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# Broward Republicans hope new leader ends internal turmoil



By **ANTHONY MAN**  
SUN SENTINEL | OCT 26, 2015



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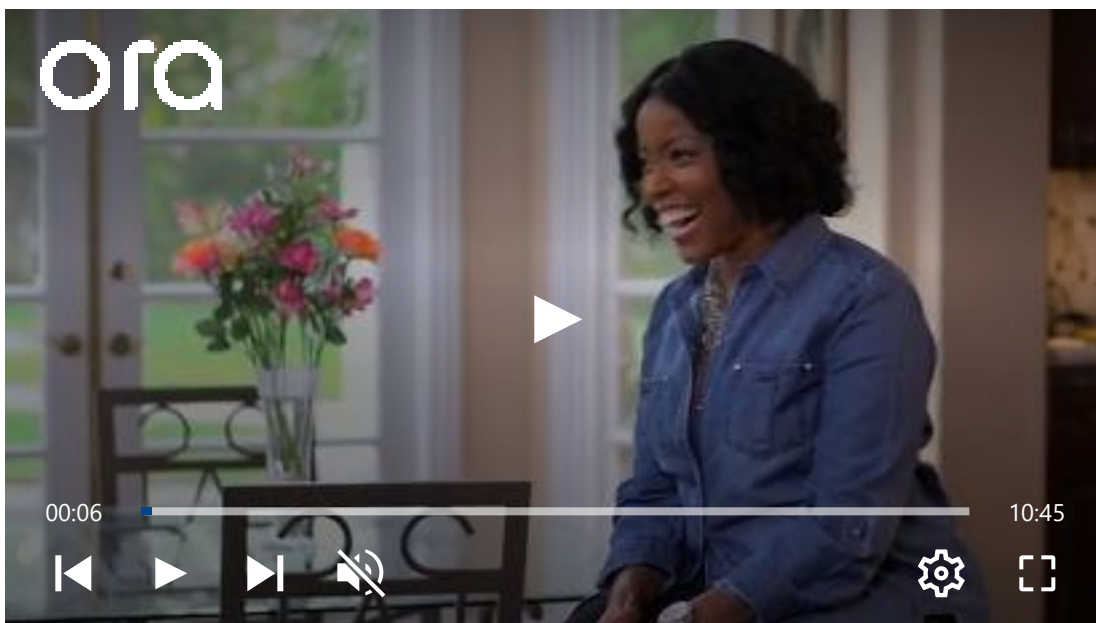


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Bob Sutton, vice chairman of the Broward Republican Party, before a Republican Business Network meeting in Coral Springs on Oct. 21, 2015. He was elected chairman of the Broward Republican Party on Oct. 26. (Anthony Man / Sun Sentinel)

After years of internal turmoil, Broward Republicans hope their new leader, elected Monday night, can turn the local party into an election-winning machine instead of a hotbed of factional infighting.

Bob Sutton won the job of party chairman.

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"If you are looking for division, if you are looking for drama and you are looking for chaos, I am not your candidate," Sutton told Republican committee members from across the county before they voted. "If you are looking for someone who brings direction, conviction and will work to get Republicans elected, I am your candidate."

The results show he'll have to work hard to achieve the unity he promised.

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Sutton won with 90 votes. The other candidate, Lauren Cooley, received 80 votes.

One vote was cast for Donald Trump, the billionaire real estate developer and Republican presidential candidate.

In late 2014, Sutton was elected vice chairman, and has been the acting party chairman since the resignation of his predecessor, Christine Butler, at the end of August.

Sutton becomes the Broward Republican Party's eighth chairman in less than nine years — a time period in which the Miami Dolphins have had five head coaches and the Miami Marlins seven managers.

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The job of party chairman doesn't pay a salary, brings a torrent of criticism and comes with a list of challenges:

- Republican numbers are declining in Broward — down 14 percent in the last decade, while the number of registered Democrats has increased 5 percent and no party affiliation/independent voters have jumped 38 percent. With just 22 percent of the county's registered voters, Republicans are now in third place — behind independents and far behind Democrats.

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•Republican Gov. Rick Scott's vote total dipped in Broward for his 2014 re-election, even as it grew 17 percent statewide.

•The local party has struggled to raise money, and didn't come up with enough cash to pay for field offices to support the election efforts of party candidates in 2014. Candidates, including the Scott campaign, mobilized their own efforts. Money is so tight that the party moved its monthly meetings this year from a Fort Lauderdale hotel conference room to a government-owned community center in Plantation.

•Broward Republicans have been plagued by infighting, with a major schism between the conservative wing, many of whose members are part of the tea party movement, and the more moderate, establishment wing of the party. One group

concentrate on electing Republicans to office.

Even though [Broward County](#) is dominated by Democrats, it has the third-highest number of registered Republicans in the state. Getting those voters to the polls is critical to helping a Republican win Florida's 29 electoral votes in next year's presidential election.

Butler resigned this summer, eight months into her two-year term. She said she was leaving because she got married and was moving to [Palm Beach County](#) to run for supervisor of elections there. She acknowledged that her resignation came shortly before a possible "no confidence" vote by the party's executive board, but said that didn't influence her decision to leave.

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Sutton, 52, of Coral Springs, is a teacher, businessman and documentary producer. He has unsuccessfully run for School Board

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and [Broward County](#) Commission.

He touted his candidacy in 24 seconds of remarks to the party voters. Cooley, 23, of Fort Lauderdale, pitched her qualifications in a six-minute speech.

She is a professional political staffer for the Susan B. Anthony List, an organization that raises money for anti-abortion political candidates. She's been active in Republican outreach to voters in the millennial generation and been involved in politics since her time in the Teenage Republicans.

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Topics: [Elections](#), [Republican Party](#), [Tea Party Movement](#), [Rick Scott](#)



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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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