

Democrat Raphael Warnock narrowly wins runoff election for US Senate from Georgia

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Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock narrowly defeated his Republican challenger Herschel Walker in a runoff election in Georgia on Tuesday, giving the Democratic Party an outright majority of 51 seats to 49 seats in the upper chamber of the US Congress.

The Democrats had already retained effective control of the Senate in the midterm general elections, held November 8, picking up one new seat in Pennsylvania that had been vacated by the retirement of the Republican incumbent, giving them a 50-49 seat edge. Had they lost in Georgia, the Senate would have remained evenly split at 50-50, as in the first two years of the Biden administration, with Vice President Kamala Harris wielding a tie-breaking vote.

The victory in the Georgia runoff strengthens the position of the Democrats, giving them a narrow majority on Senate committees instead of being forced to cede an equal number of seats to the Republicans. This will make it easier for President Biden to obtain Senate confirmation for nominees, particularly to the federal courts. It will also somewhat weaken the veto power of the most right-wing Democratic senators, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kristen Sinema of Arizona, which has been used by Biden as justification for scrapping even the most modest social reform legislation, although the tandem acting together will still be able to block passage of bills.

The 60-vote filibuster hurdle for the passage of bills in the Senate remains and the Republicans have regained control of the House of Representatives, by a narrow four-vote margin, setting the stage for two years of legislative stalemate—except when it comes to funneling untold billions into the US-NATO proxy war against Russia in Ukraine and passing record Pentagon budgets, or passing dictatorial bills blocking strikes and imposing corporate-dictated contracts on workers, as with last week’s bipartisan vote banning a strike by rail workers.

The White House, the Democrats and the bulk of the corporate media are hailing Warnock’s victory as a triumph for democracy over Donald Trump, who hand-picked Walker, a former star college and professional football

running back, as the Republican nominee. The media is trumpeting the latest defeat of a Trump-backed far-right candidate as a serious and perhaps fatal political blow to the ex-president and leader of the attempted coup of January 6, 2021.

Shortly after the general midterm elections in November, Trump announced that he was running for a second term, despite scattered criticism in the Republican Party over his continuing refusal to acknowledge the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election and his insistence on making the “stolen election” a key campaign issue. Just last Friday, Trump posted a screed on his Truth Social platform calling for the “termination” of the US Constitution in order to restore him to the White House. This came on the heels of his Mar-a-Lago dinner with avowed Hitler lover and Holocaust denier Kanye West and notorious anti-Semite and neo-Nazi Nick Fuentes.

Not a single top Republican officeholder has declared that Trump’s actions disqualify him from receiving the party’s nomination and holding office again, and the Democrats have all but dropped the issue of his open attack on the Constitution. Warnock never mentioned it in his victory speech late Tuesday night, after the major media had called the election in his favor.

Walker conceded almost immediately after the media called the election for Warnock and made a point in his remarks of indirectly distancing himself from Trump, saying: “I want you to believe in America and continue to believe in the Constitution and believe in our elected officials.”

President Biden, in his call to congratulate Warnock, said: “Tonight, Georgia voters stood up for our democracy and rejected Ultra MAGAism.”

The term “ultra MAGAism” was significant. Previously, Biden has condemned Trump and MAGA [Make America Great Again] as an extremist threat to democracy. With the qualification “ultra,” he is drawing an implicit distinction between the fascist wing of the Republican Party around Trump and the growing support among far-right Republican

officials for Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, another fascist, who has refrained from promoting Trump’s “stolen election” lie and won reelection by a wide margin in November. In early October, Biden made a point of being photographed with DeSantis after he traveled to Florida to praise the Republican governor for his handling of the Hurricane Ian disaster.

Warnock, the senior pastor at Atlanta’s Ebenezer Baptist Church, is a thoroughly conventional, conservative Democratic politician. He focused his campaign on abortion rights—his opponent Walker opposes abortion even in cases of incest or rape, and was pilloried when his former wife and girlfriends accused him of domestic abuse and paying for them to obtain abortions—while ignoring the danger of nuclear war in Europe and supporting Biden’s right-wing domestic agenda.

He entered the Senate after defeating the Republican incumbent in a special election runoff on January 5, 2021 (the day before the Trump coup attempt) held to complete the term of a retired Republican senator. Democrat Jon Ossoff of Georgia also won his runoff election on the same day, ousting another Republican incumbent. These victories flipped the Senate to effective Democratic control.

In the general election last month, Warnock obtained 37,000 more votes than Walker, giving him a margin of 0.9 percent, but fell short of the 50 percent required for victory under Georgia law, forcing the runoff on December 6. On Tuesday, amid a high turnout of over 3.5 million, he increased his lead over Walker to 95,000, with 99 percent of the votes counted. His margin of victory grew to 51.4 percent over 48.6 percent, or 2.8 percentage points.

Warnock’s lead over Walker actually fell in Fulton County, which includes Atlanta, while remaining very substantial. He made his biggest gains in more affluent suburbs of urban centers, mainly the area around Atlanta.

The *Washington Post* published an analysis comparing Warnock’s vote in Tuesday’s runoff with his vote in the 2021 runoff against then-Republican Senator Kelly Loeffler. Under the headline “Warnock improved over 2021 in wealthier precincts,” the *Post* wrote that the data showed “a clear shift of support to Warnock in wealthier precincts—places that would normally be expected to be more heavily Republican.”

The *Post* continued: “The wealthier the precinct, the more it shifted to Warnock relative to 2021... It declined in the least wealthy precincts—which also are the least densely White.”

In its election post-mortem on Wednesday, the *New York Times* bluntly spelled out the anti-working class strategy of the Democratic Party. It wrote: “Since 2008, Democrats have hoped that demographic changes and millions of

dollars could help put the growing pockets of the South and West in play, allowing the party to stop chasing the votes of white, working class voters across Ohio and Iowa.

“Democrats argue their victories in Georgia will be more resilient. Mr. Warnock’s coalition looked very similar to Mr. Biden’s—an alliance of voters of color, younger voters and college-educated suburbanites.”

In other words, continue to abandon the “white working class” to the GOP fascists while promoting the politics of racial and gender identity employed by upper-middle-class layers to secure positions, wealth and privilege.

Two other features of the Georgia senatorial race and the midterms more broadly should be noted.

First, the enormous sums of corporate money plowed into the process of choosing the senator from Georgia, making the election a travesty of democracy. According to a December 6 article in the *New York Times*, citing the nonprofit group OpenSecrets, nearly \$401 million was spent going into Tuesday’s vote just in the race between Warnock and Walker. This is merely part of the \$1.4 billion spent on four elections in Georgia since 2020, including the 2020 races between Warnock, Ossoff and their Republican opponents, and this year’s gubernatorial contest between the victorious Republican incumbent Brian Kemp and Democrat Stacey Abrams. Over the four weeks of this year’s runoff campaign, nearly \$81 million was spent for ads by Warnock and Walker campaigns.

The Georgia Senate race was the most expensive contest in the 2022 midterm season, according to OpenSecrets, and Democratic donors doled out the bulk of the cash.

Second, the remarkable fact that in this year’s elections, all incumbent senators won reelection for the first time since 1914. This points to the sclerotic and undemocratic character of the capitalist two-party system.

In the midst of an escalating war involving nuclear powers in Europe and a growing confrontation between the US and China; an ongoing pandemic that has already killed millions and continues to metastasize; raging inflation and a historic upsurge of workers’ struggles internationally; and the fascist transformation of one of the two parties of US big business as well as the growth of fascist forces around the world—the American capitalist two-party system is impervious to the demands, needs and interests of the vast majority of the population.



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