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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, up first, women, children, and big budget cuts. Then, Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer family friendly or unfriendly? Behind the headlines, toxins in everyday personal care products.

(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, children, and budget cuts.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: As massive cuts across federal agencies take effect this weekend, women and children may see themselves disproportionately impacted by so-called sequestration. From health care programs to day care centers, Head Start, and more, women and girls will be directly affected by these cuts. Middle class women who work for federal, state, and local governments may find themselves furloughed over the next few weeks. Women, for example, are 50 percent more likely to hold public sector jobs, yet some journalists fear women's concerns have been largely left out of budget negotiations.

KATRINA VANDEN HEUVEL: Too much of the media has focused on the Washington blame game. The women and children's voices have been absent from so many of the conversations. I think very fundamental cuts in programs that disproportionately help women and children from health care, nutrition assistance, women health care programs, like Safe Motherhood Initiative, Title X, pap and cervical cancer screenings will be cut.

MS. ERBE: So women will be watching as budget talks continue to see how the programs that affect them and their families will change.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So Sam Bennett, can women protect themselves and their children from these sequestration cuts?

SIOBHAN BENNETT: Absolutely not and what a better example of why we need more women in elected office – currently rank 95th in the world – than what the nonsense that's going on with this right now.

MERCEDES VIANA SCHLAPP: And these women and children should be very upset at President Obama for denying the agencies the flexibilities they need to cut the real waste and not affect these programs.

KELI GOFF: And you know what I'm most frustrated about, is that the news story that's gotten the most coverage in terms of cuts regarding this entire story, that our flights might be delayed, not that there might actually be real consequences for real working class Americans, middle class Americans, and moms – Head Start WIC very serious and it doesn't look like they're avoidable these cuts.

CRYSTAL WRIGHT: I agree with Mercy, I think women need to be angry at President Obama. And they voted overwhelmingly to give him a second term and he's not serious about cutting spending.

MS. ERBE: Well, and let's get to that, why – well, first of all, it wasn't till the way end of the week, quite frankly, that majority – minority leader Nancy Pelosi even called all the Democratic women together to protest what was going to happen to women and children with these cuts. So were they behind the ball or something? Or should they have done more?

MS. BENNETT: Actually, I think this is a good example of what just is endemic, right? We have a situation where a president, whether he's Democratic or Republican, he doesn't have a single woman or a person of diversity in the major cabinet appointments. This is something that's pervasive.

Now, though, I think the real issue here is not that, you know, President Obama has done something bad, but rather men run for office because they see it as a pathway to power. This sequestration is nothing more than a perfect example of partisan chest thumping on the part of a bunch of men. And if we had more women in elected office, this kind of nonsense wouldn't have happened. And to your point, Mercy, and to you, Crystal, there would have been a prioritized order to how these impacts would have rolled out.

MS. WRIGHT: Which is right – and not to interrupt you, but that's exactly what the House Republicans wanted to give the president and this week, he rejected that. The House Republicans said, Mr. President, we're going to give you – we have a bill. We want you to sign it. It's going to give you and the agencies the opportunity to decide where the cuts are. They won't be automatic across all programs. The president said he would veto that bill because he wants more tax hikes. Tax hikes –

MS. BENNETT: Which we need –

MS. WRIGHT: Tax hikes – let me finish. Let me finish. Tax hikes are not going to solve the problem and the deal –

MS. BENNETT: Disagree –

MS. WRIGHT: – that the president struck when he came up with this sequester, in 2011, did not involve tax hikes. More importantly, finally, I just want to say, we

should all as women be concerned that so many women are disproportionately dependent on government for their livelihood. We need to go way back to your point. We need more women in Congress.

MS. BENNETT: Absolutely.

MS. WRIGHT: Trying to figure out how to get women less dependent upon government.

MS. GOFF: Well, I want to correct the record on one thing because in terms of the women's vote actually Mitt Romney did better with white women. And –

MS. ERBE: Married – white married –

(Cross talk.)

MS. GOFF: And also there was a bit – a slight racial split, more so than there was last time. So that's a little bit of correcting the record. But the other thing here, too, is that it is really frustrating because I feel like I'm watching the movie *Groundhog Day*, where I'm seeing the same thing over and over again.

MS. BENNETT: Absolutely.

MS. GOFF: Where you have a bunch of men who are simply playing a game of chicken with all of our livelihood and our futures. We have – the GOP wants to see the president fail. That has been said out loud. That's not something I'm making up. That's not some conspiracy theory. And on the other hand, the president feels like he has some, I think, credibility that he has to re-win here because he knows that he lost some points in terms of the Susan Rice debacle and –

MS. ERBE: But didn't he – but again – but wait a minute – Keli, getting back to – didn't he clearly won with the women's vote, except married white women? All other women voted overwhelmingly for Obama. Why didn't he bring women's issues into the debate?

MS. GOFF: Oh, it's in the debate, but I agree with her that it's not as high up as it needs to be –

MS. WRIGHT: Or in cabinet positions –

MS. GOFF: And this is something I have written about. I have criticized about. I definitely agree. And what we've seen happen, frankly, in terms to what this administration prioritizes is the people who yell the loudest, such as the LGBT community, they get what they ask for and they get what they want. And I've been really frustrated because I do believe that from African-Americans to women it's almost like

we've been treated as second class citizens because we have not fought and vocalized the way that I believe the others –

MS. WRIGHT: Because we threw away our vote –

MS. SCHLAPP: So Bonnie, so he waits till the end of the week to meet with the congressional leaders to then get out so he can just blame them. When I worked at the White House with President Bush, there were so many pieces of legislation that he brought together with Senator Ted Kennedy. I mean, the opposite side completely of what – of President Bush. And he would make it work. What is so frustrating with President Obama is that he hasn't been able to create that, even with – you can say a hostile Republican side, whatever.

When you look at past presidents, I mean, look at Newt Gingrich with Clinton, they got stuff done. This is where I find that it is incredibly frustrating with this president and the fact that, again, that women really haven't been at the table and you know, it was just as – again, end of the week, talking about this –

MS. ERBE: But let me ask you this. Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security, they're off the table for cuts and women are – and women are – it's very interesting. I've used this statistic before. Women are 10 to 20 percent more likely than men to be on federal assistance of some sort. They're also 10 or 20 percent more likely to vote for Democrats because Democrats tend to support these programs.

MS. GOFF: I don't want to let the president off the hook. I want to be very clear, because I've been very vocal about my disappointment in terms of the lack of diversity, females, advisors, not just cabinet, but in terms of advisors, just outside of –

MS. BENNETT: Right.

MS. GOFF: But it is not – it has been disingenuous to say that he could replicate the relationship between Ted Kennedy and George W. Bush. They actually were willing to work together. Mitch McConnell said our goals –

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: No, let her – no –

MS. GOFF: Former senators, there are former Republican senators who after they were ousted or lost their position said we were flat out told we cannot work with this man and relayed that to Vice President Biden. It's a different toxicity –

MS. WRIGHT: OK, can I – you're misrepresenting how Mitch – no, no, you can roll your eyes. Bob Woodward, in the *Price of Politics* talks in detail about the, quote, "for the minority Senator Mitch McConnell" that you're misquoting. He said he wanted

–

(Cross talk.)

MS. WRIGHT: Let me finish this – he said –

MS. ERBE: Crystal, I want to talk about women and children.

MS. WRIGHT: Let me finish this.

MS. ERBE: We're about out of time.

MS. WRIGHT: OK. Mitch McConnell said he wanted the president to be a one-term president if he didn't compromise and move to the center and try to negotiate. That's the fact.

MS. BENNETT: OK, but –

MS. ERBE: Last word, Sam. Last word, Sam.

MS. BENNETT: If we get back to sequestration's disproportionate effect on women and children, you said why are women so dependent on government programs –

MS. SCHLAPP: No, I said we should focus on policies, like –

MS. BENNETT: Just to finish my thought. The big reason there is, in addition to women not being represented equally in government, there is a huge earning gap over the course of their lifetimes that makes them required almost to be more dependent on government in their retirement years and when they're raising children, very often on their own. So does this impact disproportionately children and women? Yes. And that's a real disappointment we all have.

MS. ERBE: All right. Let us know what you think. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe or @TotheContary. From sequestration to a controversial mandate.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: Yahoo CEO Marissa Mayer made headlines this week and no, she's not pregnant again. Mayer announced a new company policy that ends telecommuting and requires workers who work remotely or from home to relocate to Yahoo offices. When the then six-month pregnant Mayer was hired by the web giant last summer, women's groups hoped she would usher in more family friendly policies.

DEBRA NESS: On the one hand, it really flies in the face of just good research, showing that this is a direction more and more employers are going because it's good for their bottom line. And on the other, it seems to be going in the face of demographic trends. We live in the 21st century and most adults work, including women. And women

are about half of the workforce now. And that means that working families, women and men, are struggling to manage the demands of their work and their family lives.

MS. ERBE: But Mayer is focused on turning Yahoo around from a withering tech company to its former glory as a tech growth engine. She says the way to do that is to all work together literally.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So you're a telecommuting mother of five daughters.

MS. SCHLAPP: That's right.

MS. ERBE: Do you agree – do you think what she did was right or wrong?

MS. SCHLAPP: Look, we're not in the 1980s with Dolly Parton singing 9:00 to 5:00, you know. I mean, we're in the 21st century here. Women that are educated, women that are able to work from home and really be productive and add value to a company, that's helpful. Now, when going – if you – I understand she wants to cut abuses in the company, wants to cut the fat, very much understand that, but to really go into such a strict rule, which at the end, I think will drive away a lot of talented working mothers that I'm sure have added incredible value to Yahoo, it's a big disappointment coming from a young mother –

MS. ERBE: She's trying to recreate the culture at Google, where – when she came – where people, you know, they have dry cleaning services, day care, which she doesn't provide, and other services, so employees will be there all the time and collaborate with each other. Can she do that at Yahoo?

MS. GOFF: Well, look, I am going to reveal a deep, dark embarrassing secret on national television, which is that I work from home. My name is Keli and I work from home. And I'm not ashamed to admit it. But I do so at the discretion of the people who pay me. And if they choose to not want me to work from home, that's up to them. And I can either choose to go to find another job or I cannot. That's what's called living in America. But what I will say is really frustrating about the coverage and the flat that she's taken about this, the – asking others not to work from home and then installing an interoffice nursery. First of all, if she were a man and she weren't installing an interoffice nursery while running a major company, there'd be nothing but glowing profiles about what a great involved father he is and how cool he is and we'd see a segment on "The View."

The other thing I find really silly about this coverage is that we give these kinds of perks to CEOs all the time because we don't – shareholders want to see them earning their big golden pair of shoes. They don't want them leaving the office early to go to the gym or going out for dinner. So they install the interoffice chef, the interoffice gym, all these things. So if she didn't do this and have this interoffice nursery, we'd be reading

articles about how unfair it is that she leaves the premises early to go breastfeed her baby and do all these things. I think it's a lot ado about nothing and I find it such a waste of time. The Yahoo shareholders have a lot more to be worried about – and I say that as a Yahoo customer.

MS. WRIGHT: I'm going to agree with Keli and Mercy on this. I know it's a shock, but that's bipartisanship. I think – I think Keli is right that employers – and we talked about this a little bit before – don't owe you anything but a job and a paycheck. And you need to, in exchange for that, do your job. I work from home, so you can add three to the group. With respect to what Mercy said, though, however, we know –

MS. ERBE: And I used to work from home.

MS. WRIGHT: Yeah. Yay for those work at home ladies and men. But what we know, study after study shows that telecommuting productivity goes up. I mean, in China – there was a China call center –

MS. ERBE: But that's not – but wait a second. That is not what she found at Yahoo and I read an article by a guy in the Harvard Business School, which said that she was literally tracking the productivity of her 250 most important employees and was finding that working from home was not as productive –

MS. WRIGHT: But what I'm saying – I think you can deal with that. You let the people that it's working for you – let it work, and then cut the bad employees. It's called you can fire them. But you know, we're not in a world – what really bothers me, though, about this story is that she, last year, was a pregnant woman that revealed to her potential employer, I'm pregnant. They took – and I hate to say this – a chance on her when we know there's still a lot of discrimination around pregnant women in the workplace. She is one of very few of women CEOs. And I think it sends a really bad message and I think Yahoo's efficiency is going to – they are going to suffer because of this mandate of hers, this cross the board mandate. And I think it's really hyper – I'm a PR consultant. I think it's bad PR for her as a woman – it just looks bad. She builds a nursery next to her office, so she can breastfeed and do with – have the conveniences of her life at the workplace and then tells everybody else, screw you. Well, we're not in that age anymore. Companies that are successful don't say screw you to employees.

MS. ERBE: No, no, no, Sam, last word.

MS. BENNETT: I'm one of the few here where I don't work from home, but my husband does and he is a systems – very highly ranked international systems engineers for one of the largest software companies in their field, in their sector, which content management software. And I can tell you right now that he gets – my husband's going to be one of the more productive ones because he's up at 6:00 in the morning. He's there with my son to see him off to school because I'm here in D.C. And so it's actually my husband working from home that allows me to have the job that I do. But he is enormously productive. So I would just say this that I think – I agree with you 100

percent, Keli. I think this is enormously sexist. If she were a man, different coverage totally, but I think it's shortsighted on her part as a business CEO.

MS. ERBE: All right. And thank you everybody. Thank you, Crystal, for being with us for this portion of the show.

Behind the headlines, the hidden dangers in cosmetics. Most people would be surprised to learn how many toxic chemicals are in the personal care products we use every day. I sat down with Illinois Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky, who wants to see that change, so she introduced the Safe Cosmetics Act.

(Begin video segment.)

REPRESENTATIVE JAN SCHAKOWSKY (D-IL): Well, each American uses on average 10 personal care products, so we're not just talking about cosmetics like lipstick. We're talking about shampoos and deodorants and soaps, and all kinds of things that men, women, and children use – baby shampoos, et cetera – 12,500 of those – of ingredients are in those different products that people use. And very few of them, vast majority have never been tested.

Now, we do know that some of them have reproductive toxins and carcinogens in them. And the United States has done very little to ban them or to declare them improper for – as an ingredient in those products.

MS. ERBE: Are other countries ahead of us on this?

REP. SCHAKOWSKY: Other countries, the European Union, yes, far ahead of us. And so we need – we absolutely need to catch up. And this would apply not only to American made products, but also to those that are imported from places that have even fewer regulations than we may have. So it's time for us to update the Cosmetic Act, which has very little power to guarantee the health and safety of ourselves.

MS. ERBE: Now, which chemicals are toxic?

REP. SCHAKOWSKY: Well, there are many that are – mercury, 1,4 Dioxin, they call that – that is present in baby products, and then there are things like formaldehyde. We find that in hair straighteners like Brazilian Blowout, which was causing all kinds of problems – respiratory problems for salon workers and for the consumers.

So my legislation, among other things, would require pretesting of these ingredients, a ban, a prohibition on those that are toxic in some way or cancer causing. It would require a list of those – of all ingredients, including fragrances on the product. It would give the Food and Drug Administration recall authority. Even if they know that a toxic chemical is in a product, right now, the Food and Drug Administration has no

authority to recall that product. And then, there would be after market testing to just check out the shelves to make sure that those products are gone.

MS. ERBE: When you first found out about this, did you say to yourself how is it that this is going on in the United States of America?

REP. SCHAKOWSKY: Most consumers believe when they go shopping and they take a product off the shelf, be it a children – a child's toy or a shampoo that someone, somewhere has made sure that that product is not going to contribute to causing them cancer or some other horrible disease.

MS. ERBE: What's the opposition to this?

REP. SCHAKOWSKY: One of the arguments is that the amounts are so small that the kind of long-term toxic effect can't be that big. The problem is that we use so many of these things, and so there's a cumulative effect.

MS. ERBE: Should consumers be alarmed?

REP. SCHAKOWSKY: I think consumers need to be careful. The problem with this is that you – the consumer can't really be aware because if you don't know, you're not educated, it's not listed on the label, the government isn't doing anything and you're not educated about it, you're not going to be able to protect yourself. And so it's really important that we make this huge, multibillion dollar industry safer.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So welcome, Heather White of the Environmental Working Group.

HEATHER WHITE: Thank you.

MS. ERBE: You were involved with Congresswoman Schakowsky on this legislation. How is it that other Western democracies, Europe regulate these chemicals out of use and we just allow it – allow people to do whatever they want, put whatever they want in cosmetics and shampoo and all the rest of it?

MS. WHITE: That's a great question, Bonnie. And the reality is, is because in the United States, cosmetic companies can pretty much put whatever they would like to in their products. We know that toxic chemicals are cheap, but we've also found many toxic cosmetic ingredients are endocrine disruptors. They've also been associated with reproductive toxins and even carcinogens. We know there're alternatives because we know these same companies that are selling these products here in the United States are selling them abroad. But the fact is the FDA just doesn't have the authority to really protect consumers when it comes to these ingredients.

We also know from research that these toxic ingredients are polluting our bodies and we've even found them in newborn babies. So there's just a lot of concern as more and more research comes out about the need to make sure that we're protected.

MS. BENNETT: Well, if I could get my usual soap –

(Cross talk.)

MS. BENNETT: Jan Schakowsky first ran for Congress in Chicago because she was fighting tainted beef in Chicago in the meat yards. Again, men run for office because they see it as a pathway to power. Women run because they want to change the world. And so I think Jan Schakowsky, you know, championing this bill is no surprise, along with her colleague, Tammy Baldwin, no surprise there. And I think this is yet another example of not only are women, once elected, the ones that'll put forward legislation and regulation like this, who consumes most of the cosmetics in this country? It's women.

MS. WHITE: Absolutely.

MS. BENNETT: So here's another example of how women are being shortchanged and in this case polluted against and being exposed unnecessarily to carcinogens, because of the natural pervasive sexism that exists.

MS. WHITE: But I will tell you that men do use personal care products. Our own research shows that they use deodorant and toothpaste, so –

(Cross talk.)

MS. GOFF: – because they're trying to meet women. (Laughter.) But I will say –

MS. ERBE: No, actually my husband does – you know, uses shaving cream, uses cologne, obviously antiperspirant, and –

MS. GOFF: He wants to keep you happy.

MS. ERBE: – he's not –

MS. GOFF: He wants to keep you happy.

MS. ERBE: Oh, OK, all right. But he's not trying to meet other women. (Laughter.)

MS. GOFF: I will say that, you know, as an African-American woman, I was a little familiar with this issue only because I actually had gotten a Brazilian Blowout and when I saw the person wearing a mask to apply it, that was kind of my cue I didn't need

to get another. And then there was actually a very high profile case, last year, where there was an African-American woman who died. They couldn't figure out what happened. They did an autopsy and they figured out it was the glue in her hair extensions. And that's very prominent in our community –

MS. ERBE: They were cancer or they were –

MS. GOFF: It caused a toxic reaction and she died. And it's not the first case. So just now realizing that this has happened and especially for those of us who do television and some days wear extensions, you know, so this is a very serious issue I'm more familiar with. Bringing it back to the sequester, you know, it's possible the FDA is going to be facing cuts. And that's not when you think about issues like this. It's – again, we keep hearing about flights being delayed because of the sequester. There're some very real practical impacts it's going to have on our –

MS. SCHLAPP: Well, I spoke with Lezlee Westine over at the Personal Care Products Council and you know, she agrees that there has to be modernization. I mean, I don't think they've even touched the laws since the 1930s. However, with this particular legislation I think it's having problem gaining the bipartisan support. You know, they're looking more and the industries themselves, they have what is called the consumer ingredients review, where they have scientists and physicians that are studying the safety of these ingredients. And so in part – with this particular legislation, they're going to be looking at, you know, where they have to review every single ingredient and giving the FDA two years that they have review this or if not they're going to ban the ingredient.

So again, the approach from the council and the industry is let's do a more focused approach, let's do an approach where, you know, we can specialize in saying if a group wants to bring in, like EWG would bring in, let's say, this ingredient, you know, we've got to look at it. FDA, can you please look at it. This is a more efficient approach that we can look at and that would be the way to go and maybe –

MS. ERBE: Last word –

MS. SCHLAPP: – and would have bipartisan support.

MS. WHITE: Well, absolutely, there needs to be a change. Since 1976, when this Industry Review Panel was first put together, they've looked at 11 ingredients and determined those 11 ingredients need to be removed from cosmetic products. Whereas in the European Union, 1,300 ingredients are actually prohibited from use in personal care products. So this is –

MS. ERBE: But why is that? Why is that? I mean, we've also done pieces in the past on BPA, for example, on FDA just won't move, except when it comes to sippy bottles, you know, exposure for infants. Why is it so hard? Very quickly.

MS. WHITE: Because there needs to be consumer pressure. We really need to speak up and voice out and say we need a change. The FDA needs to have this law. We need an affirmative OK that these products are safe –

(Cross talk.)

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

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