

PBS' "TO THE CONTRARY"

HOST:

BONNIE ERBE

GUESTS:

DELEGATE ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON (D-DC)

KELLYANNE CONWAY

KAREN CZARNECKI

IRENE NATIVIDAD

CINDY LINDQUIST-MALA

RAE SNYDER

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MS. ERBE: More women than ever before are running for governor. Will 2002 rival 1992 as the Year of the Woman in politics?

DELEGATE NORTON: Sure enough, because a critical mass of women have been able to show their stuff in gateway posts that lead to governor.

MS. CONWAY: Women may be elected chief executive of their states, but the real place for women this year is as voters. Watch them.

MS. CZARNECKI: I don't think so. But it does show a trend for the decade, which is a good one.

MS. NATIVIDAD: Maybe five more Senators, or maybe five more governors. Year of the Woman? Give me a break.

(Musical break.)

MS. ERBE: Hello, I'm Bonnie Erbe. Welcome to, To The Contrary, a discussion of news and social trends from a variety of women's perspectives.

This week in the news, election 2002, a look at the upcoming elections which boast a record number of female gubernatorial and congressional candidates seeking office.

Behind the headlines, ceremonial tobacco use has long been a part of Native American culture, but some Native American women are leading the charge to end smoking in their communities.

We begin with Madame Governors. 2002 could become known as the Year of the Governor. Ten women are running as major party gubernatorial candidates. Michigan Democrat Jennifer Granholm is touted as a shoe-in to become that state's first female governor. Women are leading in the polls in Hawaii, Kansas, and Massachusetts. Women candidates are running evenly against male candidates in several other states. A record 135 female candidates are running for Congress. As women voters head to the polls Tuesday, political observers say the issue of security is among the top on their agendas due to the Washington sniper attack, and all the talk of war on Iraq.

As election day approaches, studies reveal changing attitudes on the part of female voters. A Washington Post-Harvard University survey finds the gender gap in party affiliation has narrowed among younger women. More young women are self-identifying as Republican. The study also reveals the GOP is now the party of choice among young adults overall, with 33 percent self-identifying as Republican, 27 percent as Democrat.

And I wonder what the rest are self-identifying as. Congresswoman Norton, so is this all hype, the year of the woman in politics, or is there some substance to it?

DELEGATE NORTON: Sure, it's always hype. But it's much more important hype than the real Year of the Woman in 1992. What led to that was, you know, a conflagration with the Anita Hill matter. But what leads to this is far more important. When you elect people like me to Congress, or even elect women to the Senate, you're saying, okay, I'm ready to be represented by a woman. When you elect a woman as governor, you say, I'm ready to be led by a woman. This is a far more complicated post. It involves being on the line for everything for the people you represent across the board, and it leads to the presidency, not Senator, not Representative, because it turns out that, frankly, each have the same kind of name recognition. People don't know about Senators, even though they all think they're national leaders, and they don't know who governors are. And yet, the governors have tended to prevail in the presidency. So, I think if you are looking for a woman to become president or vice president, these women are more important than the women who prevailed in the Year of the Woman.

MS. CONWAY: I second all of that. And I would say, the going route for women in politics has often been, well, you'd be a much better legislator than a governor because you're a negotiator, you're a peacemaker, you can reason with people, you can be part of a consensus. I believe that women are very well suited to be chief executives, which is why you see so many entrepreneurs sticking with that path. I mean, if women can be multitasked in the workplace and the household, wait until they become governor.

The unfortunate part for a number of these governors, male and female, who may be elected this cycle is, the governorships are on the brink of financial disarray. I mean, these are people who are going to face some real tough decisions. So, if we can return as a panel a year from now and see how they perform, because they are already -- there is a pile in their in-box waiting for them of some really tough decisions.

MS. ERBE: But aren't there women governors who have already ruled, been in office at a time when there were bad economic times, and they flourished anyway?

MS. NATIVIDAD: Sure. But here's the deal. What Kellyanne is saying is that the decks are stacked against whoever the governor is, and if it's a woman, and there's always greater visibility as to how she fares precisely because she's a woman, it make it more difficult, but not any less viable.

You know, the numbers we should look at should be the number of women state legislators where we do have a real critical mass. It is now over -- I think it's like 26 percent, or something like that, and that's where a lot of the governors had emerged. And that's the number where I think we're going to be feeding the gubernatorial candidates of the future.

But, as I said earlier, I hate this Year of the Woman rubric because even if we add, let's say we add two more Senators, you're talking 15 percent, 15 out of 100. Let's say we add maybe four or five governors, okay, now we're at 10, 10 out of 50. I love the incremental progress, but it is not parity. And I think we should keep that in mind, so that when you say Year of the Woman it sounds like we've reached 50 percent, and we haven't.

MS. CZARNECKI: I don't know that we're going to have parity. I think a lot more women don't want to put their entire life on the line and in the limelight to scrutinize everything that they've done. There are women who are very capable of doing this sort of thing, and I do think voters want them to have some type of experience at the local level, whether it's state legislatures, or being mayor, or having some other office. So, we're feeding the pipeline, and that's a very, very good thing.

But I also think that the national parties --

MS. ERBE: Wait. That argument troubles me, though, Karen. There are also plenty of men who don't want to run for governor. So, that doesn't explain why prejudice should be allowed against women.

MS. CONWAY: Where's the prejudice though? I think, Bonnie, it's a very self-selected group.

MS. ERBE: The prejudice is, oh, well, women don't really want it, so that's why they don't have it.

DELEGATE NORTON: The prejudice is, and this is why --

MS. CONWAY: It's a self-selected group, though, of people who want to run for office.

DELEGATE NORTON: Well, I agree on that. But the bias in that statement, and I mean bias in the pejorative sense, is the notion that women would be less likely to want to put themselves on the line. That's the one thing I think we have, in fact, shown is not the case.

MS. CZARNECKI: The bias of the voters, though, the voters, the voters --

DELEGATE NORTON: No, you said the women would be less likely to want to put themselves on the line that way. First of all --

MS. CZARNECKI: In the limelight, that's exactly right.

DELEGATE NORTON: I don't think so. I think the fact that women have gotten out here in such huge numbers for so many offices means that is one barrier we have broken.

MS. ERBE: I mean, my point is this, I just want to respond to you because I hear this from some women, and then I say, you know, the average guy who is pumping gas, or driving a truck, or being a policeman, he doesn't want to be governor either. But if he decided that he did, he wouldn't face the same obstacles that a women at that station in life would face.

MS. CZARNECKI: I'm talking obstacles. I think there are some obstacles for women who want to run for office. And what I was going to say earlier was, I think the national political parties are the biggest obstacles, because they're not as willing to accept a woman candidate unless she has prior experience in public office.

MS. ERBE: Is there any -- you're a Republican pollster, do you see any trends either for women candidates, most races, let's face it, are decided individually on the individual merits of the person, be they man or woman. But do you see any trends emerging? Let's say, ten years ago women were cleaner, they were less prone to corruption than men. Do they still enjoy that advantage?

MS. CONWAY: There are very few geographic or gender trends shaping up in Election Day 2002. But I will say this, there are more and more women who feel bold enough to come forward and say, I'm going to give that a try and enter in crowded primary races. And I think that's a great thing, Bonnie, because if you're willing to risk loss by saying, nobody cleared the field for me, I didn't survive my -- I'm not the widow of a husband who was deceased in office, if you're willing to go through the fire that way, that's great.

I think the untold story so far about Election 2002 is how single issue women have lost in these primaries, and groups like Emily's List have had a disastrous record this year. That's good for women in my view.

MS. ERBE: Single issue, who are you talking about, what issue are you talking about?

MS. CONWAY: Oh, there are a number of women who only ran because she thought they were cleaner to clean up corruption, I'll throw those guys in jails. There are women who were funded and only ran as gun control candidates, only as pro choice candidates. And what's nice is, male and female voters say, I want someone who is a little bit more broad-minded.

MS. NATIVIDAD: Kellyanne, let me just say this, for every woman -- never mind single issue, multiple issue -- for every woman who runs, it breaks that notion that a woman can't run for that office. Harrison Hickman (sp) said that he did a poll prior to Martha Lynn Collins running that showed that, you know, a lot of Kentuckians were not eager to have a woman as governor. After she finished her term, he did another poll, and it showed that, would you elect a woman as governor in the future, and of course they now say yes. It is breaking that perception that is as valuable as winning. So the fact that we have a lot who are running is as integral to breaking the mold in terms of perception of women as executives.

MS. CONWAY: What works on paper, Irene, fails in practice. That's why Geraldine Ferraro isn't vice president, that's why Elizabeth Dole wasn't president. It seems so great to say, I am for something different, and then people are afraid to exercise it.

To your question, though, is it great for women, absolutely, because voters ask themselves two questions about a candidate. Are you like me? And do I like you? And that's a much easier sort of way to get those two questions answered in the affirmative as a candidate. Hey, you're like me, you share the same kinds of issues and decisions I make.

MS. NATIVIDAD: Kellyanne, it's not any easier than it is for a man who doesn't have the same beliefs as the person who is being asked. What I'm saying here is that perception will be broken regarding gender if, indeed, there are women who still run and face the --

MS. ERBE: I'm a woman who is running this show, and we are out of time. Thank you, Karen and Kellyanne, for joining us for this segment of the show.

Behind the headlines, Native Americans have used the tobacco plant for ceremonial purposes for thousands of years. In fact, they introduced the European settlers to smoking. But today, Native American women are leading campaigns to stop smoking in their communities.

In this Native American Heritage Month, we at To The Contrary show you how these women are turning parts of their rich history into weapons in their war on smoking, and trying to improve the health of Native Americans nationwide.

MS. TRACY: This relationship that tribes have had, you know, it's part of their stories, it's part of their songs, they use it to pray with, they use it for medicine. There are some tribes that use the smoke to help heal ear infections.

MR. RAININGBIRD: When we smudge, for example, people know about that, this idea of brushing the smoke from the tobacco onto our bodies, the original purpose of that was to keep away pests, because tobacco has nicotine, which is a natural pesticide. But then it also evolved into this idea it will also keep away the spirits that want to harm us as well, using it as a way to cleanse our beings, our spirits.

MS. STAR: Or we go into a sweat lodge, sometimes the pipe will be passed. Also, we use it as a gift. It's a sacred herb that reaches to the creator, and we respect it.

MS. REANO: I think sometimes the message gets mixed up with that particular type of use and abuse of tobacco.

MS. ERBE: In Native culture, tobacco is believed to be a gift from the creator. Traditional teachings say, tobacco can heal and give life, or cause great harm. These days it's more of the latter.

MS. SHERRY: We have such an important place in our lives for our elders, and I think when our elders' lives are shortened due to health problems associated with tobacco use, we really miss out.

MS. ERBE: About half of Native Americans die of causes linked in some way to smoking or tobacco use. Although this varies from tribe to tribe and region to region, American Indians smoke and chew commercial tobacco at twice the rate of other Americans. Nearly 41 percent of American Indian and Alaska Natives, men and women, use tobacco. Native women and girls have the highest rate of smoking during pregnancy, 21 percent. Even in Alaska, where tobacco is not indigenous, or a sacred herb, the native population uses tobacco at twice the rate of non-natives, 46 percent compared with 23 percent.

They don't just smoke more, chewing tobacco, also known as spit or smokeless tobacco, is widespread. Chewing tobacco causes dental problems, oral cancers, and cardiovascular conditions.

MS. TSOSIE: If somebody is giving their toddler chewing tobacco, you know, I'm thinking, they don't know that it's a problem. Nobody wants to hurt their child. Nobody wants to have their child addicted to a substance.

MS. REANO: Native youth participate in a lot of events where that product is promoted, things like rodeos, there are high rates of use both among boys and girls. And that presents some issues and some questions for girls in particular, we question the vanity issues that are out there for other populations of girls. Why aren't they out there for our girls?

MS. ERBE: At the National Native Conference on Tobacco advocates share strategies to cut tobacco use. They teach Native Americans the difference between traditional and commercial tobacco products, commercial products, they point out, contain nearly 4,000 chemical additives, many of which are carcinogenic. And they say teaching young native Americans about tobacco's special place in their culture is a powerful antidote to its misuse.

MS. REANO: A lot of tribes are reeducating their people about the traditional uses. They are also involved in projects such as growing tobacco so that they demonstrate the meaningfulness of the plant, the cultivation, the harvesting, and the preparation, and all that it takes to use it in that meaningful way.

MS. ERBE: As part of this reeducation effort, young people are encouraged to design T-shirts and posters, attend basketball tournaments, powwows, health fairs, and dinners, all with a culturally appropriate point of view.

MS. TRACY: They could sit there in a talking circle, which is one of our traditional ways of communicating, they'll get a group of kids together, and they'll just talk about what has happened in their lives, either they smoke, or their parents smoke, or their grandma smokes.

MS. ERBE: And while weaving in history, anti-smoking advocates also address current concerns. One-third of Native Americans live on reservations, sovereign nations not subject to state laws barring the sale or promotion of tobacco products to minors. There are few, if any, restrictions on indoor smoking. Cigarettes aren't taxed, and Internet sales are growing. Marketers use cultural symbols to drive sales, and anti-smoking advocates fight back.

MS. STAR: They use the Native American Spirit tobacco, and they put our images on these things, and it makes people think that the Indians are helping them do this, you know, that we condone this, but it isn't so.

MS. ERBE: Tribes derive much needed income from cigarette sales, but don't often recognize the huge costs. Smoking causes health problems, and the Indian Health Service, tribe members say, is already way underfunded.

MR. RAININGBIRD: One of the things that gets cast aside is tobacco prevention, tobacco education, because folks don't see that as a priority. But until we educate them that if we address tobacco prevention now, we will save millions and millions of dollars in healthcare costs treating those diseases caused by smoking and chewing commercial tobacco products.

MS. ERBE: Advocates also want to see more research on the impact of tobacco on Native Americans.

MS. SHERRY: I think starting off from that point is going to be really empowering for tribes and Native communities to focus their efforts in prevention or in education towards smoking.

MS. TSOSIE: Our state is trying to collect baseline data, and we're going to be using that information both to see if our programs are doing any good, if they're targeting the right people. There are 229 federally recognized tribes in Alaska. If you're making something culturally competent, you're dealing with a lot of cultures, you're dealing with a lot of languages. And so you try to find the common tie for those things. And usually that's family, and it's community, and that's commonly understood and commonly respected.

MS. REANO: I think Indian women need to be reminded that this is an issue that is out there for them, and it's an issue that they need to pay attention to. I think we carry the responsibility for fostering and carrying on future generations. We need to take some measures to combat destructive forces.

MS. ERBE: Cindy Lindquist and Rae Snyder, welcome to the panel.

Native Americans do have a history with smoking. It's part of the Native religion. The introduced other groups to smoking. So, does that make the job of stopping smoking in your community that much difficult? And how do you deal with it?

MS. LINDQUIST-MALA: Obviously, since it is part of our culture and tradition, it is a serious issue and problem, and how we address it. I guess I would like to emphasize that each tribe is very unique and very different relative to the use, and generally our history tells us and our stories tell us that our people used it in a very ceremonial way, and quite different than how it is used in today's contemporary world.

MS. ERBE: But there's a big difference, I suppose between ceremonial use and addictive use, but how do you get that through to especially young Native Americans who may not see the distinction?

MS. LINDQUIST-MALA: I think the biggest thing that is working for us in small segments of our communities is education. And as the segment has shown, some of our people are, in fact, having very specific programs that talk about the differences between the traditional use of tobacco and the ceremonial use, and to make those distinctions. Equally important is to have various --

MS. ERBE: Yes, but isn't it still addictive, whether you start out with -- just if you have somebody who might never have smoked otherwise, using it in a ceremony, don't you greatly expand the chances of that person's addiction to tobacco?

MS. LINDQUIST-MALA: No.

MS. ERBE: You don't, okay.

MS. LINDQUIST-MALA: And I can speak personally, because I carry a pipe. I'm a Dakota, from the State of North Dakota, the Spirit Like Reservation. I have been brought up or I have taught myself these things through my family, and part of my own healing journey in dealing with addictive behaviors is, in fact, the culture and the ceremonies, which is very, very important for us in overcoming some of the health adversities that we face every day in our lives, given the lack of limited resources from Indian Health Service, and other various programs.

Ceremonial use of tobacco is very different by tribe, and I can only speak from my personal experiences. In carrying a pipe, and in praying every day with my pipe, I say my prayers, and that tobacco carries those prayers, my belief relative to how I talk to the creator. I don't necessarily smoke it and inhale it so that I have to have my pipe every day. There's a different relationship, there's a different concept, and you really have to be careful as to how you characterize that, and what that relationship is. And it is very different from addictive cigarette smoking.

MS. ERBE: Rae, I would like your thoughts on this.

MS. SNYDER: Well, I was going to add in, as Cindy was talking, there's a big distinction, I think, from what you have mentioned about isn't that an addictive behavior, and I'm thinking, well, yes, if you were smoking that pipe off and on all day, or had it going. But it's not used in that manner. The same way that tobacco, and I noticed in one of the comments that was made on some of the information I saw previously about the fact that we introduced tobacco to the Europeans, who came here and, therefore, addicted them to tobacco as well. I'd say it's probably quite the reverse. I believe that the use of the tobacco plant was totally different, and how it then was commercialized, and the additives put to it. And that's the other issue, I think, in regard to the use of nicotine.

MS. ERBE: So, nicotine is not in the kind of tobacco that Natives smoke for ceremonial purposes?

MS. SNYDER: I can't answer that. I would say probably if it was, in fact, a natural part of nicotine. I'm talking about the fact of the use of that and the degree. I don't know that anyone that smokes a pipe for tradition, in keeping with the prayers, in using it in that manner is looking at being addicted. I don't know at what stage you become addicted.

DELEGATE NORTON: I'm very glad the Native women are taking the leadership here. I see this as extremely complicated and a huge challenge. I don't think it should be underestimated. Here you have a culture in which nicotine is rooted religiously, culturally, and ceremonially for centuries. That is a bigger problem, it seems to me, than any problem. The African-American we have greater lung disease deaths than in the Native American community, but at least we only have a cultural problem to deal with, not a religious problem, not a ceremonial problem. And it does seem to me that the challenge has to be taken for it is, very, very serious challenge, and I'm not sure I've heard anything that says to me you're going to be able to break it.

I do think there is a difference, for example, when you drink wine during communion, no one thinks that means you're supposed to go out and drink to get drunk on wine. So, I think you can do it, but I think if the women take the leadership, maybe you can drag everybody else along with you.

MS. ERBE: Hold that thought. We'll come back to this in a second. We have to go to credits first.

That's it for this edition of To The Contrary. Next week, the end of the era of all-male private clubs.

Whether your views are in agreement or to the contrary, please join us next time. We want to hear from you, write to us at To The Contrary at Pbs.org, or visit our PBS Online web site at Pbs.org.

(End of program.)