

Control of Senate to be Determined by Georgia Runoff Elections

Similar to the House, the elections returned most Senators to the Senate with a handful of changes. The States of Arizona and Colorado elected Democrats to replace incumbent Republicans. Alabama's Doug Jones (D) lost his race, providing the Democrats with a net one pick-up, far short of the five seats that would have provided majority control. However, the suspense did not end with the election. Both Georgia Senate seats were contested and none of the four candidates received a majority, sending the contests into run-offs on January 5. The stakes at risk for Majority Leader Mitch McConnell cannot be overstated. If both seats break for the Democrats, it would deliver an equally divided Senate, providing the Biden Administration with the ability to break ties through Vice President Elect Harris' Senate role. And if the races end in a split decision, the Senate would have a 51-49 Republican majority, placing enormous pressure and authority on Senators like re-elected moderate Susan Collins (ME) to influence legislative agreements. If the Georgia seats remain in Republican control, the Senate majority would see a four-seat majority at 52-48. Unlike the House, the Senate rules take the form of norms and traditions. The much loved and hated filibuster was considered likely to be eliminated if the Democrats took control of the Senate. With the prospect of an evenly divided Senate at best, the idea of eliminating the filibuster is highly unlikely.

Even if the Senate's composition flips control the January 5 run-offs, committee leadership changes will still be in play. A Republican policy of imposing term limits on chairmanships means that the key committees that hold jurisdiction over environmental policies will see new leaders. Among the presumed changes are: Senator John Barrasso (WY) relinquishes the Committee on Environment and Public Works to assume the chair of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources. Shelly Moore Capito (WV) is next in committee seniority. Senator John Boozman (AR) could assume the chair of the Committee on Agriculture. Senator Mike Crapo (ID) is the odds-on favorite to lead the Finance Committee given his seniority.