

Rev. Raphael Warnock “Get Ready” Campaign Ad-Analysis

Elizabeth Hopper

COMM-509: Politics and the Media

October 1, 2025

Rev. Raphael Warnock was elected as Senator in Georgia's special election runoff, capturing victory mere hours before the insurrection on the United States Capital on January 6, 2021. However, it was not just this date that made his victory historic, but also his success in a close race and his election making him Georgia's first Black senator. Warnock's unique background shaped not only his policies, but his campaign strategy in this crucial election following a year of turmoil in the United States, campaigning throughout 2020 with the pandemic, murder of George Floyd, and a divisive Presidential election. Warnock's race for Senate was a special election following the resignation of Georgia Senator Johnny Isakson at the end of 2019, with an election planned for November 2020. In the interim period Kelly Loeffler was appointed to fill this seat and was ultimately Warnock's biggest challenger in the race (Grant 2025). In early January 2020, Warnock announced his campaign with the "Get Ready" ad, starting his campaign with a focus on his personal background and experiences (Fausset 2020).

The ad begins with calm instrumental music as Warnock talks about his family and childhood while he walks through the Kayton Homes public housing projects in Savannah, Georgia, where he grew up with his parents and 11 siblings. He begins by telling a story of how his father would come into that same building and tell him to "get ready," explaining "if I asked why he'd say 'because there's something for you to do. I don't know exactly what it is yet but be ready,'" (Warnock 2020). This starts this campaign kickoff ad with a compelling narrative of his life serving others and making change. His use of "get ready" as the title of this ad and throughout the ad itself serves as an action call to voters and demonstrates his willingness to make a difference. Following this portion of the ad, he establishes his values by rooting himself in family, faith, history, and community. He tells the backgrounds of both of his parents alongside scrapbook-style photos that appear overlaid beside him in the video, and notes advice

they gave him that furthers this message, explaining in a useful analogy how his father “spent most days picking up old junk cars that others had thrown away, and hauling them to the local steelyard. He saw their value,” and connects this to his father’s career as a preacher explaining he ministered to people who also “felt discarded” and how his father “saw value in them too,” (Warnock 2020). Warnock also explains how his mother grew up picking cotton and tobacco, beginning a more subtle narrative that will continue through the ad of how he is a product of the state and nation’s history. This ultimately becomes reality when Warnock is elected in 2021 and becomes Georgia’s first Black senator (Grant 2025).

This portion of the ad utilizes both rhetorical appeals of ethos and pathos to establish himself as both an upstanding person and connect to his audience emotionally. Warnock uses ethical appeals when centering his story around his family – describing how his upbringing taught values of hard work, love, and faith. These same anecdotes also appeal to his audience’s emotions, adding nostalgia with the old family photos, and an emotional connection through his stories of the struggles that his family faced and some people may relate to. Throughout the ad, Warnock also uses these appeals visually. The scenes in the video are classic yet simple visuals of everyday American life, creating a relatable yet nostalgic feel. Warnock wears a suit and tie for the entire video, establishing himself as professional and credible through visual cues while maintaining a connection to the audience through the scenery.

After sharing his background, and exiting the housing projects, he begins to transition into focusing on his experience, using this continued narrative to establish himself as a qualified candidate for the senate seat, explaining his educational background – attending Moorehouse College on a full scholarship (further appealing to emotions through another connection to the state) and later earning a PhD. During this portion of the ad the music begins to pick up, adding a

sense of anticipation as he continues his story and leads into why he decided to run for Congress. This begins to mark the turning point in the ad, as viewers hear about what makes Warnock uniquely qualified to serve Georgia in the senate. Warnock focuses on his 14 years of experience as the senior pastor of the historic Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, the church where Rev. Dr. Martin Luther Jr. preached. Not only does this show he has impressive qualifications, as the pastor of one of America's most historically significant and famous churches, but it associates him with the legacy of Dr. King, and the Civil Rights movement as a whole. This continues the narrative that Warnock is the product of American history and development, creating a subtle but meaningful sense of patriotism, and in this instance, successfully applying the association principle to this ad and his subsequent campaign. This principle is a common tactic in political ads that aims to draw a connection between the candidate or campaign and an external issue or event. In many cases this is used in a negative manner, like the famous Willie Horton ad that linked presidential candidate Michael Dukakis to convicted murderer Willie Horton (Hall 2021); however, Warnock's campaign was centered on the optimism, so it used as a source of credibility for his candidacy. Not only does he connect himself to Dr. King through his position as pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church, but the ad follows this statement with various news clips about his work in this role, focusing heavily on how he focused on social justice, civil rights, and social change as a pastor.

His background as a pastor also has more general societal assumptions and associations, especially when the audience sees him as a wise, community-driven man of faith. In most situations, people implicitly assume that a faith leader is a moral and trustworthy person. While this may not be the case in every situation today, the type of pastor Warnock successfully portrays himself as serves as support for this idea. This focus on his experience as a pastor allows

the audience to make positive associations between Warnock and their own faith or general moral values, they would expect a pastor to hold.

The music in the ad begins to resolve as the audience begins to understand his journey and the ad shifts into Warnock as a candidate expressing his views and what inspired him to run for Senate. For this final section of the ad, Warnock is sitting in an empty church sanctuary and begins his campaign goals by saying:

Some might ask why a pastor thinks he should serve in the senate – well I’ve committed my whole life to service and helping people realize their highest potential. I’ve always thought that my impact doesn’t stop at the church door, that’s actually where it starts (Warnock 2020).

He uses this to connect his experience with social justice as a pastor to skills that will make him a good senator. This helps him wrap up to his final message, connecting various themes and parts of his life that the audience has learned about into a clear call to action. He explains his motive to run for senate through the context of his pastoral work. Warnock says that he loves America because there has always been opportunity to make it greater, adding to the theme of his role in the greater American story – connecting him back to a meaningful historical legacy – especially to civil rights leaders like Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King. His final statements come full circle, connecting back to his opening message to “be ready,” and calling Georgia voters to action and support his campaign for a brighter future, continuing his message of optimism in the face of struggle.

This ad was released at the beginning of an important senate race and a historic year in America. The ad helped to kick-off his campaign that centered on his sense of optimism in the face of progress, honoring the leaders who brought America to this point, and fighting to

continue to make the country a more just place. In the hyper-partisan political climate that has divided America, especially under the Trump presidency, Warnock's faith, family, and morals-driven campaign announcement ad stands out for its optimism, respect, and truthfulness. While he does not discuss specific policy plans in this video, he shares overview of his life without seemingly having to revise or edit his life story. In the face of countless politicians with personal scandals, the simple American dream narrative of his life also helped him stand out as both credible and trustworthy. Additionally his positive outlook and focus stands out as a breath of fresh air in comparison to the attack ads many Americans have become accustomed to, also providing another way for him to demonstrate how he carries out the lessons of respect and justice he preaches in his own life.

Unfortunately, his connection to historical legacy also continued in the attacks he faced as a Black man from the South running for office. His opponent, Kelly Loeffler, and her Republican allies repeatedly attacked Warnock, arguing he was a dangerous radical, twisting his sermons and other parts of his career as a pastor into supposed proof that he was a "radical liberal" (Martin & Herndon 2020). However, attacks frequently played into racist dog whistles and "a strategy to motivate turnout among white conservatives, especially those who harbor racist views and are uneasy about Black leadership," (Martin & Herndon 2020). The divisions increased as the runoff elections neared and division surrounding the 2020 election conspiracies promoted by President Trump led to many other Black faith leaders speaking out against Loeffler and her allies' attacks, seeing them as an insult to the Black church and its traditions (Rojas 2021).

The 2020 Georgia Senate race followed trends noted in *Politics and the Media* in recent years where campaigns continue to break spending records from previous elections (Hall 2021).

This campaign drew particular interest for donors because it was crucial in determining which party controlled the Senate (Zubak-Skees et al., 2020). The ad itself was funded by Warnock's campaign, taking out an extra middleman that would be involved in an ad created by a Super-PAC or other secret donor, and giving it a more genuine and personal feel. When looking at FEC data on his campaign from 2019-2020, a diverse array of PACs, individuals, party organizations, and more funded his campaign (FEC 2020). This differed from the Republican candidate's funding, where despite similar spending on both campaigns (Schwartz 2020), Republicans had a significantly higher portion of campaign funds from a small number of PACs and Super-PACs donating major sums of money, in comparison to Warnock's campaign which had a much more diverse funding pool (Bowman 2020). Although PACs and Super-PACs were the major source of funds for Republicans in the 2020 Georgia Senate race, Warnock still received significant donations from various PACs. Some of the biggest PACs donating to Warnock's campaign included American Bridge, Black PAC and New South Super PAC (Bowman 2020).

While Georgia has historically been a Republican state, trends were demonstrating that the state was becoming more Democratic, continuing to attract more attention as both sides watched to see how the state would shift in their congressional and presidential elections in 2020 (Bacon 2021). It is interesting to note that there was a significant spike following the Presidential election and the period between the general election and runoff election, demonstrating the increased focus on this race as it became clear Georgia would determine which party would control the Senate, with funds pouring in across the country (Zubak-Skees et al., 2020). This makes sense because more donors and outside political organizations were able to focus more directly on this campaign. Additionally, the fact that the race required a runoff vote further gave people and organizations even more reason to donate, since the finances could impact such a

close race. Interestingly, more funds were coming from other states than from Georgia itself in this campaign, marking the partisan divide that made the Senate such a close call, and increased attention to this race because of these ramifications (Zubak-Skees et al., 2020). The race itself was close, further raising the stakes for both parties who could see a near-victory for the senate seat (Saul 2020).

Despite the increased doubts and conspiracies about voting leading up to the runoff election in January 2021 (Fausset et al., 2021), Warnock ultimately won his race. This ad was the beginning of his campaign and allowed him to successfully establish the narrative that would carry him to victory. Warnock entered politics with a unique background and important legacy on his shoulders – serving at the church of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and presiding over the funeral of Rep. John Lewis (Rojas 2020) – he leaned into this legacy, even when these iconic American figures were being attacked by right-wing movements, politicians, and pundits. Warnock was able to use his connection to these American Civil Rights heroes to connect himself to an important history, which his election only further exemplified.

In a time where many Americans were becoming divided and unwilling to consider or value the opinions of people across the aisle, he brought attention from across the Democratic party and the left to Georgia – a state that had previously been written off for Democrats. Warnock was able to undermine many of these divisions with his unique qualifications that made him appealing to people outside his own base. While a close race, he was able to win and eventually get re-elected in the 2022 midterms and is now currently serving his first full term in the Senate. His unique background as a pastor from the South allows him to appeal to more traditional, moderate or conservative voters who value faith and community. Additionally, his deep dedication to Civil Rights made him appealing to liberal voters. His “Get Ready” campaign

ad perfectly exemplified the way that he pushed the boundaries of the stereotypes of either side of the aisle and crafted a campaign unique to his experience and skills, while allowing Americans to find nostalgia for a time of progress many may have taken for granted at the time.

Warnock's "Get Ready" ad was a successful start to his historic campaign. He relied on the classic strategies of political campaigning including the association principle and rhetorical appeals to establish a sense of nostalgia and credibility that is often missing in contemporary politics. Warnock stands out for the way he blends faith and progress into a cohesive message, allowing this ad to demonstrate his outside-Washington experience while also standing on the legacy of American leaders to create trust and credibility. In the face of partisanship, this ad harkened back to respectful and unifying politics of the past, while his faith and experience allowed him to gain the trust of voters to elect him to push for change.

Works Cited (APA)

- Bacon, Perry Jr. (2021, January 5). *Democrats Hope Georgia Will Become The Next Virginia, But It Could End Up Being The Next North Carolina*. FiveThirtyEight.
<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/democrats-hope-georgia-will-become-the-next-virginia-but-it-could-end-up-being-the-next-north-carolina/>
- Bowman, Bridget (2020, December 22). *GOP has outside spending advantage in Georgia runoffs*. Roll Call. <https://rollcall.com/2020/12/22/gop-has-outside-spending-advantage-in-georgia-runoffs/>
- Fausset, Richard. (2021, January 5). *Citing 'Soul of Our Democracy,' Pastor of Dr. King's Church Enters Senate Race*. The New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/30/us/raphael-warnock-ebenezer-baptist-georgia-senate.html>
- Grant, Tracy. (September 28, 2025) *Raphael Warnock*. Encyclopedia Britannica.
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Raphael-Warnock>
- Hall, Jane. (2021). *Politics and the Media*. Sage Publications US.
- Marin, J. & Herndon, A.W. (2020, December 7). *Republicans Make Clear Their Georgia Senate Strategy: Attack Warnock*. The New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/07/us/politics/georgia-senate-debate-warnock-loeffler.html?searchResultPosition=34>
- Reverend Raphael Warnock. (2020, January 30). *Get Ready | Reverend Warnock for U.S. Senate* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zoERPDVok38>
- Rojas, Rick (2020, December 19). *Georgia Pastors See Attack on Black Church in Campaign Against Warnock*. The New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/19/us/georgia-pastors-see-attack-on-black-church-in-campaign-against-warnock.html?searchResultPosition=14>

Saul, Stephanie (2020, September 23). *A Monmouth poll of Georgia shows tight races for president and both Senate seats*. The New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/23/us/elections/a-monmouth-poll-of-georgia-shows-tight-races-for-president-and-both-senate-seats.html?searchResultPosition=47>

Schwartz, Brian (2020, November 5). *Georgia Senate runoff election is shaping up to cost tens of millions of dollars*. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/11/05/georgia-senate-runoff-warnock-vs-loeffler-race-to-cost-several-million-dollars.html>

Warnock for Georgia - Financial summary. (2020). Federal Election Commission.

<https://www.fec.gov/data/committee/C00736876/?cycle=2020>

Zubak-Skees, C., Rakich, N., & Wolfe, J. (2020, December 9). *Where Are Georgia's Senate Candidates Getting All That Cash From?* FiveThirtyEight.

<https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/where-are-georgias-senate-candidates-getting-all-that-cash-from/>