

EXCLUSIVE

ELECTIONS

Sean Leavitt exits Strafford County Commission race amid residency probe



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Key Points

- Strafford County Commissioner Sean Leavitt has withdrawn from his 2026 reelection race.
 - Leavitt's withdrawal follows a complaint from fellow Republicans questioning his residency.
 - The New Hampshire attorney general's office is investigating the residency claims.
 - Robert Drew will replace Leavitt on the November ballot against a Democratic opponent.
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DOVER — [Strafford County Commission](#) member Sean Leavitt has withdrawn his candidacy for reelection in 2026 while facing an investigation after being accused by fellow Republicans of being dishonest about his place of residence, which he denies.

Ken Hilton, chairman of the [Strafford County Republican Committee](#) and vice chairman of the New Hampshire Republican Party, filed a complaint with the New Hampshire attorney general, stating Leavitt's [99 Columbus Ave.](#) Dover address is his place of business, not his residence.

Sean Locke, senior assistant attorney general, in a letter provided by the AG's office, stated the office's Election Law Unit was investigating and found "credible information" indicating Leavitt may not live within the district his commission seat represents, and the ongoing probe will determine if further action is needed.

Leavitt, in an interview for this story, said 99 Columbus Ave. is his primary address when he is in the city, and it is the address he listed when he filed for reelection to the Strafford County Commission District 3 seat. The district comprises Barrington, Madbury, Strafford, Dover Wards 5 and 6 and Rochester Wards 2-4.

"I have a living space in the business, as did my father before me," Leavitt said. "I get mail there. I register cars there. I also have a house at 37 Ash Street in Dover, which I rent to my stepson, a house in Concord, and a house in Florida, so I feel pretty fortunate. These radical Republicans came and said, 'You don't live in the district, but I do.'"

Why did he withdraw from the election if he stands by his address?

Leavitt said the people complaining called the city, his friends and neighbors. He said they even went on his property, looking in the windows.

"My wife, Val, asked me, 'Is it worth it?'" he said. "I told all this to the AG investigator. ... I just wanted to do some good, and I think we have."

He said after much contemplation, and discussions with his wife, he decided to withdraw. He decided fighting was not worth what he called the harassment he has been receiving, saying he did nothing wrong.

Robert Drew, a Republican who finished second to Leavitt in the New Hampshire primary on Sept. 8, will replace Leavitt on the Nov. 3 general election ballot, the secretary of state confirmed.

What is the Strafford County Commission? And why did the Republican Party challenge a Republican?

County commissioners are the Executive Branch of the county government, overseeing the day-to-day operations of the county, such as the nursing home and jail, the sheriff's department, housing and homeless warming center initiatives, and the county's finances.

George Maglaras, a Democrat, is the longtime chairman of the commission. He has served as a commissioner continuously since 1983, winning reelection every two years, mostly serving with fellow Democrats.

Strafford County as whole votes heavily Democratic and had not elected a Republican to the commission in more than a decade until 2024, when how the county elects commissioners changed. That's when the county was divided into three districts by Republicans in the state legislature, rather than a countywide election for all three commissioners. In 2024, candidates living anywhere in the county could run in any district. Now, in 2026, county commission candidates must live in the district they represent.

Leavitt and Joe Pitre, both Republicans, were elected to the commission in 2024, giving the party the majority of the commission. Republican Leslie Feliciano replaced Pitre in the District 1 seat after he resigned in summer 2025, saying he was moving out of state. (District 1 comprises Middleton, New Durham, Milton, Farmington, Somersworth and Rochester Wards 1, 5 and 6.)

Republican leaders in the county, however, don't feel Leavitt and Feliciano represent their views.

New Hampshire state Rep. Kelley Potenza, R-Rochester, said Feliciano and Leavitt are Democrats recruited by Maglaras to run as Republicans.

"These are George's people," she said, adding they might be Republicans "on paper, but they are not Republicans. They are not involved with the Republican Party in any way."

Maglaras said Leavitt has been a Republican his whole life. He said Feliciano changed her party affiliation "for reasons unknown" to him.

"I feel bad for (Leavitt) and for Leslie Feliciano," Maglaras said. "Both are good, nice people only trying to do the right thing and not toe the party line."

Leavitt said he will reassess and might run again in 2028 and vowed to "stay involved."

Republicans succeed in ousting Feliciano and Leavitt

Republican candidates challenged both Leavitt and Feliciano in the 2026 primary election on Sept. 8. The result, after Leavitt bowed out, is there will be two new commissioners elected in November. It remains to be seen which party will win the majority.

Susan Rice, who is also a Rochester city councilor, defeated Feliciano, 1,668-1,133, in the Republican primary to win a place on the Nov. 3 ballot. Rice will face Democrat John Scruton in the District 1 election.

Leavitt defeated Drew, 1,343-1,217, in the District 3 primary before withdrawing. Drew will face off against Democrat Heath Howard, a write-in candidate who won the nomination with 324 votes.

Maglaras is running unopposed for District 2, which covers wards 1, 2, 3, and 4 of the city of Dover, and the towns of Durham, Lee, and Rollinsford.

Battle over Riverside Rest Home replacement still simmers

Maglaras had strong words about what he feels was the Republican Party's motivation behind the complaint filed against Leavitt and running an opponent against Feliciano.

"These radicals the Republicans are running are anti-middle class, anti-elderly and anti-sick," he said. "And most of all anti-government. We need some government and the things at the county exist to help people, but these candidates are out to close the nursing home and destroy the government our forefathers built as the ultimate safety net."

Potenza said Maglaras' claim Republicans want to shutter Riverside Rest Home is "not true."

The battle over the nursing home goes back to a December 2023 vote, when the Strafford County delegation of state representatives defeated a \$170 million proposal put forward by Maglaras and the commissioners to build a new county nursing home. A two-thirds vote was required to pass. It received 21 yes votes, all from Democrats. It received 15 no votes, 14 from Republicans and one Democrat, falling three votes short of passage. Commissioners at that time also had plans to convert the current Riverside Rest Home into transitional housing for the homeless population.

“They wanted the Taj Mahal, as people were saying at the time,” Potenza said. “Plus, the county could have gotten money during the pandemic, (federal CARES Act) money they could have used to make major improvements to the current home. They didn’t take advantage of that because they were focused on the new plan they had made.”

Potenza noted some Republicans visited Carroll County's more modest new nursing home at that time and suggested it could serve as a model, but said Maglaras and the commissioners were not interested in a downsized plan.

Hilton did not immediately respond to a request to comment for this story.