

PBS' "TO THE CONTRARY"

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MS. ERBE: Women's support for the pending war against Iraq has apparently waned in recent polls, how should President Bush respond?

MS. BEYER: You can't make a decision like going to war based on polls.

MS. CZARNECKI: President Bush needs to stay the course and not worried about these other things.

MS. ECHAVESTE: Women are concerned that going after Iraq will result in more terrorist attacks.

MS. PTOTENHAUER: The president needs to clearly articulate his reasons for going forward, and do so regardless of public opinion.

(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, the threat of war with Iraq looms large, but a new poll reveals women's support for war, which was as high as men's this past summer, has declined. Then, the 50th anniversary of the world's first publicized sex change operation, a look back at this remarkable man turned woman, and how transexuality may have transformed society's view of women. Behind the headlines, how one woman is making children safer from defective products after her son died in a recalled crib. We begin with women and war.

As President Bush continues to campaign for war against Iraq a new poll shows women's support for that war has waned. As recently as October women backed military action against Saddam Hussein at rates comparable to men. Women's unusual pro-war stance was then attributed to wanting to keep their families safe from terrorism. But, a Fox News opinion dynamics poll taken in November found 64 percent of women backed "U.S. military action to disarm Iraq and remove Saddam Hussein," compared to 73 percent of men.

And a University of Maryland Knowledge Networks poll out this month shows almost 59 percent of women versus 50 percent of men say the U.S. should "only invade Iraq with U.N. approval," while almost 40 percent of men, and less than 19 percent of women say the U.S. should go it alone if necessary. The same reason women first supported war may be why they now oppose it. Asked if they're worried a war with Iraq might lead to more terrorist attacks in the U.S., 61 percent of women said they are very concerned by the danger, while only 41 percent of men felt that way. Men traditionally back military action by 10 to 20 points more than women do.

So we're back to the days then, Maria Echaveste where women say yes to men who say no, as they used to say in the 1960s, in my heyday, the '60s and '70s?

MS. ECHAVESTE: No president is going to make a decision of this magnitude based on a poll. But, what it reflects is that he is not getting his message across as to why going to war with Iraq is actually going to result in a safer America. And he has really not addressed the concern, as reflected by public opinion that going after Iraq will and could, and it most likely will result in more terrorist attacks. So this is a serious problem, not because he's going to make a decision based on the poll, but because he has to articulate that this is going to make us safer.

MS. BEYER: And I think something that's happened is that people are afraid that -- I think of Al Gore's line, it's one unfinished job after the next. We were going after Osama, what happened to that? The elections come around, suddenly Saddam, we're going to war with Iraq, it was to the great benefit to all Republican candidates. And you have to wonder it was used so strongly, so politically during that election campaign, now we're beginning to wonder, wait a minute, what's going to happen if we go into Iraq? There will be more terrorism. And is this the course we should be taking?

MS. PTOTENHAUER: I think one challenge there is that obviously the two things may appear to be unrelated, but they are not unrelated. And Maria's point that Saddam Hussein and Al-Qaeda, and we're talked about what role does Hussein's country serve as a supplier to those who have attacked this country. And we're not talking about a Boy Scout here, as we all know, this is a man whose favorite forms of torture have been listed to include acid baths, rape, and other forms of sexual torture. He is an absolute

abomination. Having said that, Maria's point is absolutely, I think, the case. The president has not cleared the hurdle of articulating to the people of this country, most notably the women, that in doing this, and going after Saddam he is actually making this country safer.

MS. ERBE: I would beg to completely differ on that. I've seen people I know, again, in my own circle, this is not scientific, but everybody I know who usually is very averse to war is saying, we've got to go in.

MS. PTOTENHAUER: We've got to get this guy.

MS. CZARNECKI: I agree with little bits of what you're saying, and I disagree with a lot. I think the president has articulated a clear message. He can't say everything that he knows, there's a lot of intelligence information out there that we are simply not privy to. But, more importantly, this is also, and no offense Maria, but the prior eight years we didn't see a lot of activity like this, and I think people now -- their minds have to be refreshed as to what the threat and the dangers are. He does have to clearly state his message --

MS. ECHAVESTE: When you say -- what activity are you referring to?

MS. ERBE: Talking about war. Preparing for war.

MS. CZARNECKI: War, terrorism, even some of the decisions that were made with regard to the military funding and the downsizing. The bottom line is this is very different during this administration than what the past decade was.

MS. ECHAVESTE: Look, on the Defense question, look, if there was one -- I sat in enough of those meetings in which --

MS. ERBE: Explain your prior job.

MS. ECHAVESTE: When I used to be Deputy Chief of Staff to President Clinton, when we went through the budget, and the military got increases year after year after year, the Defense Department was not starved.

MS. CZARNECKI: It was gutted significantly. The military morale went down as did salaries.

MS. ECHAVESTE: They got a pay increase.

MS. ERBE: Let's get back to the point. I want to get back to women and their view.

MS. ECHAVESTE: And I think another very interesting point is women also feel that the U.S. should not go it alone. They understand that we live in a global community, and frankly, if you want to protect yourself against more terrorist attacks you want to be sure that you're standing with the rest of the world, because you are going to be --

MS. ERBE: Hasn't this president, whether you support him or don't support him, done a good job of getting the world community behind him?

MS. ECHAVESTE: We're getting there, but he's still making noises that maybe, depending on what the inspectors come out with, it may not meet his standards of sufficient reason to go in.

MS. PTOTENHAUER: I think that's exactly what he should be doing. I

don't think he should hold his hand if it's protecting our country's safety, just because a bunch of people at the U.N. don't agree with him. I'm sorry. I mean, having spent some time there, these people do not exactly love the United States of America, and they don't have our best interest at heart.

MS. ERBE: Okay. But, from women's perspective, are we safer going to war, or safer not going to war?

MS. CZARNECKI: I don't think we're safe either way.

MS. PTOTENHAUER: I support the president's decision, whether he's a Republican or a Democrat, it gets to one of the points that Karen made, and that is I assume, and Maria you were high enough ranking that you were privy to some of these briefings, I assume there is information that cannot be made public, because it would compromise the nation's security. And I trust the president, whoever holds that office, to make the best decision for our country.

MS. ECHAVESTE: And what's interesting is that President Bush has yet to say, Hussein has weapons of mass destruction and that it's clearly connected to Al-Qaeda, that it is a source. He doesn't have to tell us how he knows, he doesn't have to tell us any details, but he hasn't gotten up and said, this is why we have to. And if he did that, we'd be all there.

MS. BEYER: This is the question, and I think this is why you see the disparity in the polls, that women are saying, okay, we're coming down to it now, we've seen a lot of terrorism, we're afraid of that, should we go to war, risking more lives, we want more information.

MS. CZARNECKI: You may be right.

MS. ERBE: One thing I want to ask though, Dick Morris, columnist, former -- whatever, political consultant, whatever you want to -- former really colorful guy. He had a column with the headline, Wobbly Women, because women were so -- because women sort of made polling history earlier this year by being so supportive of war. Is that -- now they're coming back to the historic 10 to 20 percent gap, is it fair to call women wobbly?

MS. PTOTENHAUER: We're risk averse. No, I think we're extremely consistent in what we care about, and we are risk averse, we consider ourselves the folks who protect our families, who wake up every day making the decisions about health and safety for our family. And that's why it gets back to this burden of proof, where if the president stood up and made the statement that you articulated I think we'd be there.

MS. BEYER: And you know, Bonnie, I have to give this show credit, and the pundits here some credit, when we talked about that parity in the polls on military action, and saying how unusual it was, we all said, look, the closer we get to this military action those polls are going to change again.

MS. ERBE: Well, you know, and when you said that earlier before we started taping the show I thought, the McLaughlin Group, love them or hate them, they have the humor to rerun old predictions that turned out to be way wrong. We should run our predictions on which we were right.

In the news, 50 years ago this month the most shocking, most celebrated surgery of the century.

In 1952 George Jorgensen, Junior, an Army private from the Bronx, became Christine Jorgensen in the world's first publicized sex change operation. Jorgensen became an instant celebrity after the New York Daily

News broke the story on December 1st, 1952, with a headline that read, Ex GI Becomes Blonde Beauty. Her sex change changed possibly even revolutionized the way society viewed gender differences, and power relationships between men and women. Suddenly the epitome of machismo, a GI, was transformed by science and medicine into what some called a stunning, sexy, blonde, cabaret star, glorified by the media as the epitome of femininity. Since Jorgensen's sexual conversion, and many others that followed, society has become more accepting of homosexuality, transvestites, and transexuals, but also of women's rights. Some activists claim it was this pioneer of sorts who helped make it possible for the women's movement, which began a decade or two later.

Nancy, don't laugh, nobody laugh. I know this is an oddball subject, and an oddball proposition, but how about the fact that a GI in the 1950s, when most women, or certainly all women who could afford to, were staying home full time, not working, a GI, that epitome of machismo, becomes a woman. How does that affect society's view of relationships between men and women, and power struggles?

MS. PTOTENHAUER: I really don't know what the direct affect would be, or if there is a direct affect. But, what struck me in listening to this is that when you go out even now and you ask a group of men how many of them, if they could choose to be a woman, would prefer a woman's role in society, almost none of them choose a woman, say that the woman has an easier job or an easier path. If you ask women, very many of them will say, quite frankly, I'd rather have a son, because they're going to have an easier life than a woman's life. Now, I believe in strong women. I had strong women in my life as role models, and I wouldn't change a thing myself, but it's instructive to me that boys will always say, no, I'd never be a girl, and girls would go, hey, you know what, I kind of like the fact that they can live the way they want to live.

MS. ECHAVESTE: I remember adolescence having a very strong feeling of really wishing I'd been born a boy, because I saw the options for the boys so much greater than for the girls. And I think maybe what this 50 years ago was really the beginnings of showing that actually the differences between men and women are really small, they're biological in the sense that hormones and chemicals, and so this big difference in terms of what your life could be really was wrong and unfair. That it should be so dispositive when, in fact, the difference is strong, and we are hard wired differently, but it shouldn't determine what you as an individual could accomplish.

MS. BEYER: But, look at this new generation, there's something called dialectic materialism that says, you can change a law, and you can change the culture, I look at Title IX --

MS. ERBE: Why is it -- dialectic materialism?

MS. PTOTENHAUER: I think it's just a public choice area.

MS. BEYER: What it means is, you change a law you change a culture. Title IX, look at this new generation. And, you know, Maria, when I grew up it was the same way. I really felt that I could be a nurse or a secretary as far as my father was concerned. You know, he was going to pay for a master's program for any of his boys. We were supposed to graduate from college, and the boys were supposed to go on to do something else.

MS. ERBE: My best friend from childhood, the same thing. Her brother was sent to Harvard Law School, and she went to public -- she had to go to public school.

MS. BEYER: Nothing against daddy.

MS. CZARNECKI: My poor parents had five girls and two boys, and we both had the same opportunities. I also grew up in a household where my mother was a doctor, and two weeks after each one of us was born went back to work. And she was one of the first through medical school, and it wasn't because of the women's movement.

But I want to get back to the topic at hand. I'm going to change this subject. I think saying that this individual, or anybody who has gone through a sex change operation has helped the women's movement, I think it's a far stretch. I think there may have been parallel things happening at concurrent times.

MS. ERBE: And we recognize in doing this story that most people are not going to see a relationship there. But since this was the 50th anniversary, why not. It was an interesting thing to talk about.

MS. CZARNECKI: It's very interesting. It's unique.

MS. ERBE: But wait, expand on that. You don't see a relationship.

MS. CZARNECKI: I don't see a relationship at all. I think women wanted to get into the workforce after World War II. I think the women's movement is a completely separate thing. And I think this is an abnormality perhaps 50 years ago. And people at that point didn't know what to say one way or the other. It may have preceded the women's movement by 10 years or so, but I see them as completely separate issues.

MS. BEYER: This also brought out of the closet in the '50s and '60s when this was publicized, or the '60s, that there are people -- there's a wide range, wide spectrum of sexual identity. And there are some people that are in this no man's land, not to make a pun, but --

MS. ERBE: No man or woman's land.

MS. BEYER: And this can be psychologically devastating. And a lot of these people committed suicide, they had many troubles, and then science caught up to them in terms of being able to offer them some kind of option. You know, is it right, is it wrong, it's up to the individual, I think. But it brought out to the public the idea that there are people suffering because they're in this ambiguous state.

MS. PTOTENHAUER: You used, I think, an important term. You said individual. And from a Libertarian's perspective, what this would do, thematically, that would link the two together, is emphasize that an individual has rights. That you don't have a right because you happen to be a man, because you happen to be a woman. You have a right because you're an individual born in the United States of America, and we happen to believe that all individuals are created equal.

And so, I think there was a little bit of a, this person, regardless of what gender he or she happens to choose to be, has the same rights everyone else has. And that's always good because you've got things moving in the right direction.

MS. ERBE: Hear, hear, and what a nice thought to end the segment on.

Behind the headlines, children's products are constantly being recalled for safety issues, and yet parents and childcare providers don't hear about the majority of recalls. Linda Ginzel started Kids in Danger to improve

children product safety after the death of her son.

MS. GINZEL: Well, my son Danny was 16 months old, and he was in a licensed daycare here in Chicago, and he was strangled. He was killed when the crib collapsed on his neck. The day after we buried him, we read in the newspaper that he was the fifth child to die in this way. That the product had been recalled by the government and the manufacturer. We didn't know, the State of Illinois didn't know, the licensing people and his childcare provider had no idea. My husband and I are both professors, and we're fairly informed and educated. And we set out to find out how this could happen. How could these children die and no one know about the extent of the danger. And what we've learned was horrifying.

MS. ERBE: How many children's products have been recalled that are still in use?

MS. GINZEL: That you're not going to get a succinct answer to. Those statistics are not kept. So, the products that -- recalled products that kill children very, very unknown. Dangerous products that injure children, for example, in the year 2000, the Consumer Products Safety Commission recalled about 37 million individual units. So 37 million defective children's products. And multiply that by each year, the numbers don't change that much year-by-year, so the extent of the danger is huge, and vastly underestimated by parents and by the public.

MS. ERBE: Why are those products still out there?

MS. GINZEL: Manufacturers have a responsibility to make sure that the products that they sell are safe. But there is no requirement that they do so. The government doesn't have -- consumers believe that children's products are tested prior to sale. Not necessarily so. There are no laws or regulations that require that children's products are tested prior to sale. There are few mandatory standards. However, most standards are voluntary, they're set by the manufacturers themselves in large part. And manufacturers choose whether or not to abide by them.

MS. ERBE: What can parents do?

MS. GINZEL: The best thing that parents can do right now is to make sure that all the products they're currently using for their children are safe. So, take an inventory of your products, and you have to have the manufacturer, the date, the model number, and log on to CPSC.gov, and you can do a search. The other thing parents have to do is to become informed about the problem. And for this, Kids in Danger has a web site that helps you to understand the extent of the problem, and why market forces are such that our children continue to be in danger. All the market forces are acting against the safety of our children with regard to these products.

MS. ERBE: Obviously, what Linda Ginzle was talking about is extremely important, but all I could think about in listening to this interview again was, yes, this is just one more thing that mothers need whether they're working outside the home or inside the home. Yet another list of thousands of items that you have to go through and see if you have any in your house, or any in your daycare center or whatever. I mean, it seems like an insurmountable problem.

MS. BEYER: There's an incredible burden on parents, and my child did swallow a little toy. The toy said it's recommended for ages 3 -- not recommended for ages 3 and under, she was 5. And she knew not to do it, but she did it. But you cannot regulate the risk out of a toy any more than you

can regulate the risky behavior of a child. And the important thing is, when it comes to toys in particular --

MS. ERBE: I'm not sure I agree with you. I mean, there is -- she mentioned there are no laws saying, you can't do this, you can't do that. I mean, yes, there are lawsuits when faulty products are put out there on the market, but why don't we do a better job of deciding what goes on the market in the first place.

MS. BEYER: Well, we have to be responsible, and I think design has to be responsible. And I think, you know, the toy manufacturers aren't designing toys that will hurt children. And sometimes the only way you find out about it is, oh, there's an incident, and then you realize something has gone wrong. But what I'm saying is, when children play with acorns and sticks, there are risks, and parents need to be supervising those children. There is a CPSC hotline that you can call. In fact, I called it this morning. And you pick up the phone, you tell them what brand of toys, as much information as you can give them, they can tell you if those toys have been recalled. And before you go shopping for Christmas, you might want to take your list and talk to one of these great operators, it's very useful.

MS. CZARNECKI: I think the issue here, this was a daycare provider where there was one of those collapsible cribs. And once something does go on the market, I disagree. I think things go through enough product safety testing before it ends up on the market. But, quite frankly, if something is still out in someone's home 10 years later, designs have changed, they've improved. How do you recall those. If you buy a car today, they automatically can find you if there's a problem with the muffler or the engine. It's a very expensive program for the automotive manufacturers to go find you, but I don't want to send those products registration cards in for the \$10 item, or the \$50 child seat because, my God, I'm on everybody's mailing list then. So it's really a double-edged sword. I mean, I value my privacy and I don't want to be bombarded by everything else, but if there were a problem the only way I'd find out about it is reading in one of the children's magazines, or if I made a monthly call to the Consumer Product Safety Commission. I think that there are things that can be --

MS. ERBE: Do people have time --

MS. CZARNECKI: No, they don't have time to do these kinds of things.

MS. PTOTENHAUER: You pass down clothes, cribs, highchairs.

MS. CZARNECKI: It all adds up, it's expensive.

MS. PTOTENHAUER: And you think you're helping when you do so, but it's interesting when you mentioned the auto analogy, and it's true, everybody hears about it if a tire is defective, or if a certain vehicle is being recalled. It doesn't seem to quite get the same amount of attention, perhaps, until there is a sad story like this one.

MS. ECHAVESTE: I think it's a continuum of overall our government, our society, doesn't -- puts the responsibility on parents above all for the care of their children. So, for example, it's the same way that this huge debate about the pediatric drug rule as to whether the FDA should test drugs for children specifically so you know the right dosages, which the Clinton administration put in place, but has now been suspended by the Bush administration. And medicines, I think, are even more dangerous if you don't know what dosage you should give a child, and yet our government has decided that no, we are not going to require drug manufacturers to take that extra

step to see what the right dosages are for children.

MS. BEYER: Now that's just common sense.

MS. CZARNECKI: I think that's pushing it. Doctors go to medical school for almost 10 years, and they get their pediatric reference, so they know. You can split a tablet in half for an adult dose. You do it with children's aspirin, acetaminophen. I mean, I think --

MS. ECHAVESTE: We're not talking about those things. We're talking about major depression drugs.

MS. CZARNECKI: You're changing the subject on this.

MS. ECHAVESTE: No, I'm just saying it's part of a continuum. If we're not willing to do it for drugs, we're certainly not willing to do it for toys, which are \$20, \$30, \$50.

MS. PTOTENHAUER: But I think Megan's point is a very wise one that, you know, you can't kind of regulate the risky behavior out of a child. I was just in my own mind going through, I was on a first aid squad for five or six year, and I didn't go on many calls involving children. But the two life-threatening ones involved a child swallowing a nut that was too big for them, and a child who inhaled a balloon. The balloon -- and that one, we almost lost her on because it was very difficult to remove that from her throat. And so it really does come down to balancing and common sense.

MS. BEYER: I do think what the Ginzels are doing is great, and there are some great web sites. One is called Watch, where we can log on and get information. I don't mean to say that we shouldn't have child safety laws, but I also think that, you know, you don't want the death of common sense. You don't want child lawyers to be deciding --

MS. CZARNECKI: But I want some of these nonprofits to do something productive. If the nonprofits, whether it's their nonprofit or other ones, want to really help people, they should go to the Consumer Product Safety Commission's web site monthly, and they should be distributing to pediatrician's offices, or hospitals, or daycare centers the information so that it's readily available for people. That's how they should spend their time.

MS. ERBE: All right, and finish that thought after we go to credits. That's it for this edition of To The Contrary.

Next week, what would it be like if women ran the country? New Zealanders don't need to imagine, their top three government leaders are women. We take you to New Zealand to see what it's like when women are in charge.

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 [or](mailto:contrary@pbs.org) visit our PBS Online web site at PBS.org.

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