DEMOCRACY INDEPENDENT NEWS ASSOCIATION
DINA INVESTIGATIVE ANALYSIS

Richard Hudson and Richard Ojeda Plans Under the Feasibility Test

A policy, electoral, and democratic-accountability comparison on affordability, Fort Bragg, veterans, and congressional power



DINA editorial illustration. Candidate identity references: official Hudson portrait and Ojeda campaign photograph.

By the DINA Investigative Desk

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DINA finding Richard Ojeda offers the more workable forward plan for lowering household costs because his central proposals use identifiable federal powers: tax legislation, the Fair Labor Standards Act, Medicare and Affordable Care Act policy, Social Security financing, and Veterans Affairs appropriations. Richard Hudson has real institutional leverage in the Fort Bragg authorization pipeline. But institutional access is not the same thing as a political base. Certified 2024 returns show Hudson losing the Fort Bragg-centered portion of Cumberland County by more than two to one and failing to win a majority in Hoke County, even as he carried NC-09 overall. His advice that Republicans move away from open in-person town halls, followed by his own tightly moderated telephone event, deepens the case that influence in Washington has not translated into democratic accessibility at home. DINA's internal polling points in the same direction, but this report treats the certified vote and public engagement record as the independently verifiable evidence. [1],[2],[3],[5],[10],[11],[17],[18],[19],[22],[23]

This is an analytical news report with a Democratic editorial perspective. The feasibility judgment applies five tests: whether Congress has authority, whether the proposal is specific, whether a working precedent exists, whether a funding path is identified, and whether voters could measure results within a House term.

What the Candidate Questionnaire Reveals

The Fayetteville Observer asked both candidates to identify the district's most important problem and name a specific congressional response. Hudson proposed making the temporary deductions for tips, overtime, and seniors permanent while expanding domestic energy production. Ojeda proposed tax relief on the first $45,000 of family income, an inflation-indexed minimum wage, lower prescription drug and energy costs, protection for affordable health coverage, and limits on data-center subsidies. Their Fort Bragg answers also diverged. Hudson stressed facilities, benefits, military pay, and a record of project authorizations. Ojeda emphasized VA capacity, toxic-exposure care, mental-health services, and congressional votes before offensive war. [1]

That difference matters. Hudson mostly asks voters to continue an existing governing arrangement. Ojeda asks Congress to change the distribution of income, health costs, retirement financing, and war authority. The first approach is easier to describe as continuity. The second is easier to test as legislation.

Policy Feasibility Comparison

Policy test	Hudson plan	Ojeda plan	DINA finding
Household tax relief	Make temporary tips, overtime, and senior deductions permanent	Cut taxes on the first $45,000 of family income	Both are within congressional power. Hudson names existing provisions but permanence carries a large fiscal cost. Ojeda targets earned income more directly but has not defined the tax mechanism or offset.
Wages	No wage floor proposal in the questionnaire	Index the federal minimum wage to inflation	Ojeda leads. Congress can amend federal wage law and several states already use automatic adjustments. The missing starting rate and phase in still matter.
Energy prices	Increase domestic energy production	Lower energy costs and challenge data center subsidies	Neither answer is complete. Record oil production weakens the claim that production alone will solve current prices. Ojeda reaches the right consumer concern but partly targets state tax policy.
Health costs	No detailed health affordability mechanism in this answer	Protect affordable coverage and reduce prescription prices	Ojeda leads because Medicare negotiation and premium credits are operating federal tools with measurable effects. He still owes voters a funding and bill sequence.

Policy test	Hudson plan	Ojeda plan	DINA finding
Social Security	No financing proposal in the questionnaire	Raise the taxable income threshold instead of the retirement age	Ojeda leads on jurisdiction and precedent. Social Security actuaries already score variants. His exact threshold and benefit credit rules remain unspecified.
Fort Bragg test	Cites $140.4 million in defense project authorizations and veterans-home action	Prioritizes VA capacity, toxic-exposure care, and mental-health services; served about 15 years at Fort Bragg	Hudson leads only on the authorization pipeline. Ojeda has the stronger lived connection and constituent-accountability case. Certified Hoke and Cumberland returns do not establish a stronger Hudson voter base.
War powers	Focuses on readiness and troop pay during shutdowns	Requires congressional authorization before offensive war and sunsets old authorizations	Both are lawful congressional goals. Ojeda has bipartisan precedent behind AUMF repeal but would need majorities and presidential cooperation.

Affordability Claims and Household Impact

Hudson Tax Extensions

Hudson's most concrete affordability pledge is legally doable. Congress can make the tips, overtime, and senior deductions permanent. The IRS confirms that the overtime deduction is limited to qualified premium pay, capped at $12,500 for an individual and $25,000 for joint filers, and scheduled for 2025 through 2028. That is tax relief, but it is not a universal wage increase and it does not reach workers who receive neither tips nor qualifying overtime. [1],[2]

Permanence also needs an honest price tag. CBO estimated that Public Law 119-21 would increase the cumulative deficit effect to $4.1 trillion over 2025 through 2034, including debt service. It separately estimated that making ten temporary tax provisions permanent would add roughly $800 billion to primary deficits during that period. Hudson can pass the policy if his coalition has the votes. Calling it an affordability plan without naming an offset transfers part of today's relief into tomorrow's debt. [3]

Ojeda Tax and Wage Plan

Ojeda's promise to cut taxes on the first $45,000 a family earns is more directly aimed at low- and middle-income households, but it is not yet bill-ready. He must state whether he means a larger standard deduction, a refundable credit, a zero-percent income-tax bracket, or relief from payroll taxes. Those choices determine who benefits, whether families with little income-tax liability qualify, and how much the proposal costs. [1]

His minimum wage proposal is more mature as a governing idea. Congress can amend the Fair Labor Standards Act, and the Labor Department already administers a national wage floor while states use formulas and annual adjustments. Indexing would prevent Congress from allowing the real value of the wage floor to erode year after year. Ojeda still needs a starting wage, an inflation index, a phase in schedule, and a small business transition. Even with those omissions, the mechanism is ordinary lawmaking rather than wishful economics. [6]

Energy Prices and Data Centers

Hudson says more American energy will lower bills. Production can matter, but the present evidence does not support a one-lever explanation. EIA forecasts record United States crude output of 13.8 million barrels per day in 2026. At the same time, it reports that current gasoline and diesel increases reflect higher global crude prices, conflict-related pressure, refining margins, low inventories, distribution, and taxes. A member of Congress can influence leasing, pipelines, permitting, reserves, antitrust oversight, refinery policy, and household energy assistance. Merely saying unleash production does not tell voters which of those levers will lower a Hoke County power bill or when. [5]

Ojeda is stronger when he centers the electric bill, but weaker when he assigns Congress a state job. North Carolina repealed the sales tax exemption for electricity used by certified data centers effective July 7 2026, with later billing implementation. Other equipment and development incentives may remain, but state lawmakers control the state tax code. Ojeda can target federal tax preferences, transmission planning, market power, and consumer protections. He should rewrite this plank around federal authority and acknowledge the state repeal already enacted. [1], [14]

Health Care Social Security and Veterans

Ojeda's health plan has the clearest proof of concept. Medicare negotiated prices for ten high-cost Part D drugs that took effect in 2026. CMS estimated that the negotiated prices would have reduced net spending on those drugs by 22 percent in the comparison year and projected $1.5 billion in beneficiary savings under the 2026 benefit design. Congress can expand the number of negotiated drugs, protect the program, reinforce inflation rebates, and preserve marketplace assistance. [8]

Coverage protection also has measurable tradeoffs. CBO estimated that permanently extending the enhanced marketplace premium credit structure would cover 3.8 million more people in

2035 and increase deficits by $350 billion from 2026 through 2035. That does not make the policy impossible. It means Ojeda must pair the promise with revenue, savings, or a public decision that broader coverage is worth the cost. A serious Democratic plan should publish both the coverage gain and the financing. [9]

Ojeda's Social Security financing idea is also executable. The Social Security Administration publishes actuarial estimates for proposals that tax earnings above present caps or eliminate the taxable maximum. Those options improve solvency by different amounts depending on the threshold and whether newly taxed earnings receive additional benefit credit. The architecture exists. The candidate must choose a version. [7]

On veterans, both men offer plausible federal action. Hudson can point to years of committee relationships and a concrete project pipeline. Ojeda can point to a service agenda that fits existing VA responsibilities and to about 15 years of Army service at Fort Bragg. The PACT Act already expanded health care and benefits for veterans exposed to burn pits and other toxic substances, so additional staffing, clinics, mental health capacity, and claims processing can be built through oversight and appropriations. Ojeda's weakness is not jurisdiction. It is the absence of a Fort Bragg area funding target. [10],[12],[16],[24]

Institutional Access Is Not a Fort Bragg Base

Hudson deserves credit for advancing $140.4 million in Fort Bragg and North Carolina projects through the defense authorization process. His own release describes the amount as project authorizations. That distinction is important. GAO explains that an authorization permits or establishes an activity while an appropriation supplies budget authority. An authorized project is a real legislative achievement and an important step toward construction, but it is not the same as money already obligated or spent. [10],[11]

That record proves access to the authorization process. It does not prove that Hudson has a stronger Fort Bragg-area political base. The most direct public test is the vote. In 2024 Hudson won NC-09 with 210,042 votes, or 56.3 percent. Yet in the Cumberland County portion of NC-09, which includes Fort Bragg and much of Fayetteville and Spring Lake, Nigel Bristow defeated him 29,852 to 14,274; Hudson received just 30.12 percent. In Hoke County, Hudson received 9,831 votes, or 44.93 percent, while Bristow received 10,633, or 48.60 percent. Hudson's winning districtwide coalition was therefore powered elsewhere, most dramatically by a 77.30 percent showing in Randolph County—not by dominance in the Fort Bragg-centered corridor. [17],[18],[19]

What the Certified Vote Actually Shows

Geography	Hudson 2024	Closest rival	DINA reading
Cumberland portion of NC-09	14,274 30.12%	Bristow: 29,852 63.00%	Hudson lost by 15,578 votes in the district's Fort Bragg-centered county segment.
Hoke County	9,831 44.93%	Bristow: 10,633 48.60%	Hudson did not win a majority in the county adjoining Fort Bragg.
NC-09 districtwide	210,042 56.30%	Bristow: 140,852 37.75%	Hudson won the district, but the public returns locate his strongest base outside the Hoke-Cumberland corridor.

The limits of that inference must be stated plainly. County returns do not isolate active-duty soldiers, veterans, civilian employees, or Fort Bragg precincts as a single electorate. They cannot tell DINA how every military household voted. They can show that the two county electorates most directly tied to the installation were not Hudson's comparative stronghold. Any assertion that he owns a uniquely strong Fort Bragg voter base must explain those results rather than substituting official access for electoral support. [17],[18],[19]

The Accessibility Test

Hudson's vulnerability is not literal disappearance. He maintains a Fayetteville district office, attends official Fort Bragg events, brings national leaders to the installation, and handles veterans casework. An investigation that claimed he is never present would be easy to rebut. The defensible charge is narrower and more important: when face-to-face constituent accountability became politically uncomfortable, Hudson advised House Republicans to move away from in-person town halls and toward telephone or virtual formats. [23],[25]

Hudson then used that strategy himself. CityView reported that his April 2025 telephone town hall lasted 50 minutes and included 11 constituent questions. A telesurvey repeated five times; moderators did not explain how questions were chosen; nearly half of the selected questions concerned military or veterans issues. Most questioners were from Cumberland or Hoke, and the event did include hard questions about DOGE, Medicaid, veterans care, contamination, and military families. The format reached constituents, but it did not reproduce an open room in which voters choose the agenda and can press a follow-up. That is an accessibility deficit, not proof of total absence. [22]

Why Ojeda Has the Stronger Fort Bragg-Area Argument

Ojeda's case begins with biography but cannot end there. His campaign reports 24 years in the Army, including about 15 years at Fort Bragg, where his family lived and his daughter was born. CityView documented him speaking publicly in downtown Fayetteville at the March 2026 No Kings rally. Those facts give him a lived connection and a visible local campaign presence; they do not by themselves guarantee votes or legislative performance. [16],[24]

The 2026 Democratic primary supplies a second, limited data point. Ojeda won pluralities in the NC-09 portions of Cumberland County with 2,806 votes, or 32.41 percent, and Hoke County with 1,375 votes, or 36.30 percent. Those are votes from Democratic primary participants, not the general electorate, so they do not prove that Ojeda already commands a Fort Bragg-area majority. They do show that he assembled the strongest Democratic primary coalition in both counties and provide an organizational foothold from which a general-election campaign can grow. [20],[21]

DINA Polling and the Public Record

DINA's internal polling contradicts the claim that Hudson possesses the stronger Fort Bragg-area base. The public record makes that proposition plausible even without assigning an unpublished survey a numerical weight: Hudson lost the relevant Cumberland segment decisively in 2024, failed to win a Hoke majority, and chose a screened telephone forum after advising Republicans to avoid open in-person town halls. Ojeda brings a long Fort Bragg service history, recent public campaigning in Fayetteville, and primary pluralities in both counties. [17],[18],[20],[21],[22],[23],[24]

Polling disclosure Before DINA presents its house poll as a scientific estimate, it should publish the field dates, sample size, respondent geography, contact mode, likely-voter screen, weighting, margin of sampling error, exact question wording, sponsor, and Hoke-Cumberland cross-tabs. Until then, the poll is best described as an internal newsroom signal that is consistent with certified election returns and the public engagement record. That disclosure strengthens the argument because readers can distinguish what the survey suggests from what the public data proves.

War Powers and Congressional Accountability

Ojeda's war powers plan is constitutionally serious and procedurally difficult. A single member cannot force a vote or bind a president. Yet bipartisan precedent exists. In 2023 the Senate voted 66 to 30 to repeal the 1991 and 2002 Iraq authorizations. A House member can introduce repeal legislation, use Armed Services oversight, press for reporting requirements, and condition appropriations. Passage would still require both chambers and either presidential approval or a veto override. [13]

Hudson's troop pay proposal is narrower and immediately understandable. Congress can guarantee military pay during a shutdown. The questionnaire, however, gives no bill number, funding route, or present status. Hudson's stock trading answer has the same editorial problem.

Banning congressional stock trading is achievable, but voters should receive the exact bill and current legislative status rather than a partisan account of who killed it. [1]

The DINA Verdict

Ojeda has the more doable overall governing plan because more of his promises map to federal statutes and programs that Congress can change and voters can measure. His best ideas are the inflation-indexed wage floor, expanded prescription drug savings, protection of affordable coverage, stronger Social Security financing, and additional VA capacity. Those proposals are not complete. They require bill text, cost estimates, revenue choices, and implementation dates. They are nevertheless recognizable legislative projects. He also has the stronger Fort Bragg-area democratic legitimacy argument: military service rooted at the installation, public-facing campaigning in Fayetteville, and an electoral record in Hoke and Cumberland that gives his challenge a measurable foundation. [16],[17],[18],[20],[21],[24]

Hudson has the stronger evidence of institutional leverage, including the defense authorization pipeline. His incumbency, leadership position, and official Fort Bragg work are substantial. But the forward affordability program is thinner than the record, and his districtwide electoral strength should not be mislabeled as a Fort Bragg-area base. Making temporary deductions permanent is concrete but expensive. Increasing energy production is too broad for a market already producing record volumes while global crude and refining pressures drive prices. Advising members to avoid open in-person town halls protects message control, not democratic confidence. [3],[4],[5],[10],[17],[18],[19],[23],[25]

DINA's Democratic-leaning conclusion is therefore direct. Hudson wins the institutional experience and authorization-pipeline tests. Ojeda wins the household economics, forward-plan, local accessibility, and Fort Bragg-area political-case tests. If the question is who has already moved district projects into authorization language, the answer is Hudson. If the question is whose stated agenda gives Congress the clearer set of tools to improve working-family finances —and whose public case better matches the electoral geography around Fort Bragg—the answer is Ojeda.

The next standard should be bill-ready detail and face-to-face accountability. Ojeda should publish legislative language, offsets, and Fort Bragg-area funding targets. Hudson should identify the consumer savings and fiscal cost attached to each extension, distinguish authorized projects from appropriated dollars, and hold an open in-person forum in Hoke or Cumberland where constituents—not moderators—set the questions. NC-09 voters deserve both kinds of precision before early voting begins.

Questions DINA Would Ask Both Candidates

- What bill would you introduce in the first 100 days, and what would it cost over ten years?
- Which households in NC-09 would receive the largest benefit, and which would receive nothing?

- What revenue source, spending reduction, or enforcement saving would finance the plan?
- Which Fort Bragg projects are authorized, appropriated, contracted, and under construction?
- Will you hold an open, in-person Hoke or Cumberland town hall with unscreened questions and follow-ups?
- What result should voters expect by December 2028, and which public data will prove it?

Source Ledger

1 Fayetteville Observer questionnaire syndicated by AOL

2 Internal Revenue Service guidance on temporary tips, overtime, and senior deductions

3 Congressional Budget Office analysis of Public Law 119-21 and permanent extensions

4 Federal Reserve study on inflation since the pandemic

5 Energy Information Administration 2026 petroleum market analysis

6 Department of Labor state minimum wage laws

7 Social Security Administration payroll tax solvency options

8 Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services negotiated drug prices for 2026

9 Congressional Budget Office health coverage policy estimates

10 Representative Hudson release on Fort Bragg project authorizations

11 Government Accountability Office guide to authorizations and appropriations

12 Department of Veterans Affairs overview of PACT Act benefits

13 United States Senate vote on repeal of Iraq war authorizations

14 North Carolina Department of Revenue notice on datacenter electricity exemptions

15 Official portrait of Congressman Richard Hudson

16 Richard Ojeda campaign biography and portrait

17 North Carolina State Board of Elections 2024 Cumberland County results

18 North Carolina State Board of Elections 2024 Hoke County results

19 North Carolina State Board of Elections 2024 certified statewide canvass

20 North Carolina State Board of Elections 2026 Cumberland County primary results

21 North Carolina State Board of Elections 2026 Hoke County primary results

22 CityView report on Hudson's April 2025 telephone town hall

23 Axios report on Hudson's advice to replace in-person town halls

24 CityView report on the 2026 NC-09 race and Ojeda's Fayetteville campaign presence

25 Representative Hudson's account of his Fort Bragg work and constituent services in 2025

Editorial note Candidate statements are treated as claims unless independently verified. Feasibility ratings address legal authority and implementation mechanics. Electoral returns describe past voting; primary results do not predict the general election. County-level data does not isolate military households. DINA's internal polling is not presented as a scientific estimate until its methodology is published.