Congressman Allen West's red hot response to a 14-second comment from Congresswoman Debbie Wasserman Schultz sent political partisans into overdrive on Wednesday, a day after their mutual dislike boiled over publicly.

Many saw an element of entertainment to the kerfuffle. Former U.S. Rep. Mark Foley, R-Palm Beach Gardens, said it was "almost made for the Jerry Springer show."

"I've never seen anything quite like that," said Kevin Wagner, a political scientist at Florida Atlantic University.

Immediately after West spoke Tuesday on the Republicans' "Cut, Cap and Balance" budget plan, Wasserman Schultz had her turn at the mic. She expressed astonishment that the "gentleman from South Florida" – she didn't mention his name – was supporting something that would hurt his constituents on Medicare. "Unbelievable for a member from South Florida."

Within 25 minutes, he fired back in an e-mail calling Wasserman Schultz "the most vile, unprofessional and despicable" member of the House, labeled her a "coward," told her to "shut the heck up," and said she had "proven repeatedly that you are not a Lady."

Conservative radio talker Joyce Kaufman, a West supporter who was his first choice for his chief of staff, told listeners on her WFTL-AM 850 show that his response should be viewed in the context of the pair's history. "You just don't keep poking this guy in the chest. If you want to poke him in the chest, eventually he's going to bark. And that's what happened."

West and Wasserman Schultz are at opposite ends of the political spectrum, but their feud is clearly personal.

Wasserman Schultz – needling West over the fact that he lives in her congressional district and not in the one he was running to represent – issued a tongue-in-cheek plea two weeks before the election imploring him, as her constituent, not to vote for her on Election Day.
Then, shortly before the election, Wasserman Schultz headlined a protest march outside West's Deerfield Beach campaign headquarters. She charged that West was associated with vicious, degrading attitudes toward women because he contributed a column to a biker magazine that contained words and images about women that some found misogynistic and offensive.

That really bothered West. He brought it up during an April interview on the WSFL-Ch. 39 program "Inside South Florida," then again in his fiery email.

West's spokeswoman, Angela Sachitano, said Wednesday nothing he directed toward Wasserman Schultz was motivated by gender.

"Congressman West does not hate women. He has been married to a PHD for 20 years, he has two teenage daughters, and he has said over and over again the biggest influence on his life was his mother Snooks, whose 8-by-10 picture sits in his congressional office," she said.

West's email provoked an avalanche of coverage across the Internet on Tuesday night. On Wednesday, political spinners went to work.

Lois Frankel, one of two Democrats seeking the nomination to challenge West next year, called his comments "out of control, rude, sexist and completely inappropriate." Later Wednesday, her campaign launched a "West hates women" website. The other Democratic candidate, Patrick Murphy, said West is "truly unhinged and incapable of controlling himself."

State Democratic Chairman Rod Smith called on West to apologize for his "angry tirade" – and later used it as the basis for an email fundraising pitch. The West campaign also used the incident to solicit money from donors, and the Florida Federation of Republican Women launched a campaign for supporters to email thank you cards to West for taking on Wasserman Schultz.

The lasting effect, though, may be limited, Wagner said.

"It's good red meat for the base of both of them. It's motivational for the supporters of Wasserman Schultz who think that West is inappropriate. And of course attacking Wasserman Schultz is always good for a tea party Republican -- but maybe not in those terms."