

# US primary elections in eight states confirm rightward shift by Democratic Party

Patrick Martin  
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The busiest primary day of the US congressional election season saw incumbent Democrats and Republicans winning renomination easily, while in contests for open congressional seats the Democratic Party continued its push to select first-time candidates drawn from the national-security apparatus.

On the ballot Tuesday were the nominations for 85 congressional seats—one-fifth of the US House of Representatives—together with five state governorships and five US Senate seats.

Of the five Senate seats, only one is thought competitive, in Montana, where incumbent two-term Democrat Jon Tester will face Republican State Auditor Matt Rosendale, who has the support of the national party, President Trump and most ultra-right groups. Trump carried Montana by a sizeable margin in 2016.

Republican Senator Roger Wicker of Mississippi won renomination and faces only a token Democratic opponent, while three Democratic incumbents, Robert Menendez of New Jersey, Martin Heinrich of New Mexico and Diane Feinstein of California, won their primaries Tuesday and are expected to win reelection easily.

Among the five governorships where nominations were decided Tuesday, Republicans are heavily favored in Alabama and South Dakota and Democrats in California and New Mexico, with only Iowa considered a somewhat competitive race. Republican Kim Reynolds, the lieutenant governor who succeeded Terry Branstad after Trump appointed him US ambassador to China, will face millionaire businessman Fred Hubbell, who defeated a Bernie Sanders-backed candidate, nurses' union leader Cathy Glasson, to win the Democratic nomination.

The most significant results on Tuesday came in the congressional contests, particularly in the 20 or so seats that are either open due to a retirement or closely contested, based on past results.

Perhaps most revealing was the outcome in New Jersey, where the Democratic Party is seriously contesting all five Republican-held seats. The five Democratic candidates

selected in Tuesday's primary include four whose background lies in the national-security apparatus and a fifth, State Senator Jeff Van Drew, who is a fiscal and cultural conservative. Van Drew opposed gay marriage in the state legislature and has good relations with the National Rifle Association.

He is now the frontrunner for the Second Congressional District seat in southern New Jersey, which will be vacated by the retiring Republican Frank LoBiondo. The Democratic officeholder, who had the full backing of both the state and national party apparatus against three primary rivals, goes into the general election with a war chest of more than \$600,000 compared to only \$11,000 for Republican Seth Grossman, who narrowly won a four-way contest for his party's nomination.

The four national-security candidates in New Jersey include:

Third District: **Andy Kim** worked at the Pentagon and as a strategic adviser to general David Petraeus and John Allen while they were in command of US forces in Afghanistan. He then moved to the National Security Council at the White House, where he was President Obama's director for Iraq for two years. He has raised more money than the incumbent Republican, Tom MacArthur, although MacArthur is personally wealthy and will make up the deficit. The district covers the center of the state, including Burlington and Ocean counties.

Fourth District: **Joshua Welle** is a graduate of the Naval Academy with 12 years on active duty (2003-2015) supporting combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as deployments to the Persian Gulf, Europe and the Far East. He also taught international relations at the Naval Academy, became the first Navy fellow at the Center for a New American Security, and was a term member at the Council on Foreign Relations. He then became a software consultant to the Pentagon. Welle faces an uphill race against 19-term Representative Christopher Smith in a mid-Jersey district centered on Monmouth County, which is the wealthiest in the state.

Seventh District: **Tom Malinowski**, a congressional aide and Clinton administration official, headed the Washington office of Human Rights Watch for 13 years before joining the Obama administration under Secretary of State John Kerry as assistant secretary of state for democracy, human rights and labor. He will challenge five-term incumbent Republican Leonard Lance in a district encompassing the southwest suburbs of the Greater New York metropolitan area.

Eleventh District: **Mikie Sherrill** was a career Navy helicopter pilot, with 10 years active duty in Europe and the Middle East, who left the military to become a federal prosecutor. Sherrill has raised more than \$2.5 million for her campaign, a massive sum for a first-time congressional candidate, and is now the favorite in a district in the western suburbs of Newark, where 12-term Republican Representative Rodney Freylinghausen retired rather than face a difficult reelection challenge.

Sherrill has been singled out by Democratic Party leaders and the corporate media for promotion as a future political “star.” The *New York Times* went so far as to publish an editorial endorsement before the primary, urging her selection as the Democratic Party nominee over four opponents, praising her “military background” and concluding that “we believe Ms. Sherrill is the strongest candidate, and endorse her with confidence.”

The New Jersey Democratic Party establishment successfully imposed its choice in contested congressional nominations, brushing aside several candidates backed by Bernie Sanders and his Our Revolution group. Nearly every Sanders-backed candidate in other states—for governor of Iowa and congressional seats in Iowa, Montana New Mexico and California—suffered a similar fate.

The New Jersey Democratic machine also pushed through the renomination of Senator Menendez, one of the most corrupt and right-wing figures in either major capitalist party, a longtime warmonger against Cuba, Venezuela, Iran and other countries targeted by American imperialism. A liberal challenger with almost no money, Lisa McCormick, won nearly 40 percent of the vote against the two-term incumbent senator.

Menendez only narrowly escaped imprisonment in a bribery scandal involving his longtime multi-millionaire crony Dr. Salvador Melgen, for whom he lobbied strenuously for increased reimbursements from Medicare. Melgen was convicted on multiple charges of fraud and corruption and sentenced to 17 years in prison, but lawyers for Menendez were able to obtain a hung jury on the bribery charges against the senator, which were eventually dropped by the Trump Justice Department.

The other major focus of attention in terms of the

congressional races was California, where there are seven Republican-held seats carried by Democrat Hillary Clinton in the 2016 presidential election, and three other Republican-held seats considered competitive. In two of those seats, long-serving Republican incumbents Ed Royce and Darrell Issa retired rather than seek reelection.

The main concern of Democratic strategists Tuesday was that so many Democratic candidates were running in some of these districts that they might split the vote, allowing Republicans to run first and second under the state’s unusual “jungle primary” format, in which all candidates of all parties appear on a single ballot. This was considered a particular risk in the districts left vacant by Royce and Issa, which had multiple, well-financed candidates in both parties.

With many late votes still to be counted, it appears that all 10 districts will have a Democratic and a Republican candidate in the November election. One of the Democrats, Jessica Morse in the Fourth District, has a military-intelligence background, having worked for years as a consultant for the Agency for International Development, a notorious CIA front, including a tour of duty in Iraq. Two other military-intelligence Democrats—Sara Jacobs in the 49th District, a former State Department official, and Josh Butner in the 50th District, a former Navy SEAL—appear to have fallen just short of placing into the general election, finishing third and fourth, respectively.

Morse and the four in New Jersey bring to at least 17 the number of congressional candidates with military-intelligence backgrounds chosen by the Democratic Party this year in closely contested seats, with nearly half the primary season still remaining. In the event the Democratic Party wins control of the House of Representatives, it will be depending on a group of two dozen or more former CIA and military intelligence officers, combat commanders and State Department and National Security Council officials to sustain it in power.

The other nine Democratic candidates in competitive seats in California—potential members of Congress if the Democrats win control in November—include a multimillionaire lottery winner, three millionaire lawyers, an IT venture capitalist, a businessman, a county prosecutor, a former Obama White House aide, and the executive of a charity for the homeless.

See also:

The CIA Democrats



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