MS. ERBE: This week on “To the Contrary,” women are ruling, just not in the U.S. Then, how young is too young to hunt? Behind the headlines, women strive for the perfect body while struggling with food obsessions.

(Musical break.)


Girls don’t just rule, they are ruling. This week two women made history by becoming the first female leaders of their nations. Angela Merkel of Germany will be in charge of Europe’s largest economy. Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is not only the first female president of Liberia, but the first woman elected to head any African nation. Female country leaders are no longer an anomaly except perhaps in the U.S. Women now lead 23 nations and governments, and women’s representation is rising in parliaments and congresses worldwide. Rwanda ranks number one in female representation with women making up 49 percent of its lower house. Iraq joins 49 other countries with quotas in their constitutions requiring a certain number of legislative seats to be filled by women. Women will take at least 25 percent of seats in the new Iraqi parliament. The United States ranks 67th in female representation: only 15 percent of U.S. representatives and 14 percent of U.S. senators are women. According to a new Zogby poll, Geena Davis may be the closest we get to a female commander in chief anytime soon: 61 percent of those surveyed think it’s unlikely a woman would be elected president in 2008.

MS. ERBE: So Congresswoman Norton, why aren’t we electing women?

MS. NORTON: Bonnie, countries have turned to women as leaders usually as the only way to make a clean break with the multiple crises men have made in their country.

MS. SHAW: Oh, Bonnie, I think the feminists have to take part of the blame because instead of focusing so much on women’s opportunities they have focused on their left-wing agendas too much in the last few years.

MS. LANDER: Women aren’t getting elected because we’re not seen as equals. As long as a woman’s looks is more important than what she can do, a woman will never be president.

MS. ALLEN: We are electing women. We are waiting for the right candidate positioned to run and win the presidency.

MS. ERBE: All right. I want to get – first let’s talk about why women were – took office this week in Liberia and Germany and why it’s happening around the world, but then I want to get back to blaming feminists for women not progressing because I think feminists blame conservatives for holding women back. We can get to that in a second.
Why Liberia? Why Liberia and not in the U.S., and we’re so far away?

MS. NORTON: First of all, let’s put one issue on the table. We can’t do quotas for anybody. If we could do quotas for anybody it would be for blacks, where there were poll taxes, where in fact people were deliberately kept from the polls. Our Constitution doesn’t allow that. We’re going to have to do it the old-fashioned way.

MS. ERBE: But how do quotas help women in other countries? Did it help Merkel? Did it help Johnson-Sirleaf? Did quotas help these two women who took office this week?

MS. NORTON: No, I just wanted to get that out of the way. In Liberia what of course we see as a classic example of a country that has been in perpetual crisis since it was founded, and yet male after male after male have brought war, violence. Here’s a woman jailed for three times, a national hero. And people have 20,000 people killed in the last slaughter. Well, how do you make a clean break in a country that is more than 200 years old and has never had a stable government? Well, you throw up your hands. And here steps a woman, well educated, not a part of the mess, in part—and in no small part, because she’s a woman, she wins.

MS. ERBE: You’re from Asia originally. There have been Asian women leaders for a long time now. You think about Indira Gandhi in India long time ago; in Pakistan, Bhutto, not too awful long ago; Kumaratunga in Sri Lanka. So again, why were women able to do so much better as country leaders in that part of the world and not here where we think of ourselves as so sophisticated and advanced?

MS. ALLEN: I think in smaller countries it is easier to elect women. The competition is not as severe. The only difference is a Margaret Thatcher in a country where they have a history of having women monarchs from Queen Victoria, Queen Mary, Queen Elizabeth I and now the II. But in other countries that you just mentioned, they are all very small countries. And with the Liberian new president, she, when compared to her opponent, is such a big contrast: she’s educated, she’s an economist, worked with World Bank, she knows finances. This man is a football star with a high school education. Who would have thought that there would be no difference?

MS. LANDER: That is the key. In this country we are so celebrity-oriented that there’s no way we would elect the two women who are in the news recently because one of them was 66, another was well past middle age, so you don’t see in this country an appreciation for gravitas, you don’t see an appreciation for all the accomplishments that both of those women represent. Instead, we see women, as Crystal said, as sexual symbols or as celebrities, and I think the celebrity factor is far more important than any other in this country. It doesn’t pass so much I don’t think for men, but for women you look at the women who are outstanding in our country and in general they are celebrities.
MS. LANDER: I totally agree. I think that it has more to do with, one, is money. Let’s be honest, in this country running for presidency is expensive. And how many big companies would support a woman running and would give them money the same way, and how many women would take it, knowing that we believe that that is a big part of the problem? The other point is that as long as a woman – they only focus on a woman as what her looks are. Margaret Thatcher ran for office. It was the American press who focused on what she looks like: she’s dowdy, she’s this. I mean, as long as that’s going to be the focus, we’ll never have a woman taken seriously for her accomplishments, for her great education, for the fact that she’s smart – many times smarter than many of her opponents or the people that we did elect. Ronald Reagan was not known for his intelligence, but we elected him because he was a man. Would we have elected a woman with that same intelligence?

MS. ALLEN: Now we known Ronald Reagan is intelligent based upon the writing – (inaudible) – writings. However, going back to women, I think Americans will elect the right person. It doesn’t matter whether it’s a woman or a man. It’s just that we have to have the right candidate.

MS. ERBE: But is that not a sign of us not advancing that we haven’t elected a woman?

MS. ALLEN: Look at the presidents we have elected in the last 50 years after World War II. Besides Eisenhower, all the presidents we have elected have either gone into the Senate or come from the governor’s mansion. We have not had that pipeline – (inaudible) –

(Cross talk.)

MS. ALLEN: – coming up (inaudible) the government.

MS. NORTON: Yeah. And actually, I agree with almost everything except what you said about feminism. Yeah, there are huge cultural barriers, and we’ve got to face the fact that we’ve got to penetrate them, and we haven’t done a very good job of penetrating them. But look, make no mistake about it, the cultural barriers in Africa and Asia are even more, and that’s why you’ve got all kinds of quotas, ways to get over them.

If, in fact, we’re serious about democracy we’ve got to do more feminism, not less, so that we press women forward. The reason that we have as many women in the Congress of the United States today is because feminists made the notion of elected leadership a top priority, pressing them to the point where we have had such success that people like me don’t have to run. I’ve been in the Congress for 15 years. I don’t have to run and say I’m a woman. Fifteen years ago I did, and I am very grateful to EMILY’s List that supported me and to feminists who made sure that we put it right to the American people: do you want to elect women who in fact are equal to men, that’s all we ask, or not? Now they’ve said yes. Now we’ve got to push forward and break the barriers to top leadership.
MS. ERBE: Why do you blame feminists when a lot of non-committed, not feminist, not conservative women would say the feminist agenda is women should succeed in the workforce and in political life? The Phyllis Schlaflys of the world think women should be full-time homemakers.

MS. SHAW: Phyllis Schlafly isn’t. Come on, there are plenty of conservative women who are very outstanding, and the president himself has appointed a number of outstanding women. But feminists themselves, Eleanor, are saying there’s something wrong. Feminism has gotten derailed to the point that ideology is far more important than electing a woman who’s very well accomplished. If she doesn’t have the right ideology they’re not going to support her. So it’s not a matter of women and other women appointing women and approving of women and promoting women. Instead, it’s promoting an ideology – a far-left ideology. And even within the feminist community there’s a lot of discontent because they recognize that –

MS. ERBE: But explain to me, how is that different for conservative women and promoting our conservative ideology? So what? How does that –

(Cross talk.)

MS. NORTON: If Condoleezza Rice runs for president, she’s going to be running on a Republican agenda. If Hillary Clinton runs, she’s going to be running on a Democratic agenda. Women are like everybody else. They don’t vote for agenda alone, and I hope you’re not advocating that.

MS. SHAW: No, I’m not advocating that. What I’m saying is that the feminist community says that it’s for women’s rights, it says that it’s for promoting women, but they are not promoting all women. They are promoting a specific agenda and those women who support that agenda. They are not for women in general.

MS. NORTON: All right.

MS. SHAW: And they do not promote women in general, even though that’s what they say.

MS. ERBE: From women leaders to child hunters.

Some families across the nation will take part in a time-honored tradition this weekend: hunting. One such family received national attention last month after their eight-year-old daughter shot and killed the first bear of the season. Sierra Styles (sp) is one of nearly 15 million hunters under 18 nationwide. But there are fewer young Americans hunting this holiday season than in seasons past, as hunting overall is down by 23 percent. Three hunting groups, the National Wild Turkey Federation, the U.S. Sportsmen Alliance, and the National Shooting Sports Foundation have launched an initiative to reverse this trend called “Families Afield.” They want to overturn laws in 20
states that prohibit children under 12 from hunting. Of the other 30 states, 17 require only adult supervision of children under age 12; 13 require participation in safety training.

Full disclosure here: I do write a weekly column. It broke my heart to see the eight-year-old girl being worshiped for killing – destroying a bear, such an incredible creature. But in your estimation, are children any age too young to hunt?

MS. SHAW: I’m much more concerned about the violent video games that children are watching today, frankly, Bonnie, than I am about children hunting. The children who hunt have been required to go through training, safety training, they are outside in nature, they are with their parents for the most part, so this is an activity that I think is very healthy for children. We have glamorized Bambi and Yogi Bear to the point that we forget the fact that over 4,000 people are killed every day by accidents with deer. My son, for instance, several years ago, ruined a completely new car when a deer ran in front of him. It went over the car. Fortunately, he was not killed, but several weeks earlier a young man was killed. When you see that 120 people are killed every year by deer accidents, and deer have quadrupled since 1975, we’ve got a problem with overpopulation of deer and bear, so I see no problem –

(Cross talk.)

MS. NORTON: Yeah, I appreciate your analogy, by the way, because I agree with you about the games and I think they have a much, much more detrimental effect.

Bonnie, here is where I think we better watch out on red and blue. This is a country created out of the Wild West where we think the glorification of hunting really is a matter of state and style. And I don’t think that those of us in blue states who are very urban ought to be trying to tell people who have a strong hunting – in fact, people like me who are very much anti-gun, have been at pains to say we are not anti-hunting. And look, traditionally in American life, when you teach a boy or girl to hunt was when that boy or girl was – (inaudible).

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: But maybe family hunting and childhood hunting is putting itself out of style. Down by 23 percent? I was surprised.

MS. NORTON: It is. And you know what, and moreover, states, it seems to me, have a profound obligation about training here. Remember, NRA has resisted the whole notion of training as a way to say whether or not a license should be granted. Training, adult supervision. Then it seems to me, you don’t want to wipe out a tradition that’s been with us since the pilgrims landed.

MS. ALLEN: And this is more of a gun control issue than anything else.
MS. ERBE: Why is it a gun control issue to say whether it’s right for an eight-year-old girl to be taught to kill animals?

MS. ALLEN: The people who raise these issues are gun control advocates.

MS. ERBE: Really?

MS. ALLEN: And the reality is – that’s right, the gun control advocates. The reality is the NRA has a lot of good programs that train people how to operate guns. Now, as Janice said, the hunting is a sport, and the children are brought into the hunting environment, a very protected, regulated environment. They have to go through training on how to handle a gun and how to be careful. It gives them discipline, helps them to concentrate. It is a good sport when conducted in a protected environment, which it is today.

Now, the reality is, national people are not going to be able to convert the local offices or legislators who are going to be making decisions because most of them are hunters themselves. This is not going anywhere.

MS. LANDER: I think the irony of it all is we have laws against 12-year-olds having birth control, them drinking, all these other things, but this is okay for them to pick up a gun and to shoot an animal. And I personally don’t have a problem with hunting. I have family who live in areas that definitely hunt. However, I think that it is okay to have a minimum standard saying 12-year-olds or kids under 18. They can’t drink, they can’t smoke, even if they do it with their parents, even if they do it in the household. We don’t allow it here in this country. So this should not even be an issue. And also, the fact that whether it’s children advocates or anybody else who are speaking up, we wouldn’t allow the kids to – well, we don’t want them to watch games on television where they practice shooting because we say that’s violent. Well, hey, I’m practicing shooting so when I go out and hunt in the field. What’s the difference? I don’t see a difference.

MS. SHAW: I think it’s really important to recognize that at the same time hunting has gone down the shootings on our street have gone up. And I think –

MS. ERBE: Well, actually, (violent ?) crime and gun violence has been down these last couple of years as the economy has done a little better.

MS. SHAW: One of the benefits I think of children going hunting is that I don’t think any child who has ever killed an animal knows – would fail to know that a gun is a very dangerous instrument and know that it kills, it produces blood. And I think that’s an important lesson that our children need to learn. That this is a terrible instrument of pain and death, and nothing will teach it any better than a child out there with a gun.

MS. ERBE: All right. We need to move on. Behind the headlines, women and food conquering, the obsession. Women’s constant struggle to obtain the perfect body
has created a multibillion-dollar industry. That while obesity rates have skyrocketed, and heart disease is still women’s number one killer. The December issue of More magazine profiles two women who finally made peace with food, and editor in chief of More magazine Peggy Northrop explains how.

(Begin video clip.)

MS. PEGGY NORTHROP: We have two women who have found very different ways of dealing with long-term food issues. One of them used to be a bulimic when she was younger. She was on every single diet. Fifteen years ago she decided to completely stop dieting. Now she eats as much as possible, fresh sort of Mediterranean style food, and she has stayed the same weight for the last 15 years. She eats when she’s hungry. She stops when she’s full. Then a very dear friend of hers, who we also have an essay by, has taken exactly the opposite tact. Similar kinds of food issues; ends up going into a program called, Food Addicts Anonymous, which is like boot camp. She weighs everything she puts in her mouth and calls her sponsor every single day. She has stopped gaining weight. She is down to 123 pounds. She feels really good about herself, but they’re two completely different approaches. Actually, the women end up being at about 15 pounds away from one another. They’re both considered at healthy weights.

MS. ERBE: More than 63 percent of women entering mid-life are overweight. Twenty years ago it was less than 50 percent. Women in today’s fast-paced world have put healthy eating an exercise at the bottom of their to-do lists, but both are vital for healthy living.

MS. NORTHROP: Women need to understand that if they really want to control their weight there are a couple things that they have to do, no matter what. They have to exercise, especially as you’re getting to be in mid-life, things start to move around. You might weigh the same but your weight is going to expand in the middle, and you have to start weightlifting, you have to stay active, you have to keep flexible. You can’t eat three meals a day at McDonald’s and expect to control your weight. You can’t eat in the car. You can’t eat mindlessly, as we’ve all seen people do it. I mean we’ve done it ourselves. Like you skip breakfast and then you have a candy bar and then maybe you wolf half a sandwich on the way to driving your kids somewhere. It’s like that is not the way you’re going to be able to eat in a healthy way and maintain your weight.

MS. ERBE: Americans spend between $70 and $100 billion a year on weight-loss products and health care costs, but changes to everyday routines are what really help women eat healthier.

MS. NORTHROP: What we find among our readers is that they can make small changes in the way they eat and get results. We have one woman in a story who simply installed a water cooler upstairs in her house so that instead of feeling a little bit hungry and so she would go downstairs and grab a little something, instead she will get a glass of water from the upstairs landing. Now everybody in her house is drinking more water. As
a result, they feel less sort of restlessly hungry, and she has managed to drop a few pounds.

MS. ERBE: Solutions like that may not magically help women to their ideal weight, but it will put them on the path to a healthier lifestyle.

MS. NORTHROP: You can’t diet yourself to 110 pounds. Most women just can’t do that. Exercise is very key. We now know, in fact, that thin women who don’t exercise are at much greater health risk than women who might be a little overweight but who exercise a lot. So somebody like me, for example, who’s always been thin, this could be an illusion. If I’m not exercising, I could actually be putting my health at risk. So I think that’s an important thing for women to realize is that that model thinness, if you haven’t reached it at another time in your life, by the time get to be 40 or 50 you’re not going to go back there. It’s much more important to think about are you exercising, do you have basically healthy eating habits, and do you feel good about yourself.

(End video clip.)

MS. ERBE: So Susan, is that the answer, becoming obsessive-compulsive and then you can control your weight? (Laughter.)

MS. ALLEN: To the contrary. (Laughter.)

MS. ERBE: Yeah, but I don’t want to hear from you. You’re one of those naturally thin people.

MS. ALLEN: A rational approach to a well-balanced diet and daily exercises is the key. The diet means 60 carbohydrates – good carbohydrates, 20 percent protein and 20 percent fat – good fat. Don’t be too obsessed about your weight. Your body will find itself. That’s the way to keep a healthy lifestyle so you will not die young and grow old in illness.

MS. NORTON: Is it any wonder though that in a society where we’re overwrought with consumerism that teaches that you’re entitled to have anything you want, that the message that that includes eating would not have been absorbed? So what do you do? It seems we have to face the fact that we live in a very different society. It’s a kind of video, visual society, with food that is in your face all the time, much more so than ever in history.

And diet, it seems to me, has to compete with that, and the way to compete with that I think is what your clip showed, that you simply have to find a way to tailor your needs, that is just like everything else, your need to control your weight to one of the multiple ways out here, and it can go all the way from yes, the obsessive alcoholic or dieters anonymous way to the more controlled and measured way. That’s what you have to do. We all know one size all doesn’t fit almost anything. It turns out especially so – and Bonnie, I’m going to say, I think what is really underemphasized is exercise. For
women what is overemphasized is stop eating and that’s where they get on a roller coaster they never get off.

MS. ERBE: I think Peggy Northrop has something because there’s a phrase that I learned in one of the many weight-loss groups I’ve belonged to over my lifetime. If you fail to plan, you plan to fail. And so does it amount to – if you’re not one of these people who can eat anything they want, not exercise, and stay skinny, don’t you have to get into that measuring and calculating and keeping lists and all that kind of stuff to diet successfully?

MS. SHAW: I don’t think so. I’m not a good one to ask that question in some respects, but in other respects I think I very definitely am because I think that I’ve been on every diet that’s out there, and I think part of the problem with American women today is that there are so many untruths out there. And the thing I liked about your clip was that it was full of truth; that you can’t lose weight if you exercise three times a week. Susan said exercise every day. And yet, the diet industry is so powerful and they know how to manipulate women so well that all of us have bought into all of these various theories over the years.

MR. ERBE: And we’re out of time. Sorry to manipulate, but I have to. That’s it for this edition of “To the Contrary.” Next week: stressed-out girls. Whether your views are in agreement or to the contrary, please join us next time.

(End of program.)