

Democratic Party runs more than 60 military-intelligence candidates for Congress

Part four

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This is the fourth part of a five-part series. The three previous parts can be read [here](#), [here](#) and [here](#).

Combat veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan

Soldiers who deployed to the US wars in Iraq and Afghanistan make up the largest single group of military-intelligence candidates nominated by the Democratic Party, 32 out of 67. Fourteen have already been discussed in previous parts of this series: Jason Crow, Pat Ryan, Jake Auchincloss, Maggie Goodlander, Elaine Luria, Caitlin Conley, Frederick Wellman, Bale Dalton, Eileen Laubacher, Leela Gray, Shawn Harris, Luke Bronin, Lee McNinnis and Kevin Burge. The other 18 include (proceeding west to east geographically):

JoAnna Mendoza is the Democratic candidate in Arizona's 6th Congressional District, in the Tucson area, against two-term Republican incumbent Juan Ciscomani. She enlisted in the Navy at 17, then joined the Marines. There, according to her campaign website, her roles included: Marine Corps drill instructor, deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan, and "leading the next generation of Marines."

After retiring from the military, she worked as a congressional staffer and an advocate for veterans. Her district is considered leaning Democratic, and Mendoza has actually raised more money (\$7.35 million) than the Republican incumbent (\$6.17 million) as of June 30.

John Duresky is the Democratic candidate for the 4th District of Washington, which covers the largely rural central part of the state, including the agricultural Yakima Valley and the Hanford nuclear reservation. Longtime Republican Representative Dan Newhouse is retiring, and the Republican candidate is Amanda McKinney, a Christian conservative (she identifies herself as a "faithful servant") and county commissioner.

According to Duresky's own account on his campaign website, "I had a 24-year Air Force career and retired as a major. After boot camp and training, I began work as an Avionics Technician, and then became a Commissioned Cyberspace Operations Officer. I've led teams throughout my career in deployed network, influence, and airborne communications operations working with the NSA, CIA, and Combatant Commands." Since retiring from the military, he has been a manager of technology programs for the federal government, including five years at the Hanford nuclear facility.

Jonny Larsen is the Democratic candidate in another heavily Republican area, the 4th District of Utah, in the west-central portion of the state, running south from Salt Lake City. He is running against first-term

Republican Mike Kennedy. Larsen enlisted in the Marines in 2000 and according to his website, "I deployed twice to Iraq. First with 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines, during the initial push into Baghdad, where my battalion tore down Saddam Hussein's statue. I returned with 3rd Battalion, 7th Marines, and fought in the Battle of Husaybah, a precursor to the First Battle of Fallujah." He has since worked in the IT industry, but emphasizes his Marine background in the campaign, appealing to the 30,000 veterans in the district.

Trygve Hammer is the Democratic candidate for North Dakota's at-large seat in Congress, a repeat of his candidacy in 2024. He again faces Republican incumbent Julie Fedorchuk, now ending her first term. Hammer won barely 30 percent of the vote in 2024, but raised more than \$1 million for his campaign, and could benefit from the economic crisis hitting the state's farmers.

He graduated from the US Naval Academy and was commissioned as an officer in the Marines. According to his own account, published on his campaign website, "In the Marine Corps, I served as a helicopter pilot, a forward air controller, a Military attaché at the US Embassy in Rome, and as an instructor and company officer at the US Naval Academy. I deployed to Iraq in 2003 as an infantry officer and forward air controller." He retired in 2010, after 20 years in the military.

There are four more combat veteran Democrats running for Republican-held congressional seats across the Midwest states. These four are running poorly financed campaigns, essentially "showing the flag" for the Democrats in rural and small-town districts.

Christopher Reichard is the Democratic candidate in the 8th Congressional District of Missouri, opposing seven-term incumbent Republican Jason Smith. The district covers the largely rural southeast portion of the state, including the Ozark Mountains. According to his campaign website, Reichard joined the Army at the age of 18: "Just six short months later, he was boots-on-ground in Iraq—providing critical communications support during some of the war's toughest moments—including the Second Battle of Fallujah and the first free Iraqi elections in Mahmudiya. His service from 2004 to 2012 included three deployments and numerous awards ..." Since then he has worked as an electrician in the telecommunications industry.

Drew Cox is the Democratic candidate in the 4th Congressional District of Indiana, in the west-central part of the state. The district has been held by Republicans for the last 32 years, and for the last eight by incumbent Jim Baird. According to his campaign website, while Cox is a musician and was initially a Marine bandsman, in 2011 he was "individually augmented out of the band and sent to Kabul, Afghanistan. During his deployment, Drew conducted over 700 tactical vehicle movements, safely and successfully completed over 80 general/flag officer movements, and ensured the safety of over 2,200 personnel during tactical vehicle

movements.”

Ben Ambrose is the Democratic candidate in the 2nd Congressional District of Michigan, a rural and small-town area north of Grand Rapids, including the city of Midland, where Dow Chemical has long been based. Ambrose highlights his 20-year career in the Marine Corps, including multiple combat tours. He also received a degree in international relations from Georgetown University in Washington D.C., one of the main sources of recruitment to higher-level positions in the national security apparatus.

Jerrad Christian is the Democratic candidate in the 12th Congressional District of Ohio, which stretches east from the suburbs of Columbus. He is reprising his 2024 challenge to four-term Republican Troy Balderson, in which he won only 31.5 percent of the vote. As of June 30, Balderson had 100 times more money in his campaign war chest than Christian. The Democrat writes on his campaign website: “I made the decision to join the US Navy where I served as a flight deck fueller on an aircraft carrier during Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom [the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan] for two years. After successfully surviving the hazards of the flight deck, I transitioned to the role of meteorologist and oceanographer for my final three years.”

Seven more combat veterans are running as Democrats in congressional districts in the South. These are a mix of well-financed candidates with serious prospects of winning, and candidates running what amount to token campaigns.

Tony Kozycki is the Democratic candidate in the 7th Congressional District of Georgia, in the northeast suburbs of Atlanta, where he is opposing two-term Republican Rich McCormick.

According to his campaign website, after graduating from the US Naval Academy, “Tony became a Naval Aviator, flying the F/A-18 Super Hornet. He completed three combat deployments, leading missions in complex environments where decisions carried real consequences.”

He was awarded three Air Medals for his combat missions in Afghanistan and Iraq, and later “served as a U.S. Navy liaison embedded with the Royal Australian Air Force, coordinating joint operations and strengthening international partnerships.”

Richard Ojeda is the Democratic candidate in the 9th Congressional District of North Carolina, which includes Fort Bragg and other military facilities. He is running against seven-term Republican incumbent Richard Hudson. Ojeda was previously elected to the state Senate in West Virginia and was part of the initial group of CIA Democrats in 2018, losing a contest with Republican Carol Miller in the 2nd Congressional District of West Virginia, which comprises the southern half of the state.

The WSWS detailed his record in 2018:

His five-paragraph campaign biography deals entirely with his record in the US Army Airborne, which includes multiple tours and commendations in Iraq, Afghanistan—two countries that have been devastated by American involvement, with over one million dead. Ojeda rose from second lieutenant to major in the course of more than two decades as an army officer.

We also noted that his last position in the military was as the executive officer overseeing Army recruiting from Beckley, West Virginia to Virginia Beach:

In other words, Ojeda’s job involved convincing impoverished youth, the children of miners and teachers, to join the military and become cannon fodder for American imperialism.

Evan Hunt is the Democratic candidate in the 3rd Congressional District of Texas, running against four-term Republican incumbent Keith Self in the northeast Dallas suburbs. He is a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel who was a “B-1 Bomber Weapons Systems Officer and Electronic Warfare Officer,” according to his campaign. He dropped bombs on both Iraq and Afghanistan.

After returning from overseas deployments, Hunt held positions in the Air National Guard, “including Master Air Attack Plans Chief, Squadron Commander, and Deputy Group Commander, leading both operations and maintenance units in high-stakes environments.”

Mitchell Jacob, 34, is the Democratic candidate in the 4th Congressional District of Oklahoma. He spent more than five years as a Cryptologic Linguist, deploying to southern Syria as part of the US war against ISIS, Operation Inherent Resolve. He returned to Oklahoma, enrolled in law school, and even before graduation announced his candidacy against longtime Republican incumbent Tom Cole, one of the senior figures in the party leadership.

Three career Army veterans, all African American, all retiring as sergeants after multiple combat missions, are running poorly financed campaigns for Congress in the Deep South.

Robert People enlisted while still in high school and spent 21 years in the Army “through three combat tours (two in Iraq, one in Afghanistan) and in the roles of Ammunitions Specialist and Journalist before retiring in 2018,” according to his website. He is running as the Democratic candidate in the 15th Congressional District of Florida, in the suburbs north of Tampa, against two-term Republican incumbent Laurel Lee.

Clyde Jones is the Democratic candidate in the 1st Congressional District of Alabama, which includes the city of Mobile. His 21 years in the Army saw him deployed in combat in both Operation Desert Storm (1991) and the invasion of Iraq (2003). His Republican opponent is former Representative Jerry Carl, who is seeking to regain his seat after losing it to redistricting in 2022.

Jeffrey Hullum enlisted at 18 and stayed in the Army for 22 years, retiring with the rank of sergeant major, after six combat tours of duty. He went into politics in 2022, winning a seat in the Mississippi House of Representatives. He is now challenging eight-term Republican incumbent Mike Ezell in the 4th Congressional District of Mississippi, which includes the Gulf Coast portion of the state.

There are three more combat veterans running as Democrats for Congress in the Northeast.

Justin Wagner is the Democratic candidate in the 16th Congressional District of Pennsylvania, which covers the northwest corner of the state, from Erie down to Butler. His opponent is eight-term Republican incumbent Mike Kelly. Wagner enlisted in the Army, deploying first to South Korea, and then in 2006 to Iraq, during some of the worst fighting. After active duty, he continued military service in the Army Reserves.

Christopher Gallant is the Democratic nominee in New York’s 1st Congressional District, eastern Long Island, against two-term incumbent Nicholas LaLota. He enlisted in the New York Army National Guard after 9/11, trained as a pilot and air traffic controller, deployed several times to Kuwait and flew other overseas missions.

Alissa Ellman, an Afghanistan war veteran, is the Democratic candidate in New York’s 24th Congressional District, a seat now held by Republican incumbent Claudia Tenney, a fervent supporter of Donald Trump. Ellman enlisted in the Air National Guard and was deployed to Bagram Air Base, the huge US facility outside Kabul. After leaving the military, Ellman worked at the Veterans Administration, losing her job in early 2025 in the DOGE cuts spearheaded by Elon Musk.

To be continued



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