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## Top Kentucky senators talk leadership at WKU lunch

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Senate President Pro Tempore David Givens, R-Greensburg, (left) and Democratic Senate Minority Floor Leader Gerald Neal, D-Louisville, spoke to a room of south central Kentucky executives about leadership Thursday at the WKU Alumni Center.

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A pair of Kentucky state senators gave some insight into their leadership Thursday at a southcentral Kentucky event.

The executive luncheon, hosted by the Kentucky Center for Leadership, took place at the Western Kentucky University Alumni Center.

Republican Senator and President Pro Tempore David Givens, R-Greensburg, joined Democratic Senator and Minority Floor Leader Gerald Neal, D-Louisville, to share their experiences helming their respective caucuses.

A couple of common themes emerged.

First, both senators spoke about the need to listen to, and try to understand, all perspectives, even those that are opposed to their own.

Givens talked about using "cognitive complexity" like former President Abraham Lincoln to explore the other side of issues.

He responded to a question about addressing implicit biases by mentioning his involvement in the Commission on Race and Access to Opportunity, formed in 2020 in the midst of the Black Lives Matter movement.

"One of the most difficult, but most beneficial ways, is to roll up your sleeves and walk into the space and have conversations about whatever the bias might be," Givens responded. "Get in a room with people different than you, either politically different or otherwise, and have a conversation."

Neal, for his part, told a story about a time he worked with a self-proclaimed KKK member as a young lawyer, using "emotional discipline" to stay professional despite his identity as a Black man.

"I don't write anybody off," Neal said. "They can write themselves off."

Second, the senators spoke about developing the next generation of leaders.

Neal emphasized the importance of regular communication with everyone on a team.

"If they don't feel respected, you're building a time bomb," he said. "You created an incongruence in whatever you think you aspire for as a leader."

Givens noted that in the legislature, they don't get to pick their team. He's dealt with the differing leadership styles of two governors and two Senate presidents.

But, he added that it's often worth the extra time and effort to complete a task if you are teaching someone else to be a leader instead of doing it yourself.

"Leadership done really well is anonymous," Givens said. "If I can put someone else out in front to lead on an issue and I can cultivate support for them and see them score a victory, their allegiance to me is so much more."

After the talk, Givens spoke about the need to find common ground in political settings.

"Name calling, polarization, drop the mic moments that some of my colleagues in federal government and state level enjoy having does not move the conversation

forward in positive ways," he said.

"... We got to step aside from our biases that drive us into corners and start meeting each other in the middle of the room, or this is doomed."

He also commented on House Speaker David Osborne's recent comment that it may not be feasible to completely eliminate Kentucky's income tax.

Givens said he's proud of their "self accountability model" that requires certain budgetary triggers before the income tax can drop.

"We have got to continue to sustain and fund the fundamental role of state government. At the same time, we've got to be competitive in all the states. That balance is found in the formula we put in place, he said.

"... I don't know that we'll get to zero, but what we've seen in Kentucky has been so beneficial. The potential is there."

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