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POLITICS

NEWS

# Republicans hope to reverse declining fortunes in Broward



By **ANTHONY MAN**  
SUN SENTINEL | FEB 02, 2018



George Moraitis is the new chairman of the Broward Republican Party.



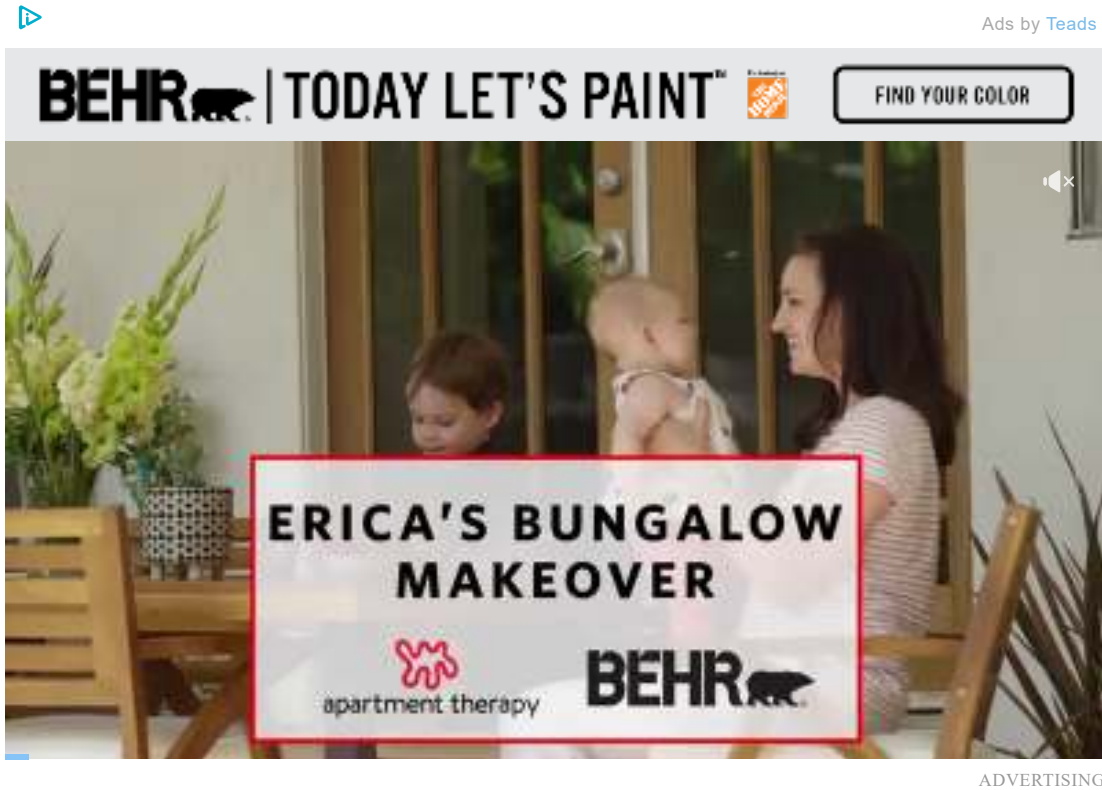
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[As the new chairman of the Broward Republican Party](#), he's attempting to execute a quick turnaround at the organization, which has lost more than a year of election prep time to [internal party struggles](#) that have diverted attention from organizing, training and raising money.



The ramifications could make the difference in whether Democrats or Republicans win key contests in November.

**FEEDBACK** “We have a lot of work cut out for us,” Moraitis said. He was elected on Jan. 22, becoming the ninth Broward Republican Party chairman in 11 years.

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Moraitis replaced [Bob Sutton, who resigned last month](#) after 26 months in the post.



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Broward Republican activists fly Trump flag in deep blue Broward

The polls aren't promising and they're vastly outnumbered in their home county, but Broward Republican activists aren't running away from

OCT 25, 2016 AT 11:02 AM

Broward County is tough territory for Republicans, and it's been trending increasingly Democratic. But a functioning local political party could help Republican candidates overcome some obstacles.

The stakes are high:

-- Republicans are trying to [hang on to the only two partisan offices they hold in Broward County](#).

One is the seat in the state House of Representatives held by Moraitis, who can't run again because of term

limits. [County Commissioner Chip LaMarca is running for that job](#), while former Oakland Park Commissioner Shari McCartney is hoping to keep LaMarca's seat in the Republican column.

-- City, town and village governments throughout the county hold elections in March and November.

Even though voters don't see party labels in those elections, political parties can — and do when they're able — provide help to the candidates for those jobs. Tom Powers, a Republican and former Coral Springs city commissioner, and Daniel

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said there is tremendous potential benefit to candidates if their political party is functioning and can help campaigns.

The Democratic Party, for example, had [volunteers making get out the vote calls](#) on behalf of Charlotte Rodstrom and Dean Trantalis in last month's Fort Lauderdale mayoral primary. Trantalis came in first and will face Bruce Roberts, who until recently was a registered Republican, in the March runoff.

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Broward Republican chairman resigns after months of turmoil

JAN 06, 2018 AT 7:00 PM

-- Statewide candidates for governor and U.S. Senate, need votes from Broward County.

No statewide Republican candidate has any hope of winning Broward. But if Republicans running statewide for governor and U.S. Senate can do well enough in Broward that they hold down the large Democratic margin, the Republican advantage in the rest of the state can get them elected.

"It can make a difference. There's a lot of Republicans here in Broward County, and if we can turn them out we can make a difference in the statewide races," said Richard DeNapoli, a former Broward Republican chairman who is now the

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Broward Republicans pick lawmaker George Moraitis as new party chairman

JAN 23, 2018 AT 9:45 AM

A well-run county political party can work on getting its registered voters to the polls, freeing individual candidates to concentrate on selling themselves to independent voters, DeNapoli and Moraitis said.

One way a political party does that is by “chasing” vote-by-mail ballots. Every day, the political organizations get the names and contact information for anyone who’s requested or received a mail ballot from the Supervisor of Elections Office.

An organized party operation would reach out to each of its voters, encouraging them to fill out the ballot and return it.

In 2016, a call for someone to take charge of ballot chasing was issued at the Oct. 24 Republican Party meeting — weeks after ballots were mailed to voters.

Moraitis’ to-do list starts with money.

As the party was consumed by internal fighting from the 2016 elections through 2017, fundraising lagged. Broward Republicans never even held their big, annual Lincoln Day fundraising dinner, and the party took in far less than in comparable recent non-election years.

According to financial reports filed with the Broward Supervisor of Elections Office:

-- Broward Republicans took in just \$22,618 in cash contributions last year. In the previous year after a presidential election, 2013, the Broward Republican Party raised \$96,117.

-- Broward Democrats brought in \$206,052 last year; in 2012, the Democrats

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“We need to raise money. We need to have a successful Lincoln Day,” DeNapoli said. “It’s the money that will then give us the possibilities of campaigning and having a well-run operation for 2018.”

Moraitis — who refers to the need to “raise resources” instead of money — said fundraising is needed so the party can deploy organized volunteers who are prepared to effectively contact voters.

“There are a lot of tools out there these days, where you can actually get voter history, voter information. It’s all public record, but they consolidate it. Help you do analytics and help you get those tools in the hands of your precinct people to contact [people] and make sure they vote,” he said.

Moraitis said the party would have a fundraising dinner sometime this spring. One challenge for him is that as a member of the state House of Representatives, he can’t raise money before the end of legislative session in March.

Building up the base of volunteers — getting them trained and interacting with voters in their neighborhoods — is another Moraitis priority.

Cynthia Busch, chairwoman of the Broward Democratic Party, said that’s important to start in the year between elections. “You have to be building a field team. You have to be getting your workers ready to go,” she said.

Busch said Democrats spent much of 2017 training volunteers, who have already started to work in their communities.

The numbers show the biggest challenge party leaders face, and Moraitis said he hopes to reverse the precipitous decline in the percentage of Broward voters registered as Republicans.

The county has the second-largest population in the state. At the end of 2007, it had the second-largest number of Republican registered voters in Florida. At the

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end of 2017, it had fallen to fourth place, behind Miami-Dade, Hillsborough and Palm Beach counties.

Broward went from the second-place Democratic county to first, displacing Miami-Dade County.

The 254,000 registered Republicans in Broward was 10.5 percent higher in 2017 than 2007. But over the same time, the number of registered Democrats in Broward surged 31 percent to 594,000.

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No party affiliation/independent voters — who make up a larger share of Broward registered voters than the Republicans — numbered 330,000 last year, up 69 percent from 2007.

Besides getting more party activists talking up Republicanism in their neighborhoods, Moraitis said “improving the brand of the Republican Party in Broward” is also on his to-do list.

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“The Republican Party’s very successful in a lot of areas, even in moderate areas of the county, but for some reason we’re not extremely successful here in this county.”

Moraitis received national attention Thursday for his vote against

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Editorial

One thing the chairman doesn't plan  
to do is distance the party in any way  
from President Donald Trump, who

[public opinion polls show is popular with Republicans](#), but not Democrats  
and no party/independent voters.

[Moraitis was an early Trump supporter](#) in the 2016 campaign. After he was  
elected county Republican chairman, he told party members that "We cannot let  
the never Trumpers and the people who want to tear down this party and the  
conservative values of this country succeed."

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South Florida Sun Sentinel



Anthony Man is the Sun Sentinel's political writer. Concentrating on local political people,  
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