Transcript

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**Adia Samba-Quee:** [00:00:00] Civics 101 is supported in part by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

**Stephen Colbert:** [00:00:04] Hello, Georgia.

[00:00:05] Remember me, your buddy, Stephen Colbert, did you enjoy voting in the twenty twenty election? Well, congratulations. You have qualified for the chance to vote again.

**News Archive:** [00:00:13] Georgia will continue to stay in the national spotlight as the balance of power in the Senate could be left to Georgia voters to decide in January.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:21] We did warn you that this year's election would drag on.

[00:00:24] And boy, we were not wrong. This is Civics 101. I'm Hannah McCarthy.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:00:29] And I'm Nick Capodice.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:00:30] And today we're answering a number of listener questions about the state of Georgia, because in Georgia, the election is very much still going on.

[00:00:38] Listeners have asked us how is it that Georgia is electing both U.S. senators in the same year? And if following the Georgia Senate runoff elections, the Senate is split 50 50, is there actually a majority leader in the Senate?

**Casey Dominguez:** [00:00:52] Right now? The whole world is focused on two Senate races in Georgia, even though the rest of us are all done with our elections. [00:01:00]

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:00] This is Professor Casey Domínguez from the University of San Diego.

**Casey Dominguez:** [00:01:04] Georgia's state laws are an important part of this story.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:01:07] Of course they are.

**Casey Dominguez:** [00:01:08] So Senator Johnny Isakson retired in 2019 due to health reasons, even though his term in the Senate ran through 2022. So Georgia state law allowed the Republican governor to appoint a temporary replacement until the fall elections of this year when there was a special election to fill the rest of Senator Isakson's term, which goes for another two years.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:01:32] States get two U.S. senators. Each of those senators serve six year terms, but the terms are staggered. Only one third of the Senate is up for election every year. That way, a state is never electing or reelecting both of its senators. At the same time, this year in Georgia, it was incumbent David Perdue's Senate seat that was on the line. He was elected in 2014. But because Georgia had that temporary replacement after Senator Isakson's retirement that triggered [00:02:00] a double Senate election, the governor appointed Kelly Loefler. And the voters got to decide whether she would serve the rest of the term until 2022 or whether they wanted someone else in that Senate seat.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:12] And the reason we're all still watching Georgia's Senate race, what happened in the Perdue election?

**Casey Dominguez:** [00:02:16] He was running against a John Ossoff, who's the Democrat and the libertarian candidate in this November's elections, got about two percent of the vote. And that held both David Perdue and John Ossoff below 50 percent. And Georgia state law says that you have to get 50 percent of the vote, 50 percent plus one in order to win a seat in the Senate. And so that race will go to a runoff because no candidate got 50 percent of the vote.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:02:41] A libertarian spoiler candidate. That is interesting. What about Loefler seat?

**Casey Dominguez:** [00:02:46] Because there were more than two candidates who ran for that seat. And again, nobody got 50 percent of that vote. Loefler, who is the Republican, is also running in a runoff against the Democrat, the Reverend Raphael [00:03:00] Warnock.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:00] Now, I know that the current election results have the Senate at a 46 50 split between Democrat and GOP candidates.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:07] And then there are two independents in the mix, Senators Bernie Sanders and Angus King, both of whom have tended to vote along Democratic Party lines.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:15] So what happens if the two Democratic candidates win in these two runoff elections?

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:20] Lest we forget, it's the job of the vice president to be president of the Senate and to provide a tie breaking vote.

**Casey Dominguez:** [00:03:28] If a 50 50 Senate were to be elected on January 5th.

[00:03:33] If the Democrats won both Georgia Senate seats, then Mike Pence would preside over the Senate until January 20th, when Biden and Harris are sworn in. And then Kamala Harris would preside over the Senate and the Democrats would their leader would be the majority leader.

**Nick Capodice:** [00:03:49] So in other words, if the Democrats win both Run-off seats, we'll probably be looking at the Democratically controlled Congress.

**Hannah McCarthy:** [00:03:57] That does it for today's one Civics 101. If [00:04:00] you have questions about what's going on now, what might go on in the future or what on earth just happened two days ago in this democracy, we are here for you. Click the button at the top of our homepage to submit your questions at civics101podcast.org.