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Hastings and Frankel: From foes to political allies

By Anthony Man, Sun Sentinel

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What a difference 20 years makes.

U.S. Rep. Alcee Hastings praised Lois Frankel and endorsed her bid to join him in Congress on Tuesday – two decades after they faced off in an especially nasty South Florida political contest, a primary campaign in which the two Democrats went head to head for the same congressional nomination.

Hastings went on to win the party primary and was elected to Congress, where he's served since. Frankel became minority party leader in the Florida House of Representatives and later, mayor of West Palm Beach.

In the past two decades, Hastings said he and Frankel have worked together numerous times, from development of Palm Beach International Airport to efforts to help minority children use computers at the West Palm Beach city library.

"We buried the hatchet. That's what grown people do," Hastings said Tuesday in an interview. "I have a life to live, and I can't go around being mad at people because we had political differences."

Those differences were strong. At one point during the 1992 campaign Hastings called Frankel a "racist bitch," words he later conceded may have been "intemperate."

Frankel said that was a long time ago. "Since that time we've worked together," she said.

She's now running against Broward County Commissioner Kristin Jacobs to become the Democratic nominee in the Broward-Palm Beach County 22nd Congressional District. Hastings, a Miramar Democrat who also represents parts of both counties, said he has nothing against Jacobs, but prefers Frankel.

Hastings said it's possible for political foes to come together, noting the 2008 battle between Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama for the Democratic presidential nomination. She's now his secretary of state.

Despite the bad blood between the two 20 years ago, Florida Atlantic University political scientist Kevin Wagner said Tuesday's endorsement wasn't a shock.
"Whether he likes Lois Frankel personally or not, if she wins [Democrats] are one step closer toward taking back the House," Wagner said. "She's a likely winner. And Hastings would prefer to see her than a Republican."