Two Democrats with similar politics but differing styles are vying for their party’s nomination in the South Florida congressional district being vacated by Republican Rep. Allen West.

As redrawn, CD 22 has turned bluer and West opted this month to head north to the new 18th Congressional District on the Treasure Coast.

Spoiling for a showdown with the tea party favorite, former West Palm Beach Mayor Lois Frankel announced for the seat 10 months ago. Shortly after West bolted, Broward County Commissioner Kristin Jacobs jumped in to challenge Frankel, while a third Democrat, Patrick Murphy, announced he would follow West up to CD 18 and battle him there.

Republicans hope to hold West's old district with the entry of former U.S. Senate candidate Adam Hasner.

Hasner, a former Florida House majority leader from Delray Beach, represented a central core of the district that straddles sections of eastern Palm Beach and Broward counties.

"Mayor Frankel and Commissioner Jacobs will have their primary and largely discuss raising taxes, more government spending and more job-killing regulations. I disagree," Hasner says.

"Higher taxes will not create jobs, and government overspending is why we have amassed a $15 trillion deficit. My campaign is about fixing the Washington that was broken by Democrats and Republicans, not perpetuating it," the attorney said.
While Hasner calls Frankel and Jacobs "two sides of the same coin" politically, the two Democrats approach their primary race with contrasting styles -- and very unequal bankrolls.

"This race will come down to personality. Frankel has a reputation as a fighter and party leader -- making some friends and enemies along the way," said Sean Foreman, professor of political science at Barry University in Miami Lakes.

"Jacobs comes across as more civil and reasonable, but she can also be divisive on the Broward Commission."

Kevin Wagner, a political science professor at Florida Atlantic University in Boca Raton, gives the early edge to Frankel.

With $1.45 million cash on hand, Frankel "scared Patrick Murphy off," Wagner said. "She's won a lot of races and she's very popular with the base."

Frankel is already looking ahead to Hasner and the Republicans.

"Congress is paralyzed by extremists like Mr. West. Mr. Hasner has the same political values -- an unbalanced approach to solving our problems," Frankel told Sunshine State News.

Drawing on her tenure as mayor and 14 years in the Florida House, where she served as the Democrats' first female floor leader from 2000-2002, Frankel has a lengthy list of endorsements that reads like a who's who of Florida Democratic hierarchy. Among them:


In addition to several Palm Beach county commissioners, Frankel also has the support of one of Jacobs' colleagues, Broward Commissioner Sue Gunzburger, as well as EMILY's List.

Jacobs advertises her 14 years on the Broward Commission, where she represents portions of the new CD 22. Jacobs' campaign website says her campaign for Congress "will focus on being a voice for women, children, seniors, and the District 22 community in Washington, and a problem solver who will get results on energy independence, health care, education and strengthening our economy."

Currently serving as vice mayor, Jacobs did not return phone calls and emails from Sunshine State News.
"She’s been a good advocate for her constituents, staying out of the fray and above the corruption in Broward County," Foreman said of Jacobs. But the commissioner drew only about 60 people for a campaign announcement event on Presidents Day.

"Democrats are looking for someone with fire in the belly," said Foreman.

"Frankly, I’m a little surprised that Jacobs even challenged [Frankel]," Wagner added.

Whether Jacobs reaches her announced goal of raising $250,000 by March 31 will foretell the campaign’s viability against Frankel, Foreman said.

The professor, who co-authored "The Roads to Congress 2010," said Hasner "can make a good run because he has party support and has represented the area. I wouldn’t count him out."

By the same token, neighboring Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, D-Fort Lauderdale, holds the keys to the Democratic Party’s war chest as chairwoman of the DNC.

Wasserman Schultz spokesman Jonathan Beeton said the congresswoman does not endorse in primary races.

Foreman said Broward County will be "a test of President Obama’s strength."

"If they can drum up Democratic turnout, he could have some coattails in this race. And if a Democrat wins CD 22, the party will hold the seat for a decade," Foreman predicted.

But he said that if the Democratic turnout is poor, as it was in the 2010 gubernatorial race, "the GOP could capture the seat, despite voter advantage for Democrats."

In 2008, the district went for Obama over John McCain, 57-43. In 2010, Sink carried the district by a narrower 53-44 margin.

Hasner, who received a rare early endorsement from former Gov. Jeb Bush, reportedly has amassed an $800,000 war chest. And unless Broward County Commissioner Chip LaMarca decides to run, Hasner appears to have a clear path to the GOP nomination.

The term-limited state representative who won repeatedly in the closely divided district may be able to connect with CD 22’s numerous Democratic Jewish voters in a way that West could not. Though Frankel, Jacobs and Hasner are all Jewish, Hasner’s vocal support for Israel positively distinguishes him from Obama, who is perceived by some as an inconsistent and ultimately unreliable ally.