BONNIE ERBE: This week on To the Contrary, why women don’t vote for women. Then, stay-at-home moms on the rise. Behind the headlines, career opportunities for female veterans.

(Musical break.)

MS. ERBE: Hello, I’m Bonnie Erbe. Welcome to To the Contrary, a discussion of news and social trends from diverse perspectives. Up first, Kathleen Sebelius resigns.

Sebelius is stepping down as secretary of Health and Human Services. Since the rocky, some would say disastrous, rollout of “Obamacare,” Republicans have been calling for her resignation. The resignation, which was reportedly her choice, was timed to coincide with more positive news, that seven and a half million Americans had enrolled in health care exchanges.

Obama’s pick to replace Sebelius is budget director Sylvia Matthews Burwell.

So Jennifer Marshall, was Sebelius the fall guy for “Obamacare?”

JENNIFER MARSHALL: Secretary Sebelius had an impossible task to implement “Obamacare.” It’s an unworkable, unaffordable law that a majority of Americans oppose and that’s not going away.

PATRICIA SOSA: Well, she was a fallback, but she did an elegant job and she definitely left on her own terms.

FRANCESCA CHAMBERS: Kathleen Sebelius was my governor for six years. She is a wonderful administrator and she was a wonderful governor of her state. “Obamacare” did not fail because she was a bad administrator.

MEGAN BEYER: I agree. She’s not the fall guy and what portends well for this transition is that Senator John McCain has already tweeted that Sylvia Burwell is an excellent choice for a replacement.

MS. ERBE: OK, but if she’s not the fall guy, why did she leave?

MS. BEYER: I think, you know, it obviously did not go well. I think if you would call her a fall guy she would have been fired immediately. And she wasn’t fired immediately. And I think the president was wise to get through that milestone we’ve all been sort of looking at, which is that 7 million signup. They achieved that. She gets to leave with some grace. She was a policy person they brought in. She was one of the top five governors in the nation, according to “Time” Magazine, when she served in politics. But it could be you needed someone who was a management person, you know, it was
Jeffrey Zients, who came over from the OMB to kind of clean up the mess with the IT problem they had with “Obamacare.”

And now we have Sylvia Burwell coming over. She also, very strong on management, not only worked as the assistant chief of staff for Clinton, also worked for the Gates Foundation, and ran the Wal-Mart Foundation. So she’s got a great background.

MS. ERBE: But what’s this going to do to Republicans and “Obamacare” in the upcoming elections?

MS. CHAMBERS: Well, I think that’s actually an excellent question, Bonnie, because I actually do think that she was the fall guy for “Obamacare.” I think it makes it much more difficult for Republicans to run on this issue in November because when they came –

MS. ERBE: While the program’s still in place.

MS. CHAMBERS: Yeah, the problems with the program are not going away and that is going to be the story for a long time. You cannot create a massive centralized health care system like this. It just – this will not work for our country. You have to allow more patient empowerment, not get in between patients and their doctors. And that’s what centralization of health care, as “Obamacare” does, has created for our country.

MS. ERBE: It seems to me – I mean, the prediction is for massive losses for Democrats in the House and Senate, maybe even losing the Senate. So it seems to be a working issue for Republicans.

MS. SOSA: Absolutely. I’m not quite sure from a political standpoint if letting her go now, even though she announced to the world months ago that this is the date she was going to leave, so this was obviously well orchestrated –

MS. CHAMBERS: That’s not true.

MS. SOSA: Let me finish. It’s really not good for politics because the fact is that for a long time we’ve been hearing news that she was never really in the inner circle of the implementation of the health care bill, really truly that the White House was coming to shots. But she was always willing to take the fault. She was always willing to take the fault. And a lot of negative energy was projecting on her.

It would have been a good thing to continue that through the elections because the Democrats are in danger right now of losing both the House and the Senate.

MS. BEYER: But you know, I wouldn’t necessarily buy into that. You’ve got 7 million people who’ve signed up. You’ve got a lot of families whose children, up to the
age 26 now, don’t have to get their own insurance. They’re covered by their parents. And you have people with preexisting conditions who are just beginning to tell their story about how this has profoundly changed their lives, changed their abilities to switch jobs and get the kinds of careers that they want. I think that it’s a bit premature to be making these negative prognostications.

MS. CHAMBERS: All I was just going to say is that just 12 days ago, she actually said that she wouldn’t be leaving till November. So it hasn’t been long known that she was going to be leaving at this time. I do think that this was a strategy by the Democratic Party to take some focus off of her because she is the one who’s mostly linked to the law, so that going into November it would be harder for Republicans.

MS. ERBE: Last word, Jennifer.

MS. MARSHALL: One thing her fingerprints are all over is the HHS mandate that requires almost all employers to provide for abortion inducing drugs contraception and sterilization. And there are hundreds of cases in court right now that are challenging that on religious liberty grounds. That is – then HHS – it’s the HHS mandate and her fingerprints are on that.

MS. ERBE: All right. Let us know what you think. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe or @TotheContrary. From presidential nominees to women voters.

(Begin video segment.)

Nearly 300 women are running for House and Senate seats in the upcoming midterm elections, some in very tight races. But these candidates have learned not to count on women voters. In recent elections, several female politicians lost the female vote. For example, Democratic Senator Blanche Lincoln lost her reelection in Arkansas partially due to a 16-point deficit among women.

Christine Quinn won only 16 percent of the female vote in her failed run for mayor of New York City. Even Hillary Clinton lost the women’s vote by 24 points in the South Carolina primary in 2008. So why don’t women vote for women? Celinda Lake, a Democratic pollster, is one of the strategists trying to answer that question.

CELINDA LAKE: In general, partisanship’s soundly transgender now. We still see a little bit of Democratic defection for women candidates and we definitely see independent women vote more for women candidates.

MS. ERBE: On the other side of the aisle, many Republican women candidates struggle with the women’s vote, particularly Latina and black female voters. In 2010, California gubernatorial candidate Meg Whitman won among white women, but lost the Latina vote by 70 points and the black female vote by almost 40 points.
With the midterm later this year and a looming 2016 presidential elections, female candidates will try their best to make their case to all women.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So Megan, if Republican women are losing the Latina and African-American votes and probably as well the older white women’s votes by such huge margins, why are Democrats still positioned as it looks like to lose the – possibly lose the Senate and lose more seats in the House this fall?

MS. BEYER: Well, as I said, let’s just wait and see. You know, we’ve just come off a week where the Republicans have pretty much said they’re not going to vote for paycheck fairness and a whole lot of economic issues that are rolling through November. And while they’re focusing on criticizing “Obamacare,” the voters are going to find out where they stand on these household economic issues that are really important to women of both parties.

And if you want to see an example of crossover voting by women, look at Kirsten Gillibrand’s last race in New York. Kirsten won 33 percent crossover voters, Republican voters. Why? Because she focused on those family economic issues – raising the minimum wage, fair paycheck, you know, making sure women and men are being paid the same, childcare, paid maternity leave. Women –

MS. ERBE: Sexual assault in the military, she’s been big on that.

MS. BEYER: She has been big on that. And these are not necessarily Republican issues or Democratic issues. They appeal to moderate women of both stripes. And I think that you’re seeing a lot of these issues now. They’re going to be getting a lot of attention before November. And so we look at it now and it looks like “Obamacare” is an ace for the Republicans. I think that could change, too.

MS. MARSHALL: Women candidates should be evaluated on the merit of their ideas and the qualifications that they have for office, their competency. And so if women are not always choosing women to vote for, that’s great. Feminists should cheer that because it shows that women are thinking for themselves. So let’s have great idea debates about keeping more of your paycheck, about having the choice to make the things – make the decisions that work for your family and your work-life balance. That’s, I think, what we need to be debating in this country.

MS. ERBE: I have a question. Men, obviously, vote for men, right? I mean – so why shouldn’t we want women to vote more for women?

MS. MARSHALL: They like their ideas.

MS. SOSA: You know, but I think there’s another issue here. I wish it was also simple that is all about, you know, your qualification and is not about meritocracy, but
the fact is that women candidate have to be beautiful, have to look perfect, have to have great ideas. You know, the standard is so much higher for a female candidate. And that’s really the challenge. And we know it makes a difference.

I remember during a budget debacle how the female legislators, particularly in the Senate, were the ones that got together and really were able to salvage the moment. So we need more women in positions of power, but it’s the expectations of the voters that need to also evolve, and they haven’t. There’s double standards.

MS. ERBE: So how do you – let me go back to you. How do Republicans, if they can at all, win minority women’s votes?

MS. CHAMBERS: Well, I think that what you need on the right that has really been missing for a long time is organizations that reach out specifically to women that are empowered, sort of like Emily’s List. There are some on the right, but none that are as powerful as Emily’s List at getting women elected. And so whether they’re minorities or otherwise, I think that the right has to build up an infrastructure like that before you’re going to see a lot more women candidates getting elected to –

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: Let me ask you this because minority women, sadly, are among the lowest income people in the country – you know, demographic in the country. And the Democrats are more for government services for poor people. So they’re not stupid. They vote Democratic because they know the Democratic Party is going to pass “Obamacare” and is working towards equal pay, whereas middle and upper class women don’t really care about that stuff as much. So don’t you have to change your party’s platform in order to get more women? I mean it is a – a poor woman is not going to vote Republican if she thinks she’s going to lose welfare or, you know, “Obamacare.”

MS. CHAMBERS: Well, it’s not just minority women, obviously, that Republicans have a problem with. They have a problem with minorities, period, and young people. The reason I mention young people is because they’re also people who like to keep government services. They don’t have a lot of money.

What Republicans need to do is a better job of articulating that if you vote for the Republican Party, instead of giving you a bunch of free stuff from the government, we’re going to help you get the opportunity to have the money to get your things for yourself.

MS. MARSHALL: Low income moms talk all the time about wanting safe and effective schools for their children as well and hoping for better for their children. So I think that’s a huge area for conservatives to connect with.

MS. SOSA: But the other area is immigration. I mean, you can’t, you know, a lot of the – particularly among the Latina, the positions on immigration of the Republican Party are completely unhelpful.
MS. BEYER: And what it’s coming down to in this discussion is I think that to say why aren’t women voting or women, you know, you wouldn’t want to vote for someone who didn’t have positions that were congruent with the way you see how the democracy should work. So I think it’s better that – to look at women as being thinking members of the electorate who will vote on something more than just gender.

MS. SOSA: Exactly.

MS. ERBE: And to close, I want to say, one of my closest childhood friends – I’m from Manhattan – did not vote for Kathleen Quinn, even though she is a woman and she is a lesbian because she thought that Kathleen Quinn was too – owed too much to the real estate market. And my friend is very much for rent control. (Laughter.) So again, there is an issue where, you know, you would think somebody would want to vote for somebody, but it didn’t turn out that way.

From voting to raising children.

More mothers are full time homemakers. Although most families today need two incomes, a Pew Research study finds 29 percent of mothers stayed home to raise children, that in 2012. That’s up from a low of 23 percent in 1999. Who are they? Two thirds have working husbands and most are home by choice. Even though they are not considered affluent, a growing number, 6 percent could not find work.

Researchers also say immigration plays a role. Forty percent of immigrant moms stay home, compared with about one quarter of moms born in the U.S. Whether by choice or circumstance, researchers say most stay-at-home moms are younger, less educated, and nearly three times as likely to live in poverty than mothers who work.

So before we get to this issue, I want to correct myself. I said Kathleen Quinn. It’s Christine Quinn who ran for mayor of New York City.

But anyway, so what’s this with immigrant moms staying home? They’re doing it in poverty? I don’t get it.

MS. SOSA: Well, I think it sounds more – I mean, it’s foreign born, mostly seems to me cultural. Yes, the data shows that most of the women that stay at home are higher poverty rates than women that work.

MS. ERBE: So they’re coming here to go on welfare and raise –

MS. SOSA: Well, the thing is if you look at the number, but –

MS. ERBE: No, no, no, let me –
MS. SOSA: – they have husbands. The majority of these women have husbands that are working and they’re staying at home taking care of the kids. There is 20 percent that are single moms and, you know, really it’s very hard and extreme poverty most likely for those. But the foreign born and the thinking is that the reason why they show that way in the figures is because they’re becoming increasing large numbers of the population as a whole. So it’s reflective also of the percentage and the large number of immigrants in the country.

But the majority of them are just, you know, probably from traditional countries in which, if you have a husband that can support you and you can take care of your children, that’s what you would do.

MS. BEYER: But also, it’s a little bit difficult at that level to – everybody I know does the math says it’s hardly worth it. You know, I have to pay for childcare and I may as well be home with my children because I’m not able to do it. And in a lot of countries, you have some support with childcare.

MS. ERBE: Usually what you hear about immigrants, particularly, you know, 80 percent of the immigrants who come in don’t have a high school education, is they come here to work. That’s what’s surprising to me. And the women work a lot, too. So I’m surprised – I was surprised by these data that said that a lot of them aren’t working.

MS. MARSHALL: Well, so I don’t think this study gave us an insight as to what the pattern is in the immigrant population, so it may reveal some cultural preferences, as you were saying. But the majority here are home because they want to be home. Now, 6 percent are saying I can’t find a job. I would like to be in the workforce. But in general, the surveys that look at what women want in terms of their work-life balance, most women are saying I’d like to work less than I do, or I’d like to be at home completely with my kids.

We want an economic system where we have the most freedom to make that choice, each of us for ourselves, each married mother for her – and every mother for her family needs. That should the environment that we create with our economic policy. If we’re seeing a rise in those who can’t – who aren’t able to – who are saying they’re staying home because they can’t find the job that they want, that’s a problem and we need to address that.

MS. CHAMBERS: And I agree with what you were saying about how a lot of –

MS. ERBE: By the way, the answer to that, education. It’s the answer to everything. (Laughter.) You got an education, you’re not poor.

MS. CHAMBERS: Higher education, higher education specifically. But I do agree with what you were saying about the economics of the situation. I have a friend who’s having twins right now. And her and her husband did the math and determined that it didn’t really make sense for her to go back to work. She wanted to be at home
with the kids because a nanny for two is very, very expensive, when she could just stay at home and be with the kids. And I know not everyone’s having twins in this survey, but I do think that that’s what a lot of women are thinking.

MS. BEYER: But you know what happens? I mean, this is the thing, you know, when you’re young and you think, oh, I’ll stay home for a few years. But I do think you need to think about it very carefully because if you’re not at least keeping your hand in, then when you want to go back and when the kids are in school all day, you may decide that you want to go back, it can be difficult.

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: I know so many women 50-plus looking for work. They can’t find it or it takes years to find a crummy job.

MS. SOSA: It’s impossible for women –

MS. ERBE: Isn’t that a kind of a scary trend then?

MS. SOSA: That is for me the concern. When I read the story, that’s what concerned me the most because we talked about it in the program. We’ve seen the data. Leaving the workforce is very hard to come back. And it’s especially hard to move up and make good salaries and get into positions of influence.

MS. ERBE: You’re in the messaging business about tobacco. Why aren’t we messaging young women and high school kids, you know, you better – if you take time out, you’re going to cost yourself.

MS. SOSA: I totally agree with you and that’s the reason why I’m concerned every time there’s a story about the Harvard graduate that decided to stay home with the kids. It’s like the best idea ever. And I think that is not. People need to understand fully the consequences of –

(Cross talk.)

MS. MARSHALL: I don’t think they are getting you go messages right and left. The message that I’m concerned that we’re not holding up as more – as much anymore –

MS. ERBE: Which you go girl?

MS. MARSHALL: You go girl, you know, get a couple of degrees. Get the best career you can and don’t quit until you get to the top. What we’re having less cultural discussion about is starting a family. And that flipside of what you’re talking about is waking 35 and 40 and not being, you know, past your biological clock. So there’s a lot of opportunity for regret here. And let’s have a full conversation about –
MS. BEYER: Absolutely.

MS. MARSHALL: – all the choices.

MS. BEYER: No, it’s true. In fact, you know, I tell young women in television, don’t forget your personal life because a lot of people do. But –

MS. ERBE: But also 20 percent of Americans, like myself, are child free by choice. And I’m thrilled that – you know – I got to live an incredible life that I never would have had if I stayed home with children.

MS. SOSA: But that was your choice, Bonnie, and you thought through it. And I think you have a good point. I’m going to give it to you. I think – and I do also, when I advise professional women – because we tend to relate to people that are truly more into the career than the family – is don’t forget the family. Have a balanced life. But if you leave the workforce is a big risk and it can put you in poverty.

MS. ERBE: Last words.

MS. BEYER: Let me tell you about Switzerland. Switzerland, they run the whole thing as tough everybody’s going to stay home with their kids. In fact, they don’t have a school lunch program because mother’s assumed to be there cooking the meal. And what happens is they have a 50 percent divorce rate, just like us, which kind of surprised me because I thought with this sort of, you know, environment, where they kind of set it up so that mother stays at home, I thought, oh, this is like –

MS. ERBE: They should be setting enough for both –

MS. BEYER: – maybe it’s good for the parents. This is the focus group. Is this good for the families to have these traditional roles because it’s really hardwired into the culture? And they have a 50 percent divorce rate. The husband then leaves. The wife is kept economically at that level because she’s still making lunch. Her career does not –

MS. ERBE: All right, but let me tell you where that’s –

MS. BEYER: – the children are living –

MS. ERBE: – we have a documentary coming up about the last stage of feminism is getting men to do half the homecare and the childcare. And it’s really true and that’s where Switzerland program and other programs like it are wrong.

MS. BEYER: And even the men don’t like it because they think –

MS. ERBE: Because other countries have programs where the men have to do half the maternity, paternity leave, and that’s where women are doing much better.
Behind the headlines, more American women are serving in the military and that translates into more women veterans. Their experiences, both in and out of the service, often differ from those of male vets. That’s why a special coordinated effort is underway to address their employment needs.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: Alissa Etten served her country in the Marines. After leaving the service, she thought high school, but she found herself unemployed after moving for her husband’s new job. At first, she didn’t know where to turn.

ALISSA ETTEN: It’s actually overwhelming how many resources are available, not only for veterans, but specifically women veterans that I would have never known about had I not met Charlie.

MS. ERBE: Navy veteran Charlie Palumbo helps women veterans find and use employment services. She says the women don’t always recognize how military service translates into valuable civilian job skills.

MS. ETTEN: I didn’t even know what I was capable of doing. And the things that I learned, not only as a teacher, but as a Marine, to put into my résumé and what I’m actually qualified to do.

MS. ERBE: The Department of Labor is also jumping in to help women veterans.

LATIFIA LYLES: We were able to, in a short period of time, over the past year, finally develop a program through our Veterans Employment and Training program that specifically focuses on the employment needs of women veterans.

MS. ERBE: One of the challenges, women don’t always tell recruiters or potential employers that they are veterans.

CHARLIE PALUMBO: Being a woman vet myself, I noticed that we have a lot of women veterans not self-identifying and employers not realizing that women veterans are a value.

MS. ERBE: Today, women make up 10 percent of American veterans and 14 percent of the active duty population. Of the roughly 2 million women veterans in 2014, some 5 percent are unemployed. That’s likely to increase as service women reenter civilian life in larger numbers. More combat experience for women is also creating unforeseen problems.

TERRY GERTON: I think it’s really important to remember that female veterans don’t come out of a cookie cutter. There’re as many different experiences as there are female veterans.
MS. ERBE: Veteran and single mother Jacqueline Santana operated cranes and boats for five years in the Navy. Since living, she’s used the GI Bill and state funding to build a career in communications. Despite earning a Master’s degree in 2012, she lost her job to outsourcing. Last year, Santana discovered she had breast cancer.

JACQUELINE SANTANA: There are some difficulties that I do face, but I’m confident with the network that I’m establishing and I’m hoping that the Women Veterans Conference can open up doors for me that I was unable to recognize during my early years.

MS. LYLES: There’re going to be more veterans coming out who are younger, who are women who are supporting their families. And the good story is that there’re women who are coming out with an incredible host and breadth of experiences and new skills that a lot of women in the civilian community don’t have.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So should the government be doing more for women vets?

MS. BEYER: You know what they are doing, which I think is so great? They are going to require that companies that contract have the same percentage of employees that are percentage of veteran women in our society. So they’re now saying not just hire veterans, but we’re going to give you preference in our contracting if you reflect women in your workforce who work in the military on a metrics based basis.

MS. CHAMBERS: The number of veterans that I see that are homeless on the streets in Washington, D.C., is just completely heartbreaking, and this is one area in which they work for the government. They were willing to give their lives and I absolutely think that government should do more.

MS. SOSA: Well, networking is fantastic. It works for everybody and I really exciting to see that veteran women networking to help each other.

MS. MARSHALL: The needs are as diverse as the number of women, as we heard. And so this is going to be an issue of raising awareness and making sure that the relational networks are there in many, many different ways around them.

MS. ERBE: And it’s wonderful that they are coming out of the services with technical, male-oriented skills that they can go into the marketplace and sell.

That’s it for this edition. Please follow me on Twitter and visit our website, pbs.org/tothecontrary. And whether you agree or think to the contrary, see you next week.

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