**Headline:** Why Raphael Warnock’s Reelection Could Tip the Balance for America’s Economic Future

By Tom Conway

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**[Article Body:]**

Michael McMullen spent years agonizing over the failing pension plan that put his golden years at risk.

He wrote numerous postcards and made countless phone calls urging Congress to step in and safeguard his future. But not until he and fellow Georgians [elected Raphael Warnock](https://www.npr.org/2021/01/06/952429877/democrat-raphael-warnock-wins-georgia-runoff) to the Senate in 2021 did the Democrats have the final vote needed to pass legislation stabilizing that plan and other multiemployer pension funds on the brink of collapse.

Warnock saved McMullen’s retirement and that of [1.3 million](https://www.democrats.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/DPCC%20ARP%20Pensions%20Report.pdf) other Americans—then cast scores of other votes that helped to shift the nation’s trajectory from peril to progress. Now, reelecting Warnock in Georgia’s [December 6 runoff](https://www.politico.com/news/2022/11/09/herschel-walker-raphael-warnock-georgia-senate-race-results-2022-00064771) is crucial to continuing the country’s hard-fought path forward.

“He’s for the working class, for the middle class,” summed up McMullen, president of United Steelworkers (USW) Local 1703, which represents workers at the Georgia-Pacific paper mill in Cedar Springs, Georgia, who are already benefiting from the [pension-saving provisions of the American Rescue Plan](https://theintercept.com/2021/03/22/covid-stimulus-retirement-pension/) that Warnock pushed over the goal line in March 2021.

McMullen and other union members had grown increasingly alarmed over the years about their paper industry pension plan, one of about [130 multiemployer retirement](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/democrats-coronavirus-relief-pensions_n_60256967c5b6591becd748bd) funds hurtling toward [insolvency](https://aflcio.org/statements/statement-afl-cio-retirement-security-working-group-grassley-alexander-multiemployer) because of Wall Street recklessness, corporate bankruptcies, and other factors outside workers’ control.

Some of his coworkers already delayed retirement to build up savings in case the fund went broke, while others worried about meager retirements in which they’d have to choose between buying food or prescriptions.

“They were really worried about it,” McMullen said, adding that the plan’s impending failure also portended the demise of stores and restaurants relying on retirees for business. “It would have been like a mill closing.”

Unions and their Democratic allies repeatedly attempted to save the plans, but the pro-corporate Republicans in control of the Senate [blocked](https://www.democrats.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/in-senator-mitch-mcconnells-legislative-graveyard-senate-republicans-block-commonsense-legislation-to-secure-our-elections-protect-americans-health-care-and-safeguard-pensions-earned-by-working-americans) all efforts to safeguard the futures that many workers and retirees had spent decades building.

Warnock’s election in 2021—he [won a seat](https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/05/us/politics/warnock-beats-loeffler-in-georgia-senate-race.html) previously held by a Republican—helped to give Democrats the razor-thin Senate majority needed to [finally pass](https://www.businessinsider.com/stimulus-no-republican-in-congress-voted-for-biden-stimulus-package-2021-3) the pension legislation [without a single](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/07/06/remarks-by-president-biden-on-the-american-rescue-plans-special-financial-assistance-program/) Republican’s support.

“It took every Democratic vote. If they didn’t have that one vote, they couldn’t have passed it,” McMullen said of Warnock, recalling how the anxiety that he and others harbored about their pensions vanished in an instant.

Working with President Joe Biden and the Democrat-led House, the new Senate majority went on to pass other legislation pivotal to defeating COVID-19 and surmounting the [economic crisis](https://abcnews.go.com/Business/trumps-economic-legacy/story?id=74760051) wreaked by the previous administration.

Warnock, [a pastor with working-class roots](https://www.warnock.senate.gov/about/), delivered crucial support for the $1.2 trillion Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) that’s modernizing the nation, [creating middle-class jobs](https://www.usw.org/blog/2022/the-infrastructure-programs-chain-reaction), and revitalizing American manufacturing.

In October, for example, Solvay Specialty Polymers announced that [IIJA support](https://www.augustachronicle.com/story/business/2022/10/19/solvay-build-augusta-ga-battery-parts-plant-with-grant/10544879002/) will enable it to build an electric vehicle battery parts plant in Augusta, Georgia, creating dozens of manufacturing jobs and expanding the state’s foothold in the clean economy.

Warnock passionately [defended voting rights](https://www.c-span.org/video/?c4997751/sen-raphael-warnock-voting-rights) amid Republicans’ efforts to [disenfranchise millions of working-class voters](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/interactive/2021/voting-restrictions-republicans-states/) across the country, warning that people were being “squeezed out of their democracy.”

He led [the Senate’s passage](https://www.georgiademocrat.org/georgia-democrats-in-congress-notch-huge-win-for-consumers-while-all-8-republicans-vote-against-strengthening-us-economy/) of the CHIPS and Science Act to [build out critical supply chains](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/08/09/chips-act-semiconductors-supply/) and enhance national security.

And he not only sponsored but also pushed through legislation that imposes a [$35-a-month cap on insulin costs](https://www.warnock.senate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/passed-senator-reverend-warnocks-proposals-to-limit-seniors-drug-costs-and-cap-insulin-costs-both-passed-by-senate-in-sweeping-legislation-to-reduce-deficit-lower-health-care-costs/) for Medicare recipients and limits seniors’ overall out-of-pocket drug costs to $2,000 a year.

“I know seniors who pay $400 to $500 a month for insulin. To have that capped at $35 is a lifesaver,” noted Darryl Ford, president of USW Local 254, which represents hundreds of American Red Cross workers in Georgia and other states.

Ford, who’s campaigned for Warnock and spoken to him during conference calls arranged by the Georgia AFL-CIO, respects the senator’s deep connection with everyday Georgians and lifelong commitment to serving others. “‘I’m not in love with politics. I’m in love with change,’” Ford said, repeating from memory [one of Warnock’s](https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-political-scene/the-political-gospel-of-raphael-warnock) favorite expressions.

“He’s authentic. When I see him, I can see my dad. I can see myself. He motivates you to want to fight, to want to make things right,” Ford said, noting Warnock’s continued [support for legislation](https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/senate-bill/420/cosponsors) making it easier for workers to form unions and seize control of their own destinies.

Voters elected Warnock in 2021 to serve out a predecessor’s unexpired term. Since then, he’s earned a full term of his own, Ford said, noting that Warnock—a freshman legislator with no prior government experience—amassed a remarkable record of accomplishments in under two years and won praise for reaching across the aisle to move critical legislation forward.

“He’s there to work,” Ford added. “He’s not there to make the backdoor deals. I wish we could have more senators like that.”