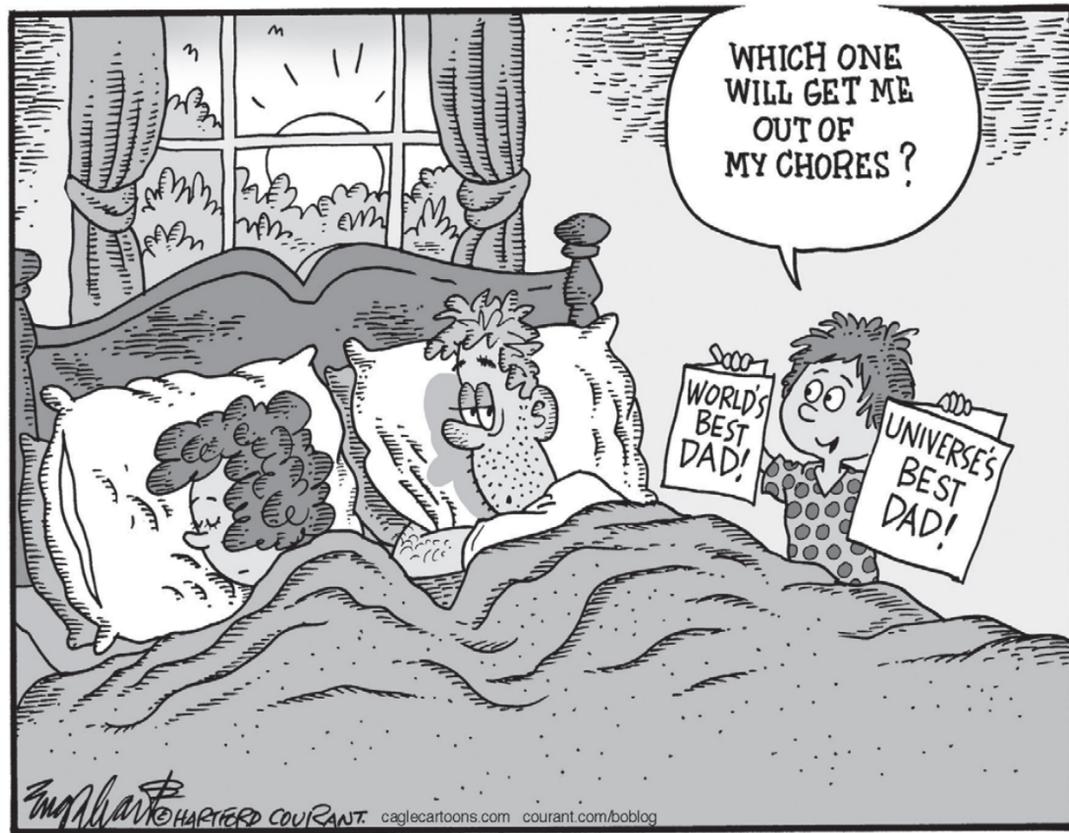
arrest our way out of this crisis" was repeatedly expressed at the Senate task force hearings, including by law enforcement and district attorneys. Of course we can't, but that doesn't mean we can afford to ignore strong laws and law enforcement.

I clearly recognize the importance of law enforcement in addressing this particular threat to public health and safety. I applaud the state's recent action to deploy 100 additional, experienced investigators to the State Police Community Narcotics Enforcement Team (CNET) to aggressively combat heroin trafficking. Maybe the governor can help bring the Assembly around. It seems like we should back up our Troopers with tougher laws like the few of those proposed by the Senate.

We'll soon know what the Assembly decides to do. But we already know that we need to act now to save lives, and we're going to act. By week's end, we should be on our way to responding to the heroin crisis much more forcefully – and hopefully with the stronger criminal penalties that I firmly believe should be part of our response.

State Sen. Tom O'Mara, R-Big Flats, represents New York's 58th Senate District, which includes Steuben, Chemung, Schuyler and Yates counties, and part of Tompkins County.

ANOTHER VIEW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Flowers missing from VA gravesite

TO THE EDITOR | I have a family member whose final resting place is at the Bath Veterans Administration Cemetery. I visit and attend to the gravesite frequently.

It is the policy of the VA for flower pots to be placed on the gravesites for 2 weeks before and 2 weeks after Memorial Day for your loved one. After the flowers are removed by staff, they are taken to a "holding" area for family members to claim. After a period of time, they are disposed of.

On June 9, the flowers were removed from the gravesite. On June 11, I went to the VA to get

them and they were nowhere to be found. They were in a wrought iron bucket and were a beautiful arrangement of small red flowers, white lace and blue petunias. They were watered frequently so were flourishing. I also watered all flowers that were in the same area.

When I checked the "holding" area, all that were there were flowers that quite obviously hadn't been watered in awhile.

This is the second time this has happened to me at the Bath VA Cemetery. If anyone knows what might be happening to the bouquets at the VA or mine as described above, please contact me at 329-2477 or the Bath VA

Police at 664-4768.
Theresa Hughes
 Bath

Do you part to end elder abuse

TO THE EDITOR | "One person. One action. One nation. United against elder abuse."

As our population is growing and aging, we know that more elders are enduring abusive conditions, often not knowing where to turn. Experts believe that for every case of elder abuse or neglect reported, as many as 23.5 cases go unreported.

This month, the Steuben County Office for the Aging joins with the Department of Social Services and our wider community to raise

awareness about this issue. More importantly, we are asking that members of our community partner with us to identify and resolve the challenges of abuse for the vulnerable elders.

What can you do? If you have concerns about the needs of an older person, call us for a confidential discussion about the help that is available. Call Steuben County Protective Services for Adults at 664-2000 or the Office for the Aging at (866) 221-7324. World Elder Abuse Awareness Day was Saturday. You can play a role locally in stomping out elder abuse!
Patricia Baroody, director, Steuben County Office for the Aging

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