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Date: May 5th, 2026

Kennesaw State University Hosts Civil Political Dialogue Event on Political Extremism and Violence in America

KENNESAW, Ga. — Kennesaw State University's School of Government and International Affairs (SGIA) hosted a Civil Political Dialogue event on Wednesday, April 29, bringing together politically diverse students and two local elected officials of opposing parties for a structured conversation on political extremism, political violence, and the importance of civil discourse.

The event, held in the Academic Learning Center on KSU's Kennesaw campus, featured the two leaders that represent Kennesaw in the Georgia General Assembly, State Representative Lisa Campbell, a Democrat, and State Senator Ed Setzler, a Republican, as panelists. The discussion was moderated by former Republican Georgia State Senator Don Balfour and Dr. Eric Castater, a Professor of Political Science at KSU. Senator Balfour currently serves as a Senior Advisor for the Georgia Democracy Resilience Network, a cross-partisan initiative launched and supported by the Carter Center to promote peaceful political engagement, trust in elections, and community resilience against political violence. Dr. Castater ran as a Democrat for the Georgia State House in Cobb County in 2024. Approximately 40 students attended the event, which was designed as a listening and learning experience with both academic and civic purposes.

The dialogue focused on the causes of rising political extremism and violence in America, the meaning of civility in politics, the responsibilities of leaders from both political parties, and ways elected officials can model constructive disagreement. Students also had the opportunity to ask questions during a moderated Q&A session.

"Civility means practicing sustained respect and compassion, not just politeness. It includes welcoming diverse perspectives, listening actively, managing emotions, honoring dignity, and showing kindness amid disagreement. This session, I introduced [HB 881](#) and [HB 926](#) to promote civility among legislators, aiming to build trust, reduce conflict, and support ethical, inclusive interactions. I'm thankful KSU is prioritizing civility in its academic discussions and pleased to have participated in this conversation with students," said Representative Campbell (D-35).

"The panel made it clear to me that the rise of violence on the political right and left in our country emanates from the shocking rise in nihilism, the belief that there is no Truth and that

nothing in this life truly matters. America's best days, from the deep personal sacrifices of the Revolution, Civil War, civil rights movement, and defeat of global tyranny in the 20th Century, have as a source the American belief every human being is made in the image of their creator, and thus has timeless value. Remembering this, which makes America unique, is the path that will lead our nation back from political violence," said Senator Setzler (R-37).

The event was structured to encourage thoughtful discussion across political differences. Ground rules asked participants to critique ideas and policies rather than motives or character, answer questions directly, avoid interruptions, and acknowledge fair points made by others.

"We organized this event because of the disturbing rise in dehumanizing views and treatment of political opponents, as well as the growth of domestic terrorism — including, most recently, the attempted assassination of President Trump at the White House Correspondents' Dinner," said Dr. Castater. "By bringing together Rep. Campbell and Sen. Setzler, elected leaders from different parties who often disagree on major issues, we wanted students to see that people can debate difficult topics directly, honestly, and civilly without treating political opponents as enemies. Although Rep. Campbell and Sen. Setzler disagreed about the main causes of growing political extremism and violence, they modeled exactly the kind of serious, respectful democratic engagement this event was designed to encourage."

The Civil Political Dialogue event was intentionally designed for an ideologically diverse student audience. Students were asked to approach the event with openness to new ideas and to participate in a respectful exchange about one of the most pressing challenges facing American democracy.

After the formal program concluded, Rep. Campbell and Sen. Setzler stayed on campus for more than an hour to continue speaking with students individually and in small groups. Their willingness to remain after the event, answer additional questions, and engage students in extended conversation further demonstrated their commitment to civil dialogue and public service.

"To watch two politicians, each from opposing parties, talk civilly about the rise in political extremism and violence while agreeing on the danger of 'othering' among other topics was unusual but pleasant, especially in the current climate of widening bipolarism," said Briana Castro-Balbi, a sophomore majoring in International Affairs at KSU.

"One of the things that I really enjoyed from this dialogue for the start it was clear on language. The dialogue was meant not to attack each other but to get a clear understanding on what they stood on. It also allowed to get a better understanding on why they may think their way is better," said Melanie Alfaro, a senior majoring in International Affairs at KSU.

"It was my first time attending a meeting with elected officials, and it was a fascinating look into those running our state's government. They navigated the discussion and explained their differing viewpoints clearly for us students, and when I asked a question, both Representative Campbell and Senator Setzler explained their reasonings thoroughly, and I could understand how they

came to their responses from their dialogue earlier in the meeting," said Eric Setzer, a senior double majoring in International Affairs and French at KSU.

The event is part of SGIA's broader commitment to civic education, democratic engagement, and preparing students to discuss public issues in a serious, respectful, and informed way.

About the School of Government and International Affairs (SGIA)

SGIA at KSU, housed in the Norman J. Radow College of Humanities and Social Sciences, offers undergraduate and graduate programs focused on political science, international affairs, and public administration. SGIA emphasizes experiential learning through internships, study abroad, and student organizations like Model United Nations and Model NATO.

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