US primaries: Military-intelligence candidates win four Democratic congressional nominations

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On Tuesday, candidates with links to the military or intelligence services won all four of the Democratic primary contests in which they were running. These results mark a significant advance in what amounts to the takeover of the Democratic Party by the national security apparatus.

In the Sixth District of Kentucky and in three Texas runoff contests, in the 21st, 23rd and 31st Congressional Districts, candidates running on their records in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan defeated more traditional Democratic candidates, one backed by the party establishment and three linked to Bernie Sanders' 2016 presidential campaign.

The most high-profile contest came in Kentucky's Sixth Congressional District, which includes the city of Lexington, the state's second-largest, and a dozen nearby counties. Lexington Mayor Jim Gray had the backing of most of the party establishment after he entered the race, but he was defeated by former Marine fighter pilot Amy McGrath, the first woman to fly an F-18 fighter jet in combat, who was backed by veterans' and women's groups and raised more than $2 million through a series of Internet ads that focused on her military combat role.

The incumbent Republican congressman, Andy Barr, won reelection in the district by 12 percentage points in 2016, but is considered one of the most vulnerable Republicans in the November election. The primary turnout was an indication, with 100,418 voting in the Democratic contest compared to 48,372 in the Republican. Both McGrath and Gray received more votes than Barr, who had only token opposition in the Republican primary.

In three Texas congressional district runoffs, candidates with a military-intelligence background defeated candidates who adopted a more "progressive" stance, including two who were heavily backed by Our Revolution, the group founded by Sanders supporters.

In the 21st Congressional District, Joseph Kopser, a West Point graduate and Army Ranger with 14 months in Iraq and several years at the Pentagon, defeated former math teacher Mary Wilson, a gay activist and pastor who finished first in the primary but was heavily outspent in the runoff election. Kopser raised $1.2 million and spent most of it. Wilson raised and spent less than $100,000. Kopser remains an underdog in the general election to replace retiring Republican Lamar Smith, with Republican voters accounting for 55 percent of the primary turnout.

In the 23rd Congressional District, former Air Force intelligence officer Gina Ortiz Jones easily defeated schoolteacher Rick Trevino, who had the backing of Our Revolution but was outspent by a margin of nearly 50 to 1. Ortiz Jones, designated part of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee's highest priority "Red to Blue" program, raised $1.2 million and spent $800,000. Trevino spent only $37,000, and lost by a 2-1 margin.

Ortiz Jones will face incumbent Republican Will Hurd, a former CIA officer, giving voters in the district, which extends along much of the US-Mexico border, their choice of intelligence agents to send to Congress.

In the 31st Congressional District, former Air Force helicopter pilot Mary Jennings Hegar defeated osteopath Christine Mann for the nomination to face incumbent Republican John Carter in a district extending from the northern Austin suburbs to Temple and Fort Hood. Hegar is another favorite of the

Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee (DCCC), and had an 8-1 financial advantage in the runoff.

She came to prominence in a lawsuit to win the right of female pilots to fly in combat after flying a medical rescue helicopter during three tours in Afghanistan. Her memoir, *Shoot Like a Girl: One Woman's Dramatic Fight in Afghanistan and on the Home Front*, is becoming a biographical film with Angelina Jolie cast in the lead role.

The four victories for Tuesday brings to at least 12 the number of former military-intelligence operatives who have been nominated by the Democratic Party as its congressional candidates, with at least 25 more on the ballot next month in nearly a dozen states, from Maine to California.

There has been virtually no discussion in the corporate media about the significance of this rising force in the Democratic Party, or the critical role that a military-intelligence "faction" would play if the Democrats regained control of the House of Representatives in November. In that event, a group of two or three dozen Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans and intelligence operatives would hold the balance of power in Congress.

Instead, the focus of media coverage has been the rise of women candidates, and particularly minority women, including the two most prominent winners on Tuesday: Stacey Abrams, who won the Democratic nomination for governor of Georgia, and Lupe Valdez, who won the Democratic nomination for governor of Texas. Both will be considerable underdogs in the fall campaign, with Abrams facing the winner of a Republican runoff between Lieutenant Governor Casey Cagle and Georgia Secretary of State Brian Kemp, and Valdez challenging incumbent Republican Governor Greg Abbott.

According to the corporate media, the gender of these candidates—which they share with half the human race—is more important than the law-and-order demagogy of Valdez, the former sheriff of Dallas County, or the right-wing political record of Abrams, who led the Democratic minority in the Georgia state legislature, making a series of deals with Republican governors and legislative majorities.

Similarly, McGrath, Hegar and Ortiz Jones are presented as part of the "wave" of female candidates winning nominations for the House of Representatives, while the fourth military-intelligence candidate, Kopser, as a white male, does not rate a mention.

The focus on gender is most obviously bankrupt when it comes to a contest like that in the Seventh Congressional District of Texas, in the upscale Houston suburbs, where millionaire corporate lawyer Elizabeth Pannill Fletcher faced former journalist and "progressive" Laura Moser, who was attacked by the DCCC during the first round of primaries but nonetheless won second place and forced a runoff.

Fletcher had the support of Emily's List, the well-financed lobby that promotes female candidates, mainly Democrats, although there were few differences between her and Moser on the issues and both candidates are women. The corporate media barely reported one important difference between the two: Fletcher's law firm has been a frequent combatant on behalf of large corporations against workers, including attacks on the "Fight for 15" campaign promoted by the AFL-CIO and the Services Employees International Union.

The trade unions and their "left" supporters heavily promoted the Moser campaign, with *The Nation* magazine citing claims that she was building "a movement" and had 1,300 volunteers working on her behalf. In the runoff, however, she ended up with only 5,605 votes, less than half the total for Fletcher, and her vote actually fell significantly from the first round of the primary, when she received some sympathy votes after the DCCC attack.

The current issue of *The Nation* carries a cover story headlined "Texas Showdown," which overstated the prospects of three Sanders-type candidates for Congress—Mary Wilson, Rick Trevino and Laura Moser—all of whom lost badly on Tuesday to candidates backed by the Democratic Party establishment.

These results underscore the bankruptcy of the perspective advanced by various pro-Sanders pseudo-left organizations of turning the Democratic Party into a progressive party of "the people."