

ITEM #65

ADDITIONAL MATERIAL

**Regular Meeting
DECEMBER 4, 2018**

SUBMITTED AT THE REQUEST OF

COMMISSIONER STEVE GELLER

Gov. Rick Scott took low road in removing Broward Elections Supervisor Brenda Snipes | Editorial



Broward's suspended elections supervisor, Brenda Snipes, shown here, needs to go. But in one of his last acts as governor, Rick Scott made Snipes a cause celebre, a black Democratic woman replaced by a white Republican man — Pete Antonacci — who doesn't even live in Broward. (SSMG)

By **Sun Sentinel Editorial Board**

DECEMBER 3, 2018, 6:25 PM

There's nothing to like about Republican U.S. Sen.-elect **Rick Scott's** Friday night takedown of Democrat Brenda Snipes, Broward County's embattled supervisor of elections, whom he's accused of "misfeasance, incompetence and neglect of duty."

Snipes had announced she was resigning Jan. 4, after all. Why did the governor feel compelled to kick her in the backside — and threaten her pension — on her way out the door?

Without question, Snipes, 75, needs to go. She's stayed in office far too long and has made far too many mistakes. In the days after the November election, she rattled public confidence yet again by saying she didn't know how many ballots remained to be counted. This editorial board, which endorsed **her opponent** in the last

election, called for her **resignation**. People on both sides of the aisle agreed her time was up. Days later, so did she.

You can understand Scott's pique with Snipes, who regularly brings up the rear in reporting election results. During her office's chaotic November count, his margin of victory fell into the mandatory recount range. But then again, her flawed ballot design — believed responsible for 25,000 voters skipping the **U.S. Senate** race in Florida's bluest county — might have helped him secure his win against Democratic incumbent Bill Nelson.

Snipes did herself no favors by scheduling her resignation for the day after Scott is sworn in as a U.S. senator. Had her plan played out, her replacement would have been named either by Lt. Gov. Carlos Lopez Cantera, acting in an interim role, or Gov.-elect **Ron DeSantis**, who will take office three days later.

Still, Scott has now made Snipes a cause celebre, a black Democratic woman suspended and replaced by a white Republican man — Pete Antonacci — who doesn't even live in Broward. More on that in a moment.

As human nature would have it, Snipes punched back by rescinding her resignation — which Scott had not yet accepted — and promising a fight. Now Florida's Democratic Black Caucus is pushing for a hearing in the **Florida Senate**, which must decide whether her suspension should be made permanent.

“What he did was unnecessary, small and petty,” says Sen. Perry Thurston of Broward, who will play an important role in the proceedings. “She said she's resigning, she's walking away. There was no need to just pile on unnecessarily.”

At the hearing, Thurston plans to ask why Scott suspended Snipes, who did nothing criminal, when he refused to suspend four of his North Broward Hospital District appointees who were criminally indicted for violating the Sunshine Law. “I'm looking forward to hearing an answer to that comparative analysis.”

Former state Sen. Chris Smith says Senate President Bill Galvano doesn't want this fight. “For Galvano to kick her out, he has to take on the Black Caucus on something he doesn't care about. Why take on the Black Caucus, and start a partisan fight with Democrats, over the Broward County supervisor of elections? It's not like she stole money or that elections didn't happen. We're talking about a few gaffes.”

Smith told us that if Scott really wanted Antonacci, he could have arranged to send him down to work with Snipes on the transition. Instead, he sent the Florida Department of Law Enforcement in as a “show of force” late Friday to escort employees out of the building and lock it down. “I don't know what that was about.”

And now, Broward's elections supervisor is a Scott loyalist with a reputation for doing the governor's bidding.

As Scott's former general counsel, for example, Antonacci orchestrated the ouster of Gerald Bailey, the former head of the Florida Department of Law Enforcement, who had complained that the governor was politicizing the police agency for his campaign. Antonacci visited Bailey and told him he was out, though that power rests with the Florida Cabinet. Cabinet members were told Bailey had volunteered his resignation, when he hadn't. During this fiasco, Antonacci gave transparency a bad name.

Later, Scott sent Antonacci in to replace the director of the South Florida Water Management District, who'd expressed a reluctance to cut taxes because of the district's infrastructure needs. While there, Antonacci fought plans for the reservoir now planned for south of Lake Okeechobee. He also told scientists not to cooperate with top federal scientists advising Everglades restoration, but rather to "stay in your lane." He showed little leadership in addressing our 70-year-old flood control system, which is at the breaking point under the pressure of sea-level rise.

Later, the governor sent Antonacci to run Enterprise Florida, where he said his top goal was to land Amazon's HQ2 sweepstakes. The company chose two northeastern cities, instead.

In none of these roles has Antonacci developed a reputation for public outreach or transparency — a key attribute needed in the elections supervisor's office.

Indeed, in the Bailey case, he reportedly suggested the state's top cop should delete the emails he received from Scott's campaign — in violation of the state's public records law.

So you can forgive Broward's Democratic leaders for fearing this Republican operative may create mayhem here.

"He could do a lot that would hurt voting in Broward County," says Smith, who was under consideration for the appointment had DeSantis gotten to make it.

"There is a possibility that he could cut Early Voting days, or order the purge of voter files of anyone who hasn't voted in the past three elections. He could say two weeks is too early for Early Voting, that we don't need 22 Early Voting sites ... (and) instead of 800 precincts, he could combine them, which would create longer lines."

Broward's elections office needs shaping up, without a doubt. It needs a trustworthy and transparent supervisor who can build public confidence. But for this heavily Democratic county, Gov. Scott instead chose a loyal Republican soldier.

We'll have more to say about the changes needed in the elections office in the coming days.

For now, we can only express disappointment that as one of his last acts as governor, Scott chose to stir up a racially-tinged hornet's nest. That instead of taking the high road, he demonstrated spite toward a public servant at the end of her career. And that among Broward's nearly 2 million citizens, he couldn't find a single candidate worth interviewing about how to build confidence in the county's elections office.

Editorials are the opinion of the Sun Sentinel Editorial Board and written by one of its members or a designee. The Editorial Board consists of Editorial Page Editor Rosemary O'Hara, David Lyons and Editor-in-Chief Julie Anderson.