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House Republicans Consider Next Steps Following Cantor's Loss

In an unprecedented upset, Rep. Eric Cantor (R-VA) became the first modern House majority leader to lose renomination to Congress Tuesday. Leader Cantor, who held a 26-1 cash advantage over his opponent, college professor and Tea Party activist David Brat (R), lost by 11 points. His unexpected defeat has serious implications regarding the House GOP's legislative agenda, the make-up of the House GOP leadership, and the future of the Republican Party.

As House majority leader, Cantor—who assumed the role in 2011—has worked with House GOP leadership to set the congressional calendar and legislative agenda. In the coming weeks and months, the House must address numerous key issues, including: trade promotion agreements and free trade agreements; reauthorization of the Export-Import Bank; housing finance reform; immigration; highway funding; tax extenders; appropriations; and continued oversight activities.

With Cantor stepping down from leadership effective July 31, the House GOP's legislative agenda is now in flux. The House has a brief window to act on these and other issues before the August recess and midterm election, though legislative activity during the lame-duck session following the election is expected.

That said, House Republicans will vote to replace Cantor next Thursday, June 19, which will allow the newly elected leader and a newly elected whip to smoothly transition into their new roles. Specifically, the transition period will enable the newly elected leader and whip to build their teams and have some semblance of order. Additionally, it will serve as a safety net for the House as a whole, as well as for the Conference.

Jockeying among Republicans to replace Cantor and the current Majority Whip Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), whom Cantor has endorsed for majority leader, is in full swing. In addition to Rep. McCarthy, Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX) is pursuing the role as House majority leader. Additionally, Reps. Steve Scalise (R-LA), chairman of the House Republican Study Committee, Peter Roskam (R-IL), chief deputy whip, and Marlin Stutzman (R-IN) are positioning themselves for majority whip. And although the field seems set at this point, other contenders may emerge.

Although the outcome of the leadership election remains uncertain, it will undoubtedly impact the legislative agenda and direction of the House GOP. Cantor's primary defeat will continue to reverberate throughout Washington in the weeks and months ahead.

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in the decision-making process is no longer a luxury—it's imperative. Please contact a member of Brownstein's Government Relations team to discuss how we can help when the stakes are high.

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