

# Know Before You Go: VA-07 District Primer

*July 2018 • Researched, summarized, and edited by Swing Left's all-volunteer research team!*

**In the last election, Republican David Brat won this district by 16%. But VA-07 is now more blue!**

With your help, we're going to win this seat for the Democrats in 2018.

## About the Incumbent

**Introduction:** Republican David Brat is in his second term in Congress. He holds a BA in Business, an MA in Divinity, and a PhD in Economics, which he taught at Randolph-Macon College. In 2014, he ran in the primary against Eric Cantor, then Majority Leader, as a hard-right conservative, and, in a surprising upset, beat Cantor by 12%. Brat went on to beat his Democratic opponent by 20% and again in 2016 by 16%. He is 53 and married, with two children.

**Issues:** Brat, a member of the conservative/far-right House Freedom Caucus, often invokes his Christian beliefs, the Constitution, and free markets in his speeches. His platform emphasizes strong opposition to illegal immigration, Obamacare, and abortion. He supports gun rights, fiscal responsibility, and spending more taxpayer dollars on investigating Benghazi. He's voted with Trump's agenda 88% of the time, opposing such issues as raising the debt ceiling, disaster relief for Puerto Rico and other disaster areas, and the recent Republican immigration bill.

**Strengths:** Brat enjoys firm support from Republicans and from several ultra-conservative groups. VA-07 has been a reliably "red" district for a long time; many voters may find it difficult to vote for a Democrat even if they're not enthusiastic about Brat. He's received a top rating from the Conservative Review Scorecard, National Right to Life, Americans for Prosperity, and Gun Owners of America; he's been endorsed by the Campaign for Working Families and the National Vietnam and Gulf War Veterans Coalition.

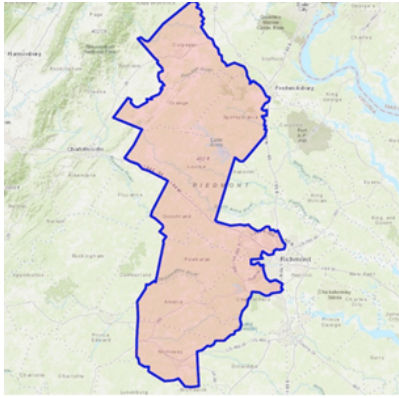
**Potential Weaknesses:** In a district where there are more women than men, Brat has an appalling lack of respect for women who disagree with him as well as for voters who supported Eric Cantor. He's made little effort to heal divisions in VA-07, often boasting of his underdog status and upset win over Cantor. Brat is no longer an upstart "underdog" nor can he claim to be a fiscal conservative after voting for massive tax cuts that will raise the national debt.

## About the Challenger

**Introduction:** Democrat Abigail Spanberger has spent most of her career in the public sector, first as a federal law enforcement officer and later as a CIA officer. In 2014, Spanberger left government service for a career at EAB Royall & Company, a college enrollment management firm.

**Issues:** Spanberger decided to run when the House voted to repeal the Affordable Care Act. Healthcare has been her top campaign issue. She also supports protecting Social Security and Medicare, handle drug addiction as an illness rather than a crime, protecting net neutrality, enacting common sense gun safety legislation, strengthening the public education system, enacting tax reform that strengthens the middle class, promoting campaign finance reform and transparency, and investing in alternative energy sources. As a former CIA officer, she brings valuable experience to issues of national security and foreign policy.

**Strengths:** Spanberger's unique background with the CIA has the potential to appeal to voters across the aisle. Despite having a well-financed, strong competitor, she won the Democratic primary by a wide margin. The courts redrew VA-07 prior to the 2016 election, and there are indications that the traditionally Republican district is moderating, especially in the Richmond suburbs. In the most recent election, Democrats successfully flipped three House of Delegates seats that overlap with VA-07. Spanberger is likely to benefit from Brat's identification with the far-right, which may weaken his support among moderate Republicans and independents in this evolving district. Brat has never had to run in a competitive general election, and Spanberger has out-raised Brat for three consecutive quarters in a row.



## VA-07: Facts & Stats

### Population Centers

- Chesterfield County (p), 339,009
- Henrico County (p), 326,501
- Spotsylvania County (p), 160,307

### 2016 Presidential Results

- Clinton: 173K (44%)
- Trump: 198K (50%)

### 2016 House Results

- Bedell (D): 160K (42%)
- Brat (R): 218K (58%)
- Other: 1K (0%)

### 2014 House Results

- Trammel (D): 90K (37%)
- Brat (R): 148K (61%)
- Other: 325 (0%)

## VA-07: Better Know the District

### Geography

VA-07 runs north-south down central Virginia. It includes all of Orange, Culpeper, Goochland, Louisa, Nottoway, Amelia, and Powhatan counties, which together comprise about 26% of the district's population, and portions of Chesterfield, Henrico, and Spotsylvania counties which comprise about 74% of the population. It's situated between the Shenandoah National Park and Charlottesville to the west and Fredericksburg and Richmond to the east. The Washington DC metro area is to the northeast. Only 9% of the land is urban and the remaining 91% is rural.

### Citizenry

VA-07 has about 775,000 residents of which 71.3% are white, 18.7% African American, 5.2% Asian, and 7.3% Hispanic (any race). The median age for the district is 39 and median income is about \$71,000 with the lowest average in Nottoway County (\$37,000) and the highest in Goochland County (\$82,000). About 86% of district residents earn more than \$25,000/year. The unemployment rate is about 3.9% (2017). About 8.4% of VA-07 falls below the poverty level with the highest rates (21.3%) in Nottoway County. Of those in poverty, 61% are white, 27% are African American; 16% are Hispanics (any race). About 10% of the district's population is foreign born. 51.4% are women and 48.6% are men. Approximately 10% of the population are veterans.

### Elections

VA-07 was redistricted prior to the 2016 election. Republicans won in the 2016 and 2017 presidential, congressional, and gubernatorial races. The rural areas west of Richmond include Republican enclaves, though the suburbs around Richmond are trending more Democratic. Democratic gubernatorial candidate Robert Northam carried Chesterfield County in 2017, the first time a Democrat has done so since 1961.

### Higher Education

Ninety percent of the inhabitants have a high school degree and 37% have a bachelor's degree or higher; 14.3% have a graduate or professional degree. There are no major colleges or universities in the district, though residents have access to multiple institutions in neighboring areas.

### Industries

Most of the district's residents live within the reach of the urban centers to the east (Richmond, Fredericksburg, Washington DC) and employment reflects an urban economy. Over 42% work in management, professional, and related industries, almost 15% in service industries, and 24.6% in sales and office work. Other parts of the district host companies that service urban and national clients. Goochland county, for example, is the headquarters for Capital One bank, employing 5,000 people. Agriculture, forestry, fishing, hunting, and mining account for less than 1% of employment. More specifically, education, health care and social assistance account for 22.8% of civilian employment; professional, scientific, management, administration and waste management 12.3%; retail trade 11.8%; construction, manufacturing, arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food about 19%; and public administration, other services, finance, insurance, and real estate each account for 5 – 10% of employment. Transportation, warehousing and utilities, information, and wholesale trade each account for less than 5% of employment.