

So... what does the Senate have the power to do?

The November election and the work of organizers across the country opens a window to more power for us to influence the decisions that affect our daily lives and demand more from our elected leaders. The Georgia Senate runoff is an opening as part of a broader shift to remake government. On January 5, 2020, Georgia residents will vote for two U.S. senators. The outcome of this election will determine who has control of the Senate and the types of policies that will be passed. The people of Georgia are uniquely positioned to vote for leaders who have their best interest in mind. Unfortunately, the [voter turnout is lower in runoff elections](#). Additionally, it becomes even more challenging to get voters to the polls due to the runoff election happening right after the [holidays](#), [and with COVID-19 cases surging](#).

In an effort to increase Georgia voter turnout, below we outline research and potential narrative points that can be used for social media and other outreach methods. The main goal is to educate voters on the power that senators have, and the impact that senators have on regular people's everyday lives.

Key Narrative Points

- The most unequal recession in modern U.S. history was created by failed leadership, and those of us most affected are not the ones being heard.
- When we vote in the Senate runoff, we're voting on the issues that will define a generation.
- Our collective power - across generations, identities, and communities - makes a difference.

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For months now, many of us have done our best to stay inside and take care of loved ones, but we haven't gotten the support we need from our government. Business is [booming for retailers](#), but many [workers aren't getting hazard pay or paid leave](#) to stay safe and care for their families. Black, Latino, Asian, and indigenous young people who work in retail, hospitality, and food industries are being asked to [make sacrifices without any guarantee](#) that their best interests are being considered.

The groups calling the shots - from the White House to the Senate - don't reflect our communities. The Georgia Senate runoff election is an opening to demand more from our government. We have to make our voice heard in the runoff and vote for leaders who have our best interest in mind.

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COVID-19 ECONOMIC RELIEF

Senators are uniquely positioned to pass a COVID-19 relief package that will impact everyday Americans and small business owners who've been negatively impacted by leaders' failure to facilitate a safe reopening.

- The Senate has the power to approve stimulus checks to Americans who need it most. In March 2020, Americans were mailed a \$1,200 check to provide financial support at the beginning of this uncertain period. We are almost 10 months into a pandemic and Americans have not seen any other support.
- The Senate has the power to extend unemployment benefits to Americans who continue to struggle during the pandemic. [4.1 million Georgians have had to apply for unemployment](#) since the start of the pandemic and [over 230,000 Georgians are still unemployed](#). [9 million households are behind on rent](#) payments and bans on evictions are expiring. The extra \$600 in unemployment compensation expired in July and the last [support for self-employed and gig workers expire at the end of December](#).

ADDRESSING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Senators have the power to provide federal guidelines to [control the spread of COVID-19](#). The current federal administration has taken a passive approach allowing most states to create their own reopening plan. However, public health experts believe that having a [national order would be preferable](#) to control the spread of the virus and to ensure consistent messaging.

- [Congress has the power to pass legislation imposing a temporary national stay-at-home order](#) and ensuring the national coordination of lifting of the restrictions.
- Congress has the power to provide funding for vaccine distribution, which will ensure that individuals who are at highest risk are protected.

SMALL BUSINESS

The Senate has the power to provide struggling [small businesses with financial support](#) to keep their businesses from failing during safe reopening.

- The first round of small business support funds from the government were [not designed to reach businesses owned by people of color](#), while [big businesses obtained billions of dollars in emergency loans](#). Many small businesses such as gyms, hair salons and restaurants have had to keep their doors closed or completely limit their services. These businesses are an integral part of our communities and the Senate has the power to pass a stimulus bill that continues to help these businesses from permanently closing.

AFFORDABLE HEALTHCARE

Senators have the power to fight for more affordable and widespread healthcare. Georgia has some of the [highest healthcare costs](#) in the country. [Rural hospital closures in Georgia](#) put our medical care at risk and damage our communities' economic prospects. We need leadership that understands the struggles of finding in-network providers and makes it easier to address our wellness *before* an emergency.

- Georgia is [one of 14 states that has not expanded Medicaid](#) to provide insurance to more residents. Nearly 14% of Georgians are uninsured and 1.8 million Georgians have pre-existing conditions.
- Freeing Georgians from [high medical bills and debt can help folks accomplish other goals](#) from buying homes to pursuing new careers.

WAGES

Senators have the power to raise wages. The House passed legislation to raise the federal minimum wage in 2019, but the Senate [blocked it](#). Georgia has one of the lowest state minimum wages in the country at [\\$5.15 an hour](#). [Raising the federal minimum wage](#) to \$15 would lift wages for over 33 million workers, in particular 21% of ALL Black workers.

- Domestic workers - caretakers of children, loved ones in older age, and homes - in Georgia have been left out of minimum wage policies for decades. Domestic workers are predominantly women of color and immigrants. Tipped workers in the service industry have been paid as low as \$2.13 an hour since 1996. It's time to care for the caregivers and essential workers.

RACIAL JUSTICE

Federal intervention is urgently needed to address the harms done by policing and immigration enforcement to Black, Asian, and Latinx communities. Congress has the power to move forward [legislation shaped by Black organizers and policy experts](#).

- Too many federal resources are going to policing over healthcare, education, transportation, and more. We deserve schools that allow our children to thrive, neighborhoods free of surveillance and monitoring, and restorative approaches to harm and healing.

IMMIGRATION

The past administration took attacks against new Americans to new lows - the Senate must protect and support immigrants in this administration.

- [Black immigrants and asylum seekers have been adversely targeted](#) by this administration's terrorization of immigrants. While 7% of non-citizens in the U.S. are Black, they make up 20% of those facing deportation on criminal grounds and Black migrants face the highest asylum rejection rates. The Senate can expand access to seeking asylum, move away from criminalizing immigrants, and end the "Remain in Mexico" program that has put asylum seekers at risk.
- The Senate can help to strengthen protections for DACA recipients and provide protection from deportation for essential workers that are integral to their communities in America.

STUDENT DEBT RELIEF

The Senate has the power to forgive student debt for nearly 45 million Americans, which would help borrowers consider new career paths and strengthen small businesses. Black households [hold more debt than other households](#) and two-thirds of Black borrowers owe more than they originally borrowed.

Our collective power - across generations, identities, and communities - makes a difference.

When we vote and organize, we show our power, and force elected officials to see that we're paying attention, showing up, and holding them accountable -- they need to hear us and to serve our interests, and not just the short-term interests of the class that has always had too much influence in Georgia.

These systems weren't made for us, but we can make them work for us. The collective power of Black, Asian-American, Latinx, indigenous voters made waves in November. Let's do it again.