



HOST:

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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, first, a combat win for women. Then, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's legacy, and women and Hollywood awards.

(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, women move to the frontlines.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: The ban on women in combat has been lifted. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta addressed the country this week explaining his decision.

SECRETARY OF DEFENSE LEON PANETTA: It's clear to all of us that women are contributing in unprecedented ways to the military's mission of defending the nation.

MS. ERBE: Fourteen percent of the military's active duty personnel are female and many women have called for ending the ban on combat positions for them for years. But not everyone is happy about women serving on the frontlines. A think tank, the Center for Military Readiness, released a report stating women are not equal on the battlefield and should not be forced into combat roles.

Manhattan Institute's scholar Heather MacDonald told me lifting the ban will ultimately hurt women.

HEATHER MACDONALD: I don't think that this is a move that is inspired by saying let's improve our combat readiness. This is all about women seeking a ready path up the career ladder in the Pentagon and making a theoretical and abstract point about equality. I can guarantee you that we will start seeing claims of sexual assault which will bring in more demands for gender sensitivity training because it will be assumed that it's the men who were exclusively at fault.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So Kellyanne Conway, will the addition of women into the combat forces bring added value to the military or hold it back?

KELLYANNE CONWAY: Women are already making incredible contributions to the United States military and will continue to do so. But the military's first and primary mission is to win wars and to be completely as capable and as efficient and as uber-ready as it can be. We also don't want to put our women in harm's way.

DEBRA CARNAHAN: Oh, I think it's absolutely going to be a valuable asset to the military and we've already shown that women are a valuable asset in Iraq and Afghanistan, not just in interpretation or talking to the women, but since there're no frontlines, they've been out there in the battlefield and they performed heroically.

TARA SETMAYER: It all depends on how we're defining combat. They've already been in combat support roles. I think that's great. But when you're talking infantry, frontline, close quarter, special operations, absolutely not.

PATRICIA SOSA: Well, some people say that they're ready in combat. And this is basically formalizing the process to make it official.

MS. ERBE: You know, I've been doing a lot of reading on this topic and physical fitness experts say that what – the most important thing – young women now can become almost as strong as young men. It's a matter of, you know, keeping fit, keeping weight off, exercising regularly –

MS. CONWAY: Well, some –

MS. ERBE: So – so – and also 30 percent of men fail the physical to get into the military. So you know, more women obviously would fail than men, but still set it at a certain level where it's supposed to be, and if a woman passes, fine.

MS. CONWAY: Well, wait, but let's go back 20 years to the Shannon Faulkner example, the Citadel, she was used by the feminist movement to make a point, the poor 19-year-old, 20-year-old at the time, and lasted a couple of weeks because she couldn't keep up with the physical endurance. Now, if you're suggesting that physical fitness experts say it's different, I'll accept that, Bonnie, except to say that we should not have the girls' version and the boys' version of that physical fitness test. I want the best prepared military, regardless of gender. But I'll tell you, if physical fitness – if we were physiologically – not mentally, emotionally, professionally equal to men – if we were physiologically as strong as men, rape would not exist. You would be able to defend yourself and fight him off.

MS. SOSA: Well, I don't know where we need to go to that comparison, but I would say this. The chiefs of staff actually approved the recommendation. They were consulted. They've been looking at the data. As everybody knows, the lessons learned in Afghanistan and Iraq have informed this process. I think there's another factor that you're citing something that happened 20 years ago, is evolution of technology in terms of the military. You know, what is to go to war now? You know, what is a battlefield? It's in a very different place. And many argue that women have already been in the battlefield, but because they were not officially recognized, they didn't get the benefits of promotion, the benefits of retirement, I mean lots of things – it was discriminatory. So basically – and the other point –

MS. ERBE: But let me ask – let me ask you this. Does it – like with the Marines, you select to try for the Marines, right? So women don't have to go into the Marines. Does this combat order mean any woman who joins the Army will have to go to the front?

MS. SETMAYER: No, it gives them the opportunity to, from what I understand. But this is the issue. The physical part of it, even –

MS. ERBE: So what's the problem if women – if women are choosing to go and they can pass the physical tests?

MS. SETMAYER: Well, that's the issue –

MS. ERBE: What is the problem?

MS. SETMAYER: Yes, big ifs, the physical tests have – they must be the same. I haven't heard them say that they're going to do that yet, uniform physical fitness tests. The Brits tried to do this a couple of years ago and they found that women – injuries for women increased 50 percent because we are built differently. Now, for the .001 percent that may be able to handle it, OK, but should we up set the upper card as far as military readiness and infantry units? We're not talking about, you know, women who are fighter pilots, good for them, women who are in combat support roles, I think that's fantastic. And you should not – the promotional system should change, so that they're not penalized –

MS. ERBE: But combat support –

MS. SETMAYER: But infantry, frontlines, we're talking, what – you know, Marines in a fox hole for, you know, a week at a time, sleeping in sleeping bags next to each other or holding open plastic bags to defecate in, because they're in fox holes on a mission. Is this – you know – putting – inserting women into that environment, I don't think is in the best interest of the military.

MS. CARNAHAN: OK, first of all, wow, I was going to start in one place, but now I'm going to another.

MS. SETMAYER: That was actually –

MS. CARNAHAN: We've got women being blown up, shot at, and killed, so I'm not worried about whether their sensibility is going to be offended by having to defecate in a bag in front of somebody else. You know, they're out there taking care of people. They're right there, right next to a man in Iraq. They've been there in Afghanistan –

MS. SETMAYER: Not in infantry frontlines.

MS. CARNAHAN: The other thing coming back to the history –

MS. ERBE: Well, let me ask you this, though. Isn't this just a real world situation – like they're just approving what they already need to approve? They need – they need more people who are physically fit to go into combat. Women are 14 percent of the military and growing. Isn't this just a realization of what's already going on?

MS. CARNAHAN: I think absolutely it is. I mean, we heard somebody's arguments when women went into West Point and then to the academies, very successful there. The other thing is I trust our military leaders. I trust the Joint Chiefs. My father was a West Pointer and served on the Joint Chiefs. I mean, these are people that look at these things very seriously and combat readiness is their number one, most important –

MS. CONWAY: This also denies –

MS. ERBE: But let me ask –

(Cross talk.)

MS. CARNAHAN: – so we need to trust them and also we have three years to be looking at recommendations or concerns that they have before any implementation is going to happen.

MS. ERBE: OK, sexual assault in the military. Are we –

MS. CONWAY: It's real.

MS. ERBE: Of course it's real and it's huge. But they are starting – the military is – the Pentagon's starting to get a handle on it. And I've seen different reports. Some say – the conservative say this will increase sexual assault in the military having women in combat zones. And there're others that say absolutely not. But that it will change the culture of the military –

MS. CONWAY: But anti-American –

MS. ERBE: No, but women more in charge. In other words, if you're a sergeant, are you going to sexually assault a major?

MS. CONWAY: No, no, no, no. I'm not worried about our sergeants. I'm worried about our enemies. Bonnie, we go to – you know, notwithstanding – this isn't why I'm bringing up sexual assault and rape. This is why. Because we go into real wars with real anti-American, anti-women enemies – thank you – who use rape and torture and will use rape and torture of women –

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: They use torture – you know, you put a –

(Cross talk.)

MS. CONWAY: – also then I shouldn't want one of my three daughters to be one of them one day.

MS. CARNAHAN: No, no, but rape is not number one – rape is not a sexual act. It is an act of power.

MS. CONWAY: But I want –

(Cross talk.)

MS. CARNAHAN: – women and making them more powerful. We do have a problem of rape and sexual assault within our own military. I see that is only helping because you have more powerful women. And second of all, rape is not limited to women. Men get tortured with rape, too. So we don't say we don't have our men going in because they're going to get raped by the enemy.

MS. CONWAY: So part of the equality is let's make sure everybody has an equal opportunity to be raped?

MS. CARNAHAN: No –

(Cross talk.)

MS. SETMAYER: But this portion of it denies the natural human instinct of men wanting to protect women and they have said this in studies that men, no matter what, no matter how tough the woman is next to them, their instinct is to protect her in battle or they would protect her – maybe go out of the way and compromise what they would normally do so that she wouldn't have to endure the horrors of –

MS. ERBE: What does that have to do with sexual assault?

MS. SETMAYER: No, no, no, I'm talking about the role of women in combat and being potential POWs or captured by the enemy that that – the psychology of that with men and women dynamics is a very real thing we need to consider. You don't want to compromise missions because men are trying to do the right thing to protect women so they don't have to go through hat.

MS. SOSA: A lot of this is being taken into consideration. I mean, this is being not a lighthearted decision. This is a decision that's taken years to occur. And as I understand, they're going to start a process in May of this year, which will be finalized in June 2016. So I am feeling that we're having a debate that is happening for years.

MS. ERBE: OK, one more question, in particular to you two on the panel. Feminism has constantly stood against war, yet this is a feminist victory. This was pushed by women's rights groups. So how do you justify the two?

MS. SOSA: Oh, absolutely, absolutely.

MS. ERBE: How do you justify – so is it really –

MS. SOSA: It's an important issue for equality, but actually put women at risk. The bottom line is if you qualify to be in the front, then you go to the front.

MS. CARNAHAN: It's about choice.

MS. SOSA: So you're not going to be protected from women are banned from the front. So it's real.

MS. CARNAHAN: It's about choice. You know, some women are anti-war. Some women are not so anti-war. But it's about choice and it's about equality.

MS. SETMAYER: No, it's about equality and opportunity or guaranteeing equality of outcomes. You can't guarantee the equality of outcome and in this situation what's at stake is way too great for a social experiment. And not for nothing, but when you start to get to the three, four, five-star level, it becomes a very political position for you when you're a general. Ask some of the guys who are in the lower level ranks how they feel about it. And I think they'd have a different opinion.

MS. ERBE: All right. Let us know what you think. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe or @TotheContrary.

From women on the frontlines to Hillary Clinton's legacy.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave what will most likely be her last appearance before Congress to testify on the Benghazi U.S. diplomatic compound. That, where four Americans, including the U.S. ambassador were killed last year. She was applauded by Democrats, but grilled, even insulted by Republicans, including Wisconsin Senator Ron Johnson in this exchange.

SECRETARY OF STATE HILLARY CLINTON: With all due respect, the fact is we had four dead Americans. Was it because of a protest, or was it because of guys out for a walk one night who decided they'd go kill some Americans? What difference, at this point, does it make?

MS. ERBE: Kentucky Republican Rand Paul also told her had he been president, he would have, quote, "relieved her of her post," end quote, for not reading a cable from

the embassy sent before the attack. She responded almost 1.5 million cables come to the State Department each year and she does not even see most of them.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So in terms of her legacy, how will this appearance play?

MS. SOSA: Well, from my perspective, it strengthened her legacy. She was forthcoming. She was strong. She was humane. I was very touched by her testimony. I actually had the opportunity to watch it. Is it going to be used politically by the other side? Obviously she is the number one contender for 2016, not just among the Democrats, really, among any potential presidential candidate. So they absolutely are going to use everything she said against her.

MS. SETMAYER: As they should have. I can see the campaign commercials now with her righteous indignant “what difference does it make?” It makes a whole hell of a lot of difference to the families of the dead Americans who died over there for the people who were incompetent and did not give that ambassador and his consulate the security they need. I’m sorry that she was busy off at wine tastings and didn’t decide – and couldn’t take responsibility at the time, but it makes a difference to a lot of people. And I was there. My boss is on that committee. He challenged her on who’s been held accountable for this. The only person is the guy who made this random video allegedly. He’s in jail. He’s the only one. And she also – where was that passion when the time came and she was actually asked about this and they perpetuated this lie that it was about some random Muslim – anti-Muslim video? She perpetuated that lie. She was part of the PR campaign to mislead the American people on what actually happened and she should be called to task for it, but unfortunately, the media and everyone’s in love with Hillary. She’s going to get a pass.

MS. CONWAY: I think her saying “what difference does it make” was one of the big blunders of her very long and storied political career, blew up on Twitter. People were very critical that there is a difference whether it’s an al Qaeda inspired or organized, preplanned terrorist plot to kill Americans, in this case four of them, or as she put it, people are just walking around, looking to – it’s a huge difference because we’re fighting al Qaeda every day, everywhere. We’re fighting anti-American terrorists everywhere. And for the secretary to say, whoever he or she is, whatever political party, to literally shrug the shoulders and say what difference does it make, I thought was a huge error for a woman of such intelligence and experience.

MS. CARNAHAN: Well, I think this is being taken out of context. It’s kind of like Shakespeare’s “first think you do you kill all the lawyers.” He wasn’t advocating killing all the lawyers. He was saying if you want to have chaos in this society, get rid of the lawyers. In this case, what she was responding to was an attack that said why weren’t you putting out there that this is an attack when this was going on, the day after, the day after that, referring to a Sunday morning talk show, OK? What she was saying was, at that point, what difference did it make? We were trying to get control of what’s going on

on the ground, taking care of these people. She didn't say what difference does it make that it happened.

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: We need to turn to her legacy. She's – the Kerry hearings have already started. She's on her way out very shortly. She has done so much to promote women and girls around the world, not just in this country. Is that going to be her main legacy as Secretary of State?

MS. SOSA: It will be. She's been so consistent. She's a veteran of the political process. And you know, the whole thing of who cares about what happened reminds me of the slogan, you know, I built it, you know, that the Republican used during the presidential election. It didn't have any consequence.

So I think her work speaks for itself and I don't think this is going to have any impact on it.

MS. SETMAYER: Well, not in the immediate future. It won't because, again, there's a love affair with the Clintons and she gets a pass. Has she done some good work as secretary of state? Yes, I think she has. But that doesn't mean that a lot of the – you know – some of the grievances that we had that are legitimate ones as her job of secretary of state should be overlooked.

MS. ERBE: You said grievances. What about – beyond this comment, what are the other grievances?

MS. SETMAYER: Well – (laughter) – well, first of all –

MS. CONWAY: I dodged fire in Bosnia.

MS. SETMAYER: Yeah, no kidding. She seemed to be almost – where was she when we were going into Libya? Where was she, about, you know, or absence in Syria. She kind of was, you know, flying around, earning her million miles, and there was no challenge in the Obama doctrine and what we were doing overseas. She was kind of – she was not really forceful enough, I think, in using the position because I don't think she necessarily agreed with it, because I don't know a lot of people who realize this. She was critical of Obama's approach –

MS. ERBE: Wait a second –

MS. SETMAYER: – like during this testimony that I think she felt the whole time and she should have pushed back against some of the Obama policies.

MS. ERBE: But do you think four years from now, if she runs, as everybody assumes she's going to, that this will still be a live issue in the campaign?

MS. CARNAHAN: I think that the Republicans will try to make it a live issue. Of course they will. I mean, that's politics, but I think that she has a fantastic record. She's been held as one of the strongest and best secretary of state that we've ever had by people in both parties. And so I think that she's came out stronger on this. I think she handled herself well. I think it's kind of insulting to sit there and talk about making her million miles and drinking her wine.

MS. SETMAYER: Well, that's what she was –

MS. CARNAHAN: Condoleezza Rice drinking wine, when you know, the 9/11 happened –

MS. SETMAYER: Not when our embassy was under attacked. Condoleezza Rice was not in Australia doing wine tasting.

MS. CONWAY: Let me bring this back down to policy and politics. I think Hillary Clinton's actually at the crescendo of her career because she's been a much more notable secretary of state than she was United States senator, first lady –

MS. ERBE: Well, isn't it – any senator is not going to have the power to actually do things that –

MS. CONWAY: Well, she's Hillary Clinton, though, so – but, Bonnie, seriously speaking, she's probably at the crescendo of her career, will probably be a grandmother at some point soon. And if I'm Hillary Clinton, I don't run for president again, for the however many consecutive years now, she's been voted the most admired woman in the U.S., above Oprah, above Michelle Obama, and others. And so she really can go out on a high note without that rough and tumble of a campaign where it's not as easy. You know, I sat here. The reason I'm laughing slightly only at the comments – Hillary Clinton – I sat here years ago and heard the same exact comments and the woman didn't make it. She was beat by somebody nobody talked about at the time named Barack Obama, who's now two term president. It's not going to be easy for 79-year-old Hillary Clinton to turn back some Democrats in the primary –

MS. ERBE: Won't be quite that. She'll be 68 –

MS. CONWAY: OK. And believe me, we always – we always age it up for women, don't we? They're not distinguished. They're just old. But – but seriously speaking, there're a lot of up and comers in Democratic Party I don't think are going to let her have that for eight years so easily.

MS. ERBE: All right. We are out of time. From Hillary Clinton to women in film.

With the Hollywood Awards season underway, critics are asking if separate best actor and best actress categories are archaic. This year, the Screen Actors Guild dropped the term actress, but still offers different categories for male actors and female actors. Many in the film fraternity say gender should not be the defining factor in determining winning characters. But the numbers tell a different story. According to a recent study, about a third of the characters in the 100 top grossing films in 2011 were women. Critics say that while in theory it makes sense not to have gender based categories, there are more good roles written for men and women are already at a disadvantage.

So Tara, why do women want to be called actors?

MS. SETMAYER: I don't know. (Laughter.) I think this is asked. Really, I do. I mean, at some point, I actually liked being a woman, I liked being recognized amongst my peers for my craft, whatever that may be –

MS. CONWAY: You're looking good, girl.

MS. SETMAYER: Thank you. I don't understand this. There's the whole obsession with gender neutrality is going – it's over board. And this is one of those examples. So we should – so Meryl Streep didn't deserve the myriad of awards that she has all these years, you know, winning best actress and best supporting actress because she should be up against the men?

MS. ERBE: Well, they still want to keep it – SAG after – still going to keep the two categories –

MS. SETMAYER: By just calling it the best actor, male or female.

MS. ERBE: Right.

MS. SETMAYER: Right?

MS. ERBE: Right, exactly.

MS. SETMAYER: You know, I – stewardess versus flight attendant, I don't know. I just think that this is unnecessary and I hope that they don't separate the categories, you know, go further and say there's just going to be everyone all in one because there is value to the characters that women play, versus what men play, and I think we should – that should be recognized.

MS. SOSA: Well, one fact that – when talk to many of the well-known actresses, they were saying, no, we need to have different categories, is that women only have 30 percent of the leading characters in films. So there's an unequal set of categories. So of course, there're going to be more men eligible for best actors, compared to women. So when we have a little bit more of equality, maybe they will be open to the idea.

I don't think it's a critical of national – and issue of national importance, so I'm not too worried about it.

MS. CONWAY: Actually, wait, but you won't have equality because if it's 30 percent versus 70 percent and you had one category, then you would come back and complain that only three of the 10 were women, whereas that would be proportionately representative of the 30 percent of female roles. So right now, you've got 50-50 categories. Women are actually ahead. So I don't understand why they would want to diminish their percentages, one. Number two, maybe these women don't want to wear these size zero and a half gowns and go on juice cleanses. They just want over a tuxedo doesn't go into one restaurant. (Laughter.)

MS. CARNAHAN: Well, you know, from what I was reading, I don't think the majority of women want to have one category together. I think they're saying just what you all are saying, which is leave it the way it is because Hollywood's very disproportionate right now with women and with the roles and in production and all those other things. I mean, I have a niece, who is an actress and very successful in Beverly Hills, has been in many, many films. And my sister's a producer. And I don't know why she likes to be called actor, but she does. And she's younger and she's 28 and I think that they just feel like actor was normally what it was to begin with because all actors were either men – I mean just –

MS. ERBE: But let me – let me throw this out there, OK? “Forbes Magazine,” last year, late last year, top – the top 10 performers by pay under 30, four of the top five are women, celebrities, I'm sorry. And it included Rihanna, Lady Gaga, the young – God, my brain's not working –

MS. CARNAHAN: Taylor Swift.

MS. ERBE: Taylor Swift was number one, Justin Bieber was number two, and then the other three were all women in the top five. So – and Kristen Stewart was the only actress on the list, but she was on there. Most highly paid under 30. Doesn't this mean things are kind of changing?

MS. CONWAY: It means the free market it takes care of it –

MS. SETMAYER: That's right.

MS. CONWAY: People – they're the highest paid because people buy their records. They don't buy the records, let's say, because that's a woman and I don't want to buy a man's record. They like that music. They like that art. And look at the diversity list you just gave us. Taylor Swift and Rihanna? You know, Lady Gaga and anybody else? You know, that's diversity in and of itself, so the free market took care of that.

MS. SOSA: And let's put this discussion in context. This is about awards and what are awards good for? I mean, in terms of talent, it doesn't measure anything. It gives someone an edge in terms of marketing their movies –

MS. ERBE: Right, marketing, I was going to say.

MS. SOSA: The more categories you have, the better. The more opportunities people have to market their movies and make more money, so that's OK. Let's have you know, many more categories, you know. Short women, tall women – (laughter) – I don't care.

MS. ERBE: Your thoughts, Debra.

MS. CARNAHAN: You know, I agree with you that the free market drives a lot of this. I also know that there's been a push over the years to have more women singers, to have more women groups, to produce more records, and pressure has been put on this industry to also be kinder to women, to not discard –

MS. ERBE: And now the young ones are outselling the men, so that's free market.

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: But that – that is it for this edition of *To the Contrary*. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe and @TotheContrary and check our website, pbs.org/ttc, where the discussion continues. Whether you agree or think to the contrary, please join us next time.

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