

# Republican wins Georgia Senate race as Obama lies low

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Saxby Chambliss, a conservative Republican from Georgia, retained his US Senate seat in a runoff election Tuesday, easily defeating his Democratic opponent, Jim Martin, by a 58 to 42 percent margin. The runoff was required because Chambliss fell just below the 50 percent mark in the November 4 general election.

The voter turnout in the runoff election was far below the record total a month before, when the presidential contest was on the ballot. Democrat Barack Obama lost the state by a relatively narrow margin of four percent, and Martin posted nearly the same margin, winning 46 percent of the vote and holding Chambliss to 49.8 percent, while a right-wing Libertarian candidate took the balance.

Some 4 million people voted on November 4 in Georgia, but a month later the turnout was barely half that. Turnout fell far more sharply in black and working class areas than in the upper middle class Atlanta suburbs, like Cobb County and Gwinnett County, and Chambliss greatly increased his margins in those areas.

Media attention on the race largely focused on whether the Democratic Party would achieve the 60 votes in the US Senate needed to halt a filibuster. The results of the November 4 balloting gave the Democrats 56 seats out of 100, a gain of seven seats, with two independents—one of them right-wing Iraq war supporter Joseph Lieberman—usually voting with the Democrats.

The Senate seat from Minnesota remains undecided, with a recount to be completed by Friday, December 5, and Republican incumbent Norm Coleman leading Democrat Al Franken by less than 100 votes out of more than 2.5 million cast. But the Georgia result insures that even if Franken ultimately prevails, the

Republicans will hold 41 seats.

In practice, this figure means little, because on any particular issue, there are right-wing Democratic senators like Lieberman, or "moderate" Republicans, who could shift their position and uphold or shut down a filibuster, depending on the pressure from the ruling financial elite.

The most important feature of the Georgia race was the apparent decision by Obama, now the president-elect, to intervene as little as possible in the contest. He made a radio commercial for Martin, but did not campaign personally and sent no surrogates from his administration-in-formation.

Such Democratic Party figures as former president Bill Clinton and former vice president Al Gore made campaign appearances in Georgia, but the effort was perfunctory, especially given the huge sums poured into the Chambliss runoff campaign by the national Republican Party and such groups as the National Rifle Association and the US Chamber of Commerce, in addition to well-publicized appearances by defeated Republican vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin.

Obama's hands-off policy was widely praised in the US media as a signal of his intention to run a "bipartisan" administration, along with his reappointment of Defense Secretary Gates, his selection of pro-war figures like Hillary Clinton and retired General Jim Jones for secretary of state and national security adviser, respectively, and his choices of proven friends of Wall Street for key economic positions.

It is likely, in fact, that Obama had little desire to achieve a 60-vote supermajority in the Senate, since the "threat" of a Republican filibuster serves as a built-in excuse for the Democratic administration to repudiate its campaign promises to end the war in Iraq, provide jobs and move towards universal access to health

insurance.

The principal task of the incoming administration, as far as its big business backers and its leading personnel are concerned, is to prop up the crisis-stricken US financial system, while redeploying US military forces for a new round of aggressive actions in southwest Asia—on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, as well as against Iran, Syria and other potential targets. All these reactionary policies have broad support in both the Republican and Democratic parties.

Whatever Obama's intentions, moreover, nothing that the president-elect has done since November 4, in terms of either policy or personnel, was calculated to produce the kind of upsurge in mass popular support that would have been required to win in Georgia.

While 36 percent of Georgia voters cast early votes (before Election Day), only 9.2 percent bothered to do so in the runoff. The drop-off in enthusiasm among Georgia voters suggests the growing disillusionment among black and working class voters after the first month of the transition to an Obama administration.

The lack of a "filibuster-proof" majority in the Senate is a transparent pretext for Obama's repudiation of his campaign promises to working people. Even with 58 seats, the Democratic majority in the Senate is the largest enjoyed by either party in more than 30 years.

It is an illuminating fact of American politics that while 41 Republicans can supposedly wreak havoc on Obama, a far larger number of Democrats in the Senate during Bush's eight years in the White House (and an outright majority in 2001-2002 and 2007-2008) rubber-stamped tax cuts for the wealthy, wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the establishment of the torture camp at Guantánamo, and all the other right-wing measures of the Bush administration.



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