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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, first, more women in the new Congress, including Iraq war veteran Tammy Duckworth.

REPRESENTATIVE TAMMY DUCKWORTH (D-IL): (From tape.) It's given me a new mission.

MS. ERBE: Then, outrage over a fatal gang-rape of a woman in India, and declining birth rates in the U.S.

(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, diversity in Congress.

The new Congress is the most diverse ever with 20 women senators and 78 women in the House of Representatives. The House Democratic Caucus has more women and people of color than it does white men, another historic first. We will explain what this means to you. But first, we introduce you to one of those freshmen, Illinois Democrat Tammy Duckworth, one of two female war veterans to be sworn in this week.

Duckworth is also the first double amputee to serve in Congress. The Iraq war veteran is using her story to get more support for veterans across the country. I sat down with this incredibly inspirational person to hear her story in her own words.

(Begin video segment.)

REP. DUCKWORTH: I'd been in Iraq, at this point, eight months. I had been away from home 11 and I was just doing a regular day's mission, flying a Black Hawk helicopter. I was the copilot on the crew. And we had flown a full day of missions, so had a really good day. The weather was getting better. It wasn't so hot anymore. I was flying with a crew that I had – I really got along with and – and two aircraft. And at the end of the day – this was during the second battle for Fallujah and we were not in the battle, but we were in nearby area. And what had happened was some of the insurgents who've been flushed out of Fallujah had been hoed up in an area and we were ambushed in flight. And they shot at us with a number of things, small arms – and we were hit with small arms and a rocket propelled grenade, which was exploded on me. And we were able to land the aircraft. The last thing I remember was trying to shut down the engines on – emergency engines shut down.

MS. ERBE: Duckworth woke up as a double amputee. She lost both legs. How did it change her life?

REP. DUCKWORTH: It's freeing. It's been a gift. And I choose to look at it as a gift. Yes, my life is infinitely more difficult physically. I can't do the things that are great passions in my life. I can't – you know, my unit is deployed right now and there's a piece of my heart with them. And I can't be there.

I'm sorry.

It's given me a new mission and I get to do this for them.

MS. ERBE: She wants to use her political clout to help service personnel.

REP. DUCKWORTH: There're so many things that need to be done. I think there's a responsibility to if we are going to go to war, have a discussion of how we will use these men and women, right? They're the ones who bleed. So we don't make decisions to go to war recklessly. We have honest discussions of the cost of war. If we're going to expand our greatest national treasure, it'd better be for the right reasons. And then, they'd better be well-equipped. And then, when they come home, whether or not they have visible wounds, we need to take care of them. And we need to take care of their families.

MS. ERBE: Duckworth plans to make sure deployments are more fully vetted and discussed in the future.

REP. DUCKWORTH: I think that, hopefully, I can be a voice to say, well, I'm not weak on defense. And I won't go tomorrow. I'm still serving in the National Guard. I don't know what they can do with a gimpy lieutenant colonel, but maybe I can wash windshields or something. I can still do that. (Laughs.) But – but if we're going to do this – and I will be the first to volunteer to go, but we're going to have a discussion. We're going to have a good thorough discussion, where we don't demonize or vilify one another, because someone is questioning the motivations and the benefits of this nation, right?

If we're going to invade another country, if it's truly in the greatest interest of the United States, then absolutely. Let's have that discussion and we're going – if we're going to do it, then we're going to do it.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So Congresswoman Norton, how does having a woman like Tammy Duckworth in Congress with you change Congress?

DEL. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON: Bonnie, in today's Congress, with only a handful of veterans male or female, a female disabled veteran who saw combat is going to have unique standing to speak to defense issues.

JENNIFER SEVILLA KORN: And I think that she's going to be just wonderful of our veterans because so many of our veterans, who are disabled and come home, don't know what their mission is. And to have someone in Congress who is, you know, holding the fire for them, I think that's a good thing.

MARIA TERESA KUMAR: And I think this increased diversity which she represents, the fact that she believes that we need to modernize the VA is incredibly important. And to have her constantly beating that drum is important to make sure that the American people recognize the sacrifices that these military folks have made for us.

GRETCHEN HAMEL: She's an example of how the role of women has evolved over the course of the past few years and past few decades in Congress and in the military.

MS. ERBE: So how does – how does adding her voice change, for example, how things are going to be done about the next war, if there is one?

DEL. NORTON: Well, it's interesting to note that there are veterans, people who were –not in this Congress – but to take McGovern, who was another war hero. These were people who, often, because they have seen war, were really listened to. I wasn't in the Congress then, when they spoke to those issues. And one of the reasons that he rose to prominence, became the – I remember the Vietnam War and all of that – was because he had been a war hero. There's no question that she sounds very much like she is not inclined to go to war very lightly. And so in the Congress, you will see that when it comes time to speak to the defense authorization bill, and we all have to wait in line, she's going to be moved up front, and not only that. I'm sure she's going to be on the Defense Committee.

MS. ERBE: You know, I've seen all over the news this week about the diverse Congress being sworn in, but I wonder –in terms of public policy, what's it going to mean? Is it because most of them are Democrats, is it going to be, you know, an acceptance of more spending, more social programs? What does it mean to the average tax payer?

MS. KORN: Yeah, to have a more diverse Congress, I think that remains to be seen. I think it's great when the Congress is a reflection of what America is. And so having more people who feel – women and those who are disabled – feel like they can run for Congress, that it isn't this club for just certain people, I think that's a good thing. I think policy wise, though, I think that remains to be seen, because if we are talking about Republicans and Democrats and sort of everybody going to their sides and not making the difference, we may be in that sort of still stalemate. I think it remains to be seen.

MS. KUMAR: Well, you know, just that interview with Representative Duckworth, it showed that seemed very pragmatic when it came to approaching policy and being thoughtful. And I think that's what we're going to see from a more diverse

Congress. Folks that have lived the lives of the folks that they're representing back home. And this, actually, if anything, it's promising. And it does reflect the change in demographics. But it also demonstrates the importance of making sure that both people – both the Republican and Democratic Party come more together. And I think she was an example of that within –

MS. ERBE: Will it make it easier for the two – particularly in the House, where she is, where you are, where two sides are extremely divided, will it make it – will it make the – the budgeting process, whatever, easier.

MS. KUMAR: So this is – what was interesting – and just tot take it back to what we just saw with the fiscal cliff, where a lot of negotiation happened behind closed doors and Boehner came back and saying I don't want it closed doors, I want it to be open. Well, what happens when it's open is that all of a sudden it comes into everyday Americans' living rooms, every single day through social media. And all of a sudden, American people are part of that conversation. And they're going to force their congressional members, whether the Republicans or Democrats, to actually come to to certain agreements. So I think it actually creates an opportunity for the American people to be more engaged in their politics. And it's a lot harder for either part to sequester and hold bills when they're unchecked.

MS. HAMEL: You know, I think definitely having more women in Congress is going to make it a lot prettier. (Laughter.) A lot easier to look at and much see space. And – but you know, to be – I think it remains to be seen, but the way things are going right now, I don't see it will make a vast difference in the way things are handled, now, if you – women really just rise up and lead the charge. I think it can make a great bit of difference. And I – hopefully it'll be more efficient. But I just don't know if it's going to make that –

MS. KUMAR: But I think until we actually have a representative government, where 51 percent of members of Congress and Senate are women, then – and they're actually reflecting the population, I mean, I think – I think – I mean, we're basically right now we're roaring because we have 20 – 20 elected – but we're not there, right?

MS. HAMEL: No, we're not there. I mean, we only had 44 women total serve in the Senate, and we have 20 of them right now. I mean, that says how far we've come, but we're still not there.

MS. KUMAR: Absolutely.

DEL. NORTON: And let's face it. When – if she speaks up – she's a Democrat. I would imagine that she is not going to be very pro-war. If on the other hand, she's a Democrat who spoke out sometimes about war in ways that in fact were more on developing, she might be different. I don't think that's what – look, McCain was a veteran. He is a veteran Republican who speaks about war the way you'd expect a

Republican to do. I would wait that she'll probably speak about war and defense the way you'd imagine a Democrat to do.

MS. KORN: But I'd like to see is her – especially with her experience of not only being in combat, but also being in the Veterans Affairs, is going in there and finding where the waste is, finding where the bureaucracy is, and finding where we are not serving our veterans. I think if she could do that without a Democrat or a Republican, any kind of partisan veil, I think that would be – we'd benefit a lot from that.

MS. ERBE: How can you do anything, though, in Congress without some kind of partisan veil these days? I mean, would – would – well, you know, beyond just – beyond just Tammy Duckworth, I mean, we – there's talk about this diversity, the caucus, the Democratic caucus is more female and diverse than it is white male. That's never happened in history before. We have the first bisexual woman in Congress. We have the first lesbian in the Senate. How – tell me how this is going to change things for the average taxpayer?

MS. KORN: I don't know. We don't know that yet. And what I hope is that instead of the importance put on just the diversity, the importance put on the policies that are passed and how are they going to help the American people. Because the American people, your regular mom at home who's paying the bills, is worried about how – are my taxes going to go up, not how many women are in Congress. It's great that we have more diversity, but we need policies that are going to really help Americans and that's important.

MS. ERBE: And one – one last quick question, Gretchen. The Republican Party – the diversity's all pretty much on the Democrat side. What do Republicans need to do to get more women and people of color representing them in Congress?

MS. HAMEL: Well, the Republicans have, you know, over the course of the past few years, been painted by Democrats as being anti-women. And I think this is something where political bickering has really kind of fueled that. And it's not always been needed. And I think that, you know, Democrats have done a very good job of framing Republicans that way. And I don't think it's quite fair, but also I believe Republicans need to reevaluate some things and change their message when it comes to women and women's issues.

MS. ERBE: All right. Let us know what you think. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe.

From the women's voices in Congress to an international outcry.

The Indian women's rights community is calling for justice in the gang rape and murder of a 23-year-old student in New Delhi. Last month's assault sparked outrage and protests across the country, because of what protesters say is the government's inability to prevent violence against women. They're urging officials to make it safer for women

and to stand up to perpetrators. Indian officials have arrested five men and have another in custody. The men are charged with rape, kidnapping, and murder. Protests continue across the country.

Maria Teresa Kumar, tell me about what women face routinely in India, particularly in New Delhi, that we've learned this week, when it comes to gang rape and rape?

MS. KUMAR: That there's a generational shift occurring before our eyes. And what happens when women go into the workforce and are actually coworkers with men. Because unfortunately, sadly, these incidents happen all the time, but the fact that you have more professional women going into the workforce, working alongside men, it came out into the open. And it went viral.

MS. ERBE: So you're saying – but you are agreeing with – because some commentators say – you know, I've read a lot of them – some commentators say India's just not a country that's used to treating people equally. Look at their Dalit – used to be referred to as the untouchables. But some say – particularly men say that this is a reaction – this surge in rape and it has surged in the last five or 10 years, as have women surged into the workplace, that men are angry and they react. This is how they're reacting?

MS. KUMAR: But to be fair, it's reported rape that has actually – that surged. So whether – so the fact that women actually feel that they can actually report it is actually, I think, a good thing, that you actually bring it to the light of day. The fact that you have women standing next to men, protesting and demanding that justice be served is also saying that there's a new day in India, where before, women would be on the sidelines and would be too afraid to have that commentary.

But I also wanted to talk a little bit about we – you know, this is a horrendous crime, but the fact that – they are moving forward as a country and trying to do justice is good. But then let's take a step back on what we're doing. We failed to pass the Violence Against Women Act that protects not only women, but also women and gays in relationships, and the fact that we're pointing our finger at another country that, as tragic as it is, they're coming together and trying to make that change, we're taking a step back. And I think that's something – that's a discussion that we need to have.

MS. HAMEL: Well – well, if we're going to get into this, but I think politics have really come to play with and the Violence Against Women Act, you know, I personally, you know, I had someone very, very close to me be abused. And you know, I'm very much for there being rights for women and to protect – this is a human rights piece of legislation. But over the course of the past few years, when it has been up for reauthorization, Democrats have taken this as an opportunity to kind of win some political points with women and saying that Republicans are against this bill, when actually this bill has changed over the course of the past few years, and there are some points. There are some things that we do need to debate in here. And there are some

things that we need to make – that may not even be part of this bill that I think we should have a debate about and consider. It's not about just being anti-woman. It's –

MS. ERBE: But let's – I don't want to spend too much of our limited time on VAWA. I do want – I am just amazed at what is going on in India, which is trying to become one of the world's superpowers, which already is probably economically. And China and India, we always talk about being overtaken by China. But China and India are actually competing with each other for that role. And can they possibly think about becoming a superpower when they – their own police rape women who have been raped, who come – there were many incidents in the past couple of years, where, including a 16-year-old girl brought by her parents to the police station because she's been raped, and then the police raped her. And this goes on with some degree of frequency.

DEL. NORTON: You make a very important point, and that is the – as a country rises to – and it's economic power, it becomes the focus of other countries and is much more sensitive to the kinds of criticism that India is now getting. But there is a very important issue that needs to be uncovered here. These are gangs of very young men, who roam the streets. India is one of those countries which has favored male over female births and they are paying the price for it now. These are young, unaffiliated men. There are not comparable women in their age group to be with them. They're in a society that doesn't value women anyway. They're out like wolves, looking for women. The policy –

MS. ERBE: So what does that – what do we –

DEL. NORTON: India would have been in the forefront of thinking through birth control and such issues allowed the notion that had always been there of the preference for male children to become dominant in that society, just as it is in China. Except in China, they punish it so harshly that –

MS. ERBE: The one child rule –

MS. KORN: They're definitely having growing pains. I mean, it's a cultural thing. And to Maria's point that the fact that there are these rallies now and protests of men and women and children next to each other saying no more rape is a good thing, but they're still not anywhere where they need to be.

MS. ERBE: Especially – and I hope they see that this will hold them back as a potential superpower. You can't be a superpower if you repress more than half of your population.

MS. KORN: I mean, the fact that companies, now that women are in the workforce, have to hire buses just to take these women home is an indication of how bad the situation is. I mean, the government tried this thing where they have women only buses and men only buses, which wasn't working because sometimes the men would still go on the women only buses. But that's not – that's not the solution. The solution is to

have to put these men behind bars and to make sure that they're convicted at a higher rate, because it's only like 24 percent are being convicted, whereas you compare that to America, we're over 50 percent of men who are convicted of rape.

And so I think the system has to change and it's going to take a while because it is a cultural thing.

MS. ERBE: All right. From safety for women to smaller families.

Hispanic women generally considered to have the highest fertility rate in the U.S., now have the steepest declining birth rates of any group. According to the Pew Research Center, in 2011, the American birth rate hit a record low with 63 births per 1,000 women ages 15 to 44, led by the decline in births to immigrant women. The national birth rate is now half what it was during the baby boom years. The decline was steepest among Mexican-American women and women who immigrated from Mexico. Sociologists and demographers attribute this decline to a change in the way many Hispanic women view motherhood, greater access to information, and higher education.

So is this a good thing or a bad thing, Jennifer?

MS. KORN: Well, I don't think it's something that we need to get too alarmed about right now. There's many factors that contribute to it. One, Hispanics have the highest unemployment rate, almost at – between 10 and 13 percent over the last four years, where you've seen the decline, but also it's a cultural thing, as more women get educated and more women are in the workforce. It's – they're not having the eight kids that let's say my grandmother had. Now, you know, limiting to two or three. And so a combination of the economy, plus the fact that they're getting higher education has led to this. But I wouldn't get alarmed because – I mean, we are growing at a very fast rate. In just the last 10 years, we've doubled the Hispanic population. And by 2050, we're estimated to be at 132 million. So I would say, you know, watching the situation, but it's not an alarming rate yet.

DEL. NORTON: Bonnie, this is really a very – very American – this is really a very American thing if you think about it. Notice when this declined sharper than we expected, earlier than it expected, when it began. It coincides almost exactly with the coming of the recession. And immigrants, when they first come to this country repeat the pattern of their home countries. They have a lot of children. So they've been here just a little while and they understand that the best way to increase your income in the short-term is to reduce the number of children. And don't forget what is happening in Mexico. In Mexico, they're down to two and a half children per couple. So it's all part of a package that makes sense to me.

MS. HAMEL: But there's a longer term problem here that I think we have to worry about, with the shrinking – you know, the birth rate going down, we also have to worry about how many people are going to be in the workforce down the road and how many people are actually going to be paying taxes. Right now, we have a problem

because we have so many baby boomers, 10,000 baby boomers entering the system every day, and the workforce isn't what it needs to be in order to support those. Think about what is going to be like 30, 40, 50 years down the road, when you have this population trying to support the population before, the generation before.

MS. KUMAR: This is a fine switch because – if anything, it's because of the Latino community for the most part that we've actually been able to maintain high birth rates and making sure that we're not – we're actually rising instead of declining, like you find in Europe. Who have – Europeans have lower birth rate. But the interesting part is that we're getting much more of an educated workforce coming out of this and I think that actually strengthens us for the new economy that's coming out, meaning that if you were getting educating, you're going into higher – higher paying jobs, that you're going to be able to support different social – safety nets. But what's curious of all of this is that when you start pulling in Latinas, we just recently did a study. When you start pulling in Latinas on what they want to do, more than anything is get an education. That's their number one. But are we serving them with the education and giving the resources they need?

MS. ERBE: But isn't that – isn't that overall – I would say it's a great thing because – and also, I mean, is anybody here concerned about the fact that in my lifetime the population of the U.S. went from 170 million to now 310 million. At what point are we going to say there're too many of us here? We're destroying the environment, making it impossible – for example, the drought in the Midwest over the last two years, the drought in – the water shortage in Georgia of several summers ago, where all of Atlanta had almost no water. When are we going to start worrying about overpopulating the country?

MS. KUMAR: Well, I think it has less to do with overpopulation. It has more to do with are we using our energy resources smartly? Are we actually educating folks? Because you could actually argue that China, as they increase their middle class, they actually all of a sudden want to be high price middle class items, such as – at a very simple level, you know, all of a sudden, meat is all of a sudden something that the stock price is going up because it's something that is seen as a luxury. How are we educating our population to make sure that we are being kind to the environment, making sure that we are actually using stuff that are at our disposal and are working smartly?

DEL. NORTON: It does respond – I think it's something very natural about this. It's – people are going to have fewer children when they feel more uncomfortable about the environment, about their ability to rise in the society.

MS. HAMEL: Or about the economy.

DEL. NORTON: And certainly about the economy. So I think this is going to take care of itself. Women don't have to have a lot of children.

MS. ERBE: OK. We got it, right. That's it for this edition of *To the Contrary*. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe and @tothecontrary and check out our website, pbs.org/ttc, where the discussion continues. Whether you agree or think to the contrary, please join us next time.

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