

Brat

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The town hall followed several weeks of criticism from liberal constituents in Brat’s district that he wasn’t having a town hall in the district — and they wanted to let him have it about their fears of the Trump administration. Brat said he’s held more than 500 meetings in the past few years and bristled at the notion that he wasn’t accessible.

In his opening remarks, he asked for a civil discourse and said his motto is to never put people down.

“I know there’s a lot of anxiety on a lot of issues, and I’ll give you forthright answers,” he said.

As he outlined his biography, however, some people in the crowd began yelling “Questions! Questions!” as he talked about his book — “American Underdog: Proof that Principles Matter” — and his previous teaching job at Randolph-Macon College.

On a question about whether he wanted to privatize Social Security, Brat noted that people are anxious after Trump’s ascendancy to the White House.

“Trump has said that he will not allow any changes to Social Security and Medicare.”

When Brat began talking about economic growth in response to a question on his support for the Environmental Protection Agency, some in the crowd grew loud and the mayor proclaimed: “Ladies and gentlemen, please let the congressman finish.”

Earlier, outside, Brat worked a long line of supporters and detractors.

Charlotte Whitmire of Goochland has attended town halls with Brat in her county.

“I voted for him two times because he’s a conservative like me, and he comes to Goochland constantly,” she said, holding a sign that read “Women for Dave Brat.”

One of her big issues: “I don’t believe we should be supporting Planned Parenthood with tax dollars.”

Dana Smiddy, a constituent from Henrico County, approached Brat outside to ask



Rep. Dave Brat, R-7th, answered questions about Social Security, the border wall and Steve Bannon.

JOE MAHONEY/TIMES-DISPATCH

him if he would still back repeal of the Affordable Care Act — a pledge of Trump and congressional Republicans — if there was no plan to replace it.

Smiddy later said he was laid off from his job as a business consultant and on Tuesday enrolled for health insurance under Obamacare. He drove 90 minutes for the town hall.

Inside the town hall, Brat’s prediction of a repeal and replace for the signature accomplishment of the Obama administration was met with a mix of boos and applause.

Brat said no one would have the rug pulled out from under them if Republicans repeal the health law.

“All I can tell you is every plan I know about, everybody gets a two-year transition, with health care, basically what you have now, right? And there will be a two-year transition.”

Brat added: “I talked to a young gentleman out there who had serious concerns... There will be a transition path. And then from there it’s a debate over what the replacement package looks like.”

One man yelled “Stop selling your book!” when Brat later brought up his book.

When asked if he favored an independent investigation of

U.S. election-related hacking by Russians, Brat said, “Yes, our legal authorities should investigate and follow the rule of law no matter what party you’re in and our oversight in the House and Senate will do that.”

He later said he did not support an independent investigation of former national security adviser Michael Flynn, who resigned after reports that he misled Vice President Mike Pence about his contacts with the Russian ambassador to the United States.

“You don’t get to just throw spaghetti on the wall,” Brat said.

Brat was asked if he denies climate change.

“No, the climate changes all the time,” he replied.

Many in the crowd booed. Brat smiled. The mayor ordered the audience to let him finish.

He said he believes in science and if given data is a “rational guy.”

What was his relationship with controversial Trump political adviser Steve Bannon? Brat said not much.

He said he believed the Trump administration’s travel ban — which courts have put on hold — is constitutional and legal but should not have included those with green cards. (Two days after the president

issued his executive order, Secretary of Homeland Security John Kelly clarified that citizens of the seven countries who hold green cards would not be stopped from re-entering the U.S.)

Brat said the cost of building a new border wall with Mexico could be justified because of hundreds of billions in costs America incurs due to illegal immigration.

But if “the wall” were to cost \$20 billion, he said, “that’s still serious change. And I’ve got serious reservations there.”

Did he agree with Trump’s assessment that his administration was running smoothly?

Some laughed.

“Given the obstruction in D.C.,” Brat began. The boos then drowned him out.

He said Trump is overturning regulations to get the economy moving. “The stock market is going like zing!” he said.

The heckling grew louder.

Some Brat detractors in the audience played a bingo game in which they listened for key words he likes to use, like “Judeo Christian,” “fake news” and “Soros,” a reference to billionaire George Soros, a major donor to liberal causes.

“Have I mentioned I went to seminary yet?” Brat said, mak-

ing the best of it. “I think you’re playing bingo out there.”

Brat also played up his independence, saying he works out with Democrats, has worked with Rep. Keith Ellison, a Minnesota Democrat who could be the next chairman of the Democratic National Committee, and that he likes Bernie Sanders.

“Bernie is a buddy of mine,” he said. “He tells the truth.” Then he added: “I disagree with him on half the stuff.”

Brat previously was chairman of the economics department at Randolph-Macon.

He scored a stunning GOP primary upset in 2014 by defeating House Majority Leader Eric Cantor, propelling him to national attention.

Brat was easily re-elected in 2016, pulling more than 57 percent of the vote against Democrat Eileen Bedell.

The surprise election of Trump at the top of the ticket, however, has brought out liberals and progressives in Brat’s 7th District in ways he hadn’t seen in his first term in Congress.

As is happening nationally, a group of liberal constituents — shocked by Trump’s election — wanted to let Brat hear about it. They demanded a town hall and formed a Facebook group called “7th District Town Hall Meeting.”

Brat held two Facebook Live events in which he answered questions; thousands of viewers joined.

In the second, he announced he’d be holding the in-person town hall in Blackstone and said he’d be scheduling other town halls as the year goes on. He noted that he’d had 31 public town halls all across his district.

“A small percentage of folks load up the Facebook with comments and you can kind of tell there’s an organized pattern,” he said Feb. 14 on Facebook video.

But he added: “The majority of the folks that are contacting us are sincere folks that have policy questions that they want to discuss.”

He repeated that on Tuesday: “I didn’t say that’s bad, I just said a lot of people are organizing and doing rallies.”

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