



GOVERNMENT MATTERS

E-NEWS OF NOTE FROM GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

November 17, 2022

Visit us on-line at [ERIE Action Network](#)

Government 101: Why a True 51-49 U.S. Senate Majority Matters

Interesting fact – “Georgia On My Mind” became the Georgia state song on April 24, 1979 when Gov. George Busbee signed it into law. The song was written by Hoagy Carmichael and Stuart Gorrell in 1930 and became a major hit with Ray Charles in 1960. Ray Charles performed the song for the Georgia Legislature March 7, 1979.

Georgia is on a lot of Washington lawmakers’ minds because of the U.S. Senate runoff election on December 6 between Sen. Raphael Warnock (D-GA) and former NFL star Herschel Walker (R). We’ve known since Sunday that Democrats clinched at least a 50-50 U.S. Senate “majority” (made possible by Vice President Kamala Harris’ tie breaking vote, since the VP presides over the Senate). And we now know Republicans will control the U.S. House of Representatives by a slim majority (final numbers TBD) as the GOP has now formally captured at least the 218 seats needed. The senate runoff election will decide whether Democrats will operate with a true 51-49 majority or a 50-50 “majority.”

How much difference does a 51-49 majority make? There are some benefits of a true majority from a governing perspective.

- **Committee Representation** - In a 50-50 Senate, each party has equal representation on committees based on a power-sharing agreement reached early in the current Congress. Such an agreement wouldn’t be needed with a 51-49 majority. Democrats would have an advantage on each committee.
- **Confirmation of Judicial and Executive Branch Nominees** – The even split has caused Democrats some logistical and procedural challenges in confirming judicial nominees, such as needing perfect attendance, requiring attendance from Republicans in committee to move forward on nominees, and requiring additional procedural steps on the Senate Floor if a committee deadlocked on a nomination. A true majority would greatly improve the efficiency of the nomination process. And with a 51-49 majority a single Democrat could not hold up or block a nomination.
- **A Small but Important Buffer** – A 50-50 Senate means Democrats could be one serious illness, death, or resignation away from losing the majority. A 51-49 edge would give the party a buffer on that, along with a small cushion to bypass a member or two who breaks from the party on certain votes. The “buffer” is reduced because Democrat priority bills will have to pass the Republican-controlled House.

While the Georgia Senate run-off is no longer a pivotal contest to determine control of the Senate, the extra cushion would make it easier for Democrats to manage their Senate majority.