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NEWS

Broward Republican chairman resigns after months of turmoil



By ANTHONY MAN
SUN SENTINEL | JAN 06, 2018



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Bob Sutton resigned as chairman of the Broward Republican Party on Jan. 6, 2016. In this picture, he was attending a Republican Business Network meeting in Coral Springs on Oct. 21, 2015. (Anthony Man / Sun Sentinel)

FEEDBACK

Bob Sutton, the **beleaguered chairman of the Broward Republican Party**, resigned on Saturday, ending a tumultuous tenure during which his leadership came under scrutiny locally and by the state GOP.

Sutton's resignation was announced — with him present in the room — by Blaise Ingoglia, chairman of the Republican Party of Florida, during the state party's quarterly Executive Board meeting at the Rosen Centre Hotel in Orlando.

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The state party's Executive Board directed the county party organization to hold an election on Jan. 22 to elect a new chairman — and imposed several other restrictions on the Broward party.

“The whole thing is a step in the right direction,” said Richard DeNapoli. “We’ll hopefully get ready for 2018 and mend fences. Hopefully ... we can be united as a party in Broward.”

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DeNapoli, reached by phone en route back to Broward from the meeting of the Executive Board on which he serves, is the county's state-elected Republican committeeman and a former county Republican chairman.

As word spread about the afternoon's events, Broward Republican activists started calling, texting, emailing and posting on Facebook to praise or criticize the resignation and state party's restrictions — generally depending on which faction

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“My phone’s been blowing up all day,” said Rico Petrocelli, a former county Republican chairman.

Sutton could not be reached for detailed comment. He confirmed by text message that he’s no longer chairman, and referred questions to the party’s vice chairwoman, Celeste Ellich, whom Sutton described as “acting chair.” Ellich couldn’t be reached for comment via voicemail or text message.

Ingoglia also couldn’t be reached for comment; a state party spokeswoman confirmed Sutton’s resignation.

Alvin Entin, a prominent Broward lawyer and Sutton ally, wrote on Facebook that he was sorry to see him go.

Borrowing language from President Franklin Roosevelt’s address to Congress the day after the sneak attack on Pearl Harbor that got the U.S. into World War II, Entin said Saturday is “a date which will live in infamy,” because of what happened with the Republican Party and Sutton.

“A good and decent person who was the most committed Republican I know was forced to resign the chairmanship of the Broward Republican Executive Committee due to the maneuverings of particularly devious individuals,” Entin wrote. The Broward Republican Executive Committee is the formal name of the county Republican Party organization.

FEEDBACK

The party has been [plagued with infighting for years](#) and the job of chairman has been a revolving door for most of the past decade. Sutton lasted longer than most: 26 months. The next chairman will be the ninth person to hold the job in 11 years.

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party post in 2015.

“If you are looking for division, if you are looking for drama and you are looking for chaos, I am not your candidate,” he said at the time. "If you are looking for someone who brings direction, conviction and will work to get Republicans elected, I am your candidate."

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The party’s dysfunction continued. [He won re-election to the job in 2016 with just 51 percent of the vote.](#) In 2017, when party secretary [Dolly Rump resigned after a little more than four months on the job](#), she emailed fellow Republicans that, “We do not operate as a cohesive board; there is major dysfunction, division, and disorder.”

The party wasn’t even tending to basic tasks, Rump said, such as maintaining membership rolls, making sure the party website is functioning, and raising money.

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In November, [Ingoglia put Sutton on six months' probation](#) and told him to improve the way he was running the county party. “Broward is important to state-wide elections, and this ridiculous infighting needs to stop! With all these findings, BREC leadership should consider themselves on a very short leash,” he

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Editorial

In the past week, many Broward
Republican activists complained to

the state party about the way Sutton was operating, especially over the plans to pick a new state committeewoman. That position, vacant since August, carries a seat on the county Republican Party's board of directors and on the board that governs the state Republican Party.

In 4 p.m. email on New Year's Eve, committeemen and committeewomen — the people from across the county who make up the party apparatus — learned Sutton had set the election for Jan. 15, the federal holiday for Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday. He also changed the location to Pembroke Pines in far southwestern Broward, where one of the two candidates for the party post lives. For years, the county party's meetings have been held in Plantation, in the geographic center of the county.

On Saturday, the state party's Executive Board ordered that the committeewoman election — and a contest to replace Sutton — be held on Jan. 22 at the usual meeting place in Plantation. And, the board ordered a halt to attempts to remove people who had been appointed as committeemen and committeewomen in recent months. Anyone who was on the membership rolls at the end of August will be allowed to vote.

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Anthony Man is the Sun Sentinel's political writer. Concentrating on local political people, parties and trends, he also covers state and national politics from a South Florida perspective. He previously covered Palm Beach County government and made repeated reporting trips to Tallahassee. He has also covered state and local politics in Illinois.

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