

West vs. Klein

There are two reasons Republicans and conservatives in general throughout Florida's 22nd District are passionate about defeating one-term Democratic Rep. Ron Klein. The first is that, but for freakish circumstances in 2006, Clay Shaw would have clung onto the seat he had held since 1980 and gone on to be ranking Republican on the House Ways and Means Committee. But in the worst Republican election year since Watergate in 1974 and when scandal-plagued Rep. Mark Foley (R.-Fla.) was from the neighboring district, Shaw felt the voter fury against all Republicans and lost to Klein by 8,000 votes out of more than 200,000 cast.

The other reason is retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. Allen West, a much-decorated U.S. Army veteran who served stints in Iraq and Afghanistan. Earlier this year, West attracted national attention by wrapping up the Republican nomination to oppose Klein. Coupled with their desire to undo Shaw's narrow loss, Republicans were well aware of the strong veteran population in the Fort-Lauderdale-Palm Beach district and rallied early behind West.

If Virginia's Jim Webb symbolized anti-war veterans elected to Congress as Democ-



Allen West

rats in '06, West is emblematic of the pro-Iraq veterans running on the GOP line in '08. Tough, articulate, a military history buff who spices his defense of the U.S. mission in Iraq with references to Baron von Steuben, West was once criticized for rough handling of a prisoner—conduct that resulted in gaining information that almost surely saved Americans.

But rather than recalling that or his two years of training the Afghan army, the GOP nominee gently changes the subject to his differences with opponent Klein on what he feels are key issues: energy ("He voted for the Democrats' energy bill and it's a waste of money"), spending ("He's for that expensive stimulus package—I'm for lower taxes and less spending, period!")

Whether it's as a scuba diver, coach of a track team that won a state championship, or fighting for his country, Allen West has always been a winner. With help from his fellow conservatives, West can win once again—undoing the circumstances of '06 and becoming congressman from Florida's 22nd District in '08. ■