MS. ERBE: This week on “To the Contrary,” Palin takes on Biden while the economy sinks and the Obama campaign rallies. Behind the headlines, for Breast Cancer Awareness Month actress Cynthia Nixon describes her battle with breast cancer.

(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, the VP candidates go at it.

The first and only vice presidential debate broke no new ground, but Governor Sarah Palin’s credibility grew at least a bit as she handled herself without any major gaffes, that following a series of shaky network TV performances. Both candidates emphasized their family credentials, with Governor Palin mentioning repeatedly her role as wife and mother.

GOV. SARAH PALIN (R-AK): (From tape.) Being a mom, being one who is very concerned about a son in the war, about a special needs child, about kids heading off to college, how are we going to pay those tuition bills, about times and Todd and our marriage in our past where we didn’t have health insurance and we know what other Americans are going through as they sit around the kitchen table and try to figure out how are they going to pay out-of-pocket for health care? We’ve been there also, so that connection was important.

MS. ERBE: Senator Biden made clear she wasn’t the only family oriented person on the stage.

SEN. JOE BIDEN (D-DE): (From tape.) The notion that somehow, because I’m a man, I don’t know what it’s like to raise two kids alone, I don’t know what it’s like to have a child you’re not sure is going to make it – I understand. I understand as well as, with all due respect, the governor and anybody else what it’s like for those sitting around the kitchen table.

MS. ERBE: There was one question, however, about congressional legislation, where Senator Biden displayed superior knowledge about a bankruptcy bill and its impact on consumers.

GOV. PALIN: (From tape.) Here again, there have been so many changes in the conditions of our economy in just even these past weeks that there has been more and more revelation made aware now to Americans about the corruption and the greed on Wall Street. We need to look back even two years ago, and we need to be appreciative of John McCain’s call for reform with Fannie Mae, with Freddie Mac, with the mortgage lenders, too, who were starting to really kind of rear that head of abuse. And the colleagues in the Senate weren’t going to go there with him.
SEN. BIDEN: (From tape.) Mortgage holders didn’t pay the price. Only 10 percent of the people who are—have been affected by this whole switch from Chapter 7 to Chapter 13—it gets complicated. But the point of this—Barack Obama saw the glass as half empty. I saw it as half full. We disagreed on that, and 85 senators voted one way, and 15 voted the other way.

MS. ERBE: Earlier in the week, Governor Palin said she believes in a right to privacy in the U.S. Constitution, which she says does not conflict with her adamant belief in no right to abortion, even in cases of rape and incest.

KATIE COURIC: (From tape.) Do you think there is an inherent right to privacy in the Constitution?

GOV. PALIN: (From tape.) I do.

MS. ERBE: This view contradicts most legal scholars, who note the right to privacy was created in the Roe v. Wade decision, which legalized abortion on a national scale. When Couric asked Palin what other Supreme Court decision she disagreed with, she could not name one. She also told her she considers herself to be a feminist. All this happened against the backdrop of a weakening economy, higher jobless figures, Senate passage of the $700 billion bailout bill, which both Senators McCain and Obama supported, and gyrations in the stock market.

Perhaps due to the economy or in part to Governor Palin’s decreasing credibility with the public, national polls showed Senator Barack Obama holding consistent leads ahead of Senator John McCain, something he did not have as recently as two weeks ago. Within those polling numbers, a new Gallup poll shows Obama beating McCain by 13 points among women overall.

So Congresswoman Norton—a and of course, later in the week the House also passed the bailout bill, but a new “Time” magazine poll shows that Governor Palin is now more popular with men than she is with women. Will her debate performance change that?

DEL. NORTON: I don’t know, Bonnie. Women have been scrambling out of Palin territory even before the debate, and with the economic collapse I don’t expect them back anytime soon.

MS. SETMAYER: Well, with the volatility of this election, I think that women will start to come back to listen to Sarah Palin and she certainly didn’t wave a surrender flag last night. She had an excellent performance, so we’ll see.

MS. BEYER: I think Joe Biden was so content driven that he probably brought more women to him during the debate.
MS. CARPENTER: I think it’s incorrect to try to look at the debate for a moment where she said something like, “vote for me and shatter the glass ceiling for women.” She’s not going give you that kind of stump line. And we’re just going to have to see how she performs and if she becomes more substantive.

MS. ERBE: But is stump lines what women are looking for from her or are they looking for an indication that she’s familiar with the issues and an intelligent woman.

MS. CARPENTER: Yes, I think people are still finding out more about her. I think because of her debate performance, she’ll now be able to go out on the campaign trail, do more press conferences. I’m hoping she will do that; maybe hold more town halls. And clearly she thought the debate went well because she gave Joe Biden an open invitation to join her at another event. So we’ll see if he takes her up on that.

DEL. NORTON: She’s going to – she’s going to – she helped herself a lot with her base, and that’s what she’s done all along. But we’ve seen that her favorables have gone down. Her unfavorables are going up. And she’s no more popular – indeed, she’s less popular with the people who decide elections, and that’s independents.

MS. BEYER: And there’re two polls out. One that came out immediately after the debate, the CBS poll showed 46 percent of those independents – and that’s what we’re fighting over in the last month – thought that Biden had prevailed. Only 21 percent were willing to say that they thought Palin had prevailed. And then the very next day, there was another 1,000 sample. They were asked and there was a spread of 70 to 30, so it was pretty definitive.

MS. SETMAYER: Well, there are other polls that showed differently that night, is the other way around, where the Drudge poll, which may not be as scientific, but there’s a whole lot of people that go there, had the complete opposite, where they had Palin overwhelmingly winning. So –

MS. ERBE: But among women I mean. The whole thing has been since Senator Obama got the nomination, whither the Hillary supporters? And for a little while, at least after she was first selected by McCain, it looked like she might draw a considerable percentage of those voters along with her, and now it looks like they’re turning against her. Do you think the debate changed that at all?

MS. SETMAYER: I think what the debate did was to show that she is in fact a legitimate candidate, that she’s not this beauty queen bimbo that’s been portrayed in the last two weeks from the Saturday Night Live skits to some of the other horrible things that have been said about her in the media.

Now, she has not helped herself. She had a rough two weeks. I think the part of that, though, was a complete mishandling of her out of the gate from the McCain campaign. They were too controlling. They were too insulating with her. They put her out in areas that she should not have been in because, no, she doesn’t have the depth of
knowledge that 35-year senators do, but at least she didn’t go out there and misquote the articles in the Constitution when we’re talking about like the other vice president, like Senator Biden did. But are they going to – is he going to be called on the same things that she has been? No –

MS. ERBE: How did he misquote?

MS. SETMAYER: Oh, well he said that Article 1 of the Constitution was discussing the executive branch, where it’s not. It’s the legislative branch. He switched – it’s completely wrong. And he’s in – and someone who’s in the Senator for 35 years, I would hope that they would know that, but they – but the same level of scrutiny isn’t applied.

MS. BEYER: But this debate wasn’t a game of gotcha. What, I think, came across in this debate was a very clear choice and I think Biden really laid it out, and it was that we have a crisis in the economy. We have a crisis in our foreign policy. Do you want to stay with more of the same, which is what John McCain represents, or do you want the change that is the promise of the Obama-Biden ticket? And I think that is what came across during that debate.

MS. ERBE: Amanda, do you think what’s driving more women into the Obama camp at this point in the campaign is what’s going on on Wall Street, even with passage of the congressional bailout bill, or is it Palin’s performance?

MS. CARPENTER: Well, I’m a little bit reluctant to look at Palin and say is she going to move women or not? It seems to me the only reason you look at that is if you believe that Sarah Palin is a play just for women. When I see Sarah Palin – when she got tapped to become VP, she was a play for the energy issue, reform, and outside of Washington. So she needs to bring that back. That said, we’re going to see a lot of swing between women because the economy is so back and forth right now. And I do think that’s going to be the number one voting issue.

DEL. NORTON: Well, the economy unfortunately – very unfortunately is not back and forth right now. After this bailout, we may see – I have no doubt we do – see some stabilization, but the credit markets – if they loosen up, it certainly won’t be for the man in the street and the woman in the street. And that is why I think that Palin can’t help much. Women are looking at the pocketbook. They are the big spenders. They are the ones who, in fact, go out and buy the food and the food prices have been going up. And we are in the midst now of a recession.

MS. ERBE: Why do you think that that is driving more women into the Obama camp because Obama stands for regulation versus McCain standing for deregulation or does Sarah Palin play a role in all that?

DEL. NORTON: Obama has finally got his mojo. He should have been planning on the economy all along. In a very real sense, to be frank, this issue has been handed to
him and he’s picked up on it. And if this issue were, in fact, to come back, if we had a cyclical economy – we went into a cyclical matter now, that’d be one thing, but that’s not what we’re in. And there so much uncertainty here that even McCain’s – I won’t call it a lead, but he had something close to it with older people – that’s turned on its hand because they are closer to their 401(k)s and their retirements. I don’t see – I don’t see which women there are. The younger women were already with Obama. The baby boomers are scared and are the last ones in the middle of this crisis. And then we have the elderly, who are losing the most from it. All the women, it seems to me, are gone.

MS. BEYER: And this is what we saw during the economic crisis. Suddenly these 401(k)s were like evaporating. And AARP has now come out with a very aggressive program asking Congress to please pass that package. And I think the way that both John McCain and Barack Obama handled this economic crisis; it was the equivalent of that 3:00 a.m. phone call.

MS. SETMAYER: Well, there’s a lot of things going on here, a lot of things at play. I think that –

MS. ERBE: Well, let me ask you this, though. Game changer for McCain-Palin, what do they need in the next four weeks? And this has been a campaign like I’ve never witnessed before, where the pendulum has been swinging with great regularity, completely in the opposite direction several times. But he needs a game changer at this point, according to the polls. What could it be?

MS. SETMAYER: Well, I think that the role that Sarah Palin can play in that is that she connects with the average person, average woman. Some people were dismissive of her –

MS. ERBE: But we’re seeing now –

MS. SETMAYER: – I’m going to make a point.

MS. ERBE: – is that really, quite frankly, she’s connecting with Joe Six-Pack, not with his wife.

MS. SETMAYER: Well, but the problem – well, but I think that that’s going to change from this point on. I think she – in the beginning it was because she was being – she was allowed to be who she is and that’s why she was a successful executive in the executive as a governor and as a mayor, and then she was micromanaged and packaged as something that she was clearly out of her comfort zone. And people went, “wait a minute.” And perception is reality, whether it’s true or not. She’s clearly an intelligent woman.

DEL. NORTON: Oh, come on. Come on. All that moose stuff.
MS. SETMAYER: Now, the next thing – well, wait a minute. Then the next – now we have the debate where she was able to say, “listen, I wasn’t – I didn’t have the health insurance. My husband – we have five kids. I’ve special needs.” Those are things that people understand. Now, what John McCain and their campaign needs to do, they need to come out and articulate their positions – us versus them. Is judgment, is their judgment –

DEL. NORTON: The men who were infatuated with the moose stuff and the gun stuff, they’re going to be following their wives as soon as they can. There’s no reason for the men even now to stay with her. It was – it was the fluff stuff that got them and that’s gone.

MS. CARPENTER: I’m not sure that that’s true, but I do want to revisit the play of what could have been a game changer from the McCain campaign. And call me crazy, but I think that they could have really struck a chord with the American people by opposing this bailout. There was a period of time when people were so vehemently opposed to bailing out Wall Street. And I know our readers at Town Hall, the conservative base, was very upset that John McCain jumped on board with the Bush administration, helped broker a meeting to further this package. And I think they should have opposed it. I think that really would have been a good, high path for us to take.

MS. ERBE: Okay, but now that it’s passed and McCain voted for it, in the next four weeks, do you see another possible game changer?

MS. CARPENTER: I don’t. I know it’s definitely hurt them among the conservative base. This is like another time that the maverick has come out and disappointed them. I don’t like to say that, but –

MS. SETMAYER (?): No, you’re right.

MS. CARPENTER: – it’s what I’m hearing, so.

MS. ERBE: Among women, as well as men?

MS. CARPENTER: Oh, yes, absolutely. Town Hall readers, I mean, you’ve got to understand, that is the hard conservative base. But they see what’s happening. They don’t want to bail out and a lot of them would much rather risk their 401(k)s on the free market than handing it over to the people who should have been conducting oversight on this in the first place.

DEL. NORTON: She had saved the base for him and then he had gone straight into the maverick posture. And now the base is mad at him again.

MS. BEYER: It’s like the immigration bill. He’s trying to have everybody like him, and that’s a tough thing in the GOP right now.
MS. ERBE: Well, again, record unemployment. On Friday figures were out showing 160,000 jobs lost in September. Who has the best plan to turn this thing around?

MS. SETMAYER: Well, John McCain has a better plan. Anytime you want to limit government, you don’t want to expand government. That’s why it’s so frustrating for us as conservatives that he jumped on the bailout. Amanda’s right. But come on, you know what this is going to do, but it’s an emotional reaction. The timing of this – I think if this had been six months ago, John McCain wouldn’t had jumped on with this plan, but he knows that people react emotionally when it comes to their pocket vote. That’s just the way it is. And the devil’s in the details. This is a disaster.

DEL. NORTON: Nine straight months, the unemployment rolls are going out. We also have not responded directly because, yes, we had to –

MS. ERBE: You as Democrats.

DEL. NORTON: Exactly. Yes, we had to save the pieces from falling all at once for the four months we’ve been (gone ?), but we’ve done nothing to start money flowing into the economy. When Roosevelt rescued the economy and rescued the banks, stopped the run on banks, nothing happened for five or six years until he began to put some money in the economy. And I was for a stimulus package. We passed one in the House. The Senate did not. And I don’t see any reason for people to start spending now. Where are they going to get the money from?

MS. BEYER: And the other thing is, Tara –

MS. SETMAYER: Where is the government getting the money from?

MS. BEYER: – if we had not done something, what was happening was the credit markets were freezing. And what was going to happen in a matter of weeks was the companies were going to lose their lines of credit, which means, Tara, people wouldn’t be getting their paychecks. And that is a populist issue.

MS. SETMAYER: I understand what that means. Listen, don’t lecture me on what it means and what it doesn’t mean. The American people also understood that the bad decisions on the part of Wall Street, bad decisions on the people who couldn’t afford their homes, those things got us into this position as well, and our federal tax dollars should not be going toward bailing people out –

MS. ERBE: But isn’t a calculation that all politicians had to make was whether there was enough oversight and obviously oversight was the major problem that allowed these crazy mortgage investment vehicles to be put together by Wall Street houses in the first place.

MS. SETMAYER: Absolutely.
MS. ERBE: But anyway, regardless that the markets were panicking, that unemployment is really picking up steam, that we’re a consumer driven economy and without credit there is no consumer engine for the economy.

MS. SETMAYER: But there was argument over whether there was actual credit freezing, how serious this was going to be –

DEL. NORTON: No argument on that.

MS. SETMAYER: Yes there was, and the difference is that you have to inject this type – this much money and give this much power to the treasury secretary? That was not – that was not necessary.

MS. ERBE: All right. Megan, finish up.

MS. BEYER: All the experts agree that there will be some value that will come out of the $700 billion. What we’re doing is we are buying securities, some of which will hold value just as when we created the Resolution Trust Corporation during the S&L crisis. There was a value to those real estate properties at the end of the day.

DEL. NORTON: We don’t know that, but we had no alternative. And look, it’s some credit to McCain that he would not accept your advice and demagogue this issue because if he did, he would be left, it seems to me, only with his base. He’s only got that.

MS. CARPENTER: Regardless of what happens, $700 billion is a huge amount of money to hand over on something we don’t know is going to work. Regardless of whether you do that or we did nothing, it’s going to be painful. I would much rather risk – risk it with the American public and not Congress.

MS. ERBE: All right, behind the headlines, October is Breast Cancer Awareness Month, the second leading cause of cancer death for women. More and more American women are surviving breast cancer. Cynthia Nixon is one of them. Better known as Miranda from “Sex and the City,” Nixon shares her personal story.

(Begin video segment.)

CYNTHERIA NIXON: Two years ago, I had a completely routine mammogram. They found a tiny little speck of something. My doctor said you wouldn’t even thought anything of it, but luckily I had been getting mammograms since I was 35, so they had ones to compare it to. And it wasn’t there before, so they biopsied it and they found that was cancerous. They gave me a lumpectomy. They gave me radiation. And today – knock on wood – I seem to be just fine.

MS. ERBE: Nixon is working with the Susan G. Komen for the Cure Foundation, encouraging all women to get screened early and often. It’s something she’s glad she did for herself.
MS. NIXON: If you’re going to have breast cancer, if you can detect it before it’s spread beyond the breast, you have a 98 percent survival rate. My mother had it and I had it, but only 10 percent of the women that breast cancer is found in have a family history of it. So don’t think you’re off the hook if your mother or your grandmother or your aunt didn’t have it, you know. You’re still at risk and you need to get your mammograms.

MS. ERBE: Nixon is among a number of celebrities going public with their diagnosis, including actress Christina Applegate, whose breast cancer was spotted earlier this year. Because Applegate’s mother was a two time breast cancer survivor, she decided to test for the breast cancer gene mutation or BRCA, which increases the chance of the cancer reoccurring. After testing positive for BRCA one, she decided to have a double mastectomy, bringing into public light gene testing for young women and the tough decisions women with a positive test must make.

BARB BIESECKER: If you’ve had breast cancer – you were recently diagnosed with breast cancer, you might make a different decision about if you had a choice between lumpectomy or mastectomy, you might choose to go the more radical route, knowing that you have a high chance for another primary cancer. A very small subset decide to have their breasts removed before they’ve ever had cancer. And again, the people who make that decision go through long decision-making processes about what they want to achieve and it’s usually motivated by being nervous and anxious about their cancer risk all the time, so that it really disrupts their life. And that’s one way they can put their anxiety to rest.

MS. ERBE: More and more women are choosing to undergo gene testing, which can cost thousands of dollars. Last year, 100,000 tests for breast cancer gene mutations were performed, twice as many as in 2005. But genetic counselor Barb Biesecker warns BRCA testing is not for everyone.

MS. BIESECKER: I think now there is a lot more awareness of genetic testing, and I think there is some seduction of testing. It’s become available on the internet now to get genetic testing. And so more women who are concerned about the risk for cancer are going to their physician, raising their concern, and then enquiring about genetic testing. But it’s really only useful for people who come from very, very high-risk families, what we call hereditary breast and ovarian cancer families. The majority of us learn the most by just getting an idea of what their lifetime risk of developing cancer is and sometimes we worry that our risks are high, but when you sit down and have a counselor go through your family history, your risk really isn’t very high. Studies show that women in the United States fret and worry over their cancer risk at a much higher rate than they need to for what their real risks are.

MS. ERBE: The best way to check for breast cancer is still routine mammograms. Nixon says women shouldn’t fear them.
MS. NIXON: Don’t be nervous about getting them. Don’t even be nervous about the diagnosis if it’s negative. The only thing to be nervous about is if you wait too long because if you wait too long and it spreads, that’s when you’re going to have a problem.

Cancer does not equal death. It’s not a death diagnosis. It’s a medical condition that luckily nowadays there’s a lot you can do and you can take care of it.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So to test or not to test, that is the question. Good idea to test for it if you can – assuming you can afford the test?

MS. BEYER: Well, if I had a family history, I would probably want to do the test, but there’s a guy at MIT named George Church. He mapped the human genome, and he’s had this idea of trying to do almost an open source kind of tracking of people who are found to have these kinds of markers. And then to – as their medical history develops, put that into this database so that we’ll have a greater sense of of those who have this marker, which ones really should go to these extremes measures to try to prevent cancer?

MS. ERBE: You mean like double mastectomies or you’re talking about having one test.

(Cross talk.)

MS. BEYER: – have more information about is this really something I need to do, I think it’d be helpful.

MS. ERBE: If you got breast cancer in one breast and knew you had the marker, would you do what Christina Applegate did?

MS. SETMAYER: Probably because I think it’s – at that case – if you can deal with not having one, then you might as well be safe and what’s the difference not having two, and I think – having both of them. But it’s a difficult decision. It’s an emotional one for women. I think there is less stigma attached to it now because of how prevalent it’s become – the increase in breast cancer cases. But at least the level of awareness and women are more up to do what it takes now to stay healthy, where that stigma before used to be almost like a veil of shame. And I don’t think that that’s the case anymore. Women are empowered from the race for the cure and all of the different things that have helped bring awareness on this. I think it’s made it easier.

DEL. NORTON: This 10 percent is a – I think such a figure. I never thought it would be that high. And I think it may tell me something about why so many women, younger women – I can’t understand why we’ve seen what I regard, at least compared to my generation, a surge of younger women – if –
MS. ERBE: Getting breast cancer, you mean.

DEL. NORTON: Getting breast cancer. Apparently they do delineate how many degrees of family history. And I don’t see why having a breast would be so important, given what we know about the marker. The only thing I’d ask is what the prevalence of those with the marker has been for getting the disease. That information would help.

MS. ERBE: Quickly, Amanda, any privacy concerns here about data being pooled?

MS. CARPENTER: Not immediately. The first concern that I have, which I do think the marker testing is a good idea, but at what age a woman would have – would know herself well enough to make a decision that could change your life in such a fashion, could – I don’t know if I could say if I got that test at the age of 18, found I had the marker and got both my breasts taken off that I would maybe regret that later on. So I do wonder at what age you can handle that, making that decision.

MS. ERBE: All right. Thank you. That’s it for this edition of “To the Contrary.” Next week, TV’s Judge Hatchett on the disproportionate number of children of color in foster care. 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.

(END)