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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, first, children as human shields in the gun debate. Then, who's leading the way for women in the workforce? Behind the headlines: as we introduce you to some new female members of Congress, this week it's Arizona's Kyrsten Sinema.

(Musical break.)

MS. ERBE: Hello. I'm Bonnie Erbe. Welcome to *To the Contrary*, a discussion of news and social trends from diverse perspectives. Up first, the gun debate rages on.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: Children move to the forefront of the gun control debate as both sides use kids in their campaigns. First, the NRA released a web ad accusing President Obama of being a hypocrite.

MAN [Narrator]: But he's just another elitist hypocrite.

MS. ERBE: That because he's skeptical of putting armed guards in schools while his daughters are protected by the Secret Service. Then, flanked by children of all ages in the background, Mr. Obama signed 23 executive orders on gun control.

Late next week, the Senate starts considering plans to limit gun ownership.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So, Congresswoman Norton, are kids being used as props in the gun control debate?

DEL. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON (D-DC): Well, Bonnie, this time kids were targets, not just props. So on appropriate occasions, they're going to insist upon being heard.

GENEVIEVE WOOD: I think children have been used on many political issues by both sides because it brings sympathy to any issue. So I think we're seeing it again here.

NUCHHI CURRIER: Also I think they act as witnesses, and they – I think they're more than just props. And they have, like you said, been used over time. When it was the issue of nuclear disarmament and during Reagan's time they were used repeatedly because, again, it's the sympathy that gets generated.

ANGELA MCGLOWAN: Of course, both sides use them as props, but that doesn't make it right. And especially with the NRA showing the president's daughters in the online commercial, I was totally against that. Even though I'm for the NRA, that is below the belt to me. Kids should off limits.

MS. ERBE: Well, but as Eleanor pointed out, I mean, the kids in Connecticut were targets. So why in this instance is it inappropriate to some people to use this?

MS. WOOD: I don't think it is inappropriate, frankly. I mean – look, children – I mean, almost every president, when they sign a piece of legislation or they have a particular event, have people in the background. With the health care legislation, there were children standing in the background there too.

But, I mean, in this particular episode, basically, he was going to probably have somebody out there who doesn't bring sympathy. And did the White House press office think about that? Well, of course they did.

MS. MCGLOWAN: But kids were targets in Columbine, but in the black community in Chicago, in Washington, D.C., you've had children being killed for decades now. So why now? This is nothing new that happened in Newtown.

DEL. NORTON: No. This is why now because it is new. This is new.

MS. MCGLOWAN: That kids are being killed?

DEL. NORTON: This is different.

MS. ERBE: No. No. No. One at a time.

DEL. NORTON: This is different. Nobody has seen anything like this. In fact, with all of the murders we've had – and I come from a city where children have been routinely killed. No one envisioned that anybody would mow down children.

Kids are – especially today's kids, you know, who are used to expressing themselves are going to want to be heard, and, on appropriate occasion, should be heard.

The NRA gets a thumbs down because it's not about kids. It's about somebody's kids. And that somebody's kids happens to be the president's, the president of the United States. And he didn't even have – the president didn't even have the discretion not to have his children protected and we would have been appalled had that not been the case.

So to put the president's kids in with kids who step up and say, I want everybody to know how kids feel about this, is not apples and oranges. It's A to Z and it shouldn't happen. And I think he's been condemned. He's been condemned – the NRA ad has been condemned I think across the board.

MS. MCGLOWAN: Yes.

MS. ERBE: Yeah, but although their membership has –

MS. MCGLOWAN: Has gone up.

MS. ERBE: Mushrooming.

DEL. NORTON: But not all for this ad.

MS. ERBE: But I want to get to the legislation. And there's been a lot of talk late this week about the fact that maybe the fizz is being taken out of the Newtown disaster and massacre, and that members – that this time too, the NRA will be able to get its way because politicians are already backing down from passing strict gun control measures.

MS. MCGLOWAN: Whenever you talk about the constitution, whenever you talk about the Second Amendment, it's a passionate issue on both sides. And something should be done. However, my thing is this, Bonnie. You lost more people in Chicago than the war in Afghanistan in 2012. So if there's nothing –

MS. ERBE: And there have been over 1,000 gun deaths, we should say, since Newtown.

MS. MCGLOWAN: Yes. So the bottom line is this: we need to come to the table, but criminals don't go to gun shows and get guns. Criminals don't register their guns. So I see both sides of the argument here.

DEL. NORTON: Criminals do go to gun shows to get guns. In fact, they'd be crazy not to, because you can get into a gun show and nobody asks them –

MS. CURRIER: And it's not necessarily hardened criminals.

DEL. NORTON: But just a moment – and nobody will ask any questions. And you can not only get one gun. You can get 10 or 15 guns. So, you know, we're going to have this back and forth. What we need to do is to come and say, look, what things do we agree upon? Then come out from that and see what we can – what we can do.

MS. ERBE: Nuchhi.

MS. CURRIER: And why should assault weapons be available to ordinary citizens? Why should we have these massive magazines of fire arms and – what are they, bullets or whatever?

MS. MCGLOWAN: I can't see going to a gun show – and a person who's a victim of a violent crime, and if I was packing that day when I was mugged, probably I

would be in a better in place than I'm right now dealing with post-traumatic stress. I can't see gang bangers going to a gun show, having a background check with a criminal record getting a gun.

MS. WOOD: And I think, Bonnie, to your point of why are we maybe seeing some people talking a step back. I think because the longer people say, look, before we just jump, everybody wants to do something. Everybody wants to address this issue.

But I think people are trying to be thoughtful about it, which is a good thing. If we want to make sure we're addressing the problem, just quickly passing legislation or sending out an executive order, I think – and to your question, we had an assault ban that banned the very things you talked about for 10 years. It didn't stop Columbine. There's no evidence in many cases it would have stopped what happened in Newtown.

So we need – before we just go pass it – I understand the question, but we've got to look at the evidence. The longer people are looking – it's not about the NRA pressure alone. It's also the evidence.

MS. ERBE: Enough. I want to get to the NRA and the president. Who's strategically in a better place right now? Because, if you look at – Gabby Giffords has a Super PAC. Michael Bloomberg has a – Mayor Bloomberg in New York has a Super PAC. He's spending a lot of money. The NRA was not effective, very effective in the last campaign. They had a lot of losses of – you know, people they backed in a big way didn't win in Congress. And the president's approval ratings are higher than at any time since he was first elected.

DEL. NORTON: And the polls – and the polls are with the president, but you make the most important point. NRA has had this game all to themselves. They've been able to play it with no money in the game on the side of the people who wanted some sensible gun safety. Now, with people like Gabby Giffords getting in to people who can attract funds and target them strategically, I think the game has changed.

MS. MCGLOWAN: The president has the national narrative. He has more power than the NRA. But I believe you were right from this standpoint. And being a person who makes laws, people should come to the table and find out what they do agree on instead of politicizing it. It is a political issue, but I think leaders should come together and start the bipartisan – (off mic.).

MS. ERBE: When you have the NRA saying, we're against an assault weapons ban, we're against everything – you know, to me, the NRA has become nothing than a shield for the gun manufacturers. And if you find out where their finances are coming, it's true. I mean, they get their membership dues for sure, but they get huge money from gun manufactures. And they're trying – they're in the business of selling more guns.

MS. MCGLOWAN: They are in the business of selling more guns, but you do have Democrats that have been endorsed by the NRA that might have a tough race next go around if they go against them.

MS. ERBE: Last word.

MS. CURRIER: That may be fine, but I think time is of the essence. Whatever needs to happen, needs to happen now. The president needs to take action now because otherwise they're going to be back to the same debate, which is going to stay unresolved to bring more people to the table and wait another few months, nothing will happen. It has to happen now.

MS. ERBE: All right. Let us know what you think. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe or #tothecontrary. From kids and guns to working women.

In 1990, the U.S. ranked sixth for women's participation in the workforce among developed countries. Since then, however, the percentage of women employed has stagnated.

According to a new study by the National Bureau of Economic Research, the U.S. ranked 17<sup>th</sup> in the year 2010. Meanwhile, the number of women working in Europe and Japan has been steadily rising. Researchers say the reason for this is those countries' family-friendly policies, flexibility to work part time, generous maternity leave among others.

So is the U.S. falling behind? Perhaps not. The researchers say some family-friendly benefits have unintended consequences that drive more women into part time and low paying jobs.

So would the OECD – Genevieve, would the OECD model work here in the U.S.?

MS. WOOD: Well, I think – I don't think so. I mean, the fact is in this country, compared to a lot of countries in Europe that we're looking at and comparing, in this country, women and men have just the same amount of likelihood of being managers, for example. It's only half that chance if you're in many parts of Western Europe. So it's great to have family friendly, what we think of as family friendly policies. But if that encourages businesses not to hire a woman because there's more opportunity to leave, then fewer women are going to end up in the opportunity to be managers alike.

DEL. NORTON: That's a poor reason for saying to a woman that she should go into the workforce and let her kid come what may. The reason that women who here are managers in greater numbers is because they can afford to pay for somebody to take care of their children.

Let's talk about the average woman. The average woman has had to flood – these women have flooded into the workplace. Why? Because the standard of living for the

American family has been kept from – has risen, but it's been kept from completely eroding only because women have gone into the workforce. And they've had to go come what may.

I think women would say – and I think you're absolutely right, Genevieve. Some would take part-time work and the rest. So be it. We want women to do what is their choice, but we don't want that choice to be pre-ordained for the average woman because she's got to go in there without any way to have child care, without – there are low-income – low-income women don't even have sick leave.

So, you know, we cannot be for – we cannot be against what will help women to enter the workforce with some grace and some comfort because some of them will decide that they would rather have part-time work.

MS. ERBE: Wait. Wait. Nuchhi – I want to – Nuchhi Currier, new to the panel, and welcome. You've – you were born in Pakistan. You've lived all over the world. Do you see America, the U.S. as falling behind in terms of a leadership position it may have had in the world in terms of the most advanced country for women say 20 years ago?

MS. CURRIER: I think, as a Pakistani-American, this country has opportunities for everybody. And I also see women here are getting education much more than – sometimes more than boys.

So the fact that women are falling behind in the workplace then has to mean that their life circumstances are such that they cannot advance or they cannot do – go beyond part-time work. So I totally agree with the congresswoman. I think that you have to – the government, the state has to prepare the ground for these women to achieve the maximum that they can.

MS. MCGLOWAN: But I think another take on that is, as a woman that's worked in corporate American for a very long time, I found women in managerial positions won't hire other women. I find sometimes we're biased on each other in hiring qualified women.

MS. CURRIER: I don't – I don't agree with that. I've now – I'm running a non-profit organization –

MS. MCGLOWAN: I understand.

MS. CURRIER: – with 500 women in it. And I have also worked in America for the past 30 years. I don't think women are women's worst enemies. I think that's a myth that –

MS. ERBE: There are some – there are some of them, but they're not in the majority.

MS. CURRIER: But then there are some guys who go against guys too.

MS. MCGLOWAN: I don't think they're the majority, but I'm just – I'm giving a different take on it to add to it the reason why we're not because I've seen some women with sharp elbows, they don't want the competition.

MS. ERBE: Well, I was most – I was most surprised, I must say, about this study that it did show that family-friendly policies, yes, they get more women into the workforce, but they get them into the workforce in part-time jobs and less powerful jobs. To me, is that – now, that's not a bad thing for – as you mentioned, low-income women, but if we're trying to get women to the tops of American corporations and in top jobs, is it a bad thing?

DEL. NORTON: But wait a minute. That was in Europe. That was the effect in Europe. We don't know what the effect would be here, because we've never had the luxury of having a child care system, for example. And I would say let's try it.

I think women here by necessity – we went into the workforce by necessity. We've finally come to the point we're having nobody take care of your children. Understanding what these early years of brain development mean, women are making sacrifices. The people who are taking part-time jobs are not just low-income women. They are many women who went to the best law schools and management schools in the country. And all of that is robbing the country of talent.

MS. ERBE: All right. Behind the headlines: Kyrsten Sinema is a study in the atypical politician. The new U.S. House member from Arizona is a young, openly bisexual woman who doesn't align herself with the faith community. And that, she says, is what makes her great to represent Arizona.

(Begin video segment.)

REPRESENTATIVE KYRSTEN SINEMA (D-AZ): I could go on for a long time about how wonderful Arizona is. If I can – Arizonians are very practical and common-sense people and we're really interested in solving problems and getting things done. And we're just not that interested in focusing on people's private lives or their personal choices or decisions.

MS. ERBE: A lifelong resident of Arizona, Sinema comes from humble beginnings.

REP. SINEMA: My family was actually homeless when I was a kid for two years after my parents got divorced. My family lived in an abandoned gas station. We lived without running water. We lived without electricity. And, you know, sometimes we didn't – you know, didn't have enough food to eat. And it was thanks to family, and friends, and my parents' church, and sometimes, the local state and local government that

we were able to make it through. It was a kind of a combination of hard work and determination and help and support from those around you. That's how I was successful.

MS. ERBE: Sinema got her start in politics in 2004, when she ran for a seat in the Arizona legislature.

REP. SINEMA: I had been a social worker in a low-income community for many years. And I started going down to the capital to lobby to try and help change state policies so that we could create more opportunity so people could actually move from poverty to self-sufficiency, find a job, get on their feet, not need help from the government any longer. And when I got to the state capital, I got frustrated because I didn't feel like many folks were looking at that kind of innovation or change. So I thought, well, I'll give it a shot.

MS. ERBE: After serving in both chambers of the state legislature, Sinema decided she wanted to change the face of Congress.

REP. SINEMA: They seemed more interested in bickering than in solving problems. And I thought, you know, Congress needs some people who know how to get stuff done. And, as a social worker, that's been my job. And as a member of the Arizona state legislature, that was always my goal. So I thought, you know, I think I can bring a little bit of common sense and practicality.

MS. ERBE: Sinema was catapulted into the national spotlight during her campaign. As a member of the LGBT community, she's the first openly bisexual members of Congress. But despite the attention, she says her sexual orientation doesn't matter.

REP. SINEMA: I've been out for many, many years, just nobody cares. I've served in Arizona's state legislature for seven years. And this is just not really an issue. I think people are most concerned about whether or not I'm serving their interests in my duty as a public servant.

And so they want to know that I'm voting in their best economic interest and that I'm taking action to help protect them and their families and prepare them for the future. And they're just not interested in any of that social stuff.

MS. ERBE: And her personal diversity represents the vast diversity of this new Arizona district.

REP. SINEMA: It's an incredibly diverse district. We're home to Arizona State University, the largest university in the country, which I'm honored and privileged to teach at as well.

But also home to Sunnyslope, which is a community where I worked as a social worker for nearly a decade, one of the most low-income communities in our community.

We're also home to the Biltmore, which is one of the most affluent neighborhoods in the state.

And so it's an incredibly diverse and rich district with seniors, and Anglos, and Latinos, all of us together. And what I'm excited to do is to – we're in about the deepest fabric of that district in trying to represent all the corners of the district.

MS. ERBE: Sinema says she wants people to be self-sufficient. But she will work in Congress to ensure her constituents get the support they need.

REP. SINEMA: The number one priority I have is to help people feel that sense of economic security by creating jobs and creating a climate where jobs can flourish. So ensuring that high-tech, high-wage jobs come to our districts, that they stay in our district, and that we have an educated workforce that is ready to take advantage of those jobs of tomorrow.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So speaking of tomorrow, is she the face of tomorrow in American politics and that not fitting the mold at all?

MS. MGGLOWAN: Bonnie, as someone who's a diversity consultant of "Fortune 500" companies, we would call her a triple minority – being openly gay, a woman, and then coming from her socio-economic background. So, yes. She is a face of tomorrow. And, yes, Congress does need her now.

She's a little more progressive than I am since I am conservative, but that's what makes the world go round, diversity of voices. And this lady, she has a J.D, she has a Ph.D., and she was a social worker. And she's for self-sufficiency but she's also for same-sex marriage. So I think she has the look of tomorrow.

DEL. NORTON: Well, you know, she's from a district – it would be interesting to see her hold that seat and I certainly hope she does. But she barely got it.

MS. ERBE: Yeah. Very – one of the last races called.

DEL. NORTON: Yes. And she – she's from a university town so she's from a town in a state which is becoming America and then some. And I suspect that she is right, that she did not get elected because of what makes her so distinctive in this white male preserve in which I serve, because it's still that, even with the increasing diversity at least of the Democratic Caucus. And her district, with a really competitive seat, with somebody who's been very strategic about how she's climbed the ladder, this is one smart woman.

MS. ERBE: Your thoughts. You're not a fan. Wrong party.

MS. WOOD: Well, no. No. No. No. It has nothing to do with that. I could care less what her personal life – even though I find it interesting that so much of that interview was about the fact she’s bisexual, even though she said that’s not anybody wants to talk about, but what matters is what she does when she’s in Congress, how does she represent the people of her district, how does she stand for issues.

My guess is she’s going to be – take a different position on many issues than I would want to see a member of Congress take. But that has nothing with what her background is.

MS. MCGLOWAN: When she was in the state House, she actually did a bill that passed for veterans to have in-state tuition, no matter where – so she’s from – she’s been from both sides. And being conservative –

MS. WOOD: Well, even Eleanor does some good things every once in a while, OK?

DEL. NORTON: Yeah. I have a bill like that.

MS. WOOD: But I’m saying in general I don’t think she’s going to be a conservative member.

MS. MCGLOWAN: No.

MR. CURRIER: I think it’s important for her to come out. And it’s important for her to see that she’s going to take care of the constituency that really needs taking care of because we – I think we need to protect the rights of everybody, whatever minority they belong to, whether it’s a sexual minority or whether it’s any other kind of minority. So I think she’s absolutely right in pushing that line.

MS. ERBE: Well, what about – and another thing we haven’t talked much about – we mentioned it in the piece – but she is not a member – the “Huffington Post” called her, incorrectly she told me, an atheist. She’s not a member of a faith community. Is that – you know, 10 years ago, 20 years ago, that would have been unheard of for somebody to get elected to Congress.

MS. CURRIER: I think that’s important to be represented also.

DEL. NORTON: I feel – I would hope she would feel about discussion of her views on religion the way she feels about discussion or views on her sexual preference. I don’t know why anybody has any business asking me what my religion is. And one of the problems we’ve had – it has been people wearing religion on their sleeve in politics. So I was shocked to even know that. I don’t know anybody’s religion in Congress.

MS. MCGLOWAN: In going back to the constitution, we have freedom of religion, but also we have freedom of choice. So I think it’s great that she has –

MS. CURRIER: I agree with you.

MS. MCGLOWAN: Thank you. That she has a voice. So we won't have people wearing the Bible on their arm because, as true Christians, you're not supposed to judge anyway.

MS. ERBE: What about – about what this though: how can you campaign at churches, which is where a lot of politicians like to campaign if you don't belong to one?

MS. WOOD: Well, I think a lot of politicians speak in a lot of different places where they're not a member. But I don't think she has been outside that community. If I'm not wrong, I think she went to Brigham Young University, didn't she?

MS. MCGLOWAN: She did. She did for her undergrad.

MS. WOOD: Which is Mormon.

DEL. NORTON: Mormon. She was Mormon.

MS. WOOD: University, right. So I don't think she mentioned her – in the interview her family's church community helped her when they were – so it doesn't sound like she's anti just because she isn't an active member of a congregation.

MS. CURRIER: And you can still give out a message of inclusion, of humanity instead of giving out a message of religion, because I think religion sometimes becomes exclusionary. It's my little club. Whereas, this way, she can actually present a much wider – (inaudible). Yes.

DEL. NORTON: In the same way that Jew can go to a Christian church to give a message.

MS. MCGLOWAN: Or a Christian can go to a synagogue.

DEL. NORTON: And I think she – she's not going to have any trouble. They know who she is and she got elected.

MS. WOOD: Right. What matters is what she stands for and what she does when she's in Congress.

MS. ERBE: Wonderful. That's it for this edition of *To the Contrary*. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe and #tothecontrary. And check our website: [pbs.org/ttc](http://pbs.org/ttc), where the discussion continues. Whether you agree or think to the contrary, please join us next time.

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