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TOP STORY

Balancing love, work as Kentucky politicians

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Kentucky State Treasurer Allison Ball speaks to students on Wednesday, October 17, 2018, at the Downing Student Union. (Austin Anthony/photo@bgdailynews.com)

Austin Anthony

Kentucky Treasurer Allison Ball visited Western Kentucky University on Wednesday to discuss her career, marriage and life advice with students, professors and alumni along with her husband, Asa Swan, the chief of staff for the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet.

The largest share of attendees were political science students of Professor Victoria Gordon's "Women and Politics" course, which examines the status of American women from women's suffrage up to the #MeToo movement.

But politics weren't really discussed Wednesday. Instead, the focus was work-life balance.

"As Type A go-getters, we've had to learn how to find balance," Swan said.

For relationship satisfaction, the young couple emphasized that communication is key, as well as calendars – they pencil in slots to spend time together and with their child.

And they support one another. "We cheer each other on," Swan said. "That takes care of numerous frustrations."

Though mostly a lighthearted hour of chatting, Ball took time to encourage the students to pursue political futures if that was their desire.

"It's a great time to take risks," she said. "Ninety percent is showing up."

Ball reiterated the point specifically to the women, warning them to not make the same mistake she made: only running for political office when asked to do so.

"We need both genders represented, we need both of those voices," Ball said. "I really want to encourage the women in the room, and I want to be very deliberate and clear when I say that. There's a tendency (for women) to self-disqualify."

When the couple concluded their words of advice, several attendees asked questions. One man asked Swan what it's like being a man with a wife ranked politically higher than him.

Swan initially stumbled to find the right words, but he circled back to the idea of mutual support being essential to a healthy relationship.

One student asked how Ball overcame growing up Republican in a predominantly Democratic hometown, to which Ball replied that it's all about the "endgame," finding common ground to negotiate and being kind.

Afterward, several students expressed surprise that the conversation barely touched on the current political and cultural climate for women, and instead focused on the politicians' career trajectories and personal lives.

"I thought it would be politically heavy," said Ashley Wright, a junior at the Gatton Academy of Mathematics and Science.

"It's a refreshing topic, (work-life balance), it isn't talked about a lot in politics," said WKU freshman Brooklyn Lile, who is now convinced she wants to sign up for the "Women and Politics" class.

Both seemed pleased with the couples' attempts at nonpartisan conversation.

Shannon Vaughn, an associate professor of political science at Western Kentucky University, also enjoyed that the young couple spoke together, and commended them for "recognizing and supporting women" through their work.

Gordon also enjoyed the talk. She has a keen interest in the selected topic because she is writing a second edition of her book, "Maternity Leave: Policy and Practice," with a new section of work-life balance.

"There's an imbalance," Gordon said. "The more we have these discussions, the more we're likely to get things on the radar. ... Career and family don't have to be mutually exclusive."

Caroline Eggers

News reporter.