

WHY ARE SO FEW VETERANS IN PUBLIC SERVICE?

BY

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by

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Disclaimer

The views expressed in the academic research paper are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the US Government, the Department of Defense, or any of its agencies.

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WHY ARE SO FEW VETERANS IN PUBLIC SERVICE?

Introduction and Problem Statement

How will the fact that fewer members of the US Congress have served in the armed forces affect future defense policy? The question always asked is why more former Service Members do not opt to serve in a public office. It is amazing that ordinary people such as teachers, military Veterans, attorneys, small business owners, and even ranchers have decided to put their private lives aside for a time and run for public office. “The call to service is intensely personal and idealistic, but the path to service is decidedly non-partisan.”¹ The majority of members of the US Congress are there because they want to make America a better place, but most Americans—if current surveys are to be believed—believe they are there to enrich themselves.²

The media is always reporting about elected officials being involved in shady deals, unethical business transactions, immoral sexual relations, and making seemingly ridiculous decisions. They clearly do not represent the people who elected them and it sometimes appears they are only there for the prestige, power, and certain retirement benefits. They were elected by their people to represent them and to make logical and well-informed decisions that affect not only their districts/states but the Nation as a whole. This is where the problem starts as these elected officials usually do not see the “big picture.” They are often very good at looking out for their constituents in the area of the economy and employment as US Congressmen frequently steer Department of Defense (DoD) contracts towards industry in their district. A prime example is ship building. Unfortunately, many times more ships are built than are needed or even requested by DoD and are built only to make the politician appear he is looking out for his district. Corruption may often be associated with third-world countries, but it is evident that it is present today at all levels of government, especially at the federal level.

Service Members are much more disciplined and have the moral backgrounds to make better decisions and to better represent their constituents. They are trained in leadership and management styles and have the moral fortitude to make tough and unpopular decisions. Service Members are held to a higher standard than publicly elected officials and the historical record clearly dictates why with countless examples.

From their vast experiences and deployments, Service Members have a wide array of skills to draw upon and are taught from early in their careers to approach a mission with the

larger mission in mind. Being able to see the vision of the future and the “big picture” will enable them to make decisions based on the greater good of the Nation versus only their district or state. Former Service Members may enter public service for a multitude of reasons, from just wanting to continue to serve this great Nation, to improving Veteran’s benefits, or as US Representative Joe Sestak (D-PA) said, “to improve healthcare in this country.”³ “Sestak’s young daughter had a brain tumor, and thanks to his US Navy benefits, she received excellent health care. His daughter’s hospital roommate on the other side of the curtain had to struggle to piece together enough insurance coverage to stay. Sestak said, “I was running to be sure every child in America has health care. I am going to make my service about exactly that.”⁴

Minnesota State Representative Steve Simon said he believes it is crucial that elected officials look to their values when making policy decisions. “I think that public officials owe their very best judgment to their constituents,” explains Simon. “Sometimes, that judgment may lead to unpopular decisions. Exercising independent judgment also means being courageous. By making clear to constituents and your fellow elected officials where you stand on the issues, you communicate integrity and authenticity to your constituents.”⁵

This paper briefly looks at a few historical examples of both civilian success stories and Service Members who have had great success in elected office. It also shows how government at the state and federal levels could be much better if more former Service Members were serving in public offices. This paper does not get into the details on how to run a campaign as there are numerous books that elaborately discuss those directions, but instead will generally touch on a few topics such as funding a campaign. Additionally, this paper will list recommendations for assistance that could be given to Service Members who choose to run for public office. It analyzes some of the failures and makes a recommendation on who is best served and best qualified for elected office. All levels of politics will be addressed but the primary focus will be on the US Congress. This paper should answer the question-how do we raise the bar for the US Congress?

Historical Background of Selected US Congressmen

There are, of course, numerous public officials who have no military service and served with distinction over the years. The following examples include elected officials from all parties, all racial backgrounds, men and women from all walks of life. It should be noted that military

service has not historically been a factor in the success or failure of elected officials, but in the past dozen years or so, the extra training in ethics, leadership, decision making, and public relations appears to make those with military experience more efficient and respected.

Many great politicians come to mind immediately--Abraham Lincoln, Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, Ronald Reagan, George H.W. Bush--but we want to look at the more current leaders who have been elected to public office and are still in office or have just recently left office. Here are but a few examples of some great role models who have distinguished military service records.

The first example is US Senator Bob Dole from Kansas. Senator Dole was a Platoon Leader in the US Army Tenth Mountain Division in Italy and was gravely wounded on the battlefield in 1945. He received numerous awards for bravery, including two Purple Hearts. President Ronald Reagan once said of Dole, "His title of Leader is not just a job title; it's a description of the man."⁶ Dole was the Republican presidential nominee in 1996 and was awarded the presidential Medal of Freedom by President Bill Clinton, his rival, in 1997. He additionally served as Chairman of the newly-dedicated National World War II Memorial honoring all of the heroes of the WWII generation in Washington DC.

The next example is US Senator James Webb from Virginia. Senator Webb graduated from the US Naval Academy in 1968 and was first in his class of 243 at the US Marine Corps Officer's Basic Course at Quantico, VA. He served as a Platoon Leader and Company Commander in Vietnam and was awarded the Navy Cross, Silver Star, two Bronze Stars, and two Purple Hearts. He later received his Juris Doctorate (J.D.) from Georgetown University and became the first US Naval Academy graduate to serve in the US Marine Corps and later as Secretary of the Navy. Since then, he has been elected to the US Congress and is making a positive impact for Veterans' programs, particularly the GI Bill. He is a key member of the Senate Armed Services and the Veterans Affairs committees.

Another excellent role model for military and civilian service to the Nation is John McCain, US Senator from Arizona. Senator McCain served in the US Navy, as did his father and grandfather and was truly a role model for his men while wearing the uniform. During the Vietnam War, he was shot down and spent five and a half years in a North Vietnamese Prison Camp referred to as the *Hanoi Hilton*. Senator McCain refused to be released after his captors

offered his release once they learned that his father was a US Navy Admiral. His leadership motivated his fellow prisoners to not give up hope and it could be said that he saved their lives while in prison. He was awarded the Silver Star, Bronze Star, Legion of Merit, Purple Heart and the Distinguished Flying Cross for his service. Senator McCain later felt the need for further public service and entered politics in 1982, eventually running for president in 2008 and narrowly losing to the Democratic candidate, Barrack Obama, who incidentally had no military service.

Max Cleland is a distinguished Vietnam combat Veteran and former senator from Georgia. Senator Cleland became interested in politics during college and studied at American University. After being near fatally wounded in Vietnam, losing both legs and an arm, he was upset about many Veterans' issues after the war and the fact that Vietnam Veterans weren't being received well upon redeployment home. He ran for the US Senate in 1996, won a term, and served on the Armed Services Committee.⁷ He was a staunch supporter for all issues related to Veterans and received excellent grades from non-partisan watchdog groups during his tenure in the US Senate. He only served one term and went back to Georgia, but his term will never be forgotten. Senator Cleland served several years on the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks on the US after being appointed by President George W. Bush in 2002 and also served as an administrator in the Veterans Administration under President Jimmy Carter. Oddly enough, Senator Cleland ran for reelection in 2002 and was beaten by a Republican, Saxby Chambliss, who seemingly twisted facts and made it appear that Cleland was unpatriotic. Chambliss again beat a Vietnam War Veteran, Jim Martin, in the December 2008 runoff elections in Georgia.

And finally, the last example is Newt Gingrich, former US Representative and Speaker of the House from Georgia. Representative Gingrich was never in the military, but his leadership and management skills were exemplary. He was an Army brat and the leadership traits he developed while emulating his father were instrumental in his evolution into such a dynamic leader. Representative Gingrich was first elected to the US Congress in 1978 and Time Magazine said of Gingrich, "Leaders make things possible. Exceptional leaders make them inevitable. Newt Gingrich belongs in the category of the exceptional."⁸ Gingrich's father was a career Soldier and Representative Gingrich is recognized internationally as an expert on world history, military issues, and international affairs. He also serves as a professor at the National Defense University in Washington DC, teaching senior officers of all Services.

Unfortunately, as do the great role models, the poor ones also come into one's mind almost immediately. Names such as Jimmy Carter, George McGovern, Edward Kennedy and Bill Clinton will always be associated with contempt, immoral behavior, and poor decision making. It is worth noting that President Carter was an officer in the US Navy, an expert in nuclear engineering, and graduated from the US Naval Academy in 1946. The following examples are politicians with less than distinguished careers in the US Congress and who have made numerous significant blunders.

There is no shortage of US congressmen who are lacking in professionalism and one that is often in the news is Barney Frank, US representative from Massachusetts. Representative Frank is a well-known homosexual and has been caught with male prostitutes in his government office. He is also unfortunately credited with a lack of oversight in the current economic crisis as he was Chairman of the Financial Services Committee in the House and neglected to address regulations on the banking industry. This decision, of course, is haunting him now and has been a factor in plunging the Nation into a deep recession. Frank has no military service and received his J.D. at Harvard University. He continues, however, to get reelected from his district and has served in the US Congress since 1981.

Cynthia McKinney, former US representative from Georgia, is well known for her conspiracy theories as she blamed then-President Bush at the time for bombing the Pentagon, having knowledge about the Twin Towers attack, failing to warn the country, and starting the Global War on Terror. Recently she publicly accused the Bush Administration of slaughtering 5000 prisoners and dumping them into a Louisiana swamp using Hurricane Katrina to cover up the mess.⁹ McKinney was accused of striking a security guard at a House office building when she was stopped while trying to enter without any credentials. McKinney, widely known as "the girl who cried racism"¹⁰ was also the Green Party candidate for president in 2008. McKinney has no military experience and served a total of twelve years in the US Congress.

Representative Randy "Duke" Cunningham of California was found guilty of accepting bribes of over \$2.4 million dollars from the contractor MZM Inc., which received earmarks from the US Congress for intelligence work. MZM was given a task of delivering intelligence so that forces in Iraq could locate improvised explosive devices (IEDs) prior to detonation and MZM had hired only a third of the employees requested. Instead of using the money to hire more employees, MZM bribed Representative Cunningham with a yacht, jewelry, antique furniture

and thousands of dollars in campaign contributions. He pled guilty and was sentenced to prison in 2006. Had the IED program done what it was supposed to do, US Army Major Eric England says we could have had a really different number of casualties.¹¹ Unfortunately, Representative Cunningham was not alone in the scandal but is the only US congressman indicted and convicted on this case. Oddly enough, Representative Cunningham was one of the most highly decorated pilots in the Vietnam War.

Mark Foley is the US representative from Florida. Foley sent sexually laced, grammatically challenged instant messages and e-mails to teenage boys in the congressional page program for more than ten years. Interestingly enough, he was the Chairman of the House Caucus on Missing and Exploited Children and one of the foremost opponents of child pornography in the US Senate. Representative Foley has no military background and is now out of politics.

Larry Craig, the US senator from Idaho, was caught in a Minneapolis, MN airport bathroom soliciting for sex with an undercover male policeman in 2007. Senator Craig originally pleaded guilty and then changed his mind which made it an even larger spectacle. Senator Craig is a rancher and has served in the US Congress since 1990. He has been under investigation several times for lewd behavior regarding homosexual acts and allegations of sexual relationships with congressional pages. His lack of sound judgment over the years makes Senator Craig an ideal example of poor leadership. Oddly enough, the senator spent about two years in the US Army National Guard but only gained the rank of Private and was discharged due to medical reasons.

Many members of the US Congress have been indicted and even convicted of crimes, and it should be noted that even this does not preclude the congressmen from participating in congressional proceedings. A conviction of a felony does not automatically keep them from working; however, they lose their authorization to vote if their conviction calls for punishment of two or more years of imprisonment. The US House of Representatives has only expelled five members in the history of this Nation, with three being in the Civil War era and two since 1980. Neither expulsion nor conviction of a crime, except for certain national security offenses, would lead to the forfeiture of a member's federal pension.¹²

Accountability in the US Congress is far different and much more lenient than in the military. The bar is actually pretty low in the US Congress as a good percentage of the members

would not even be able to enter the military due to their past. Of course, it is worth emphasizing the fact that Service Members are held to a much higher standard, both by an unwritten code of ethics and more importantly, by the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). President Lincoln once said, “While we must, by all available means, prevent the overthrow of the government, we should avoid planting and cultivating too many thorns in the bosom of society.”¹³

When it comes to presidential Veterans, more than a half of the presidents served in the armed forces in some capacity, with twenty four serving in war and six serving during peacetime. Only thirteen have no military experience at all as shown in Table III.

Table I. Presidents Who Are Combat Veterans

- George Washington – Commander in Chief during the American Revolution
- James Monroe – American Revolution
- Andrew Jackson – American Revolution, War of 1812, First Seminole War
- William Henry Harrison – Indian Wars in the NW territory, War of 1812
- John Tyler – War of 1812
- Zachary Taylor – War of 1812, Black Hawk, Second Seminole, and Mexican War
- Franklin Pierce – Mexican War
- James Buchanan – War of 1812
- Abraham Lincoln – Black Hawk War
- Andrew Johnson – Civil War
- Ulysses Grant – Mexican War and Civil War
- Rutherford Hayes – Civil War
- James Garfield – Civil War
- Chester Arthur – Civil War
- Benjamin Harrison – Civil War
- William McKinley – Civil War
- Theodore Roosevelt – Spanish American War
- Harry Truman – World War I
- Dwight Eisenhower – World War II
- John Kennedy – World War II
- Lyndon Johnson – World War II
- Richard Nixon – World War II
- Gerald Ford – World War II
- George Bush – World War II

Table II. Presidents with No Combat Experience

• James Monroe • James Polk • Millard Fillmore • Jimmy Carter • Ronald Reagan • George W. Bush
--

Table III. Presidents with No Military Service

• John Adams • Thomas Jefferson • John Quincy Adams • Martin Van Buren • Grover Cleveland • William Taft • Woodrow Wilson • Warren Harding • Calvin Coolidge • Herbert Hoover • Franklin Roosevelt • Bill Clinton • Barack Obama
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Analysis of Historical US Congresses 107-111

From day one, it appears the politician's main goal while in office seems to be reelection. It appears that they routinely fall victim to lobbyist efforts and their decisions are many times influenced by money under-the-table or pork-ridden legislation for their home districts, which may be great for their district or state, but not good for the Nation. The current US Congress has the lowest approval ratings in the history of the United States and being a politician is one of the least respected jobs in the country. This needs to change.

In a 2008 Harris Interactive Poll rating the public perception of various occupations, the citizens polled responded with a firefighter holding the most prestigious job with a scientist, medical doctor, and a nurse closely following. The next position of prestige was that of a military member, which is not surprising due to the media support of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. The politician was more than halfway down the list and was close to half as prestigious as the military member. At the bottom of the list were a real estate agent, stockbroker, and banker. Since the recession began in late 2008, it is probably safe to assume that the stockbroker and banker have taken over last place and it would be prudent to say that the US congressmen's prestige rankings have fallen as well.

Table IV. Occupation Prestige Ratings¹⁴

	2008 Total for Very Great Prestige	Changes since 1977	Changes since 2007
Occupation	%	%	%
Firefighter	57	N/A	-4
Scientist	56	-10	+2
Doctor	53	-15	-6
Nurse	52	N/A	+2
<i>Military Officer</i>	46	N/A	-6
Police Officer	46	N/A	0
Farmer	41	N/A	0
Priest / Clergy	40	-1	-2
Engineer	40	+6	+10
<i>US Congressman</i>	28	N/A	+2
Lawyer	24	-12	+2
Athlete	20	-6	+4
Journalist	18	+1	+5
Union Leader	18	N/A	+5
Business Exec	17	-1	+3
Entertainer	15	-3	+3
Banker	15	-2	+5
Stockbroker	10	N/A	-2
Real Estate Agent	6	N/A	+1

Here is an analysis of the military service in the past four federal US Congresses (107th-110th) and the current one (111th) as well as the trends since 1943 reflected in Table VI.

107th US Congress: There were 167 members of the 107th US Congress who served in this Nation's military. 129 (78 Republicans and 51 Democrats) were members of the House of Representatives, including one woman. In the Senate, 38 members had military service (22 Republicans and 16 Democrats). This includes service in wars and conflicts from World War II up until Kosovo, including all peacetime and in all components of the military. One Senator was the former Secretary of the Navy.¹⁵

108th US Congress: There were 153 members of the 108th US Congress who served in the military. 117 (69 Republicans and 48 Democrats) were members of the House of Representatives, including one woman. In the Senate, 35 members were Veterans (19 Republicans and 16 Democrats). This includes service in wars and conflicts from World War II

up until Kosovo, including all peacetime and in all components of the military. The former Secretary of the Navy again served as a Senator.¹⁶

109th US Congress: There were 139 members of the 109th US Congress who served in the military. 109 (62 Republicans and 47 Democrats) were members of the House of Representatives. In the Senate, 30 members were Veterans (16 Republicans and 14 Democrats). This includes service in wars and conflicts from World War II up until Kosovo, including all peacetime and in all components of the military. One Senator was Secretary of the Navy.¹⁷

110th US Congress: There were 129 members of the 110th US Congress who served in the military. There were 100 members in the House of Representatives with 56 being Republicans and 44 being Democrats. In the Senate, there were 29 members with 16 being Republican and 13 being Democrat. These Veterans served in every war and conflict since WWII. The 110th actually had two former Secretaries of the Navy in Senators John Warner and James Webb, both of Virginia, and one female Veteran.¹⁸

111th US Congress: There are 119 members who served in the military at one time or another. The new House has 94 Veterans with 47 being Republicans and 47 being Democrats. The new Senate has 25 Veterans with 12 being Republicans and 13 being Democrats. Both former Secretaries of the Navy are still serving in US Congress, but Senator Warner has already committed to step down at the conclusion of his term. The current Speaker of the House, Representative Nancy Pelosi, D-CA, is shown in Figure 1 swearing in all the new members of the 111th US Congress.

Table V. US Legislators with Military Experience

Congressional Session	Total # of Members with Military Service	# of Members with Military Service in the House	# of Members with Military Service in the Senate
107 th US Congress	167	129 (78 R / 51 D)	38 (22 R / 16 D)
108 th US Congress	153	117 (69 R / 48 D)	35 (19 R / 16 D)
109 th US Congress	139	109 (62 R / 47 D)	30 (16 R / 14 D)
110 th US Congress	129	100 (56 R / 44 D)	29 (16 R / 13 D)
111 th US Congress	119	94 (47 R / 47 D)	25 (12 R / 13 D)



Figure 1. Speaker Pelosi Swears In Members of the 111th US Congress

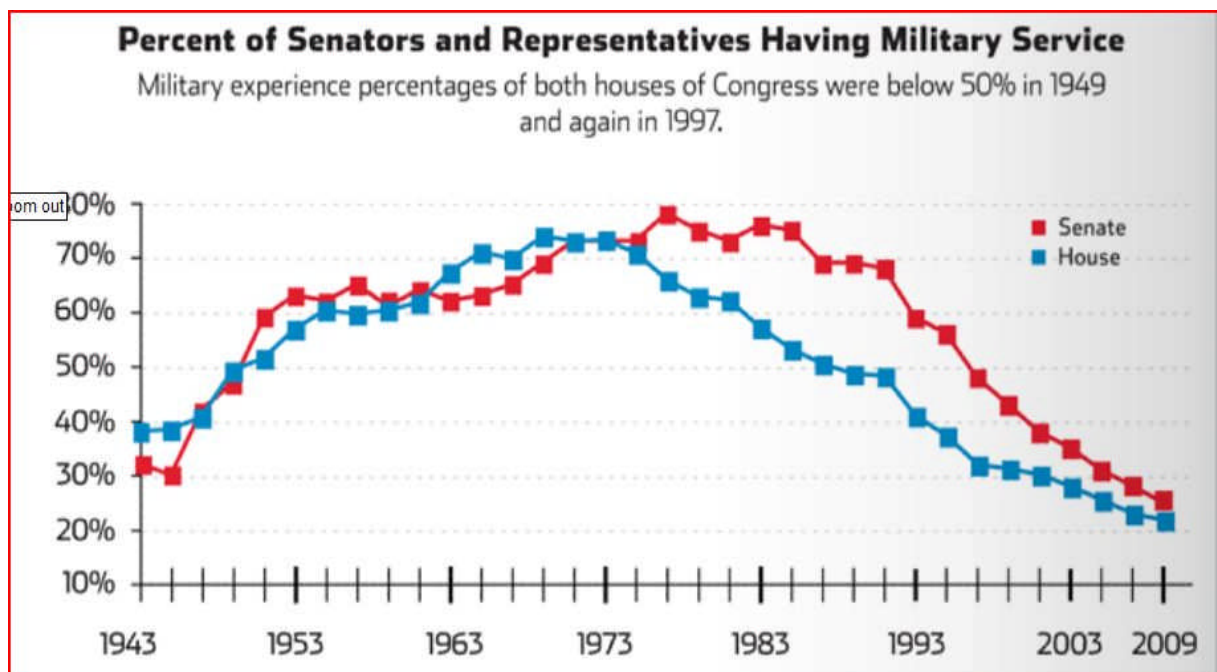


Figure 2. Percent of US congressmen having military service¹⁹

Less than one-quarter of the members of the US Congress have a military background, the lowest ratio since World War II, according to figures compiled by the US Congressional Research Service. That fact rankles some critics who argue that most lawmakers who vote to pay for wars and send troops lack combat experience themselves.²⁰

Military service was at one time viewed as a prerequisite to be elected to the US Congress. Former Service Members elected to the US Congress have steadily declined since the end of the draft after the war in Vietnam.

In modern days, the US Congress hit a high for military Veterans in the mid-1970s, when nearly 80% of federal lawmakers had a military background. From 1951 to 1992, more than half of all members of the US Congress had military experience, according to US congressional records.²¹

Six of the sixty members of the US Congress elected in 2006 had military service and this election proved that military experience does not guarantee an election according to the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA). While the resulting percentage of Veterans in the US Congress shows a downward trend in the years since WWII, we should note that the percentage of Veterans in the US population is estimated at about 11 percent. When viewed from that perspective, Veterans are still well represented in the US Congress.²²

Of the six Veterans who served in Iraq and ran for the US Congress in 2006, only Representative Patrick Murphy, D-PA, was elected. He served two tours in Iraq after the September 11th attacks. Others, such as Illinois' Tammy Duckworth, a Democrat who lost both of her legs in Iraq when her helicopter was hit by a rocket propelled grenade, ran for an open seat in Chicago's 6th US Congressional District. She came close to being elected in 2006 in a traditionally Republican stronghold due to voters crossing party lines to support anti-war candidates.²³

"They can speak firsthand to a pressing issue," said Representative Rahn Emanuel, who as Chairman of the Democratic US Congressional Campaign Committee in the last election cycle, recruited Veteran Tammy Duckworth and helped her win her primary.²⁴ Representative Emanuel has since been named as President Obama's White House Chief of Staff.

Since 2001, there has been an increase in Service Members running for political office, sometimes even against each other. A contest outside Pittsburg, PA featured 17-term Democratic Representative John Murtha, a former US Marine and the first Vietnam Veteran elected to the US Congress as well as an early proponent of withdrawal from Iraq.

Representative Murtha ran against retired Army Lieutenant Colonel William Russell, who opposed a withdrawal timetable. Even though Representative Murtha stumbled several times and even called his constituents racists and rednecks, he still won and his victory was attributed to his name recognition and the publicized amount of pet projects he provided for his district.

In central Georgia, Democratic Representative Jim Marshall, a US Army Veteran of Vietnam narrowly defeated Rick Goddard, a retired US Air Force Major General and Veteran of Vietnam. And in California, Republican Duncan Hunter, a US Marine Corps Reserve Captain who served two tours in Iraq defeated Democrat Mike Lumpkin, a retired US Navy Sea, Air and Land Forces (SEAL) commander and an Iraq War Veteran, who was at one time in charge of all Special Forces in Iraq.

Tim Walz ran for the US Congress in 2006 in Minnesota's First District. Mr. Walz, a high school teacher who had never run for elected office, decided to take on a six-term incumbent. The district, which encompasses much of southeastern Minnesota, is traditionally conservative, and the conservative incumbent was widely expected to win reelection. But Mr. Walz ran a campaign that highlighted his real experience and commitment to his community as his qualifications for serving in the US Congress. A longtime US Army National Guardsman who served in Afghanistan, Mr. Walz was a popular high school teacher and football coach who believed that because of his life experience, he could do a better job in the US Congress than the incumbent. He appealed to voters with a great authentic message:

I sure never prepared my life around a run for the US Congress, but my life has prepared me well. My experience as a public school teacher (and son of a teacher) has taught me the importance of investing in our children and investing in our communities. My military service has taught me the importance of giving back to our country and keeping our commitment to those who serve. Authentic experiences are what have prepared me to serve in the US Congress.

Voters responded to this grounded, humble message, and Mr. Walz came from behind to win a hard fought election that gained national media attention. One voter summed up the positive feelings about Walz that put him over the top: "He seems like a genuine person with a passion to do something right."²⁵

There seem to be some differences in the age gap of Veterans who are in the US Congress and who have run for political office. Historical data reveals that serving one tour in

the military has far less effect on one than retiring from the military. What that means initially is that a Service Member is certainly taught the US Army values in the initial tour, but having only three years is not near enough to fine tune one's values and skill sets and learn from peers and supervisors. Just because an individual served one tour in WWII or Korea does not automatically make them fit for the US Congress or any elected office for that matter. WWII, Korea, or even Vietnam was a different era for service in the military and as time has passed, the military has strengthened its values, leadership training, and management skills.

The military today is the best ever and retired Service Members today have the experience and skills to do great things in whichever career they choose to enter. "Veterans have special credibility on issues of war and peace whether they support the current conflict or not." says Oklahoma Representative Tom Cole. "Each race involving a Veteran has a different dynamic, and those who have watched them closely say that while service is an advantage, it is no guarantee of winning office."²⁶ A vast difference in substance and experience is found when you compare WWII Veterans, Korean War Veterans, Vietnam Veterans and the Veterans of our most recent military conflicts. The bottom line is that a Veteran with a short tour, while having learned some skills, is far less able to make a substantial impact in elected office compared to a recently retired Service Member. With that said, the more recent the Service Member has retired, the more relevant skills, experience, and fine-tuned leadership and management skills he or she can bring to the table.

The training of Service Members and the patriotic duty that drew them to government service should be capitalized on. Military Officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs) are committed to their love of country, selfless service, and personal courage. A look at public opinion on how Service Members are perceived versus elected officials tells the story. As stated before, Service Members must adhere to a stronger and more stringent set of values, moral ethics and laws called the UCMJ. If the UCMJ was required for the US Congress and other government workers, our government would be severely overburdened with criminal cases. Service Members are in physically good shape, having to meet physical standards while in uniform. This allows them to be healthier, present a more pleasing appearance, and enhances better decision making.

"As Veterans of the current conflicts, they have a unique perspective on the wars that should be a part of the debate on the floor of the US Congress, and a vote that helps shape our

security policy.”²⁷ Again, it must be noted that having military service does not automatically guarantee success. There are several examples in history as well as in the current US Congress where a Service Member has gotten elected and been ineffective. There are just as many examples where great military leaders have run for office but lost due to public perception, lack of personality, lack of money, or just out-campaigned. Retired US Army General Wesley Clark is a prime example of just that.

To add to the before mentioned facts, there are many current members of the US Congress who have stellar military records but who have made “less than stellar” decisions while in the US Congress. There are numerous senior US congressmen who have military service - whether it’s a two year stint during WW II or a five-year stint in the Army Reserve - who have made and continue to make errors, some resulting in felony convictions such as just recently with Senator Ted Stevens from Alaska. Stevens was the longest-serving Republican in the US Senate and was convicted on seven different felony counts. US Congressman William Jefferson, D-LA, served nearly six years as a JAG Captain in the US Army and US Army Reserve, but was caught with bribes and even went to the extent of hiding his ill-gotten gain in his freezer. Representative Jefferson was defeated in a runoff in December 2008.

Campaign Costs

Money is the main reason why Service Members choose other post-retirement careers. Service Members are not rich, nor do they join the military for money. Military lawyers do not make anything near what a civilian attorney makes; but on the other hand, military attorneys are held to a set of values, unlike civilian lawyers (for the most part). Service Members usually opt for higher paying contractor jobs with the defense industry when they retire, and some choose low-stress positions due to their many years of high-stress jobs. Without campaign reform (not covered in this paper), the legislature will just be a “bunch of rich guys” because only the rich can spend the type of money necessary to get elected. As a matter of fact, the 50 richest members of the US Congress have portfolios ranging from over \$5 million to over a billion dollars and these figures are only what the US congressmen themselves have reported which is almost always far less than what they actually have.²⁸

Table VI. Top 15 Richest US Congressmen²⁹

US Congressman	Estimated worth	State
Sen John Kerry	\$231 M	MA
Rep Jane Harman	\$226 M	CA
Rep Darrell Issa	\$161 M	CA
Sen John Rockefeller	\$80 M	WV
Rep Robin Hayes	\$79 M	NC
Rep Vern Buchanan	\$65 M	FL
Sen Frank Lautenberg	\$55 M	NJ
Sen Dianne Feinstein	\$52 M	CA
Sen Edward Kennedy	\$48 M	MA
Sen Gordon Smith	\$29 M	OR
Rep Michael McCaul	\$24 M	TX
Rep Rodney Frelinghuysen	\$22 M	NJ
Sen John McCain	\$20 M	AZ
Sen Claire McCaskill	\$19 M	MO
Sen Bob Corker	\$19 M	TN

Politics is marketing, and you cannot win market share unless your name and main idea gain at least the same familiarity as your opponent's. If you want to run for the US Congress, you have to dust off your rolodexes, high school yearbooks, college boards of trustees, family trees, and lists of progressive business leaders, and then call all your friends and political allies and ask them to do the same.³⁰ It takes great vision to run for elected office, but a vision without money is just a hallucination.

The average US House incumbent spent almost \$595,000 in 1992, 41% more than the average incumbent in 1990. The average incumbent candidate for the US Senate spent \$3.8 million in 1992.³¹ The average cost to run for a state Senate or House seat is now almost always over a million dollars and that amount can be greatly increased for a state with a huge population. For example, the US House district in rural Montana is nothing compared to the US House district seat in the Miami, FL area. The costs are skyrocketing largely because of the ever-increasing cost of media advertising and transportation.

California's 2004 US Senate race between Democrat Barbara Boxer and Republican Bill Jones cost a total of \$19.1 million and three quarters of that was spent by Senator Boxer. The most expensive US Senate race in history remains Democrat Dianne Feinstein's 1994 victory over Michael Huffington. This race cost \$44.3 million, much of it from Mr. Huffington's

personal fortune. However, these races are dwarfed by some recent state governor's races as the 2003 California gubernatorial recall was close to \$88 million and the 2002 California governor's race hit \$114 million.³² Table VII shows just how much campaign costs have skyrocketed.

Table VII. Cost of Winning an Election

Year	House Winners		Senate Winners	
	Nominal Dollars	2006 Dollars	Nominal Dollars	2006 Dollars
2006	1,259,791	1,259,791	8,835,416	8,835,416
2004	1,038,391	1,115,883	7,183,825	7,719,931
2002	911,644	1,027,319	3,728,644	4,201,759
2000	845,907	998,448	7,198,423	8,496,499
1998	677,807	838,318	4,655,806	5,758,347
1996	686,198	887,917	3,921,653	5,074,488
1994	541,121	741,101	4,488,195	6,146,876
1992	556,475	805,929	3,353, 115	4,856,236
1990	423,245	662,985	3,298,324	5,166,605
1988	400,386	674,334	3,746,225	6,309,432
1986	359,577	658,408	3,067,559	5,616,893
Jon Corzine (D-NJ) spent \$63,209,506. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) spent \$29,941,194. The remaining Senate winners in 2000 spent an average of \$4,737,365. Source: Analysis of Federal Election Commission data. Copyright Brookings Institution Press, 2008.				

The amount that Service Members make in salary and other compensation is a matter of public record. As stated before, Service Members do not get rich serving this great Nation but they also have ample opportunities to network themselves over a course of a career and make sound financial and investing decisions. It is probably safe to say that few, if any, make decisions so wise and timely that their portfolio is bursting at the seams and could bankroll a high-visibility campaign. With that said, Service Members will need assistance if they choose to continue their stellar careers in serving in public office.

Assistance for Service Members Entering Elected Office

The truth is you can't run for the US Congress alone. You need a core group of aides who can help you with advertising, polling, research, writing speeches, developing positions, scheduling your time, figuring out how to respond to your opponents attacks, and organizing volunteers; basically the people who will stuff letters, answer the telephones and make calls on

your behalf. Running for the US Congress is expensive, and while it's true that you can still lose with a lot of money, you cannot win without it.³³ A Service Member must be supported and backed by at least a few organizations if he or she wants to have a chance at being elected. Although there is some public assistance for campaigns, the bulk will come from fundraising efforts and support from benefactors and other associations.

Many potential venues of support for Service Members entering politics, whether local, state, or federal, are addressed here. There are many military organizations available but in this paper we will only cover the ones usually associated with the US Army. Organizations that could assist include the Military Officer Association of America (MOAA), which is the largest of the associations having over 360,000 members. Others include the Association of US Army (AUSA), the National Guard Association of the US (NGAUS), the Reserve Officer Association (ROA), the Veterans Administration (VA), United Services, and other service associations. The two main political parties, as well as viable third parties, could step up to the table and offer support to Service Members. Most of the management of these political parties is retired politicians and life-long partisans but the chance of them assisting financially in this day and age is slim at best. The military-related associations, some of which were mentioned earlier, can be most helpful; however, many have their own policies and bylaws which preclude them from participating in active campaigns. However, their networks of retired Service Members and key influential members of government and industry could offer a goldmine of support for a promising public servant.

There is a Military Coalition which include many military associations, not just US Army, that routinely meet together to ensure all are on the same sheet of music as far as Veterans' issues are concerned. The Coalition is comprised of 35 organizations that represent nearly six million uniformed Service Members and their families and are listed in Table VIII.

Table VIII. Coalition of Military Members

Air Force Association (AFA)
 Air Force Sergeants Association (AFSA)
 Air Force Women Officers Associated (AFWOA)
 American Logistics Association (ALA)
 AMVETS (American Veterans)
 Army Aviation Association of America (AAAA)
 Association of Military Surgeons of the United States (AMSUS)
 Association of the United States Army (AUSA)
 Chief Warrant Officer and Warrant Officer Association of the US Coast Guard
 Commissioned Officers Association of the US Public Health Service, Inc.
 Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States (EANGUS)
 Fleet Reserve Association (FRA)
 Gold Star Wives of America (GSW)
 Jewish War Veterans of the United States of America (JWV)
 Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans Of America
 Marine Corps League (MCL)
 Marine Corps Reserve Association (MCRA)
 Military Chaplains Association of the United States of America (MCA)
 Military Officers Association of America (MOAA)
 Military Order of the Purple Heart
 National Association for Uniformed Services (NAUS)
 National Guard Association of the United States (NGAUS)
 National Military Family Association (NMFA)
 National Order of Battlefield Commissions (NOBC)
 Naval Enlisted Reserve Association (NERA)
 Naval Reserve Association (NRA)
 Navy League of the United States (NLUS)
 Non Commissioned Officers Association (NCOA)
 Reserve Enlisted Association (REA)
 Reserve Officers Association (ROA)
 The Retired Enlisted Association (TREA)
 Society of Medical Consultants to the Armed Forces (SMCAF)
 United States Army Warrant Officers Association (USAWOA)
 USCG Chief Petty Officers Association (CPOA)
 Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW)

There are also specific functional area organizations such as the Engineer Regimental Association, Army JAG Officer Association, Army Medical Officer Association, and others that could offer at the least advice, mentoring, and networking opportunities. Every officer branch in the US Army has at least one association specifically organized to support that functional area and its members could very well lobby together in support of a candidate. The American

Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) are two strong organizations that could offer financial support and well mentored advice to the potential elected official.

The money to conduct congressional campaigns comes from three sources: contributions by individuals; contributions from state or national party organizations such as the Democratic US Congressional Campaign Committee for Democratic House candidates or the Republican Senatorial Campaign Committee for GOP Senate candidates); and contributions from organizations known as political action committees (PACs).³⁴

There are also many organizations formed by Veterans to assist other Veterans with certain causes. VoteVets Political Action Committee is a federal political committee which primarily helps elect Iraq and Afghanistan war Veteran candidates and educates about Veterans and military issues aimed at influencing the outcome of the next election. VoteVets Action Fund is a 501(c)(4) organization that focuses primarily on nonpartisan education and advocacy on behalf of Veterans and their families. VoteVets Political Action Committee and VoteVets Action Fund are separate organizations and are just two of many which have recently surfaced online to assist Veterans running for office. The mission of VoteVets.org Political Action Committee is to elect Veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to public office; hold public officials accountable for their words and actions that impact America's 21st century Service Members; and fully support our men and women in uniform.³⁵ This organization was instrumental in electing four Veterans to the US Congress in 2006 (Patrick Murphy, Joe Sestak, Tim Walz and Chris Carney) and backed thirteen candidates for federal office in the November 2008 elections. They also backed many more at the state level and raised over \$1.4 million just during 2008. "These are the young turks of the Veteran's world, a counterweight to the hard-core radical right... They are a powerful force in this guerilla war for the moral high ground of who really represents America's vets."³⁶

As our presence in Iraq and Afghanistan continues, there will be more military groups formed to carry on support for Veterans and programs. Vets for Freedom, Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), Iraq Vets for US Congress (IVC), and the Colorado Veterans for America (CVA) are examples of groups that are non-partisan and support Veterans in their attempts at public office as well as lobby the US Congress for military-related matters. "Calling the network of Veterans a 'fraternity of committed and energetic Americans' that can activate voters, Doug Thornell, the national press secretary for the Democratic US Congressional

Campaign Committee, said that a number of outside groups are cultivating potential disenchanted Soldiers coming back from Iraq. Veterans are very organized.”³⁷

Additionally, there are military-related groups that are formed as a result of an ongoing issue or a candidate that is disliked by a certain group. A prime example is from the 2004 presidential election when the Swift Boat Veterans rallied together and mounted a media attack so fearful that it was credited with Senator John Kerry’s defeat against President Bush. Senator Kerry already had many credibility problems at this point and this media outburst from the T. Boone Pickens-backed Swift Boat Veterans, whom the general public regarded as trustworthy sources, pretty much ended Senator Kerry’s bid for president.

Besides the military-themed organizations and those formed by traditional former Service Members, there are hoards of organizations out there that could financially back Service Members in their quest for public office. However, most if not all of these, will require or certainly want their equities covered when it is time for new legislation or a vote on pending legislation, providing the election is a success. The National Rifle Association, the Sierra Club, the petroleum industry, and many others will assist a candidate, but again, the military and its members aren’t their first priority.

The media has historically favored the Democratic Party but at the same time also favored the Service Member. The national broadcast media, as well as the print journals and newspapers, are always first to hail the Service Member, his actions, his family, their sacrifices, but their values are rarely praised in public. This “two-faced” attitude in the media has been present for a number of years and is likely to continue until new ownership and management of the large outlets are changed to people with greater sense of nationalism instead of ratings. The potential of some favoritism from the media would be welcomed in a forum where it can make or break a candidate. One must remember that the media is mainly for entertainment purposes and not necessarily an accurate outlet for information.

An interview with Mr. Bill Loper, Director of Government Affairs at the Association of the US Army, revealed that they would like to support Service Members, especially Army Veterans who wanted to run for office. However, at this time their bylaws preclude them from any support until after a candidate is elected. It would definitely behoove the military associations as well as the military as a whole to have an elected official with their equities in mind and their best interests at heart.

Many of the military association members contacted during this research agreed that a system from several of the military organizations which could support potential conservative candidates with the interests of military families and retired Service Members would be beneficial. Helping elect people to public office that have the values and moral responsibility to do what is right and to see the “big picture” would do nothing but good for not only the military organizations, but the Nation as a whole.

Local politics is a great starting place for Service Members and many may choose to start there. Some of the opportunities here are excellent, especially if the military member is running for an office where a military installation is included in that district or area. With the higher proportion of military and military retirees, their chance of success is much better. Additionally, the chance to make a positive impact is much more likely. However, it is important to remember that many Service Members vote by absentee ballot so there are a significant number of Service Members who would not be eligible to vote in a local election.

State politics require much more money for the campaign but it may be more feasible for an association or organization to back a Service Member here. These positions are just a fraction of the cost of a federal office. If the Service Member does well at this level, he could have a tremendous advantage for a federally elected office or to serve in the US Congress. The great thing about state politics is that generally the political party is not as significant, because they usually work together to accomplish the greater good unlike federal politics where they usually vote along party lines, regardless of what’s right or wrong.

Federal politics include US senators and US representatives and these offices receive national recognition by serving on the different committees. Much of their responsibilities in committee work depend upon their seniority, but due to their experience level and prior recognition, they may be placed on the most visible of committees such as the Armed Services Committee or the Veterans’ Affairs Committee. Cabinet members, although not elected, are places where Service Members could serve with distinction. For example, LTG (Ret) James B. Peake, formerly the US Army’s 40th Surgeon General was the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA). His experience through the years overseeing US Army medical issues made him an excellent candidate to transform the VA into a more efficient organization with the focus being on Veterans and their families, especially now as there are so many wounded Veterans from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. President Obama chose retired General Eric K. Shinseki to be the

next VA secretary, turning to a former US Army chief of staff once vilified by the Bush administration for questioning its Iraq war strategy. Additionally, President Obama selected retired US Marine Corps General James Jones, former commander of European Command (EUCOM), to be his National Security Advisor.

There are many great leaders in government today who are holding cabinet level positions or key Assistant Secretary or Undersecretary positions who have military service. Although they are not elected positions, many of them have served at one time or another in the US Congress or served in the state that was home to the president and was vital in the presidential campaign. The key for these jobs are networking, and again, the military associations could be a key player in lobbying for a potential position.

A great option for former Service Members is joining a staff of a well-respected US congressman. “Ever since Lyndon Johnson came to Washington DC in 1932 as a representative’s aide, ambitious politicians have seen staff jobs as stepping stones to elective office.”³⁸ Working on the staff for a term or two would be excellent experience and could affirm one’s desire for being elected to office. As of November 2008, there were just over 60 US congressional staffers who are Army Veterans. Experience working for a US congressman is vital and the skills learned, as well as the networking opportunities, could be priceless. However, one must remember that this same experience could be used against you if and when you run for office. The person running against you will use your former boss, his platform, his failures, etc, in the campaign against you, so it’s important the decision with whom you work for is not to be taken lightly.

Positions on elected member’s staffs are extremely important and certain staffers for federally elected officials are indeed important and play a key role in legislation and the decisions made by those officials. This could be a great starting point and even a place where a military member could make a huge impact. One thing to remember is that the most competent person does not always win the elected seat. Much like the person being right does not always win in a court of law, the person with the best campaign strategy and usually the most money will win the election. This is exactly the case with staffers in support of politicians. Many times a politician, marginal at best, is propped by a competent staff in certain areas of expertise. These staffers are the driving force behind the elected official and are many times the keys to his success. There are times when some of these elected officials are extremely polished and great

public speakers, but without their staffers writing their speeches and advising them on matters, they would certainly lack any sense of completeness and their grasp on issues would be minimal at best.

Hindrances for Service Members' Campaigns

DoD regulations, which generally discourage candidates using their service for political gain, prohibit photographs of a Soldier in uniform as the “primary graphic representation” in any campaign advertisement.³⁹ US Army National Guard spokesman Mark Allen said political prohibitions have generally been more loosely applied to guardsmen than to active-duty Soldiers because of “this whole concept of the guy who drops his plow and picks up his rifle.”⁴⁰

DoD Directive 1344.10 dated February 19, 2008 says that active duty members may register to vote and express their opinions on political candidates and issues but not while representing the armed forces. This is not to say that a Service Member cannot vote while in uniform. It does allow for Service Members to attend political functions and rallies when not in uniform, and you may even display a bumper sticker on your vehicle as long as it is tasteful and refrains from violence, profanity, or obscenities. There is obviously no authorization to appear on the media such as radio or television while advocating a particular candidate or issue while in uniform. With that said, the reserve components of the armed forces are less restrictive but it is clear that no one can use their military affiliation as a political advantage.

“The office being sought affects not just voter expectations but also the candidate’s relationship with the media. Successfully obtaining news coverage is one of a campaign’s most important goals.”⁴¹ This is why it is imperative that a Service Member must play off of his military service, but at the same time, doing his best to abide by the rules set forth by the Department of Defense. There is much grey area on this issue and the media will usually try and capture military service and pictures of the Service Member in uniform.

“James Carville calls the news media ‘the Beast;’ if the campaign does not feed it, it feeds on the campaign. Whether or not this assessment is accurate, the media play a critically important role in new-style campaigns.”⁴² It is important early on that a Service Member makes wise decisions regarding the media and that starts out with their providing them accurate and honest information detailing service records, combat experience, schools, etc. One must always remember that the media tells the majority of people who to vote for and there is a substantial

populace that heeds their word. Educated people know that the media is just entertainment and is usually based on fact, but the story must be entertaining to a certain extent just to compete with other stories. With that said, the whole story seldom comes out of the media.

Summary

This paper has discussed many of the challenges with the US Congress today and what is seemingly a lack of leadership and professionalism at times. We looked at a few great role models and their brief stories were discussed as were a few US congressmen who did not perform so well. The prestige of government work was analyzed briefly and we looked at historical data concerning the decreasing percentage of military Veterans in the US Congress. We then discussed the importance of campaign costs and the fact that the majority of US Congressmen are financially very well off, which we concluded, was a huge factor in getting elected.

The thirty-five members of the military coalition were discussed and the potential critical role they could play in a Service Member's campaign. Other important allies in a future campaign were mentioned and we lastly emphasized many of the obstacles that are routinely in the path of a political campaign.

Conclusion

Upon formulating the topic of this research, I thought that it was clear that if former Service Members were elected to the US Congress it would clearly be a good thing and offer vast differences and improvement over the current US Congress. After thorough research and interviews, my conclusion is that while that is generally true, election of a former Service Member does not guarantee success in the US Congress. There are several factors that go into making a successful US congressman and while having military service is definitely a plus, it is not a necessity. With that said, electing a Service Member who has retired from the military with at least 20 years of service would reap huge dividends, you would think. But the evidence is just not there to draw any conclusions or see any trends because so little a number of retirees actually get elected into the US Congress.

It was noticed earlier in this paper the number of lawyers that have entered politics. This can also be said for the military lawyers. It must be noted that although military lawyers wear

the same uniform and are still called Soldiers, Marines, Sailors, etc, they do not get the comradery that is associated with being with a close-knit group of Service Members, sometimes in harm's way, sometimes getting fired at and returning fire. The day-to-day Soldier, if you will, is not bogged down chasing a case or writing a brief, they are performing maintenance on their weapons, counseling their junior members, conducting physical training as a group, and leading by example. Military lawyers and other specialties such as doctors and dentists, receive some training but their focus is on their specialty and not leading Service Members to war. It is a major difference that shapes Soldier's lives and makes them better leaders and managers.

This is not to minimize the importance of military lawyers or doctors; only to say that there is a difference in leading Soldiers in battle vice the intricate details of surgery or winning a historical legal case. The US congressmen who could make the most difference are those Service Members who have led in combat and have years of experience leading Soldiers in not only peacetime but in time of war. Their perspectives in battle, quick decision making process, and moral fortitude are what we need in leaders in the US Congress.

Finally, there are several members of the US Congress now that are retired military or have substantial military service that should be monitored in the future. It is these men that certainly have the skills to succeed and to make huge impacts in establishing legislation and keeping the US Congress on track. It is with these men that the future of Defense policy rests.

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³⁹ Army Times, “Candidate Ad Gets Review,” September 8, 2008, p. 7.

⁴⁰ Army Times, “Candidate Ad Gets Review,” September 8, 2008, p. 7.

⁴¹ Michael John Burton & Daniel M. Shea, “Campaign Craft” Praeger 2001, p.181.

⁴² Michael John Burton & Daniel M. Shea, “Campaign Craft” Praeger 2001, p.27.