

RETIRED OFFICER MAY PURSUE HOUSE BID FROM AFGHANISTAN

By George Bennett

Retired U.S. Army Lt. Col. Allen West will try to redefine long-distance campaigning if he launches a Republican congressional bid for the nationally coveted Palm Beach-Broward seat of freshman Democratic U.S. Rep. Ron Klein.

West says he'll announce his plans next week, then take off for a final five-month stint in Afghanistan, where he has been working for two years as a contractor advising the Afghan military.

If West runs, he says he's prepared to conduct crucial early fund-raising, organizing and communications from roughly 8,000 miles away in Kandahar. He's been talking with Palm Beach Gardens-based consultant Donna Brosemer about setting up a campaign Web site and e-mail account that will allow him to post blog entries, respond to e-mails and hit up contributors.

West, 46, drew national attention in 2003 after he fired a pistol near the head of an Iraqi detainee to try to scare him into divulging time-sensitive information about a planned ambush of U.S. forces. The Army relieved West of his command and fined him \$5,000. He retired after 20 years of service and received an honorable discharge.

West said he received thousands of e-mails from around the U.S. after the incident, nearly all of them supportive.

As a candidate, he hopes the 2003 controversy translates into a national fund-raising base. West, who is black, also hopes his rare status as a GOP candidate of color generates national interest – and money – for his campaign.

Says West: "I'm not the formula candidate."