PBS’ “TO THE CONTRARY”

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MS. ERBE: This week on “To the Contrary,” a new poll shows Americans tiring of church intruding on state and dividing the nation. Then, teen presidency is down but less so for African-American and Latina teams. Behind the headlines, workplace stereotypes keep women from breaking through the glass ceiling.

(Musical break.)


A new poll shows Americans’ growing weary of religious influence on government policies: 49 percent of Americans told the Pew Forum conservative Christians go overboard trying to turn religious doctrine into law, but a much larger 69 percent say liberals have gone too far in keeping religion out of schools and government. Americans told the Pew pollsters they would prefer both sides find common ground on hot-button issues, and the poll suggests rather than a nation divided politically, the U.S. is made up mainly of mainstreamers tired of extremists controlling the political agenda.

For example, while 56 percent oppose gay marriage, 54 percent support civil unions; and for the first time a majority of evangelical Christians support stem cell research. More Americans find both parties less friendly to religion than they did a year ago.

So is this good news for Republicans or Democrats, Kim Gandy, in the upcoming November elections?

MS. GANDY: You know, I’m not even sure what it means for a political party to be friendly to religion. I think churches should teach moral values, not tell people how to vote.

MS. WOOD: I think it’s great news that Americans think religion ought to have a role in politics. To the extent they are motivated by that thought, I think Republicans benefit.

MS. MURGUIA: I think this is good news for the American people. The silent middle majority is speaking up and saying extremists shouldn’t dominate the political landscape and I think both parties ought to pay attention.

MS. ALLEN: Forty-nine to 69, the Republicans seem to have a set of key issues that they agreed on – united on. The Democrats seems to have a variety of views. I think it’s good news for the Republicans.

MS. ERBE: But the overall gist of the poll, Susan, was that Americans feel like there is too much intrusion by religion into politics. The Republican Party is clearly more tightly identified with the Christian right than the Democrats are. How can you say overall it’s good news for Republicans?
MS. ALLEN: But the public also said – 69 percent of them also think that the Democrats are trying to remove religion from the public square and the public schools and religion means moral values and upholding the traditional values of the Americans which make us a country so great, so I think the 69 percent of the people who would disagree with the way the Democrats are handling religion, that’s the key to – (unintelligible).

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: Do you see an upside for Republicans in these numbers?

MS. GANDY: You know what? I think that there is something about the way that the question was asked. The 49–69 figure was the widest apart of any of the other survey questions. All the rest of them were very close. If you look at how the question was asked, it asked “are liberals doing this. Are conservative Christians doing that?” I think if they had asked about conservative Christians versus liberal Christians you would have had a closer answer.

MS. WOOD: Well, I don’t think there is any doubt Democrats are playing catch up on this or they are at least trying to to a certain extent, but I think that’s a good thing. I mean, what’s wrong with saying that religion has a role in our political system?

I mean, I agree with you, Kim. Morality is obviously an issue that churches should definitely deal with, but morality does say politics, too.

MS. ERBE: But wait a second. Let me step back for a second, Genevieve, because the gist to this poll is for the first time from a neutral source we are seeing that Americans are saying, yes, there is too much extremism on both sides, but – and that comes from extreme liberals not from necessarily tagged to Democrats, but that the Christian conservatives have gone too far and they are much more closely identified with the Republican Party. I don’t see an upside for Republicans in these poll numbers.

MS. WOOD: Well, it all depends on who is going to go out and vote there, right? And if you look at election cycles over the past eight years, however far you want to go, people may say this in a poll, but they have voted against gay marriage in every state that’s put it on their ballot and –

MS. ERBE: A lot of Democratic consultants are saying this time people are a little sick of that. It’s like enough with this gay marriage issue.

MS. WOOD: Well, I’m not saying that’s the issue that ought to be out there again, but I’m just saying when it’s been tested at the polls, we’ve seen that voters who describe themselves as conservatives and as Christians, they’ve tended to vote Republican and they cared more about that set of issues and the role of religion than I think liberals did.
Maybe that will change, but that’s the way it’s been happening.

MS. MURGUIA: Bonnie, I think people are just tired of hearing about this coming from the left or the right, liberal or conservative. They just want solutions on the issues and they want people to talk from their heart about them and they want practical solutions. So I think people are saying they are tired of labels, they are tired of hearing from hard right or hard left. They just want consensus that’s going to drive real solutions for the issues that they care about.

MS. ERBE: How does religion figure into that? You represent – I want to introduce to the audience – La Raza, one of, if not the, largest Latino, Latina, Hispanic groups of –

(Cross talk.)

MS. MURGUIA: Civil rights and advocacy. It’s the National Council of La Raza. I’m the president and CEO and we represent the largest Hispanic civil rights and advocacy organization in this country. And I guess, you know, I just feel like, you know, labels and hard right, hard left – people really I don’t think even are talking about religion.

They are really talking about this from a value standpoint and they want candidates to speak about the issues they care about and I think they want to talk about, they want to be able to relate to them. And as long as they can I think do it in a way where their values are represented in this, people can make their own judgments about that. But these overarching sort of labels that try to drive agendas – I think they’re tired of that.

MS. ALLEN: I agree. It is not the label. I don’t think also. I think religion works best when it has no political power and I think all people of all religion, whether it’s catholic, Jews and evangelical or Muslims, they all believe in certain values: that is to be a good person, to live a good life, to be good to your neighbors, to live in peace and if we can all sit together and find common ground to work on issues that we all care about irrespective of religion, whether we are atheist or not, that would be the solution. I think the American people would like to see that.

MS. ERBE: One of these numbers that came out of this poll, Kim Gandy, was that evangelical Christians now support stem cell research. How are we going to see that? Is that going to be an issue in the upcoming elections and if so, how is it going to translate into policy?

MS. GANDY: I do think that there is a lot of room for movement among a variety of people who are looking at and starting to look more at the issues, based on the issues themselves and based on their own values rather than what they hear from either political party or what they hear from the politicians. And I think a lot of evangelical
Christians – and I’m a lifelong Presbyterian myself – look at these issues and say “Gee, stem cell research could save lives. It could help people.” And that’s a Christian value. I think that that has moved them.

MS. MURGUIA: A think Genevieve should comment on this, because we were talking earlier in the green room about how within the conservative movement there’s a split among conservatives right now and it’s going to be interesting to see how that turns out, but it’s not just stem cell, but on immigration.

You’ve got some conservatives who are a little bit more sympathetic to opening up the party and having more Hispanics participate, but I think there’s a real stirring going on within the conservative faction of the Republican Party.

MS. ERBE: Well, there – yeah, what do you say? Because a lot of people have said that religiosity is going to come up as a wedge in the Republican Party and it’s splitting fiscal conservatives from religious conservatives and that’s why President Bush is doing some of these things he’s done recently like let the FDA approve plan B for sale to women 18 and older, much against the base of the party. Is that going to split the base of the party?

MS. WOOD: Right. Well, what’s interesting about that – I don’t know how that decision helps him with the business community, so I am not quite sure what was going on there. That’s a question. But I think that – to speak to that – I mean, look, there’s conservatives and Christians and people of a variety of religious backgrounds care about more than just abortion and care about more than just homosexuality and its role.

I mean, really, faith plays a role in every issue out there. I mean, your view of how we deal with poverty, your view of how we deal with taxes, how you deal with foreign policy. And what I think you are seeing, though, is that more and more conservative Christians – I hope – are taking a broader view in saying, look, my faith should inspire a wide variety of issues, not just one or two that I would agree have been somewhat polarizing in recent debates.

MS. ERBE: All right. From politicized religion to pregnant teens.

The good news: the teen pregnancy rate is dropping. Between 1991 and 2004, the teen pregnancy rate fell by one-third, with African-Americans showing the most significant decrease, but one-third of Americans teens become pregnant. African-Americans and Latinas experience higher rates of unwanted pregnancies than other teens.

In fact, 40 percent of sexually active black teens and more than half of sexually active Latinas have been pregnant. Democratic Representative Hilda Solis of California says the Bush administration’s abstinence-only sex education policy is failing in these communities and wants federal funding for comprehensive sex education.

(Begin video segment.)
REP. HILDA SOLIS: What’s striking is that the Latina population is growing and it seems to be somewhat out of control and this has been coming to my attention now for a few years and because I represent a district that’s highly Latino/Latina, we have a lot of young people there. We’re finding that on an average about women – Latinas, adolescents under the edge of 20 have at least two or three pregnancies before they reach the age of 20, and they’re not married and we really think there has to be more education, more curriculum provided in the schools and more counseling and available tools, accurate medical information as to what they need to do to prepare for a pregnancy, or even if they have had one to hopefully prevent any other unwanted pregnancies.

And I think, to be honest, some of the programs that have gotten a lot of funding as of in the last few years in terms of abstinence doesn’t necessarily work. Well, I think it’s fine to talk about it, but the reality is that numbers don’t show that.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So, Janet, is abstinence-only education helping or hurting the Latina teen community?

MS. MURGUIA: Well, it’s still not clear and I think that our Hispanic community is a very diverse community. We’re not a monolithic group and so we have to factor that in, but what’s clear to me is that we have seen some success with abstinence-only programs, but we need multiple strategies that work here and I think where we see the abstinence approach working, we should continue that. But it’s clear that we need a more comprehensive approach, because it’s not enough to cover the problem and we have a crisis right, now particularly within the Hispanic community, but I think still generally. And it’s good that the numbers are going down, but for Hispanics unfortunately they are not going down at a high enough rate.

The statistic out there is that Hispanic girls will be pregnant at least once: 51 percent of Hispanic girls will be pregnant at least once before they’re 20. So we still have to work on the best strategies and one strategy alone isn’t going to work, but I do think that we should encourage that, but we’re going to need multiple strategies.

MS. ALLEN: It’s going to be the family first. I agree that abstinence is not the only way, but it all starts with the family. Look at all this research that is done.

MS. ERBE: Yeah, but obviously if they’re – if 51 percent of these girls are pregnant, presumably most of them before marriage, the families aren’t doing the job, so then it falls to who?

MS. ALLEN: Correct. Because the family – some of the kids who become pregnant because they are out there looking for attention. Indeed, some of them wanted to have babies because they have this trophy baby.
MS. ERBE: Is it because of that or is it because the Madonnas of the world – and I don’t mean the Madonna, I mean Madonna the rock star – are out there having babies out of wedlock and glamorizing it.

MS. ALLEN: That too. Some of the inner city or even now in suburbs it’s cool to have a baby out of wedlock and I think it’s a culture. It’s a cultural thing. It got to start with a family. When you have a family (with an intact ?) family preferably or the mother or the parent is there, because the teenagers say that I would like to talk to my parents. I would trust my parents first when it comes to birth control. But the parent is not home.

Now, at the same time there are families which have had teenage mothers over the third generation. It is a way of life, so I think we’ve got to start with a family. Yes, I agree with sex education and I think we should start with a family – with the parents first. Go tell your children, the teenagers, the facts of life, the real facts of life and then practice what you teach.

MS. ERBE: Kim, do you agree with Janet that abstinence-only is sort of a good/bad impact on young girls?

MS. GANDY: Oh, I think sex education historically, even back when I was in school, started with abstinence, but it also provided medically accurate, age appropriate information –

MS. ERBE: But there is a difference between full sex – right.

(Cross talk.)

MS. GANDY: – don’t do it. And if you do it, or someone you know is doing it, here is some information that you need to have. Because one thing we know, we can talk about –

MS. ERBE: Yeah, but what I’m saying is that what’s changed here in the last few years – teen pregnancy rates have started to come down, we have advances in technology, things like plan B, but we also have many of the schools changing from teaching biology in full and saying that abstinence is the only way to completely prevent pregnancy and transmission of sexually transmitted disease, to “don’t have sex, period.”

MS. GANDY: I think that the birth rate among teenagers would have declined even more than it has if it had not been for this shift away from medically accurate sex education. And what we see – I know that there is a sense that some of these girls choose to have babies because it’s a status symbol of some sort, but they only think that until they have the babies and then they look around and say “Oh, what have I done?” And if you look at the information, these are unplanned pregnancies and I do think that increased availability of the morning after pill, emergency contraception – if a girl does
do something that she wishes the next morning she hadn’t done, at least she can keep from having lifelong consequences.

MS. WOOD: Bonnie, I think the facts are fairly clear on this issue and from 1976 up to the mid-’90s all we did was this, quote, unquote, “comprehensive sex education,” which was much more about contraception and condoms than it was anything else, and that’s when we had this growing rate of teen pregnancy in every level: black, white, Latino – it didn’t matter.

It was in the ‘90s that we tried putting in more abstinence. This is when we started seeing the numbers come down and there are –

MS. ERBE: Actually, it was after 2000. It was after the –

MS. WOOD: But the pregnancy rate started coming –

MS. ERBE: The big push on federal abstinence only was after President Bush had – so, it was 2001 and later.

MS. WOOD: That’s when we were sort of having more funding for it, but there have been more push for abstinence by private groups that were not getting government dollars.

MS. ERBE: But not in the public schools we’re talking.

MS. WOOD: Not in all the public schools, no, but some of the local – but let me just finish to say this. I mean, the fact is for years the kind of sex education you all are talking about got all the government funding and sexual transmitted diseases went up and pregnancy rates went up. We’re now seeing a shift and you can’t say that we should rewrite all the legislation yet, but I think you’ve got to look at these programs.

MS. ERBE: Quickly, Janet.

MS. MURGUIA: You need to combine strategies. That’s the bottom line and where we see abstinence working we should do it, but the fact that matter is we do have to bring more and more families into the discussion as we have seen success when we do that, so we have to break the silence and the taboo that still exists, for instance, so much in the Hispanic culture. The more you can not just have the discussion be just about sex, but about relationships and love and their future and the expectations – the high expectations we should have for these young girls, what the expectations are for these boys – that’s when you really start to see real changed behavior.

MS. WOOD: She should be an abstinence teacher, because that’s exactly the concept they talk about.
MS. MURGUIA: But I’m just saying – but we need a multi-pronged approach and we need more comprehensive strategies. They can include abstinence, but it can’t be abstinence only.

MS. ERBE: Right, exactly. My question was going to be doesn’t abstinence-only preclude a multi-program approach?

MS. MURGUIA: We have to watch the funding. We have to watch the funding on it. That’s the key and that’s why Congresswoman Solis’ bill I think should get the attention and the funding, because it does include abstinence. It’s not saying you have to just sort of only do it in the schools in terms of providing that education. We need a multi-pronged strategy – you know, a comprehensive approach that includes abstinence because in certain communities, certain families, that is absolutely going to be the best way, but unfortunately it won’t solve it for every family or the community.

MS. ERBE: All right, got to run to the next topic. Behind the headlines: workplace stereotypes. Working Mother magazine says women could be hitting the glass ceiling in large part due to unfair stereotypes in the workplaces.

The magazine conducted a survey to see how many men and women view women as unequipped to deal with corporate power. The results are surprising.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. CAROL EVANS: In a study that we conducted recently for Advertising Women of New York, we surveyed about 1,000 people – 600 women, 400 men – and one of the question areas that we asked about was how they viewed the other sex, the opposite sex in terms of their competency or skill sets to do the work and their job in general and how they view the competencies and skill sets of their own sex?

First of all, the good news was that about 50 percent of men and women felt that there was no difference between men and women. But the other 50 percent were widely conflicted. Between 25 and 50 percent of all the women felt that women had advantages in eight areas, including multitasking and really focusing on the work, socialization, and things like that. Then, when they looked at men, they gave men the advantage in eight areas – eight different areas, so, you know, driving a bargain, negotiating, power, and things like that they gave men the advantage.

When we asked the men, it was a very different story. Men gave men the advantage and felt that they had greater skill sets or advantage in eleven areas and they only found two that women had any advantage in, and this was between 25 and 50 percent of all the male respondents.

MS. ERBE: What were those skills that the men focused on?
MS. EVANS: It was multitasking and people skills. Those were the two areas that they gave us any credence for having an advantage in, and of course those were both on women’s voting side, too. But men gave themselves advantages and in 11 out of 24 areas. So there were only a few areas where they thought that they were equally advantaged.

MS. ERBE: What does this mean in the workplace?

MS. EVANS: What we concluded from this and what we see here is that there is a stereotype of women that gives them less credence for basic competencies than what we give men and even women are participating in this stereotype.

If a woman is up for a job, say, up for a tough assignment, up for a promotion, up for a raise, any one of these areas – any way that a woman is going to advance could be negatively impacted by just the general attitude of the people who are promoting them whether it’s a man or a woman on the basic issues of competency and whether women have the skills to get ahead.

MS. ERBE: So how do we get to the point where the stereotype is women are competent?

MS. EVANS: It seems like a very basic idea that women are competent, but, you know, what we see is that it’s not a stereotype. We don’t want to move to a stereotype where women and men are just exactly the same. Women have many issues on their plate that men don’t have and so their lives in some ways are much more complex and they are up against greater challenges, but another surprising finding of the same study was that men in this study were more likely to take advantage of work-life balance benefits than women, so women are fighting the stereotype by not taking advantage of some of the great benefits that companies are trying to give them to help them out.

So we need a stereotype that says women are not the same as men. We’re women. We have more in our plate in many, many ways, but we have basic levels of competency that are equal and we have some areas where we are better than men and we need to have that recognized right now and build these new stereotypes that we don’t get way behind.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So what’s affecting women in the workplace more these days, Susan Au Allen, women’s own stereotypes about themselves or men’s stereotypes about women?

MS. ALLEN: Men just don’t understand women. (Laughter.) They still think that we’re multitasking. Yes, because we do a lot. But I think it is changing slowly, but it is definitely changing. As an Asian-American woman, I am proud to say that there are two Asian women on the top CEO list of Fortune 100 companies and Indra Nooyi on
October 1 is going to be the second woman in the largest U.S. company holding a CEO position and she – you can read her life story – she could be a roadmap for other women to follow.

MS. ERBE: What do you think about these stereotypes? Do women hold too many of them? Are they fair to other women? Are men fair to women?

MS. MURGUIA: Yeah, I haven’t had time to form an opinion on this. I’ve been too busy with my work. (Laughter.) No, I mean, I just think women are trying to balance so much. That is true, but there is no question in my mind that we have made so much progress. Women are very capable, very competent, and perhaps we don’t tell our own story very well. And I think we need to figure out a way to do that, because we’re all about the work, we’re all about getting the results. Sometimes we haven’t done enough to market ourselves, I think (the way ?), with the successes.

MS. ERBE: Exactly. Well, the survey does say that men – you know, they drive hard bargains, they negotiate much tougher, women do the multitasking and they are great in HR, you know, human resources, helping other women. Do we just have to get tougher and act more like men in the workplace?

MS. WOOD: Sometimes, yeah, and I think in general men tend to be tougher at least on the outside than women are, so maybe that speaks to some of us, but multitasking is what CEOs need to be able to do, so frankly we ought to have more women CEOs because that’s a great attribute to have.

MS. GANDY: And it’s not only good business, it’s good for business because study after study shows that the companies with the highest percentage of women in the Fortune 500 have much higher returns to their stockholders and much higher gross sales than companies with smaller numbers of women in management.

MS. ERBE: But I just wonder quickly, we’ve gotten to the point where overt discrimination is sort of a thing – is largely a thing of the past, but do women need to make more of a push now to see themselves as powerful?

MS. MURGUIA: Absolutely. I think it starts with us first and we have to be able to make sure, one, not only that we’re doing the job, but we’re taking credit. I mean, I think sometimes we’re afraid to sort of brag on ourselves and take credit and I know that a lot of time we need to make sure we’re doing that.

MS. ERBE: All right, and I’ve got to take credit here. We’re out of time. (Laughter.) That’s it for this edition of “To the Contrary.” Next week, the baby business. And please join us on the web for “To the Contrary” Extra. Whether your views are in agreement or to the contrary, please join us next time.

(END)