

Georgia Senate debate: Republican fascist agitation versus Democratic political cowardice

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This past Sunday was the first, and possibly final, debate between Republican Senator Kelly Loeffler, who was appointed in January 2020 to replace retiring Senator Johnny Isakson, and her Democratic challenger, Reverend Raphael Warnock.

The contest between Loeffler and Warnock is one of two run-off elections to be held January 5 for US senator from Georgia. The outcome of the races will determine which big business party controls the Senate. As it stands currently, the Republicans hold a 50-48 advantage. However, should the Democrats win both races and split the chamber 50-50, and President-elect Joe Biden be inaugurated on January 20th, Vice President Kamala Harris would serve as the tie-breaking vote in the Senate, giving the Democrats control of Congress as well as the executive branch.

In a scheduled debate the same day between incumbent Republican David Perdue and Democratic candidate Jon Ossoff, Perdue refused to participate, leaving Ossoff 30 minutes to debate an empty podium. Perdue's refusal to participate in the debate followed new allegations of insider trading that surfaced last week.

A *New York Times* report revealed that Perdue had made 2,596 stock trades during his five years as senator, more trades than the next five senators combined, with a significant portion of the trades occurring while Perdue sat on senate committees or subcommittees overseeing the companies in which he traded. Perdue purchased up to \$260,000 worth of Pfizer stock between February 26 and February 28 of this year, after attending a classified briefing led by the Coronavirus Task Force that discussed, among other things, expediting the development of a vaccine.

Loeffler, the richest member of the US Senate, also attended the hearing and then made stock trades based on her inside knowledge of the seriousness of the pandemic. Neither she nor Perdue informed Georgia voters or the general public and instead echoed Trump in playing down the dangerous implications of the virus.

The debate between Loeffler and Warnock was dominated by the incumbent Republican senator's repeated refusal to acknowledge Biden's election victory and her support for Trump's unconstitutional attempt to overturn the election and illegally remain in power. In response, Warnock carried out the party line of Biden and the Democrats, downplaying the danger represented by Trump's assault on democracy.

Loeffler's support for Trump's coup attempt was combined with far-right attacks against her opponent. She repeatedly called Warnock, a pastor, a "radical liberal," using the epithet over a dozen times during the debate. Echoing Trump, she portrayed Warnock and the Democratic Party as a "socialist" and "Marxist" menace, and portrayed her election as the last line of defense against evil-doers out to destroy the "American dream."

Invoking all the nostrums of the far-right, Loeffler pledged her support for the police and the military, declared her opposition to abortion, denounced the Democrats for supporting "open borders" and free health care for immigrants, and warned that if elected, Warnock would seize people's guns.

Warnock responded by declaring his opposition to socialism and support for capitalism and praising the police. During a question and answer session between the two candidates, Loeffler demanded that Warnock

“renounce socialism and Marxism,” which he promptly did.

“Listen, I believe in our free enterprise system, and my dad was a small business owner,” Warnock replied.

The day before the debate, Trump held a Saturday night rally in Georgia, with Loeffler and Perdue in attendance, in which he endorsed the pair while refusing to concede the presidential election and calling for “revenge” against “radical left Democrats.” Since his November defeat and subsequent failure thus far to overthrow the vote through the courts, Trump has expanded his threats beyond his Democratic “enemies,” attacking Republican governors and election officials in closely contested states that have certified the election.

Trump has attacked Georgia Governor Brian Kemp and his Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, the latter of whom Trump has called “an enemy of the people” for refusing to go along with his attempted coup. This has evoked violent threats against public officials and election workers. Trump continued to pressure Kemp this past Saturday, demanding that the governor call a special session of the state legislature to override the popular vote and pick a new slate of pro-Trump electors, which Kemp refused to do.

Last week a top Georgia election official and life-long Republican, Gabriel Sterling, made an impassioned plea for Trump to cease his threats and scolded Senators Loeffler and Perdue for not condemning them as well. Sterling cited previous comments made by one of Trump’s campaign lawyers, Joe diGenova, who called for the former head of the federal election cybersecurity agency, Christopher Krebs, to be “drawn and quartered” and “taken out at dawn and shot.” Krebs was fired by Trump shortly after announcing that the 2020 election was free of cyber interference or fraud.

Sterling ended his plea by warning: “Someone’s going to get hurt. Someone’s going to get shot. Someone’s going to get killed.”

On Monday, after another statewide recount was completed, Raffensperger recertified the results of the election, which reaffirmed that Biden won by some 12,000 ballots. “We have now counted legally cast ballots three times,” Raffensperger declared, “and the results remain unchanged.” In regards to ongoing claims of a stolen election, Raffensperger stated: “I

know there are people that are convinced the election was fraught with problems, but the evidence, the actual evidence, the facts tell us a different story.”

It is under these conditions that, despite being asked three separate times throughout the debate, Loeffler refused to acknowledge that Biden had won the presidential election. She repeated the mantra that Trump “has every right to every legal recourse,” adding that she herself had called for investigations into alleged fraud. When asked point blank if she thought the election was rigged, she said, “It’s very clear that there were issues in this election.”

Warnock responded with a plea to “put this behind us” and accused Loeffler of “playing political games.”

In the face of repeated claims by Loeffler that Warnock wanted to “defund the police,” Warnock affirmed his support for the police, boasting of his role in bringing “together law enforcement officers here in [Atlanta], the chief of police, the Black Lives matter activists, the sitting attorney general, families, parents all in my church ...” He accused Loeffler of lacking in her support for the police, citing her vote against the US Justice Department Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program, which provided \$400 million to 596 law enforcement organizations throughout the country to hire over 2,700 police this past June.

Warnock assured the ruling class that the police “have an ally with me,” while calling for “criminal justice reform.”

At a time when some 40 million people face eviction in the next month, nearly 20 million have lost health care coverage, unemployment remains at near-record levels and food lines stretch for miles, neither candidate was willing to say how much money should be allocated to workers and small businesses through a proposed relief bill. Nor did either candidate oppose the back-to-work and back-to-school drives that are fueling the explosive rise in COVID-19 infections, hospitalizations and deaths.



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