



HOST:

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NEW WOMEN IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPECIAL EDITION

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BONNIE ERBE: This week a special edition of *To the Contrary* on the new women in the U.S. House.

(Begin video segment.)

REPRESENTATIVE KYRSTEN SINEMA (D-AZ): So I thought, well, I'll give it a shot.

REPRESENTATIVE JOYCE BEATTY (D-OH): Why now with all the gridlock? That's the time you should go.

REPRESENTATIVE JACKIE WALROSKI (R-IN): Hoosiers are known for commonsensical kind of solutions.

REPRESENTATIVE ELIZABETH ESTY (D-CT): I was warned that it well cost my seat if I voted with my conscience.

REPRESENTATIVE ANN KUSTER (D-NH): We have a long tradition of women working in New Hampshire.

REPRESENTATIVE SUZAN DELBENE (D-WA): I was fortunate to have a mother who felt like anything was possible.

(End video segment.)

(Musical break.)

MS. ERBE: Hello. I'm Bonnie Erbe on Capitol Hill for a special edition of *To the Contrary*. Women have served in Congress since 1917, when Republican Jeannette Rankin was elected from Montana. This year, there's a whole new group of women in the House determined to make a difference. We sat down with many of them and now we're introducing them to you so you can see what they have planned.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: A life-long 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 federal government that we were able to make it through.

It was 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 the capital to lobby, to try and help change state policies so that we could create more opportunity so that 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 member 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 the social stuff.

MS. ERBE: And her personal diversity represents that 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 Sunny Slope, 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 and 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 district, that they stay in our district, and that we have an educated workforce that is ready to take advantage of those jobs of tomorrow.

REP. BEATTY: I come from a large family that's very supportive. I was very fortunate growing up in a large family, where all of us – because my mother and father understood the value of education, and somewhat non-traditional that all of us have advanced degrees, we were able to go to college. I'm a public school product and I'm very proud of that. And I was always taught that it was never about me, but it was about making a difference.

MS. ERBE: And she's tried to make a difference by working in government, in the private sector and in academia as a senior vice president at Ohio State University.

REP. BEATTY: I've had the opportunity to be a health care administrator of a 141-bed hospital. I'm a small business owner. And I have a love for financial literacy and making sure that young folks understand the value of the dollar. I'm a wife. I'm a step mother. I'm a sibling. And so I think I'm that well-rounded person that's coming to Congress.

MS. ERBE: Despite reservations voiced by those close to her, Beatty ran for office because she says she's a problem solver who loves a challenge.

REP. BEATTY: When I get asked the question about why going and why now, with all the gridlock, one of the things that comes to my mind immediately is that's the time that you go. With so much at stake and with so many things to work on, it's the time to go in, and to have resolve, and come up with answers that can help solve the problems, and being able to reach across the aisle. And having so many women here now, I am so confident that we'll be able to work together and be part of the solution.

MS. ERBE: Beatty joins Cleveland Democrat Marcia Fudge, making it the first time Ohio will have two African-American U.S. representatives.

REP. BEATTY: I think when we go out and young folks, women and men, look to us, we're part of a history. And we're a part that allows especially young girls to be

able to say, I too can go to Washington and serve in Congress because there was a Joyce Beatty.

MS. ERBE: Beatty says a diverse Congress means less gridlock and more action.

REP. BEATTY: I think there will be some changes in the House because of the diversity of the caucus. And we are more reflective of America.

MS. ERBE: Beatty is ready to resolve the differences between members of Congress and believes that can only be done when both sides compromise.

REP. BEATTY: Democrats are going to be Democrats and Republicans are going to be Republicans. And on many things, our core is very different. I think you have to look at both sides of the equation. And I think you have to come up with some resolves that are palatable for both sides of the aisle.

I don't think we've spent a lot of time figuring out how we can work together. I think in the past, there was too much time spent on making sure that we were on opposite pages. I don't think you will find anyone that's not going to truly be anti-seniors, anti-education, anti-building an infrastructure. There is that percentage of things where there is room for us to develop a plan that will help us as we look at the many reforms.

REP. WALORSKI: It's a very different kind of a background. I was a TV reporter in a CBS affiliate in South Bend when I came back from college. And then, after I got married, my husband and I did four years in Bucharest, Romania. Our church had asked us if we would go for a couple – for a two-year stint, so we sold our house, sold everything we had, made the provision, raised the money, got there, and then started our own organization. And so we ended up being there four years.

But it actually precipitated my run for the Indiana State House having an opportunity to be in a different place, a different culture, and understanding what role government can and can't play when it comes to, you know, governing.

MS. ERBE: And run she did. Walorski served three terms in the Indiana State House.

REP. WALORSKI: We were \$1 billion in debt. We had very well intentioned people. Everybody was doing what they, you know, really thought they should do. Our state was at the bottom of the barrel in this nation. We were 49th and 50th in virtually every grid that you could imagine. And today we're in the top five.

And so we had a chance to really do some significant reforms in our state, balance our budget. Today, we have a triple A bond rating, higher than the federal government. And, you know, I'm proud to be a Hoosier and come from the state of Indiana because we've really been able to accomplish a lot with working together, live within our means,

and doing exactly what we said we would do, which is be one of the greatest job providers in the nation.

MS. ERBE: Walorski thinks Indiana should be an example to the rest of the nation.

REP. WALORSKI: We balanced the budget. And we did it with bipartisan support. And it was very common sense people doing a very common sense thing. Hoosiers are known for commonsensical kind of solutions and wanting to be a part of a bigger solution. And I think, you know, we've been a model for the country. And one of the things I've talked about in my district for a long time is we can do – we really can at the federal level do what we did in the state of Indiana. And we really can work across the aisle.

MS. ERBE: So she decided to run for federal office and bring her solutions to Washington. She lost in 2010. But this past November, she narrowly defeated her opponent. Now she's ready to work together to get things done.

REP. WALORSKI: I can say that, you know, in this Congress, yeah, there's partisan divide. I can tell you I'm optimistic about the freshman class. We have found ways to work together.

MS. ERBE: But she's already started something big.

REP. WALORSKI: And we cosponsored a bill about freezing pay. You know, this is crazy. I mean, you know, moms are at home right now in Northern Indiana, in Elkhart, in South Bend, Indiana, and they're shopping. You know, they're buying milk and they've buying eggs. They're paying the mortgage and they're the ones putting gas in the car. And they know that if that bottom line, that checkbook says there's no more money, there's no more money. And so I think these commonsense things, like saying to the American people, we're going to hold this Congress accountable; we're going to freeze your pay.

MS. ERBE: As a Republican woman, Walorski especially feels the pressure to work together.

REP. WALORSKI: I'm working with women across the aisle. And the bond that gender brings to be able to reach across the aisle and find commonality not just in gender, but in doing what's right for the sake of right. Women are obviously inspired by different reasons. Women want to make a difference. And not that everybody else doesn't – they do as well – but there's a benefit in being able to reach across the aisle to Democratic women. And we've already done that. And you're going to see in the future here some bills roll out that's going to have – that will have a lot of female support and it's right for the sake of right.

MS. ERBE: And she wants to inspire women far beyond the halls of Capitol Hill.

REP. WALORSKI: Every opportunity they have to stand in front of a group of people and say to girls in the state of Indiana, you can do this, and you can be president, and there is no ceiling. And as far as your dreams will take you, you can go.

I think there's an advantage, huge advantage of, you know, elected official and being a woman. And I think what that gender edge does, it allows me to look in a camera. It allows me to look in the eyes of women and understand what women's health issues are like. It allows me to understand what it means to run a household. I pay my bills too. My husband is a public school teacher. And ever since we've been married, I keep the checkbook and I pay the bills. You know, women in our nation are a growing segment of who we are.

REP. ESTY: I come from this line of women who if they see something that needs to be fixed, they get in, they roll up their sleeves, and fix it. And that, for me, came in involvement around the public schools in 2005, and I was unhappy with decisions being made on the local level.

And my daughter, who at the time was 15, said, mom, you always taught us, if you see a problem you can fix, fix it yourself. They've asked you to run. You could run. I'll run your campaign. She was 15 years old. I'll run your campaign, but you should run or don't complain. So I said, it looks like you're going to run my campaign. And she did. And I won. And that's really what set me on this path.

MS. ERBE: Esty went from the school board to the Connecticut Legislature. She lost her seat in a close election over a hot-button issue, the death penalty.

REP. ESTY: The town I live in, which is a town of 30,000 people, in a small town in Connecticut, went through a really wrenching, horrible, horrible home invasion and murder of most of a family. And in 2009, shortly after I took office, we were asked to vote on a bill to abolish the death penalty in the state of Connecticut. And I was warned that it might well cost me my seat if I voted with my conscience and my belief and my knowledge about how the death penalty actually doesn't work in our state. But I felt it was very important and believed it was important to exercise my best judgment as well as my beliefs to take that vote. It did cost me my seat in the election.

MS. ERBE: But she ran again in 2012 and won, this time, at the federal level, becoming a member of the U.S. House of Representatives. And she maintained her values and beliefs.

REP. ESTY: I ran as and won as somebody who is principled and who is going to fight hard for my district. But I am willing to take principled stances that need to be taken for us to move forward as a country. And I think that is what the voters of my district elect me to do is to be a powerful voice for them, regardless of the risk to me politically. They want me to be fearless that way. And I look forward to that opportunity to be their advocate and to be a strong voice.

MS. ERBE: And Esty wants to start with herself. As a state representative, she cut her own pay. As a federal representative, she has plans to do the same.

REP. ESTY: I thought it was important to lead by example. And I think this year, again, we are facing very tough times with the federal budget. People's personal budgets are very tight. And I think it is an appropriate move for us to look at cutting congressional pay or look at – at least saying no – you know, no pay if we don't achieve a budget that's agreed upon, that we need to hold ourselves accountable.

MS. ERBE: Esty is ready to hold her herself accountable to the voters. Her top priority: growing Connecticut's economy.

REP. ESTY: We talked a lot about jobs and the economy. And in my district, one of the central features has been around small business. And that's particularly important for women because so many small businesses really are run by women. And this is a tremendous opportunity all across my district, including for the inner cities where you see a lot of entrepreneurship, but we don't have enough access to credit.

But it's also an opportunity around manufacturing, which happens to be quite important in my district as well. And there are wonderful jobs, but we don't have the skill sets. So I'm very interested in looking at development of skills of young people in high school and in community colleges, for example, to have skills that will allow them to do manufacturing in the 21st century.

MS. ERBE: And despite being in the minority party, she feels she can get all this and more done.

REP. ESTY: I am an optimist and I want to see forward progress for this country. So I hope we move forward with the resolution that allows us to really address these long-term issues for the American people.

REP. KUSTER: I was raised in Concord, New Hampshire. I'm the youngest of five children. And my family was very politically active. My mother was in the New Hampshire Legislature for 25 years. And she actually ran for this seat in Congress in 1980. And my father was – served on our executive council. He was mayor of the city of Concord. And he ran for governor when I was growing up as well.

MS. ERBE: Annie Kuster was literally raised on New Hampshire politics. She helped out in many political campaigns as a teenager. After graduating from Dartmouth and Georgetown Law, she worked on presidential campaigns for John Kerry, President Obama in 2008, and then, in 2010, she ran for office herself.

REP. KUSTER: This would be a very good time to get involved in the political process myself. And so I ran in 2010 and only lost by 3,000 votes in a big Republican wave. And so it made all the sense in the world to run again, and this time we won.

MS. ERBE: Kuster is a part of the New Hampshire matriarchy. She represents her state along with another congresswoman, two female senators, and Governor Maggie Hassan.

REP. KUSTER: We have a long tradition of women working in New Hampshire. I also think that the electorate has a great deal of respect for women. We were very fortunate with Jeanne Shaheen, who was our first woman governor and the only woman in the country to serve as both governor and in the United States Senate.

I think the voters have tremendous respect for the performance of women in politics. We maybe tend to be a little bit less contentious, a little bit more conciliatory in terms of bringing people together, looking for compromise, looking for ways to work together. And that's what the voters are looking for now.

MS. ERBE: Kuster hopes having more women in Congress means more legislation that will help women.

REP. KUSTER: I've been very interested in talking already with Republican and Democratic women about helping our women in the military, making sure that they're safe from sexual assault and making sure that they have the services that they need. So I think there are a few issues like that, but for the most part, the issues that we're working on impact men and women. They impact families all across the state.

MS. ERBE: Kuster comes from a military family. Her father and father-in-law served in World War II. Her sons are interested in joining the military. She serves on the House Committee on Veterans Affairs.

REP. KUSTER: I want to make sure that we support the veterans that are coming home from the wars. I was not a big supporter of the war in Afghanistan and I think I certainly support the president in winding the war down. But I feel very, very strongly that we owe to it our men and women in uniform to be supportive with job opportunities, with access to high-quality health care. And making sure that the sacrifice that they've made and their families have made will be rewarded in the end, that we will stand by them.

MS. ERBE: Apart from her legal background, Kuster has also worked with New Hampshire's business and non-profit communities. She's confident she'll be able to use those experiences to help her constituents.

REP. KUSTER: There's certainly times, with over burdensome government regulation, that can be very costly to small business. And I'm particularly aware of the small business community in New Hampshire because that's where most of our jobs are created – the mom-and-pop stores and the small businesses in manufacturing. And then, in the non-profit arena, there are expenses of complying with government regulations. And I want to make sure that if we are looking out for health and safety, that that's

important. We want workers to be – to be in a safe environment. But I want to make sure that we aren't overburdening our small businesses and non-profits.

REP. DELBENE: I grew up in a family that was going through a lot of challenges economically, but I had an incredible opportunity given that I go to go to college with student loans, and financial aid, and work study programs, and get a great education.

MS. ERBE: DelBene was born in Alabama but moved around the country as her parents looked for work. After college, DelBene worked in Oregon as a researcher in molecular immunology. Later, she moved to Seattle and earned her MBA. DelBene worked 12 years for Microsoft and helped created Drugstore.com. She advised a non-profit that provided micro-finance assistance and achieved a number of other entrepreneurial successes.

REP. DELBENE: I've always been in a position where I could take care of my family. And I think over time, we've made it harder and harder for families and I think policy is something we can use to help make sure everyone has access to opportunity. And that's really what led me to want to run for office in the first place.

MS. ERBE: In 2010, DelBene ran for Congress but lost. That's when Washington Governor Christine Gregoire appointed her to head the state's Department of Revenue. DelBene tried again in a new district in 2012 and won. As a U.S. representative, she brings real world business experience to Washington, D.C.

REP. DELBENE: I am a businesswoman, an entrepreneur. And I think bringing some of that real-world private sector experience as well as my experience running the Department of Revenue of the state of Washington, so on the public sector side, gives me a good combination to help put policy together that I think could have a real impact in what I see in the real world, and help get people back to work and make sure that we also put policies in place that support working families and support equal rights.

MS. ERBE: DelBene understands the business and non-profit worlds. She's worked with women in South America, giving them access to capital and resources.

MS. ERBE: I went into the non-profit world kind of as part of my desire to make a difference and get people access to opportunity. And micro-finance is one way to help do that that I was very interested in. That was mostly an international effort and work we were doing outside of the United States. And I think there's a ton of work we need to do right here at home. And that's really what led me more to look at policy here domestically and what we can do, because we have a lot of families struggling right now. And there's a lot of work that we can do right here to make sure all Americans have access to opportunity.

MS. ERBE: DelBene calls for building a strong foundation.

REP. DELBENE: We need to continue to make sure we invest in an incredibly strong education system from early learning all the way through our higher education so people have access to opportunity.

MS. ERBE: DelBene is part of a diverse group of women elected to Congress this year. She says the way to encourage women in politics and business is to make good role models.

REP. DELBENE: Many women have really looked to see what other women are doing and understand that that's possible. I was fortunate to have a mother who felt like anything was possible. And so I always felt like anything was possible. And that gave me the confidence to pursue my interests.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: That's it for this special edition of *To the Contrary*. Follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe or #tothecontrary. And please check our website, where the discussion continues. Whether you agree or think to the contrary, please join us next time.

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