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NEWS

State Rep. George Moraitis running for Broward Republican chairman



By **ANTHONY MAN**
SUN SENTINEL | JAN 08, 2018



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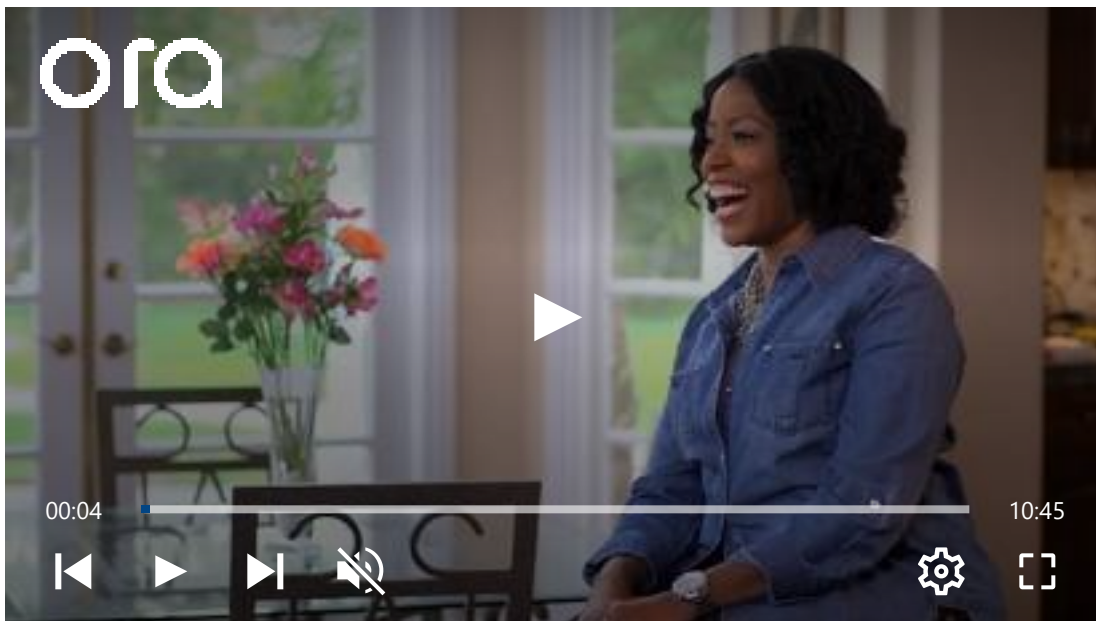


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State Rep. George Moraitis, R-Fort Lauderdale, with hand outstretched, after speaking to the Broward Republican Party meeting in Plantation on Oct. 24, 2016. He is running for the job of party chairman in a special election in January 2018.
(Anthony Man)

State Rep. George Moraitis, R-Fort Lauderdale, said Monday he's running in a special election to become chairman of the Broward Republican Party.

He said he hopes to heal divisions in a party that's rife with factions, try to bring more people in to the ranks of party activists and try to improve the party's track record in local elections.

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“We need to do something to revitalize the Republican Party,” Moraitis said. “I’d like to reach out to constituencies that haven’t been part of the Republican Party, nationally and in this area.”

As Broward has trended more Democratic, the Republicans’ fortunes have declined. Moraitis is one of only two Republicans among Broward County commissioners, local state senators and local state representatives.

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[of party Chairman Bob Sutton](#), whose tenure was marked by severe factional differences and an insurrection among several members of the county party's board of directors.

“George Moraitis is one of the few people who could bring both sides — who were pro-Sutton and anti-Sutton — together,” said Rico Petrocelli, a former county Republican chairman. Richard DeNapoli, another former county chairman and

Moraitis is beginning his final year in office. He's unable to run for re-election to his east Broward state House seat because of term limits. In March, his wife, Heather, will begin a three-year term on the Fort Lauderdale City Commission. She built such a formidable campaign organization that no one ran against her, and she was elected without opposition.

Moraitis is hoping to take over the position left vacant by the [surprise resignation over the weekend](#)

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The numbers show the biggest challenge party leaders face: In 1996, Republicans were 33.5 percent of the registered voters in Broward. In 2006, they were down to 26.2 percent. By 2016, Republicans slipped to 21.8 percent of registered voters — in third place, behind people registered as no party affiliation/independents.

Moraitis was an enthusiastic supporter of Donald Trump’s presidential candidacy last year. Delivering one of the warm-up speeches at a 2016 Trump rally at the BB&T Center in Sunrise, he said he was supporting his party’s nominee for “A better future and a better America — the kind of America Donald Trump believes in.”



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party’s positions on fiscal issues.

Moraitis acknowledged Monday that his views on some subjects are more conservative than many Republicans. But, he said, that wouldn’t get in the way of building a cohesive local party.

“The party should be big enough to have different wings,” he said. “Just because you don’t believe in every single thing doesn’t mean you can’t be part of this party.”

He said he thinks there’s room for the Republican Party to improve its performance in Broward among people who are registered as Democrats and as independent/no party affiliation voters who like the

If he's elected chairman, Moraitis said it wouldn't be appropriate to take sides in primaries, with one exception. He said if a valued incumbent is challenged in a primary by someone who isn't well known, he wouldn't "want to pretend that we're not supportive of our incumbents."

Except for his time at the Naval Academy, in the Navy, and at the University of Florida law school, Moraitis, 47, has lived in Fort Lauderdale his entire life. His law practice concentrates on real estate closings and estate planning.



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The state party decided the election to replace Sutton would be held on Jan. 22.

Fort Lauderdale lawyer Al Massey said Monday he'd considered running for the job, but "when I learned George was interested in doing it, I backed out and I support him 100 percent."

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Petrocelli said he doesn't know of anyone else running for the post.

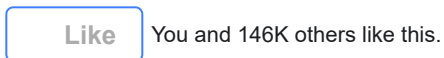
Sutton's letter

On Monday, committeemen and committeewomen from around the county — who form the governing organization of the local party — were officially notified of Sutton's resignation in an email from Acting Chairwoman Celeste Ellich.

[Sutton's resignation was announced Saturday](#) by state party Chairman Blaise Ingoglia at a meeting of the state Republicans' Executive Board in Orlando.

"After much thought, prayer, and discussion with my family; I have decided that it is in the best interest of the Republican Party of Broward County to resign as its chairman," Sutton wrote, adding that he'd say on as a rank-and-file committeeman and attempt "to effect a positive change so necessary for the growth of the Republican Party in Broward County."

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South Florida Sun Sentinel



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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