MS. ERBE: South Beach, Atkins, Weight Watchers, Jenny Craig, diet-schmiet, does any diet really help women take and keep off unwanted pounds in our size-conscious society?

MS. CONNIFF: Small changes and healthy habits are the only thing that can make long-term change.

MS. CZARNECKI: No, it's only good, old-fashioned exercise that are going to keep those pounds off.

MS. SOSA: Obesity is quickly becoming one of the leading causes of preventable death in America. Dieting is not only a business, it's an important health issue.

MS. WHITE: Sometimes, but it's not the diet, it's the discipline.

(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, President Bush signs a new law that he says protects unborn victims of crime, and liberal women's groups say limits reproductive rights. Then, the left/right media debate. The debut of a new liberal talk radio network is billed as the antidote to Rush Limbaugh and conservative talk radio and cable news. Behind the headlines, women's obsessions with fad diets. Some helpful hints if you're cutting carbs but seeing no results.

Up first, reproductive rights. President Bush signed into law the Unborn Victims of Violence Act this week, fueling the ongoing debate over reproductive rights in the courts, in Congress, and in American society. Under the new law, when a pregnant woman is assaulted, her fetus or unborn child is a separate victim of the same crime. The new law is unlikely to produce many new prosecutions, though, it only applies to federal crimes. For example, during attacks on federal land, or during terrorist strikes. But analysts say the president's signature bears greater meaning. Opponents view it as further limitations on reproductive rights, which have been slowly eroding in the three decades since the landmark Roe v. Wade case legalized abortion on a national scale.

Some medical ethicists believe technology is changing the way society and women view pregnancy and abortion rights. Sonograms, for example, were not widely available when Roe became law, nor was in utero surgery.

Ruth Conniff, since Roe became law 30-something years ago, there have been more and more limits placed on reproductive rights, and society seems to be tolerating them quite well. Has the American public become much more conservative on the abortion issue than it was when Roe became law?
MS. CONNIFF: I don't think so. And I don't think actually that we're tolerating all this stuff so well. I think this is like God, guns and gays. I think that this is a strategy to divide people, to create a really controversial topic to take advantage of a big tabloid news story, which was the Laci Peterson case, and that it will have very little actual effect. I mean, after all, this law will only apply for federal crimes. So, if Laci Peterson had been the victim of a terrorist attack, then we would be talking about something here. But that's not what really happens. What really happens is, these women who are pregnant and who end up dying, often, are the victims of domestic violence. And if we want to do something about that, then we don't need this law, we could have the Feinstein alternative, which was to say the exact same thing, it's a crime to harm a fetus, it's an enhancer, it's a penalty enhancer, it's a worse crime than harming a woman who is not pregnant, but we don't make the fetus a separate person who is a victim separately from the mother.

MS. CZARNECKI: I think there has been a significant change over the past 10 years because of medical technology, and I think it's true, the fact that if you want a picture of your baby now to send to folks, I mean, whether you like it or not, we've come so far with technology --

MS. ERBE: You're talking about, for example, where you go into a shopping mall and get a sonogram of your baby before it's born and send it out as a Christmas card or something?

MS. CZARNECKI: Absolutely. And people are doing it. I think it's a bit odd myself, but people are doing it. And the more you can see as to what's happening -- I mean, when you couldn't see anything before, you know, out of sight, out of mind, people didn't want to discuss it. But now that you can have surgeries on children who have encephalitis, water on the brain.

MS. ERBE: You should say in utero.

MS. CZARNECKI: In utero, you can correct so many different medical conditions right now so that your baby is not born and has severe disabilities, and I think that's really changing a lot of debate. But what we're really seeing now is, every four years, the people are trying to galvanize their base, whether it's the left, or whether it's the right. And that's why it's becoming more prevalent. I don't think it would be as much an issue if we didn't have the horrific situation with Laci Peterson. I agree with you on that. I mean, seeing a couple of these high profile cases that are really bringing the issue to the forefront.

MS. SOSA: Let me talk about the whole technological issue, because it's true, but at the same time that doesn't negate the social and economic reasons of why so many women need to terminate their pregnancy. So, these women particularly increasingly are working class women, also socioeconomic background, many immigrant women. For examples, Latinas have the highest rate of teenage pregnancy, so logically you're
probably going to see in terms of pregnancy termination a large percentage of these girls maybe needing those services.

MS. ERBE: How is that changing over the last 10 or 20 years?

MS. SOSA: Who is advocating? Who are the people advocating? And the reality is that the women that created this situation that gave women the rights now don't need it because they have reproductive issues taken care of, and they don't need the termination services. So the people that are left behind that are caught in the middle of this debate are people that have less political power and influence to really shape the debate to their benefit.

MS. WHITE: I'm going to say, but right now there are 29 states that have this law already in some form of the pregnancy that also has stricter penalties for violence towards an unborn child. But the problem is also, like Karen said, both sides don't really address the issue of, there's a child, we really are putting a mother and a child at odds with each other. It's a unit. You can't have -- the right doesn't talk enough about a woman, and about the fact that this is going to impact her life for the rest of her life, and the left doesn't talk enough about you are seeing now color pictures of sonograms, not even the grainy picture, you see twins kissing. I mean, that's changing the debate, and I think both sides have to address the fact that the mother and the child are not enemies of each other, that they are a unit, and we have to evolve.

MS. ERBE: You guys on the left, how should the left address that? Because what the left is saying now is that you're pitting mother against child with, for example, the ridiculous situation in Utah where they're -- I mean ridiculous on both ends, that this mother had several children already that she was apparently abusing in public, and ridiculous in terms of prosecuting her for murder for not having a Cesarean section which a lot of people see as a huge invasion in her private -- in other words, they are a unit, and yet they're being treated as if they're not. So, what's the left's answer to that?

MS. CONNIFF: The left is on the defensive. I mean, that's the whole problem with a proposal like this, is that it's not -- I don't think it's an honesty policy discussion. I don't think they're really saying, what are we going to do about these really lousy situations where murder is the leading cause of death, as you have pointed out, for pregnant women.

MS. ERBE: So, what's the left's comeback to it?

MS. CONNIFF: The left's comeback is what Dianne Feinstein did, which is to say, let's take the exact same bill, and instead of enshrining in federal law for the first time the notion that the unborn child is a member of the species homo sapiens from conception onward, right, that's what this is really about, it's getting that little foothold in and saying, this is a separate person from the mother from the word go. Let's take this exact same bill, like Feinstein did, and say, let's treat this as a more heinous crime if it
happens to a pregnant woman than it would be if she hadn't been pregnant. But not try to, as you say, pit mother against child and treat them as totally separate entities.

MS. WHITE: There are exceptions for even a woman's intentional harm to end her pregnancy that that would not be prosecuted. That abortion is an exception in this law as well. So, again, the Heritage Foundation has no position on this whatsoever. But, again, I think both sides need to evolve, because we still haven't decided when is a human life worth protecting.

MS. CONNIFF: Well, Bush doesn't want both sides to evolve. Bush wants to have a good issue to get his base riled up, as you say, Karen, and this is it. It makes the left look like, we're for terrorists and criminals who murder pregnant women. I mean, it's just silly, because we could work this out on a policy level.

MS. ERBE: Wait a second. I'm not sure. I mean, the left and the right did try that common ground movement, where they were trying to promote adoption, for example, trying to convince more women, poor women particularly, and the common ground movement died. There was no common ground. So, where are you saying that common ground may lie?

MS. CONNIFF: I think to the extent that this is not utterly cynical, which I think for the most part it is, so there's not a lot of common ground. I think to the extent that people are really concerned about pregnant women and their infants, I go back to what Patricia said, which is that we need to have decent care for women, we need to have the domestic violence amendments that were proposed to this bill that were defeated by the pro lifers that were sponsoring it, and we need to do something about children that are once they're already here.

MS. ERBE: All right. Last word, Karen.

MS. CZARNECKI: What you have here is a more organized conservative movement that wasn't very organized 30 years ago on this subject. We see the gains because of medical technology, but also because they're banded together to push their issues.

MS. ERBE: All right, from rights to radio.

For decades now conservatives have complained about the left-leaning media. Liberals, meanwhile, say they're tired of conservative voices dominating talk radio. So, left-leaning journalists have taken to the airwaves themselves with Air America, the nation's first explicitly liberal talk radio network. Political satirist Al Franken hosts a show called O'Franken Factor, poking fun at conservative commentator Bill O'Reilly. The weekday line-up also features actress Janeane Garafalo, and Comedy Central's Liz Winstead. In coming months, Air America plans to buy stations in more than a dozen cities considered battlegrounds in the presidential election. Right now, the 45 most
powerful radio stations in the nation broadcast more than 300 hours of conservative talk radio each weekday, this compared to five hours of liberal talk.

So, there's only one nationally syndicated conservative female talk radio host, Dr. Laura, so should conservative women be given equal time in conservative radio?

MS. CZARNECKI: There are a lot of women in talk radio, she's not the only one. I can't even think of the others. But there are several of them. But the thing is, it's all driven by ratings.

MS. ERBE: Nationally syndicated, though, I don't think they get the audience that she gets.

MS. CZARNECKI: True. But it's going to be driven by the ratings, and by who they are. My mother is a talk radio person, and she doesn't care if you're male or female, but if your policy discussions are good. I think that the people who listen to talk radio are C-SPAN junkies. I'm one of those. And the thing is, I can only listen to so much talk radio on any given day, I get it in my office most of the time, I don't need the radio. But if I travel, I mean, and I want to hear different perspectives, I will turn on talk radio just to see what they're talking about, what the buzz is. But unless you can really make it -- unless you're compelling, have unique issues to discuss, and come at it from a totally different angle, I don't know that it would actually work.

MS. ERBE: Do you think, in this day and age, the conservatives made the point for years and years and years that it was a liberal dominated media. Is it still? When you have Fox News and the O'Reilly Factor, and pretty conservatively skewed television network, and very conservatively skewed commercial talk radio, is there still a claim that there's a liberal media?

MS. CZARNECKI: Yes, I think there is. If you take a look at some of the internal polls done of journalists themselves, 68 percent of them, I think it is, are claiming that they're left-leaning. I think your traditional outlets are very left-leaning in their reporting, and the way they go about it. The reason you saw the occasional news channels, the Fox News Channel coming out, the reason you saw Rush Limbaugh doing so, or even Dr. Laura, is because not enough of those voices were heard. With this whole advent of this left trying to have their own radio stations, it might work in some -- it might work in Madison, Wisconsin, I don't know if it will work nationally. Only if they're providing something that doesn't already exist in their traditional media. I'm not so sure that it's needed, but more power to them if they can make it work.

MS. SOSA: Karen, I have to disagree with you. And I think embedded journalism, it's a classic example of the compromise of the establishment, really, for me trying to prove that they were not that liberal, and trying to cater to that administration. So the myth that the mainstream media is more liberal I think is questionable. But we are here talking about something else, which is radio with an attitude, which is Rush Limbaugh. I mean this guy is not radio talk, he's an indoctrinator. I mean he takes an
issue, and he hammers on them until you are convinced that he is right. And I don't listen really to Rush unless I'm taking a taxi and it happens to be in Orlando, or Virginia, or somewhere, and it's truly unbelievable. And we need an alternative. It's just not fair.

MS. WHITE: I think you have to acknowledge, though, it's part of the success of the Fox News Channel, it's the success of the Rush Limbaughs that mainstream media has changed to a certain degree, and maybe has been a little more sympathetic to this administration.

However, I've been listening to the new station.

MS. ERBE: How is it?

MS. WHITE: It's okay. It's humorous, and it's good because lots of things that liberals say is humorous to me, but it's okay. And it's even gotten mixed reviews from the New York Times. But I think, like you said, it comes down to policy, it's having something compelling to say. Rush Limbaugh, whether you agree with him or not, he has compelling things to say. There was a lot of humor on that air. They were relying a great deal on comedians, and I think that's going to change how seriously they are taken.

MS. CONNIFF: I mean, it's definitely time for this to happen. Because, I mean, when you talk about the liberal media on the one hand, by which we mean like the New York Times, and NPR, all these kind of worried liberals who don't want -- they want balance, and they don't want to look like they're going to offend the administration, that's the liberal end of the spectrum. And then you've got somebody with a bad case of rabies like Bill O'Reilly, and Rush Limbaugh, who is just screaming this, or Ann Coulter, just totally out of control. It is so unbalanced. So, Al Franken is the perfect person to step in and be just as outrageous, aggressive, and funny. And that's really -- we're not talking about, you know, is there a slight liberal tilt that the editorial page of the New York Times is going to correct. That is so careful, it's so cautious, it's so scared, what you're talking about, the liberal media, really, I mean, it's an advocate. And somebody who can speak to all the voters out there who are outraged by this administration, and that's why right-wing media picked up on it, because they hated Clinton.

MS. ERBE: Do you think the success in the '60s and '70s -- I'm hypothesizing here, so take me on, but maybe the success of the liberal media was the anti-war movement, that it got a lot of young people involved in politics in a way that they hadn't really done before. Is the success of Rush Limbaugh and his progeny, and then Fox News Channel, that a lot more young people are voting Republican, the conservative backlash that we've had the last 10 or 20 years against 30 and 40 years ago?

MS. CZARNECKI: I wouldn't call it a backlash. It's people who are disenfranchised from the traditional media. But also a lot of evangelicals are in that, the people who didn't vote, and they're not Republican and they're not Democrat, but people weren't speaking to them. Because there wasn't anybody with their voice, or listening to their ideas, you saw the advent of the Fox News, and the Rush Limbaughs, and the Dr.
Lauras, and I want to get back to the -- if the left thinks that they can have a successful program, I think they have to do it, not just looking at battleground states, and have, again, as John Kerry is trying to do, a defeat Bush mentality, I don't think that's a long-term strategy if you want to have a successful radio program.

MS. ERBE: Well, are there liberals out there who are going to be listening to Air America?

MS. CONNIFF: I think not just liberals. I mean, a lot of people like Al Franken. You know, he's a funny guy. And people like combative politics.

MS. ERBE: What does it say that the Democrats went to a comedian to start their radio network as opposed to --

MS. CONNIFF: As opposed to a clown like Bill O'Reilly? I mean, one of the funniest things about Al Franken is that he takes Bill O'Reilly, who is just out of his mind, and makes so much fun of him. I mean, just the fact that he called this, because of that lawsuit, that he called it the O'Franken Factor, he's just -- he's so funny. He's such a gadfly. Just traditionally, gadfly, just poking holes in this guy and making him crazy.

MS. SOSA: And to Al Franken's credit, I mean, he's always been this type of commentator. So, you're not creating out of a comedian a political commentator. Al has always been a political commentator. He's funny. I mean, this is entertainment. Let's be honest here, it's entertainment that has shaped the American political landscape, and now we're trying to balance it.

MS. ERBE: And now we have to entertain our viewers in a different way, and switch topics.

Behind the headlines, low carb, no carb, South Beach, Atkins, the grapefruit diet, the cabbage soup diet, low cal, low fat, diet trends come and go as fast as fashion trends these days. It's hard to know what's healthy and what works. Dr. Lisa Sanders, author of The Perfect Fit Diet says when it comes to dieting one size definitely doesn't fit all. And there's a way of figuring out whether the latest diet is going to work for you.

DR. SANDERS: What you really need to know is that diet is what you eat. It's what you eat every day. And some people have a diet that works for them, allows them to feel satisfied, eat the foods they like to eat, maintain their weight at a reasonable range. It's really the difference between the boys you date and the boys you marry. What I'm trying to do is help you construct a diet that you can live with for the rest of your life.

MS. ERBE: How do I construct a diet that works for me?

DR. SANDERS: You have to find some way to measure what your diet is really like. And so, I suggest that people keep a seven-day food diary, and that gives them some sense of how they eat. And then you need to look at how your lifestyle interacts
with that. If you travel a lot, the chances that you're going to be able to maintain a low fat diet are almost zero, because you have to eat out. And cooks, commercial cooks, add fat. Who could blame them, it makes food taste better.

Basically, there are three different kinds of diets in the world. There are diets that limit variety, like the low carb diets, and the low fat diets. And then there are diets that limit how much you eat, and that's the low calorie diet. But once you decide which of those three diet varieties, you have to keep working to whittle it into shaping into a shape that you can live with.

**MS. ERBE:** Are there data on which diets are most effective over time? Is there any tip you can give people?

**DR. SANDERS:** I think that one of the things that you'll find out, if you talk to people who have taken the weight off and kept it off for a long time, is that they'll say, well, I started with the Zone or Weight Watchers, or whatever it is they started with, but ultimately I had to do it my way. And I think that that's the truth. Ultimately, people have to figure out a way to eat that works for them personally, with their life, with their body, with their health, and then you'll be happy, and probably thin.

**MS. ERBE:** Do Americans have an unrealistic definition of feeling full?

**DR. SANDERS:** Very young children clearly have strong senses of when they're full, and you'll see that they'll eat, and they don't usually overeat. And that's true up until age 4 or 5. After 4 or 5, though, you'll see kids responding to different cues, like clean your plate cues, and other social cues about when to eat and when to stop eating that replace or drown out, I think, the very quiet clues that we have that we're full.

**MS. ERBE:** So, do you think American women will ever give up their obsession with diets, even though we're finding out more and more -- look, Dr. Atkins died, and he stayed on his diet.

**MS. SOSA:** He didn't die because of his diet.

**MS. ERBE:** Well, there are mixed reviews about that.

**MS. SOSA:** Those news reports are a bit controversial.

**MS. ERBE:** Just that diets work. If you stick to any diet, doesn't matter which diet, you'll lose weight, but keeping it off is the trick, and we're finding more and more that it's a lot of exercise and eating small portions, and not too much of the bad foods. How much more encouragement do we need than that to try to get to that?

**MS. SOSA:** I think we have a lot of the answers to the problem, it's the implementation that is the challenge. Let's go back to the definition of diet, because I think it's really important. I think people think dieting is what you do when you stop
eating your chocolate cake, and everything else is eating. Well, you're always dieting. You may be dieting in a bad way, or you may be dieting in good ways, but you're always dieting. And the key is to change your eating habits, so it's not about, I'm going to do it for six months so I can lose 20 pounds, it's because this is what I do every day of my life, and everything I put in my mouth and every 20 minutes I run, it's going to make a difference in my life. So, it's not about these specific goals. It's a completely profound change of your lifestyle.

MS. WHITE: I think it's also interesting about, you know, you have diets, and I just bought an infomercial diet, I admit it. I fully admit it. But it's also about the choices that you make every day. And it's really, like you said, it's not just about a diet, but I think that women are eternal optimists. You see something, you see those great abs on someone and you say, it's only $19.95, I can do it. One more time. And that's why, we're a consumer society, and we continue to buy into it. And I just think women are incredible optimists.

MS. CZARNECKI: We just have to realize, we are too sedentary as compared to prior generations, and it's sitting in front of the computer. I mean, we've got a life of luxury in many respects.

MS. ERBE: Driving in the suburbs, never walking anywhere.

MS. CZARNECKI: Absolutely. And we have to realize, if we really want to stay trim and fit, it's going to be the walking, it's the 30 minutes, it's the stuff I don't even like to do. I chase my kids and think, that's enough, if I keep up with them, maybe I'll keep the pounds off. But, I mean, we do have to rethink about how we're living our lives. We do live busy lives.

I thought my mother was crazy traveling with a cooler. My parents, I mean, having seven kids, didn't want to eat in restaurants because it cost too much money, and we were too picky, and they weren't going to waste the money. I find myself now traveling with a cooler so I can offer balanced meals to my kids. They're not going to eat anything but the very limited stuff, it's not worth going into a restaurant if they're not going to eat. So, I'm reverting back to what my parents used to do. And I'm serving much more fruits and vegetables. Some will eat it, some will not eat it, but again you have to know yourself and know if you burn fat quickly -- I have a brother who can eat ten meals a day and not gain a pound. He's always trying to gain weight because he loses it so quickly. You have to know your metabolism, and you have to know your family history of heart disease, and everything else, and how you will respond to food, and I hate to say exercise.

MS. ERBE: What about the time factor? You said your brother loses weight so quickly. I have to tell this story. I was in Weight Watchers 20 years ago, and the woman in line ahead of me had a grown retarded daughter with her, and they were both on Weight Watchers together. And she got on the scale right before me, and the woman weighed her, and said, congratulations, you've lost a quarter pound. And the 40-year-old
retarded woman turned to her mother and said, all that for this. And you do, people don't want to stay on diets unless they're losing seven pounds a week. Are Americans just expecting too much too quickly? Because the smart diets are the quarter pound a week for two years, and then when you get there you stay there.

MS. CONNIFF: I think that's right. And I think that we're losing control of what we eat. That we have food prepared for us, whether we buy it frozen at the store, we go to a restaurant, a fast food restaurant, super sizing it. I mean, the guy who went and ate nothing but McDonalds, read about eating nothing but McDonalds, and he had so many health problems. I mean, we, as a nation -- and talk about your taking a cooler in the car to feed your kids, so you have control over what's being eaten there, and it's actual food. Now, kids go to school, and just as they get out of that age range where they're sensible eaters, they go to school and they have Pizza Hut and McDonalds, they have Coke machines. And I think just the corporate control of what we put in our bodies, and the total loss of control, people aren't cooking, they have no sense of where food comes from, that has more to do with this problem than anything.

MS. SOSA: A major debate is happening right now. Obesity has become one of the leading issues, and to the credit of the Bush administration they have taken it very, very seriously.

MS. ERBE: And hold your thought for when we come back. That's it for this edition of To The Contrary.

Next week, we talk to one author who says America has idealized motherhood to women's detriment. Whether your views are in agreement or to the contrary, please join us next time or visit our PBS Online Web site at PBS.org.

(End of program.)