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MS. ERBE: This week on To the Contrary, the end of flex time? Then “sexting,” teens battle authorities over prosecution for texting suggestive pictures to friends. Behind the headlines, U.S. Representative Linda Sanchez on becoming the first unwed mother in Congress.

(Musical break.)

MS. ERBE: Hello, I’m Bonnie Erbe and welcome to To the Contrary, a discussion of news and social trends from diverse perspectives. Up first, work and family.

Work-life balance is no longer just a women’s issue. In fact, it may be having a greater impact on the lives of working men than women, this according to a new study by the Families and Work Institute, which finds the number of men stressed by the work-family juggle has dramatically increased during the last 30 years. In 1977, one third of men in a dual-earner couple said they experience work family conflict. Today, the figure is closer to 60 percent. The number of mothers reporting conflict only rose by a few percentage points, showing men are doing more of the housework. But that could change as cash trapped companies do away with flex time. Work-life balance advocates say the shrinking economy is reversing progress for women, reducing fringe benefits such as telecommuting, paid sick leave, and maternity or paternity leave.

So Nancy Pfotenhauer, is the recession going to set back progress that women and men have made on the work-life balance front?

MS. PFOTENHAUER: I think it’s going to pressure all forms of compensation across the board. So your salary, your time off, any type of flexibility, bonuses, everybody’s going to be pulling very hard just to keep the jobs they have.

MS. SOSA: I hope not. I definitely think we can make the case that work-life balance programs are good for economic recovery.

MS. SETMAYER: To say that it’s going to roll back 20 years of progress I think it’s somewhat melodramatic, but this is a tough economic time and companies are going to adjust accordingly.

MS. SISKIND: This is a classic example of why women’s issues are men’s issues.

MS. ERBE: Is this why – are we – are younger Americans making progress, Amy Siskind – and welcome to the show –

MS. SISKIND: Thank you.
MS. ERBE: – are men more worried about work-life juggle than women these days because more young men are sharing the childcare and work around the house, or is it that they’re just sort of just thinking and worrying about it more, but not doing much about it?

MS. SISKIND: Well, here’s what we know. There’s a wage gap between men and women and the maternity wage gap says that women who are single make 10 percent less than men, doing a comparable job, whereas women who are married with children make 27 percent less than men. So this is becoming a family issue for dual earning income families. And especially in a tough economy like this, it really impacts families. And it goes to show that some legislation, such as the Paycheck Fairness Act, to change this and to give women equal pay and this will help our families make it through this tough recession.

MS. ERBE: Don’t we just need a whole lot of bullwhips to use on the males in the family? (Laughter.)

MS. PFOTENHAUER: I could certainly use a few in my – (inaudible) – verbally, but actually I’m going to – I’d disagree with Amy with what the data shows. I think if you look at longitudinal studies that adjust for things like decisions to come out of the workforce at different times for education and timeout, lack of continuous (years in?) the workforce, you see most pay disparities disappeared – not all, but most. I think the important thing, though, here that is underscored in both analyses is that women still tend to make decisions based on the needs of their family. So we are the first ones that feel this pressure when the work-family balance stuff starts to get out of balance.

MS. ERBE: But not according to this – not according to this study.

MS. PFOTENHAUER: I think it’s still – all I said is that the historical data that I see still shows that women are much more likely to change jobs, to take time out of the workforce. I have not run into a lot of men making those decisions, but that’s anecdotal. I do think we’ve become a more egalitarian society that it’s now accepted that men make it to football games and basketball games and do a little more work around the house.

MS. SOSA: And the other thing we need to factor in is the economic crisis that we’re finding ourselves, in which they’re showing that more men are using losing jobs that women. So you’re going to have a lot of households and with the data showing that the female or the mom, if there is kids, is the provider of that household. So there’s going to be so many changes happening as a result of that –

MS. ERBE: Yes, but let me ask you this. Is this – the study was referred to as a tipping point in the whole work-life – in other words, this has been going on for 20–30 years now with more men doing more around the house, but –
MS. SOSA: The study was about attitudes and I think was she was talking was actual data on where the salaries are and I think we know what we’re hoping that history shows us in that is going to caught up – the attitude is going to – that the salaries and the jobs that women have are going to caught up with the attitude of men and women about the work.

MS. SETMAYER: Well, it did seem that with the study that a lot of it was anecdotal because they said there was little empirical data on this, whether it be the relationship between recession and the change in work life balance. But it just seems to me like this is commons sense. You adapt – you evolve based on your environment. If you’re in a family – a two-parent working family, you do that mostly out of necessity because you have to. Those are choices you make in your life. If you have children, then you know you need more money to bring home and take care of your kids. If you’re at a job where flexibility is not an issue for you, then you have to make certain choices about it. Maybe your kid can’t go to –

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: But what I’m trying to find out, though, is men in their 30s – 20s, 30s, maybe even early 40s – is there a general – generational difference between them and the boomer who still were mainly women stay home –

MS. SETMAYER: I think so absolutely.

(Cross talk.)

MS. SOSA: I was just going to say that women start out in their 20s with men, making the same wage and having the same percentage of being the general population in corporate America. But as time goes on, there’s a real difference. Only 15 percent of corporate American management right now is women. It’s a real issue. And again, this is a classic example of how it impacts men as well because you have dual-family incomes who in this type of economic climate are really having a tough time making it, and it’s because the woman in the family is discriminated against in her pay and therefore can’t pull her weight in the family.

MS. ERBE: Patricia?

MS. SOSA: And then again we’re talking about structural issues. You’re talking about attitudes. Yes, attitudes may be there, but the structure and the laws are not there. And that’s what we need to change.

MS. PFOTENHAUER: There’re two things going on and you have to separate attitudes and data because the data might catch up with the attitudes, but it’s just not there yet. Attitudinally I think I witnessed in my lifetime a big difference in fathers, particularly their attitude. They want to now be viewed as good dads. Before it was like they phoned it in. At least – I’m sorry, dad, but you phoned it in. (Laughter.)
Now, from an economic standpoint as far as how women are compensated, the last big study that was done of all the studies, and it was done by impartial government entity, said, yes, the disparity exists, but you cannot impute discrimination for the very points that I said – that because there is individual choice involved and when you – how long you stay at the job and how often you go in and out of the workforce. That gets it how we, as moms, view our jobs. We may want to change that, but until our behavior changes – and I’m not sure it should. I’m certainly not going to judge someone else if they want to take time off and raise their kids. I’ve done it. But your earnings are going to be impacted by that.

MS. SETMAYER: And it’s important – you made a great point about why my generation – I’m in my early 30s – why my generation is starting to see the importance of having a present father because my mom’s generation, the boomer generation, father was definitely absent. And that I think emotionally took a toll on how their kids were raised. So I think now that the data has shown that and dads realize that, you know what, it’s important for me to play a role in my kid’s life. And I think that’s reflected here too.

MS. ERBE: All right. From workplace flexibility to teens and technology. This week three Pennsylvania teens and their mothers filed suit to enjoin a prosecutor from charging them with violating child pornography laws – that after the texted seminude shots of themselves to friends. This is called “sexting,” a growing phenomenon in which kids use cell phones to send sexually explicit photos. In this case, the prosecutor ordered the girls to attend a class on pornography and sexual violence or face criminal charges. The students refused the deal and face jail time if convicted.

But this isn’t an isolated case. Law enforcement officials in several states are cracking down on sexting. They say taking racy shots could be the equivalent of producing child pornography. Texting it to friends should be considered the equivalent of distributing child pornography, and receiving and keeping the pictures could be viewed by the law as possession of pornography. Critics say the charges don’t fit the crime and sexting needs to be solved as a social problem, not a criminal problem. Twenty two percent of girls, 18 percent of boys, and 33 percent of young adults say they have electronically sent or posted nude or seminude images of themselves.

So, Patricia, should the authorities be cracking down on them like this Pennsylvania prosecutor did for violating child pornography laws because they sent – these girls sent pictures apparently of themselves in their bras to their boyfriends?

MS. SOSA: I think it’s overreacting, but I call this the X-rated generation and I use the term X-rated because I thought they were overexposed with Facebook and texting and – (inaudible) – everything, but now – it’s probably it’s also because of – (inaudible) – and – but I think it’s a totally overreaction. This is a social issue that should have a social solution. It’s not a criminal issue. And my main concern is some of the states are using pornography laws and have a reason to be that are not about teenagers sending pictures of each other wearing their bras. So I think it’s an inappropriate use of a legal recourse. So
I think the debate should turn into parental involvement, school involvement, which as I understand the place where a lot of these pictures are being sound. And a solution that is not bad, what isn’t punishing for the kids.

MS. SETMAYER: I agree with that. I think making this criminal is ridiculous. But there should be a price to pay. We were discussing that earlier what that price should be. I’m not quite sure, but I don’t think it should be charged under child pornography laws. We have liberals and conservatives argue about whether you can legislate morality or not and that – does that apply here too? I don’t know.

MS. ERBE: But I mean, isn’t once you get into that so-called slippery slope on judging what’s pornographic and what isn’t, is sending a picture of yourself in a bra when you’ve got these Dove commercials on billboards versus does it have to be nude, all those –

MS. SETMAYER: Right and parents need to be involved. We’re talking about minors here. This is all about our parents’ involvement in their kids’ lives, do they know what’s going on. And I have friends, some of my – you know, people I’ve grown up with their kids that are now doing this. Their 15-year-old daughter got caught doing this exact same thing because they were involved and they saw and they put an end to that. And she learned. Now, how they chose to reprimand her was up to them, but they just need – kids need to know that there are consequences for their actions these days and they’re not.

MS. SISKIND: I want to pick up on something you said on the billboards, Bonnie, because this is a national crisis for our young girls, our teenage girls. There’s a sexualization now of our young girls and they’re being taught that their self worth is based on how attractive they are. And they see it on the billboards – and this is the way it’s manifesting itself because they get the message from the music, from watching movies, from watching the TV shows, from the billboards and the magazines around them. And the way it’s manifesting itself, which is, again, a real national problem is that our high school girls and junior high school girls are experiencing escalating rates of the early precursors of domestic violence. And now one in three girls who date are concerned that they will be physically harmed by their teenage boyfriends. Thirty percent are sent text messages that are basically stalking messages from their boyfriends. So this is something that we need to start talking about and a have a national dialogue about.

MS. PFOTENHAUER: I was just going to say I agree with you. I think technology has kind of turbocharged the sexualization of the teenagers and it’s downright frightening. And no matter how involved you try to be as a parent, it’s almost like you have to put your child in a bubble to keep them from being exposed to this. And it’s – it is incredibly frightening. I don’t know how we get a handle on it. And my guess is you just got some folks who are having a hard time imposing consequences themselves to actions that kids are taking and therefore trying to almost use the heavy hand of the law to say, well, I can’t make you stop or I can’t – you know, I confiscated your cell phone,
your computer, your everything and it’s still happening. And so they’re almost relying on that because they feel frustrated –

MS. ERBE: Last word, Amy.

MS. SISKIND: We need a national dialogue on this. I mean, violence against women –

MS. ERBE: Well, what do you think is the solution to – let’s start with the teens’ sexting: what’s the right approach, and quickly please because –

MS. SISKIND: Consciousness. We need to start a national dialogue, recognize that there’s an issue not only for teenage girls but for women in this country with violence. And start talking about how it manifests itself early – this is an early precursor.

MS. SETMAYER: Programs in high schools, like they did with alcohol and drunk driving, do see – let kids see the consequences of what this does. It needs to change attitudinally.

MS. ERBE: All right. Behind the headlines, single, pregnant, and a member of Congress. California Democrat Linda Sanchez made news with her recent announcement. She’s expecting a baby. Although she’s in a serious relationship, no wedding plans are in the works, making her the first unmarried woman to be pregnant while serving in Congress. I sat down with her to discuss why she and her partner decided to go against social norms and put baby before marriage.

(Begin video segment.)

REP. LINDA SANCHEZ (D-CA): Well, everybody’s situation is a little bit different. Mine – I’ve been a committed long-term relationship with someone. We’ve been discussing marriage and engagement. We have been. And I went for my annual exam and my gynecologist talked to me because I have expressed some interest in wanting to have children. It’s something I’ve always wanted to do. And she said, well, if I were you, I wouldn’t put it off. You should start immediately on that project to avoid things like having to do fertility treatments.

So discussing that with my partner, we decided to go ahead and move forward with that first because the window of opportunity was rapidly closing, and decided to postpone the marriage and wedding part of that until later. This is our singular focus right now.

MS. ERBE: Now, tell me about your family’s reaction, your constituents’ reaction.

REP. SANCHEZ: Well, interestingly enough, it’s been very positive from constituents and I think that’s because they know the work that I do in the district. They
see me in the district quite often and know that I’m a passionate advocate for the needs and concerns that they have. My family is thrilled. I come from a large family of seven kids. My mother has three grandchildren and she’s been bugging us for grandkids. Maybe she had just probably about given up on me when I have met Jim and things looked like they’re going in a very positive direction. So she’s thrilled.

MS. ERBE: How have your colleagues in the House responded?

REP. SANCHEZ: Everybody’s been very supportive. I’ve been particularly seeking out a couple of a few more members who also themselves gave birth recently and to get advice on preparing for the birth and handling responsibilities of the job after birth because that’s also going to be a big component is learning to balance working life and being a mom. And I know that thousands of women – hundreds of thousands of women do that every day in this country, and so I know it’s difficult, but I know it’s not impossible.

MS. ERBE: And this is a very tough question, but allow me to ask it please. Have you thought about teen pregnancy, unwed pregnancy in the Latina community? Have you thought about that they will take you – you’re an incredibly credentialed, accomplished woman, so do you think your young constituents will think, well she did it, I can do it.

REP. SANCHEZ: It’s really interesting that people would even compare the two situations because I think they’re vastly different. One thing that people seem to lose in the whole mix of this; this was very much a planned pregnancy. I have the financial wherewithal and the emotional wherewithal to be a mother, something that I – (inaudible) – some time. And it’s a very different scenario than being a teenager who hasn’t finished high school who has no job or career. And for some reason, people want to equate the two things. I think this – (inaudible) – has been to say to somebody, go to college and successfully complete that. Go to law school. Get elected to Congress when you’re 33 years old. Blaze trails in the Congress and wait until you’re 39 to get pregnant with your first child. I don’t think that that’s – I’m being a bad role model. I think it shows planning and timing considerations and I think it shows something that’s a well thought out plan.

Well, I think it’s an incredible teachable moment. It’s – that’s why I talk about it. I could just decide not to say anything, but I think it’s important that young adults understand the ramifications of their actions. And my hope is that my message gets out, particularly to the folks in my district, although across the United States. And one of the things I think can help is responsible reporting of my situation versus that of an unwed teenage mother.

As far as movie stars are concerned, I think probably if you polled the youth of today, most of them don’t know who the vice president of the United States is, much less their member of Congress. So I think if you want to talk about the impact that movie stars have on youth, I think it’s a hundredfold bigger than that of elected officials. And
that’s not to diminish elected officials; we work hard, but we just don’t have the same kind of celebrity.

MS. ERBE: And in terms of the historicity of your – you are making history. You’re the first. And women are running out of firsts. Is that what you want as your legacy?

REP. SANCHEZ: Well, it wasn’t something that I sought out and said, gee, this is an area where I can really be the first on this. But if you look at governments around the world, women in much higher positions in Europe and in Latin America have children and are not married. It doesn’t impact their ability to do their job and serve their countries well and –

MS. ERBE: (Inaudible) – in Chile –

REP. SANCHEZ: Absolutely and I think that there are still some very strong stereotypes about working mothers and about marriage that I think we need to sit back and evaluate say that if this person does her job and they do it well and they’re serving their constituency well, the fact that they’re not married and they have children doesn’t make that a bad person.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: Tara Setmayer, I first want to thank Congresswoman Sanchez for having done this because, as she said herself, she could have hid in the corners and not – she’s been very media friendly on this topic. So regardless of whether one supports her decision or not, you have to admire her as a human being. But given all that, your thoughts?

MS. SETMAYER: Well, this is disappointing to me. I’m the product of a single parent. My mother was a single parent until I was 15. And there is nothing glamorous about single motherhood. And just because she has the wherewithal financially – she makes $174,000 a year – that’s great, but her circumstances are not what the normal unwed mothers’ circumstances are.

MS. ERBE: Well, let me ask you this. Do you agree with her that kids can make a distinction between that this was planned on her part and she’s where she is in her life and their own situation?

MS. SETMAYER: No, I don’t think that that’s the message that we should be – I don’t think that we should be – we should glorifying that or that we should – she should make that distinction. When did fathers become dispensable? They’re not. And the fact that she’s making a decision, well, we’re going to get married later – well, to me it’s concerning because kids nowadays, they don’t make those decisions. Fathers are important. The statistics show how difficult today is emotionally, regardless –
MS. ERBE: Quickly because we are running out of time.

MS. SOSA: I admire her. This is not the same – this is not about single parenting. She’s not going to be a single mother. She has the partner, she plans to marry the partner. It’s about the order in which she’s done things and she’s documented and she’s been open to talk about responsible behavior. And we live in a free society where people can marry or not marry to have kids. And they can still do a responsible job. And she’s saying she’s doing it.

MS. PFOTENHAUER: I wish her well. It’s a hard road to get down, even with a partner or without. I was married and then divorced and then married again. And it’s a tough – it’s a tough job. So I wish her well. I do have to agree, though, that I don’t think kids will make the distinction. We try – at least, my kids won’t make the decision. This is – (inaudible) – a lot of things and they really tend to select what works for their argument at any given time and apply it to the situation to rationalize what they’re doing. That’s been my observation and so I am afraid that even if she doesn’t want that to occur, that it will occur.

MS. SISKIND: Well, my point is if this was Congressman Sanchez, we wouldn’t be having this discussion. And there’s a dual standard for men and women.

MS. ERBE: I’m not sure about that. I’m not sure about that. We would certainly want to be interviewing the first guy in Congress to father a child out of wed –

(Cross talk.)

MS. SISKIND: – but the problem is we saw this in the 2008 election, the way Secretary of State Clinton and Governor Palin were treated. Much – not only them, but their children and families are held to a different standard and that’s why we have such a shockingly low representation of women in government. That’s why we’re 84th in the world in a recent IP study that just came out. (Inaudible) – concerned about running for office because they’re treated so harshly and judged so harshly in ways that men are not.

MS. ERBE: So you’re saying that – I’m saying not a guy like Strom Thurmond, who may or may – apparently –

MS. SISKIND: I’m saying this was out of –

MS. ERBE: – I’m talking about a guy who openly decides to have children with a longtime partner first before marriage.

MS. SISKIND: I think this is out of bounds and I think talking about this type of thing discourages people when you bring in their personal life into running into office. And that’s why we have such a low representation of women.

MS. ERBE: Quickly, Tara.
MS. SETMAYER: It’s part of public life. She made that decision. She’s openly talking about it, so we have every right to have an opinion and to scrutinize it. And I think absolutely if it were a man on the other side and having the same discussion that we – I would be just as outraged because illegitimacy is damaging to children. Studies have shown it and this is not something that we should be glorifying by any means.

MS. ERBE: All right. That’s it for this edition of To the Contrary. Next week, demand surpasses supply at the nation’s food banks. Please join us on the web for “To the Contrary Extra” and whether your views are in agreement or to the contrary, please join us next time.

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