

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

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5 October 2026

This is the last part of a five-part series. The previous parts can be accessed here: [Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#) and [Part 4](#).

Other military veterans

Another group of military-intelligence veterans running for Congress as Democrats did not play combat roles in Iraq or Afghanistan but had significant military careers nonetheless. Several of these are in highly competitive seats or are even favored to win their races.

Rebecca Bennett is the Democratic candidate in New Jersey's 7th Congressional District, where the incumbent is two-term Republican incumbent Tom Kean Jr. Earlier this year, the congressman disappeared for months, missing dozens of votes, later revealing that he was being treated for depression. He only recently returned to Capitol Hill. Bennett leads him in the polls, is favored to win by political forecasting groups and has matched him in fundraising, \$4.2 million to \$4.8 million, as of June 30. The district, which stretches across northern New Jersey from Pennsylvania to Staten Island, was previously represented by another CIA Democrat, former State Department official Tom Malinowski, who won the seat in 2018 and was ousted by Kean in 2022.

According to her campaign website, Bennett was in the Navy "for over 15 years as a helicopter pilot, experimental test pilot, and aircraft commander, and member of the Air National Guard." She writes: "After graduating flight school at the top of my class, I flew the MH-60 Seahawk and was the number one pilot in every squadron I served in. I was selected as the only MH-60S helicopter pilot in my class to attend U.S. Naval Test Pilot School, becoming just the 18th female Navy test pilot in the Navy's history." She and her husband, also a Navy veteran, moved to New Jersey where she obtained an MBA at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania and worked in several healthcare industry positions.

Another military veteran who is well positioned to enter Congress in January is **Zach Dembo**, the Democratic candidate in Kentucky's 6th Congressional District, centered on Lexington. He graduated from the University of Michigan Law School and then was commissioned as an officer in the Navy's Judge Advocate General (JAG) Corps. He spent four years in the Navy, then became a federal prosecutor in the Department of Justice in 2017, under Trump's first attorney general, Jeff Sessions. He moved back to Kentucky in 2020 to become a policy adviser and legislative director for Governor Andy Beshear. Under the Biden administration, he again became a federal prosecutor, this time based in Lexington.

Dembo's Republican opponent is Ralph Alvarado, in a contest for the seat left vacant when seven-term incumbent Andy Barr decided to run for the Senate seat of Mitch McConnell, the former Republican leader, who is retiring after 42 years in office.

Jordan Herrera is the Democratic candidate in the 4th District of Missouri, covering the largely rural west-central portion of the state. The two-term Republican incumbent, Mark Alford, won both his races with over 70 percent of the vote.

Herrera spent 16 years in active service with the Air Force, before graduating from law school and becoming Assistant Attorney General for the State of Missouri. According to his website, "In the Air Force, Jordan rose through the ranks as a Biomedical Equipment Engineer, leading operations across more than 70 military installations worldwide."

John Vincent is the Democratic candidate in South Carolina's 7th Congressional District, running against two-term incumbent Republican Russell Fry. The district comprises the state's northeast corner, including such upscale areas as Myrtle Beach. While Vincent has raised more than a nominal amount of campaign funds, Fry's war chest is nearly six times as large.

Vincent is a career Navy NCO. According to his campaign website, "John joined the U.S. Navy and dedicated 20 years to military service. He progressed through the ranks to achieve the distinguished position of Command Master Chief, a senior enlisted leader responsible for the welfare, training, and morale of service members.

"Much of his career was spent in the high-pressure environment of submarine operations. He later led a large, multi-branch command across seven bases and five military branches. This leadership role required strategic thinking, crisis management, and advocacy ..."

Together with his wife Deb, Vincent "authored *The Submarine Way*, an Amazon best-selling book about interdependent collaboration and inclusive leadership under pressure—a skill honed in the Navy and now applied to governance and public service."

Philip Ehr is a retired Navy commander and naval flight officer with a 26-year active-duty career. He is in his third run for Congress and the second in his current Miami-area district, the 28th Congressional District of Florida, where he faces three-term Republican Carlos Giménez.

According to his website, "His background includes EP-3 signals-intelligence and electronic-reconnaissance missions during the Cold War, plus combat-support work in Desert Storm and oversight of U.S. air-combat operations during NATO's Balkan campaign."

Kyle Rable attended the University of Toledo on an Army ROTC scholarship, then was commissioned as an officer in the Army Reserves. He was apparently never deployed overseas and moved to Lubbock, Texas to enter a PhD program at Texas Tech. He is the Democratic candidate in the 19th Congressional District of Texas, against Republican Tom Sell, for a seat left vacant by the retirement of longtime incumbent Republican Jodey Arrington.

A Navy veteran married to a Navy veteran, **Danielle Sterbinsky** is the Democratic candidate in Arizona's 9th Congressional District, covering the largely rural west and northwest of the state. She is running against eight-term incumbent Republican Paul Gosar, a fascist so noxious that six of his nine siblings once appeared in a political ad calling for his defeat.

Sterbinsky was an operations specialist and petty officer on board the destroyer *U.S.S. Bainbridge* in the Mediterranean Sea, according to her website. Her campaign logo incorporates the Navy anchor, and she cites her naval record as a principal credential.

Dwayne Romero is the Democratic candidate for the 3rd Congressional District of Colorado, covering the western slope of the Rockies. He is running against first-term Republican Jeff Hurd, in a tightly contested race. While Romero has had a long military career in business and government, his website cites his graduation from West Point, his participation in the 1991 Persian Gulf War and his seven years as an Army engineer.

Mike Croley is the Democratic candidate in the 6th Congressional District of Tennessee, covering much of the north-central part of the state. He is running against Republican Johnny Garrett for the seat left vacant when incumbent Republican John Rose ran for governor.

Croley enlisted in the Navy after graduating high school and writes on his campaign website, “While in boot camp, I was selected for meritorious advancement, and upon completion I served as an Electronics Technician on the east coast.” He then used a Navy ROTC scholarship to get an engineering degree at Vanderbilt and was commissioned as a Navy officer.

He gives no details of his subsequent naval deployment, an unusual omission, but after leaving the military, he turned to police work, joining the Tennessee State Park Rangers and “attending the Tennessee Law Enforcement Academy in 2016.” Later he was awarded a Presidential Management Fellowship which “saw me working in the US Departments of State and Agriculture ...”

Rick Crosson, a military officer for 20 years, is the Democratic candidate for Congress in Wisconsin’s 8th Congressional District, against first-term Republican incumbent Tony Wied. A former military officer for 20 years, Crosson notes on his campaign website that he “flew surveillance missions along the ‘Iron Curtain’.”

He continues, “I’m a US Army retired Lt Colonel & Master Army Aviator. I am also a former logistics and transportation corporate executive seeking the opportunity to once again serve my country. I have held a diplomatic passport while serving as military liaison to the government of Mexico, and also served in command and staff positions in combat aviation units.”

James Russell, the Democratic candidate in the 4th Congressional District of Arkansas (the southwest third of the state), is running against six-term incumbent Republican Bruce Westerman.

According to his campaign website, “He enlisted in the AR National Guard as a Nuclear, Biological, Radiological, and Chemical Warfare Specialist attached to a TOW missile company as a MOPP (Mission Oriented Protective Posture) gear special quartermaster.”

Maura Keller is making her second run in Georgia’s 3rd Congressional District, in west Georgia, facing first-term Republican incumbent Brian Jack, who defeated her by a 2-1 margin in 2024. Keller had a 26-year career in the military police, rising to the rank of lieutenant colonel, and then “transitioned to a role that supported the readiness of our forces as a Senior Readiness Analyst...”

Brad Meyer, the Democratic candidate in the 9th Congressional District of Indiana, is running against two-term incumbent Erin Houchin. The district comprises the southeast corner of the state, including the Indiana suburbs of Louisville, Kentucky.

Meyer gives this account of his relationship with the Navy as a contractor and civilian employee: “In 2010, my family and I moved to Bloomington to support the Naval Surface Warfare Center, Crane. Six years later, I was hired as a Navy civilian engineer and spent nine years working in electromagnetic warfare, a critical role protecting our sailors from missile threats.”

Medical officers

This series has identified and profiled 63 military-intelligence candidates so far. There are an additional four whose careers appear to have been entirely bound up with the medical side of the military. While this is certainly different from direct involvement in the mass violence perpetrated by US imperialism all over the world, medical care is a critical function in enabling that violence, and the four belong on any list of Democratic candidates with military-intelligence backgrounds.

One of the four is the prohibitive favorite to win the seat representing the heavily Democratic 12th Congressional District of New Jersey, which includes the state capital Trenton. **Adam Hamawy** won a 12-candidate Democratic primary to choose a successor to retiring Democratic incumbent Bonnie Watson Coleman. More than 77,000 voted in the Democratic primary, compared to 13,000 in the Republican primary, where Gregg Mele was unopposed.

Hamawy is a Palestinian American born in New Jersey who used an ROTC scholarship to go to college and medical school. He then spent eight years as a surgeon in combat zones in Iraq and Afghanistan, from 2003-2011, leaving the military as a lieutenant-colonel. Since then he has built a medical practice in New Jersey, while serving as a volunteer doctor in numerous overseas conflicts, including in Gaza in 2024-25. His campaign had the support of Bernie Sanders, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other members and former members of the House associated with the Democratic Socialists of America. He is not, as we shall see, the only former military officer backed by DSA Democrats.

Kristina Knickerbocker is the Democratic candidate in the 12th Congressional District of Ohio, against 12-term incumbent Republican Mike Turner, former chairman of the House Intelligence Committee. An Air Force nurse at Wright-Patterson Air Base, just outside of Dayton, Knickerbocker rose to the rank of major but does not appear to have been stationed overseas. The Dayton-based district is considered at least modestly competitive, and Knickerbocker had raised over \$360,000 by June 30.

The remaining two are in Georgia, **Pamela DeLancy** in the 10th Congressional District and **Ceretta Smith** in the 12th Congressional District.

Pamela DeLancy had a 39-year career as a medical officer, retiring as a colonel. According to her website, “she served in senior leadership roles across the U.S. Army, including Deputy Surgeon for Clinical Operations with the Office of the Chief Army Reserve, Director of Reserve Medical Programs at the Department of Defense, and Brigade Commander of the AMEDD Professional Medical Command at Fort Gillem, Georgia.” She is running against Republican Houston Gaines in a northeast Georgia district which includes Athens, home of the University of Georgia, the seat held by Republican Mike Collins, who is now running for US Senate.

Ceretta Smith was an army medic for 10 years, before becoming a civilian federal employee and rising through the union bureaucracy to become a statewide official of the American Federation of Government Employees. She is running against six-term Republican incumbent Rick Allen in an east-central Georgia district that includes the city of Augusta.

CIA Democrats and DSA Democrats

As we have already noted, the media coverage given to more than 60 Democratic congressional candidates coming from the military-intelligence apparatus is only a tiny fraction of the publicity given to the

much smaller number of Democratic candidates posturing as “left” and even “democratic socialists.”

There are currently two members of the Democratic Socialists of America in Congress, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Rashida Tlaib, and two more with past membership, Summer Lee of Pennsylvania and Greg Casar of Texas. DSA members are running as Democratic candidates in New York’s 7th Congressional District (Claire Valdez) and 13th Congressional District (Darializa Aliza Chevalier), Pennsylvania’s 3rd Congressional District (Chris Rabb) and Colorado’s 1st Congressional District (Melet Kiro). Other DSA-linked candidates include Brad Lander in New York’s 10th Congressional District and William Lawrence in Michigan’s 7th Congressional District.

The DSA-linked faction and the military-intelligence faction do not represent rival “wings” of the Democratic Party, to say nothing of the fact that the wings would be grossly lopsided in favor of the national-security apparatus. They are rather complementary.

The DSA-linked candidates provide a “left” political cover for the Democratic Party. Their emergence, particularly this summer in a series of primary defeats of Democratic incumbents, has served as an early-warning sign to the ruling class of the radicalization of broad masses of working people and youth.

The substance of the Democratic Party, however, is revealed in the massive influx of military-intelligence candidates, with backgrounds in the vast national-security apparatus which comprises the bulk of the federal government. Most of these candidates have either fought as volunteers in wars of aggression on behalf of American imperialism or helped direct and organize them. Some have played lesser roles in the same military machine.

There is no basic ideological division between the CIA Democrats and the DSA Democrats, since the political foundation of the DSA is anti-communism and the defense of the global interests of US imperialism against the threat of social revolution.

We have previously had occasion to point to the statement of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez on this issue, when a WSWS reporter asked her, in September 2018, whether she would back Democratic candidates who came directly from the military and intelligence agencies. She said:

I think it all depends on the individual candidate. I don’t think that a person’s life experience in one way or another necessarily precludes them from running for office. I think what is important ... is a candidate’s given story. And, for me I’m very outspoken about being an anti-war candidate... I don’t think that a person should be discounted because they were a bartender or on the front lines.

Since then Ocasio-Cortez has repeatedly voted in favor of massive appropriations for the US military and the 19 agencies in the “intelligence community,” as well as giving full support to the US-NATO war against Russia in Ukraine and making only verbal protests over the US-backed Israeli genocide in Gaza.

A recent article in *Politico* gave further details on the close relationship between Ocasio-Cortez and Representative Pat Ryan, the former Army intelligence and special forces officer who has held the seat for New York’s 18th Congressional District, in the Hudson Valley, since 2022. The feature article bore the cynical headline, “Pat Ryan’s Very Cordial Class War,” with the additional phrase: “A rising Democrat is testing whether you can run against ‘the rich and powerful’ without making wealthy people the enemy.”

The bulk of the article details Ryan’s efforts as part of the “pro-business, center-left New Democrat Coalition.” He occupied “a seat on

the Armed Services Committee, where he advocated for strengthening ties with Taiwan and military aid to Ukraine.” He also formed close ties to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), for whom he recorded a video last year declaring it is “so important that we celebrate and value and double down on our alliance with Israel.”

Ryan began espousing what he called “patriotic populism,” which he described, according to *Politico*, as “an uplifting alternative to the zero-sum class warfare promoted by others in his party and could end up strengthening public confidence in regulated free markets and existing institutions.”

In March of this year, Ryan and Ocasio-Cortez held a three-city tour of New York state. In the final stop at Glens Falls, Ryan led the Pledge of Allegiance and then passed the microphone to Ocasio-Cortez. As *Politico* recounts it:

Ryan and Ocasio-Cortez sat around a small roundtable, sharing intimate details about their lives before Congress. She told her origin story as a working-class waitress who couldn’t afford a blood test because she lacked health insurance, he recalled being a young military officer writing a letter to his parents to be opened in the event he died in combat. The two jeans-clad, ambitious young Democrats found an unexpected chemistry.

After a previous joint appearance in 2024, to support his reelection campaign to Congress, Ryan told the press, “I just respect the hell out of Congresswoman Ocasio-Cortez.” He added, “Actual leadership is leaning into and doing the work to find the commonality, and then reminding the community we actually do share some pretty foundational things.”

In 2025, Ryan endorsed Zohran Mamdani over former New York Governor Andrew Cuomo in the general election for mayor of New York City. But for the 2026 profile in *Politico*, he sought to distinguish between “greedy” billionaires and those in the super-rich who were not: “I actually think it’s very important to say there are good, very generous, and patriotic, and selfless wealthy people.”

Some political conclusions

One conclusion that should be drawn from this unavoidably lengthy dissection of the 2026 version of the CIA Democrats is that the Democratic Party is a party of Wall Street and the military-intelligence apparatus, unalterably committed to the defense of the worldwide and domestic interests of the financial oligarchy. It cannot be pushed to the left, let alone transformed into a party of the working class.

Over the past five elections, the Democratic Party has nominated nearly 200 congressional candidates whose principal “qualification” has been their participation in the military-intelligence apparatus of American imperialism. In the current election, there are 67 such candidates, a marked increase over the previous four. The chart below shows the geographic distribution of these candidates.

One of the foundations of dialectical materialist analysis is to recognize that quantitative changes lead to qualitative changes. The Democratic Party is being transformed qualitatively by this influx of new leading personnel. It has always been a capitalist party, but in much of the 20th century, certainly from Franklin Roosevelt to Lyndon Johnson, it postured as a pro-working-class party that would use the power of the federal government to alleviate mass unemployment and poverty and extend democratic rights. This role, and consequent popular support, made it the

choice of the ruling class to lead the country into wars.

The Democratic Party today offers no reforms, except the radical rhetoric of the DSA and a handful of other “lefts” like Bernie Sanders. But it remains, even more so, a party of imperialist war. Its critique of Trump focuses on demands for more aggressive military intervention in Ukraine against Russia, more effective waging of the criminal war against Iran, and a tougher line on China, which Wall Street regards as its greatest overseas adversary.

No one should be misled by the fife-and-drum corps of “democratic socialists” at the head of the column. The real content of the Democratic Party is indicated by the army of military-intelligence candidates marching behind them. The working class must break with the Democratic Party, establish its political independence of all forms of capitalist politics and fight for its own class interests, based on a socialist and internationalist program.



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