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THE WASHINGTON TIMES**

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MS. ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, states struggle to keep track of registered sex offenders. Then, what is a bumpaholic? Behind the headlines: H4 visas bar immigrant wives from working.

(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, tracking sex offenders.

The disturbing case of Jaycee Lee Dugard, the kidnapping and rape victim freed last week after 18 years of captivity has many questioning how states treat sex offenders who've served time and tried to return to society. All 50 states have sex offender registries easily accessible on the Internet. But some legal experts say they instill a false sense of security. There is no national registry and monitoring varies from state to state. Nationwide there are close to 700,000 registered sex offenders ranging from repeat offenders with lengthy records to 18-year-olds having sex with underage teens. Some legal analysts say the lack of consistency state to state and the workload of maintaining a registry are creating a system with serious loopholes.

So Congresswoman Norton, does the Jaycee Dugard case cry out for some national, federal tracking system for sex offenders?

DEL. NORTON (D-DC): Certainly, Bonnie, with a very tough lesson to stop paper-working everything that looks like sex and concentrate on hardcore sex offenders.

MS. CZARNECKI: We need to do a lot more. Even after the Congress passed a law in 2006, states had three years to have some type of a uniformed system but it's simply not enough.

MS. BENNETT: Yes, absolutely. I mean, I'm a former sexual abuse survivor and rape survivor myself and I can tell you, this is hard, hard stuff. So anything we can do in our society to send a clear message, this is not acceptable. But I've got to say at the same time we've got to make sure that we have legislation that protects women, allows them to be independent, and allows them to provide for themselves at the same time – it goes together.

MS. CARPENTER: I think it would be tempting to look at new laws that should be enacted but there was a breakdown in the systems in place. Law enforcement visited that house, knew the name was on the registry, and didn't go in after they got complaints. So I think the fault lies with those officers.

MS. ERBE: All right. So – exactly, when you look at what's been discovered ex post her release, her being freed from captivity, there was him following in his van,

apparently, on Google maps when they were mapping his street; he had his first victim for whom he went to jail, not his first victim, worked at a casino in Nevada, he got out of jail 11 years later showed up, tracked her down, again, to scare the bejesus out of her, and there were – and they went to his house in July of '08 to check and they didn't notice all the craziness in the backyard. So there were several places where this – you know, the fire could have been put out a lot sooner and it didn't happen.

MS. BENNETT: Well, that 911 call from the neighbors that said that there's children in the backyard; you're absolutely correct on this. I mean, in order for us to fight this kind of stuff, we all have to hold ourselves responsible including the law enforcement officers that were there. They got sweet talked out of not even going into that house.

DEL. NORTON: Well, this is – you know, this is really – there's a lot of malpractice law enforcement. But think about what we're asking the law enforcement to do. You know, these are good guys, girls – these law enforcement folks. You give them a bunch of paperwork and you keep adding newer people. And they include a 16-year-old who had sex with a 15-year-old and that life gets ruined forever because you've got to keep track of this kid even though, of course, we've been throwing sex at this kid – I mean, all the media, and the CDs, and the rest. So we spend a lot of time on that and rather than saying, look, let's divide out these people and concentrate on this group of people because they need real oversight.

MS. ERBE: Well, why can't that be done and why isn't that –

DEL. NORTON: Because it's state by state; because it's state by state law enforcement.

MS. ERBE: But doesn't that call for a – you know, get rid of the state registries and put them all in the same computer and have a federal registry?

DEL. NORTON: No. The federal registry – you would think that's not rocket science and that is taking so long. I agree with you to do that. It's an outrage. But after you do that, look at what we're going to have to really do. It's all about enforcement. Who is going to go out there and look at the people – I won't say guys – that you really have to look at.

MS. CZARNECKI: And law enforcement is so overwhelmed right now. They just can't keep track. There've a change every single decade to these sex offender laws and trying to track them. Police officers can't keep up. The Adam Walsh law that was passed in 2006 essentially said you have to have the same criteria across the states. And ultimately, at the end of this year, next year, we will have a database. But part of that law also said you have to have community notifications. Right now, the states don't have to do that and a lot of them don't. Just putting up – (inaudible) – thing.

MS. ERBE: Well, isn't that why all of them – a whole bunch of them lived in that same area as where Garrido was living?

MS. CZARNECKI: Yes, because you have to be – a lot of state laws say you can't be X feet from a school or a library or a bus stop and there happens to be nothing in that area. That's why there's a high concentration, all the more reason you would have thought the law enforcement would have done a better job knowing that there was such a high concentration of sex offenders.

MS. CARPENTER: Yes, I mean, just the thing about this, I cannot get past the fact that an officer was at the house, knew about complaints, didn't bother to check the list, and these poor girls were harmed for their life.

DEL. NORTON: But this is pro-forma law enforcement – things that you've got a list, check in once a year, go to the next house. But I blame the system far more than the law officers. It seems to me when they are held accountable for whether they went to a gazillion households, you're inviting them to do very little oversight.

MS. ERBE: But let me ask you this: he could have been – clearly this guy is schizophrenic or un-medicated seriously mentally ill person. He was talking in the '70s when he got arrested about how he was turning his life around and he found God. He was telling that to the first kidnap victim. So can there be a distinction made between clearly – and, by the way, that's how he was found in Berkley by the female police officer, or security guard, who saw him come to the campus asking for – I forget what – with the two girls. She noticed he was clearly disturbed. The girls were staring straight up in the sky. This was clearly a sick family and she's the one who blew the whistle on him to begin with. That's how he was caught. If somebody is so obviously mentally ill, why are they let out, period?

MS. CZARNECKI: I think we have a problem with our sentencing laws. He had a 50-year sentence and only served 11 years. And that's common in a lot of these cases. And when it comes to sex offenders –

MS. ERBE: But let me play devil's advocate with you because if you – there are some guys with some crimes who shouldn't serve the whole 50 years. They don't need to. How do you balance the rights of, I guess, some sex offenders who may be able to reform and should be allowed to go back into society and live a normal life versus the Garridos of the world?

MS. CZARNECKI: There are three levels of sex offender: it's one, two, and three, and based upon the severity and the circumstances around the crime, that's how they categorize you and that's how they release you from jail. I think that he was admitting to some folks during his jail time that there were other people, other victims that were out there but, you know, it fell on deaf ears. I don't know how you're supposed to do this. Literally, if somebody serves their time, they should be able to go back in the

community but the high recidivism rate, the high re-offense rate is large for sex offenders, so we have to do more.

DEL. NORTON: Yes. And one that would help is to look at those sex offenders who can in fact be medicated and those who cannot. But if they're all thrown into the same barrel then we get the kind of result ultimately – hopefully never again – that we got here.

MS. ERBE: All right. From protecting children to making them.

This week, the Duggar family from Arkansas announced the upcoming birth of a 19th child. Parents Jim Bob and Michelle have gained national attention for their reality TV show and their controversial religious beliefs. The Duggars are followers of the Quiverfull movement, which promotes large families and shuns birth control in the name of God. With more media attention on family such as the Duggars and the Gosselins from “Jon and Kate plus Eight,” some question whether some women are becoming so called bumpaholics, addicted to pregnancy. Some psychologists say women who are eager to reproduce view having more children as an alternative to addressing personal insecurities. In 2007, American women birthed more than 4.3 million babies, the highest number ever, and more than a quarter of those births were to women having their third or fourth child.

So two separate questions really: are we seeing a growth in the number of female bumpaholics in this country? And secondly, what do we think about a family with 19 children?

MS. BENNETT: I'll start with the first question. All research shows that the countries that make sure that their women have access to reproductive choices and options are the countries that thrive. I think this is an example of the media sensationalizing something rather than reporting on what's good governance and good for this country. We have families of this size; you have to ask very serious questions. This family happens to be affluent. They can afford this many kids. What about those families that can't afford it? They end up being a burden on our government and on society. Some really, really tough issues being brought up here.

MS. ERBE: But I think there was – the octomom, who was on welfare, was widely panned in the media and by viewers and consumers of media as being selfish to have eight kids on top of however many she had before that she couldn't afford. But I also think, are there not environmental concerns? I mean, are we not in an era where – and I think this question must be asked. We're the most highly consumptive nations in the country. We, per person, have the highest carbon footprints. When you have 19 children – forget about whether you can properly – whether two people can properly parent 19 people – which I think is an impossibility – but secondly, what about the environmental effects that they're going to leave behind?

MS. CZARNECKI: People who choose to have 19 or 20 children don't think about any environmental effects. They just – I mean, they're not going to worry about reproductive rights. They're not going to worry about any of this stuff. They're doing what they think is right based upon their religious or their family status. I personally don't know why people watch these type of shows, but I guess it's because they want to get a – I mean, everybody likes to view something on the other side. If you only have one or two children or no children it's an anomaly; it's a strangeness. You must be a – what's that – Monday morning quarterback and have to have a say of how they're raising or not raising their kids very well.

DEL. NORTON: Well, you know, this isn't China and we're not going to tell people how many children to have. One of the most exceptional things – wait a minute.

MS. ERBE: No. But we can educate people as to the environmental effects of having that many children.

DEL. NORTON: Before we get to the environmental effects, let's educate people about the effects on women and families. Of course, you know, I'm a big environmentalist. I drove here in a hybrid. But before that, I remembered what labor was like and I can't understand people saying, oh, let's have another baby. (Laughter.) Maybe some people forget. I found it a fairly unforgettable experience. (Laughter.)

But beyond that, I think the society generally – not enough, especially if you see more women having three and four children, but I think that once we said abortion is a constitutional right, you have the right to use as much birth control or as little as you want – once we took that off, things – here's the pill – things began to happen in this country that were absolutely dramatic. In fact, we went to at one point under two. Now we're back up. I don't know why we think we're so affluent now that we can begin to go back up. I do think –

MS. ERBE: So you're saying this is sort of a backlash against the reproductive freedoms women started to enjoy in the '60s and '70s?

DEL. NORTON: No. In fact, I think this is quite a rarity. I think the message has sunk in: not good for you, not good for the family –

MS. BENNETT: Not good for the country.

DEL. NORTON: Not good for people because people break up and children are left to themselves. And I think the fact that these people are on television tells us that this is an oddity in America and people are looking at them like they're in a zoo.

MS. BENNETT: And that's exactly right. I said this is about the media being sensationalist rather than accurate. And you know, the media can go there if they want but that's why people tune in.

MS. ERBE: But also, I do want – I want to raise a comment that I saw on a blog about the Duggars which is one woman said, I was one of 14. I was born in 1939. It's nobody's business but the family's. Is that true?

MS. CZARNECKI (?): But they're on TV now.

MS. ERBE: Is it true that it's nobody's business but the families'? From my perspective, if you're sucking up that much environmental resources, it's other people's business now. In 1939, different story, but now there are other concerns.

MS. CARPENTER: Well, I do watch the Duggar show and I do think they – they buy all second hand garments. They live very frugally. I think that's part of their religious belief. But there's a difference between somebody like the octomom and the Duggars. The octomom was clearly not stable. I think the Duggars are. You may not agree with their religious perspectives or the traditional way that they're raising their children but they all seem well adjusted, happy, and they're so cute they'll make you sick. But that's part of the spectacle. That's why people tune in because this is so unbelievable and it's also somewhat of a logistical accomplishment to watch how they go through feeding their family and all that kind of stuff.

MS. BENNETT: “Cheaper by the Dozen.” It's like watching “Cheaper by the Dozen” is what it's like.

DEL. NORTON: It's very important, something important may be happening here. You know, in the society there are people who should have children and lots of children. They like children. They're good with children. They do the kinds of things – and guess what? There are lots of people who shouldn't. And I would just as soon see the world divided into people like the Duggars – you want to have them? Okay, you have them – because over here we're not having many rather than to say, hey, all of you people must have two children. Those of you who shouldn't have any, and those of you like the Duggars. It's a free society. And what I am grateful – I am grateful to be a pro-choice woman who believes that as we get deeper and deeper into the generations, the education gets better and better.

MS. BENNETT: And, you know, it really boils down to choice. I don't think we should be in the position in this country to dictate how many kids you have. That's not why this country was founded. But let's make sure everybody has a choice.

MS. ERBE: No. And let me make it clear to you too: I'm not proposing limits. I'm proposing sensitizing –

MS. BENNETT: Absolutely.

MS. ERBE: – people to the impact that they're having outside of their own little world. And I think there should be more of that.

Behind the headlines: this Labor Day weekend, we take a look at the lives of immigrant women on H4 visas. These women want to work but their immigration status bans them from paid employment. They come to the U.S. with highly educated husbands here on work visas. While many of these women had lucrative careers back home, here in the States, they become financially dependant on their husbands. One H4 veteran has made a documentary about these often invisible women and explains why it feels as though their lives are suspended.

(Begin video segment.)

MEGHNA DAMANI [Former H4 Visa Holder]: A lot of a sense of self-worth, our meaning in life comes from what we do. And we have so many associations around that we don't even realize until we don't have it anymore. So I think a lot of just who the person I was I felt like I just left that person – not even I left, but like that person was just cut off from me the moment I landed in this country.

MS. ERBE: That person, Meghna Damani, used to be was a model with an MBA and a career in advertising. But all of that ended when she moved to the U.S. with her husband. While he was granted an H1B work visa, she received an H4 dependant visa barring her from working. She said her new status left her so depressed and isolated she contemplated suicide.

MS. DAMANI: You have dreams and visions for you life and you know that this – and being able to work is one of the things you take for granted. So it's really like losing who you were and losing who you could become because (you're not ?) going to become that person if you had continued – if life had continued the way it was.

SHIVALI SHAH [Immigration Attorney]: The minute they – these couples land in the U.S. they're told, you're husband is here and you are here. Anything you want, you need to ask your husband for.

MS. ERBE: Immigration lawyer Shivali Shah has spent the last decade representing and conducting research on women with H4 visas.

MS. SHAH: These women are not given Social Security cards or Social Security numbers, no Social Security cards. In many states they're not allowed drivers licenses. In the states they are allowed drivers licenses, the process is very long and difficult. I mean, when we think about what's in our own wallets, like the things that I carry in my wallet, every single thing that's in there are things that these women need to either get through their husbands or they're not allowed to have. It's like being perpetually without your wallet while you're in the U.S.

MS. ERBE: Women in abusive relationships can become more vulnerable with H4 visas.

MS. SHAH: In the situations that are abusive, it is devastating for the women because they don't have their own money to do anything. I mean, forget leaving and getting their own apartment. The clients that I work with, they don't have money to make phone calls to attorneys, to their families back home.

MS. DAMANI: As I think the rule set up itself is abusive, whether it is intended or not, because the rule set up that, you know, you're just dependant on this one person for everything.

MS. ERBE: About three-quarters of H4 visa holders are women but very few speak openly about the obstacles they face. Damani hopes her documentary, "Heart Suspended," will bring more of an understanding of what these women go through.

MS. DAMANI: A lot of the men who've seen the trailer on nine and whose husbands have had a chance to see it, their husbands for the first time they're understanding what they're going through because a lot of times, even my own husband, he felt like it's just me complaining or me going through this. It's just me. But when he saw me interviewing other women, for the first time he could understand that, oh, because they were saying everything that I was saying.

MS. SHAH: At first blush, what it seems like is that these women are just bored housewives and how hard is your life. You're having to sit at home and cook and watch TV. We should all be so lucky that we're forced not to work. It's extremely insulting and condescending to tell somebody that wants to work, that wants to be a full-fledged member of society that they can't because of their immigration status. And what does this say about America that we're inviting families to live here and we're telling them that the husband can work and live here as a full-fledged human being but – oh, but if you're going to bring your wife here, she needs to stay at home.

MS. ERBE: Shah continues to lobby on behalf of H4 women but says it's up to the U.S. government to fix it.

MS. SHAH: We should have at least what other developed nations offer the spouses of their high skilled workers which is to allow them, give them work authorization.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: Your thoughts, Karen Czarnecki. You worked at the Labor Department. Is this a call for change in work visas?

MS. CZARNECKI: No, it's not. While I empathize with the situation these women are in, this is a family decision before they come here. They know what their status is going to be. And with unemployment at 9.7 percent and the highest in 26 years, I don't think you're going to find a lot of policymakers wanting to make changes just to help individuals who choose to come to this country. Their husbands – predominantly

husbands – get visas for six years and they can then apply for a green card. They might have to wait it out 10 years, but quite frankly, I don't think that we're going to make it a two for one: if one gets in, you both get in and get a H4 visa.

MS. ERBE: Why do we even – the husbands get the HB4s, right?

MS. CZARNECKI: No. If the husband is getting IT work, going to Silicone Valley or someplace else, immediate family members, spouse and children under 21, get the H4 visa and they're allowed to come here.

MS. ERBE: Why don't we change it so that's not – you get a visa for one and that's it? You get a visa for one –

DEL. NORTON: Could I say – because I want to second the emotion there. Karen – (inaudible) – I agree with you. (Laughter.) You know, I greatly sympathize with these women. The feminism in me sympathizes with these women. The congresswoman in me says, wait one moment. Look who these women are. They're almost all upper cast, if I may say so, women. These are not your average women coming here. They have had the ability to come here and live. They made a family decision. Meanwhile, we're accommodating many legal and illegal residents from all over the United States. We give a special visa to her husband. I don't know. Then the feminism in me shouts, hey, wait a minute. Why should it be two for one? We're giving a visa to him because he's applied for it and because he has a skill others here do not have. Who knows that she has such a skill? What is to say that she isn't competing with the 9.4 million American workers who can't find jobs? And why should we – why should we say, you who get every privilege in India, privileges that are denied to almost all in India, you get special treatment when you come to this country. Love you, but not that treatment. Wait your turn.

MS. CARPENTER: Yes, I do think it's sad that our economy and our laws can't make room for someone that's qualified like the woman shown in that documentary, but it is not a job qualification to be married to a man who's accepted for that reason. It's just not how it goes.

MS. ERBE: Well, they did say, however, in the documentary, 75 percent of the H4 holders are female. That means 25 percent are men, which is interesting too.

MS. BENNETT: Well, I think if we look at this from a legislative standpoint, there's an unintended consequence here. You know, we need some of this skilled labor to come in because we don't have it here.

MS. ERBE: Well, wait a minute. That's debatable too but –

MS. BENNETT: Well, it is. I mean, those laws were made for a reason though. Those laws were made for a reason. They didn't come out of thin air, Bonnie.

MS. ERBE: Yes, but they were made for the reason that Bill Gates decided he wanted cheaper labor.

DEL. NORTON: No, no, no. It's really far more complicated.

MS. BENNETT: It's far more complicated than that.

DEL. NORTON: We cannot find workers –

MS. BENNETT: We can't find them here.

DEL. NORTON: – at the skill level that they are in India, I can tell you that. Even though we have lots of IT workers, these people are the crème de la crème. But there is an issue here: discrimination and abuse.

MS. BENNETT: Yes.

DEL. NORTON: That's separate from whether or not I should be able to work just like everybody else.

MS. BENNETT: And if I could interject, I think we have an unintended consequence here. This legislation was created to make sure that our nation could remain globally competitive and have the best labor that's out there in the world over here doing stuff for us.

MS. ERBE: As the sister-in-law of a former computer programmer who kept getting –

MS. BENNETT: I'm married to one.

MS. ERBE: Yes, but kept losing jobs to outsourcing in India and finally – and couldn't find work even though there's so much of it that we can't find people here, I beg to differ in terms of the –

MS. BENNETT: But again, the unintended consequences, we have this legislation. We have it. These women are in abusive, potentially abusive situations. There's something we have to deal with. At least let them have some sort of ID, some sort of flexibility.

MS. ERBE: For temporary workers.

MS. BENNETT: Yes.

MS. ERBE: That's it for this edition of *To the Contrary*. Next week, a look at the benefits and barriers for Americans who work into traditional retirement years.

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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