

PBS' "TO THE CONTRARY"

HOST:

BONNIE ERBE

GUESTS:

CARI DOMINGUEZ

MICHELLE SINGLETARY

KAREN CZARNECKI

MARIA ECHAVESTE

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MS. ERBE: This labor day, what is President Bush doing to help working women?

MS. DOMINGUEZ: From job creation to tax reductions, access and inclusion, the president's agenda is good for all working men and women in this country.

MS. SINGLETARY: I'm a working woman, and I don't know.

MS. CZARNECKI: The list is exhaustive, from securing our homeland, to improving education and working on retirement security, he's done a lot.

MS. ECHAVESTE: Not enough, we've lost 2 million jobs since President Bush

took office, we don't have a prescription drug benefit, the list of what hasn't gotten done keeps growing.

(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, female candidates for public office gear up for the September primaries put mostly their kids at home, while male candidates promote them. Then, a Nigerian woman is sentenced to death by stoning for having sex out of wedlock. The sentenced meted out under Sharia, a strict form of Islamic law, has American feminists up in arms. Behind the headlines, we commemorate Labor Day in an interview with U.S. Labor Secretary, and long time former *To The Contrary* panelist, Elaine Chao. She tells us how the Bush administration is helping working women. We begin with men, women and children on the campaign trail.

During this political season a curious male-female schism is developing in campaign styles. Men who run for public office are more likely to promote their families in posters and public appearances than female candidates. That's the finding, at least by an Arizona University researcher quoted in the *Arizona Republic*. Why? Pollster, Celinda Lake, and Republican Linda Duval find voters fear a female public official with young children may put her own family responsibilities ahead of her job, whereas voters don't register the same concerns about male candidates.

In fact, male candidates frequently find it beneficial to soften their images by promoting their fatherhood. Another survey by Rutgers University Center for American Women in Politics of state legislators found married female candidates for state office believe they need to hide their husbands, this in stark contrast to the wives of male candidates who can be enormously effective as supportive campaigners. Political insiders say when a female candidate appears with her husband, it's all too easy to assume the man is really in control.

So in this day and age, Maria Echaveste, we finally have women running for office in larger numbers, and there are still these, you might say, subtle forms of discrimination. Do you believe that they exist, agree they exist?

MS. ECHAVESTE: Absolutely. It's astonishing, actually, how much there is still this almost public reaction of, yes, women are running for office, but if they're mothers maybe they need to hide that fact, almost, because there is this almost instinctive, well, you're going to be a political office holder, what about your family, what are the choices you're making. And yet we never really ask that of men. And so it's there, and it is subtle, but it's going to take probably a few more decades before we get away from this.

MS. SINGLETARY: My whole problem with that is that we've got it all backwards. We ought to put our families before our jobs, even if you're a public office holder. And I think if we did that for men and women, we'd have better policies for families and the country, and labor. So I think we ought to let them put their families first, and say that that is most important, because then you will really understand what it's like to have a working mother or father who can't get to the daycare on time, because they've got these long work hours.

MS. ERBE: I agree, but how long it is going to take until the public treats them equally, ask that of the men, too? Celinda Lake and Linda Duval did polling and focus groups that showed, men, they never ask what about your familial responsibilities.

MS. SINGLETARY: We should start electing men who have put their families first, I mean, look at how they have run their personal lives. And to me, a man who has spent 80 hours at work during the work week, that's not a good father to me, that's not a badge of honor for me. I'm like, where are the kids, why aren't you spending more time with them. And I don't think that's the kind of man that's going to make policies that are going to help me. So elect guys who stay home with the kids for a couple of years, or whatever.

MS. CZARNECKI: I think it's an interesting situation, and I think it's different when you're talking about women who are running in large cities, versus women who are running in more rural areas, like most of America. I think in larger cities they'll accept you whether you're married or not, whether you have kids or not. But, in a lot of America they want to see women putting their families first. Men and women are different in the way they perceive jobs, the way they perceive issues, and quite frankly in the way the public views them. And I think it is more difficult if you do have young children, and you do want to run for office, because they are saying, well, what about your kids?

MS. DOMINGUEZ: I think a political office is a much more level playing field. For example, is it Maria Cantwell, the soccer mom who got elected --

MS. ERBE: Patty Murray, the other female Democratic Senator from Washington State.

MS. DOMINGUEZ: Okay. Well, Patty Murray, she became known as a soccer mom, but I think the issues are very different in the workplace. In fact, I remember a story about MBA graduates who are being interviewed for jobs, and the men, the guys who were just MBA graduates would put on wedding rings when they were not married, and the women would take them off, because the standards were very different. So I still think that in the political field women can hone and polish their image a lot better than they can in the workplace.

MS. ECHAVESTE: But, I actually think we have to recognize that we have not made in this society the substantive, deep seated change about the responsibilities for raising a family.

MS. ERBE: Not at all, we haven't even come close, really.

MS. ECHAVESTE: We're not close. And I also think we have to recognize that until that changes, a woman who is a mother has a tremendous --

MS. DOMINGUEZ: Ten jobs.

MS. ECHAVESTE: A huge responsibility. And I have to say, having worked in the White House, that depending on the job, I'm going to want someone who's going to spend 80 hours a week. I'm serious, there are serious jobs. Now, if you're a member of Congress, I might value the person who's running for office differently, depending on do you have young children, older children, because the jobs are really hard. They're so demanding, you're having issues that relate to world peace and security.

MS. ERBE: But, you personally, would you make those same demands or have those same questions about a man as you would as a woman?

MS. ECHAVESTE: I would, but unfortunately my experience is, that the fact is men are able to have those tough jobs, because they are not pulling their weight

at home, and the women are. And the fact is, when you look at the upper echelon of political appointees, particularly in the White House, most of the women are either not married, or do not have young children.

MS. DOMINGUEZ: Well, Karen Hughes, for example, who was paying a huge personal price in terms of family and had to --

MS. ERBE: And her child wasn't even that -- her child wasn't even that -- her boy was 15 years old, so we're not talking about 2 year olds.

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: But, they don't usually get it, is my point. I mean, mothers --

MS. SINGLETARY: They should. I mean, we wouldn't have some of the issues we have now, such as pregnancy, and smoking, I mean, okay, we're supposed to leave them untouched, but look at the Bush girls, and Bush in Florida and his girl and drugs. I mean, why do you think that's happening? Because the parents are not there.

MS. CZARNECKI: I think when you're in politics, whether you're a Republican or a Democrat, it's hard on you personally, and it's especially hard on families. And if you've got a decent support network, and want to run as a female candidate, you can if your mother will help you out, or if you've got an au pair, or a good babysitter. But, if you don't have that network, you will be criticized more severely --

MS. ECHAVESTE: Than a man would.

MS. CZARNECKI: That's correct. But, I'm wondering when these voters are looking at these women running for office, what about help? I mean, most professional women these days have daycare centers that they take their kids to, or providers at home. The public doesn't seem to recognize that yet.

Islamic based and brutal sentences against women overseas are sparking international furor.

Thirty year old Amin Lawal was sentenced to death by stoning last March for an adulterous affair. But, her appeal to an Islamic high court was rejected this week. Her execution was postponed until January 2004, when her daughter will no longer need to be breast fed. Lawal is the second Nigerian woman condemned to death by Islamic courts for infidelity. She's also illiterate. Prosecution of the man she allegedly had sex with was dropped.

Sharia, or strict Islamic law is witnessing a resurgence in Northern Nigeria, Lawal's sentence is causing conflict between Nigeria's Christian, or constitutional, and Muslim, or religious, local authorities. It also drew outrage from international human rights, and women's rights groups, which recently protested another sentence in Pakistan. This summer, a tribal council ordered the gang rape of a woman whose brother had raped another woman. The sentence was delivered as retribution for the family of the first rape victim. This year alone dozens of rapes and so-called honor killings of women have been registered in the Pakistani province of Punjab. Women have been slain by fathers, brothers, and husbands for "crimes," including failing to conceive children, and refusing to become prostitutes. Michelle Singletary, are we seeing this because of a resurgence of the strictest form of Islam, and a resurgence of Sharia, or is it unrelated?

MS. SINGLETARY: I think there is more of an effort to go back to sort of basic religious principles. And I think everybody is looking at what's happening around the world, and thinking you have to get more strict. But, I think it's perfectly appropriate for us in the U.S., and other groups to get involved in these cases. You do have to walk a fine line between respecting their religion, but this is just not acceptable. Any great religion does not condone this kind of thing, in terms of killing, none that I know of. And I think that we need to get involved in these kinds of cases, and make sure that these women are safe. This is just outrageous.

MS. ERBE: What is the proper U.S. role here? I mean, there are all kinds of NGOs, non-governmental organizations that are registering protests, but what's the proper government role?

MS. CZARNECKI: The best thing I think you can do is some of this through diplomatic channels, but I don't think that's the only way to do it. I'm very happy to see Amnesty International and a lot of other groups involved, raising the public awareness, not just here, but perhaps in these countries is just extremely important to do. I think we're all very shocked to hear about this sentence. I don't think it will be the last time we're going to hear about it, but I think we're going to start hearing more and more. Whether people are reverting back to whatever they perceive as their basic religions, women, whether they're looking at the women in Afghanistan, us looking at them, or looking at other forms of discrimination around the world are going to be attuned to this sort of thing. That's not a bad thing, but it doesn't resolve the current situation.

MS. ECHAVESTE: I think investment in education, because one of the interesting things about this story, she's illiterate. And what we know is that when women are educated they learn to value themselves and to say, this is not the way I want to be treated. I think it's also a huge reminder, to us especially in the U.S., that we focus on sometimes some of the most superficial things that we feel we're not getting access to. And it's a good stark reminder that a majority of women on the planet do not have basic human rights. So it should encourage us all to support the groups that are trying to help them, as well as our federal government to take a more active role in trying to -- you're not going to change thousands of years of cultural tradition in a decade. But, there ought to be a movement toward some basic human rights, basic decency.

MS. ERBE: Do we do enough in terms of USAID programs that do try to educate? And I'm not just talking about the Bush administration, I mean, over -- Americans generally seem sort of remiss to spend education dollars or scarce resources overseas. There are good reasons for that. But, then you have situations develop like this. So where's the trade off?

MS. DOMINGUEZ: Exactly, and I don't think we ever can do enough. I don't think there are enough resources to go around. But, we should certainly be doing more. I agree with Maria, I think education should be at the top of the agenda. I'm very concerned, it's not just a women's thing, it's a family thing. I'm very concerned about this little baby, whose mother has been sentenced to die by stoning. What's the impact going to be on the next generation.

MS. ERBE: And I found it interesting, too, they postponed her sentence only because she's still breast feeding. What do you do about a value placed on a woman by a society that all she is is a breeder, and a caretaker of children?

MS. SINGLETARY: Well, we do exactly what they're doing, they're involved,

they're trying to change it. The NGOs are there on the ground. I think we ought to look at their budgets, increasingly their budgets are being cut, because we're so insular in the U.S., and we don't see the benefit of making sure that women worldwide are taking care of. And I think as hard as it may be, with our budgets so tight, we need to look at their budgets.

MS. ECHAVESTE: It really is, again, a reminder that what we have in our country, and what we have in sort of Western civilization in terms of women's roles is relatively new compared to the thousands of years of treatment of women. I mean, the gender inequality has taken thousands of years to develop, and we need to value what we have, but also remember that we have a responsibility to frankly our sisters around the globe.

MS. CZARNECKI: You brought out an interesting point, though, when you take a look at a lot of the polling data, Americans do get very outraged at the amounts of money that are spent overseas. And if they don't have an understanding of what the different programs, and there are tons of government programs that spend money overseas, but without an understanding of how these funds are being spent, I think it's difficult for the American public to make that connection.

MS. ERBE: Right. And the connection I made one time in Morocco was, I was having dinner with some of the USAID folks, and they were telling us how American companies were so upset that a French company just got a huge government, Moroccan government telecommunications contract. Why? Because the French government pumps foreign aid into Morocco, and we don't spend much there. So it does translate into dollars for American businesses, and dollars for American jobs. End of speech.

Behind the headlines, to commemorate Labor Day weekend, I sat down with Labor Secretary, and former long time To The Contrary panelist, Elaine Chao. I asked her how the Bush administration is helping working women, and she said, change starts at home, in the Department of Labor.

SECRETARY CHAO: I'm very proud to say that the Department of Labor is the first Cabinet department in United States history to have 50 percent of their top leadership to be women. So 50 percent of the leadership in this department, top leadership are women. And I think that makes a big difference, because it gives the policymakers, it gives the leaders of this department, I think, an opportunity to carry out their own life experiences. Our experiences as women are different. We see life differently. And so I think having all these women, and having them be at the table where important decisions are made makes a big difference.

MS. ERBE: There was talk of the Women's Bureau being disbanded.

SECRETARY CHAO: I know, and it just puzzles me as to how all that got started. The Women's Bureau is one of the agencies, 17 different agencies, that we have here at the Department of Labor.

MS. ERBE: What does it do?

SECRETARY CHAO: The Women's Bureau has evolved to much more I think of a touchstone agency. It's only about -- its budget is only about \$5 million, in a total departmental budget of \$45.5 billion. But, I hope that people won't view it as a reduction of the Women's Bureau's activities, but see that the Women's Bureau is actually leveraging and partnering with other agencies, to ensure that women's issues are being highlighted, and are being paid attention to. I think the larger challenge is not how we can have the Women's Bureau champion women's work, but rather how do we integrate the rest of the department to fully embrace

and be concerned with the full panoply of concerns that women are faced with these days.

MS. ERBE: What's going on with the wage gap these days? Are women doing better?

SECRETARY CHAO: I think women are doing better than what some of these popular figures are being tossed around. I think it's important to also educate women that just because they're in the workforce does not mean that they will automatically rise to the top. They're going to have to work for it. But, more importantly, they're going to have to work smartly. They're going to have to select jobs that pay more. So a lot of women are disadvantaged, if they leave the workforce early for whatever reason, if they leave mid-career, because they want to take care of their families. I think our society is more understanding of those breaks now, but not quite. But, you can also understand from an employer's point of view, they want someone who will stay with the company, who has a good retention record, I mean, that is beneficial to them.

MS. ERBE: You say women bring a different perspective when they get access to the old boy's network, and now you're the Labor Secretary, married to an important Senator, have you become part of the old boy's network?

SECRETARY CHAO: I will tell my husband that you think he's important, is an important Senator. No, I don't think I've ever forgotten, or I could ever forget what it feels like to be an outsider. And I feel very much that I am reminded of the importance of incorporating people, and including people in what I am doing. I'm reminded of that every day in what I do, because I see so many people who are not in the mainstream of America. And I view it as part of my job, my everyday job, to make sure that those who are excluded are included, those who are disenfranchised are empowered. And so it's a constant reminder to me of what I have to do, and what my mission and passion are. So I don't think I ever lose that.

MS. ERBE: As a member of the Bush administration do you think the word is getting out about what the administration is doing for working women, is the public well aware of it, does the public end to be made more aware of what's going on?

MS. DOMINGUEZ: Well, there's never enough awareness raising. I think Secretary Chao is doing an exceptional job in being out there, and sharing information. Certainly at the commission of EEOC, we're doing the same thing. We have many challenges ahead of us, not just for women, the president --

MS. ERBE: But, this show is about women.

MS. DOMINGUEZ: But, what about disabled women, 70 percent of your individuals with disabilities, many of them are women who are still shut in, and not able to have access to transportation and technology. So I think it's a key thing, and you know, talk about the pay gap, I also find an occupational gap, which oftentimes translates into pay gap. We're still finding women not going into sciences and math types of occupations and disciplines. And that has a direct connection with their pay potential.

MS. ERBE: Is that something that, A, should be focused on by the administration, or B, is being tended to by the administration?

MS. DOMINGUEZ: Every day we're out there talking and telling women, particularly at the pipeline level, particularly -- I have made a strong commitment at the University --

MS. ERBE: But, do you need to do more than talk?

MS. DOMINGUEZ: First of all, we need to engage everyone, and let everyone know it's a shared responsibility. There's only so much that the government can do, I think colleges and universities, I think families, communities, I think we all have a responsibility in this.

MS. SINGLETARY: But, the administration doesn't really recognize that there's a pay gap. I like the Labor Secretary, I think she's smart and I like her, but I think it's ridiculous to say that women need to be educated, that they need to work really hard. Give me a break, just have a baby and you know what it's like to work hard. I mean, they are certainly working hard. And I think there are credible studies that show, even given the fact that women leave the workforce, if you equalize things, there is still a legitimate pay gap. And I think this idea that there are these far off studies from Martians that are saying that there isn't is not true. There are legitimate pay gaps, legitimate issues in the workplace in terms of women and families and we've talked about this before. And I really don't think that the administration in their campaign recognizes that. I mean, it's ridiculous to say that you have to educate women to work hard.

MS. ECHAVESTE: I think Secretary Chao is in a difficult spot, because the Department of Labor, even in a Democratic administration, is a hard department to really have any real clout within a large federal bureaucracy. And I worked for Secretary Reich, and he had to muscle his way into some important meetings. I think in this Bush administration, which already has a reputation of being friendly to business, right, of being overly solicitous of working with business, I think she's in a very hard place to really protect workers, which is her job, when you've got an overall administration that is tilted a different way. And then you've got an agency that oftentimes is treated as a backwater agency.

MS. ERBE: What do you think is the most pressing need for working women on this Labor Day?

MS. ECHAVESTE: I think that they continue to be the same issues we're talked about before. I think it has to do with, what are we going to do to reduce that pay gap, and hopefully more and more men are realizing, because we have double income families, so many families depend on both checks, that it's in their interest to make sure their wives, or their significant others, are getting what is equal, because it will provide for their families. I think issues about work and family, again, we remain the one industrialized country that does not provide a systematic response to the childcare issues. And this is our future workforce, and we are letting women who bear the responsibility of having to juggle what kind of care, what can I afford, what I cannot afford.

MS. ERBE: So you're saying, right, right, right, but are you for subsidized daycare?

MS. CZARNECKI: No, but work and family, balancing work and family is important, and I think the top issue that the Department faces in the 2003 legislative cycle is looking at the comp time, flex time issue. Out of all the polls, when people talk about balancing work and families, what are the top priorities, that comes up time and time again, and that will be an uphill legislative battle, because there are people on ten sides of that issue, that is one of the top priorities for this administration, addressing that and figuring out what to do.

MS. ERBE: I mean, truly, how do you do that, aside from jawboning? How do you do that without putting more money into it, without raising taxes, which is something the administration doesn't want to do.

MS. CZARNECKI: We are operating under 1930s Depression era workplace laws. The Department is looking right now at updating and modernizing laws so they reflect common circumstances in the workplace, and quite frankly in families.

MS. ECHAVESTE: They're changing the definition of who's eligible for overtime.

MS. CZARNECKI: That's a side issue.

MS. ERBE: Wait, Karen. Hold the thought for just a second.

That's it for this edition of To The Contrary. Next week, as the sad anniversary of 9-11 approaches, we tell you how that tragic event changed the way women around the world view American women.

Whether your views are in agreement or To The Contrary, please join us next time, and visit our PBS Online web site at pbs.org.

(End of program.)