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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, first, what's holding back young women? Then, the future of gay marriage. Behind the headlines: one woman's banishment from the Westboro Baptist Church.

(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, running from politics.

Young women aren't interested in running for office, this, according to a new study by American University. Despite having historic numbers of women in Congress, almost two-thirds of women between the ages of 18 and 25 have never considered to run for public office. More surprising is young women are just as politically engaged as their male counterparts.

So why aren't they interested in running for office? Researchers cite a combination of factors. Young women are less likely to be socialized to consider politics as a career. They are exposed to less political information and see fewer political discussions. And they think they are less qualified to hold public office.

Congresswoman Norton, why are young women moving backwards rather than forwards in this regard?

DEL. ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON (D-DC): Perplexing, Bonnie, but today's well-educated young women seem to be looking for serious problem solving professions. And politics in America may not fit that description. (Laughter.)

SABRINA SCHAEFFER: We're in agreement. (Laughter.) You know, I've often said that I think that women are faced with so many wonderful opportunities today that they have different choices. But I actually just stumbled upon some research from the University of Pittsburg that found that there – I think it has a lot more to do with the modern campaign than anything else.

RUTH CONNIFF: The truth is, you know, in a democracy, we have to have equal representation. So even if politics stinks, we have to have people who hold their noses and go for it. And the big problem for women is girls don't see themselves in those roles. And the major finding in this study is there's a 20-point difference between men's ability to even consider running for office and women's ability to do that so girls need to be asked.

DARLENE KENNEDY: But there's no question that it starts at home and the encouragement that they get from their parents. And, I mean, I know I was encouraged

to be involved actively, reading newspapers, watching campaigns. So, I mean, part of it starts systemically in the household and then it goes up from there.

MS. ERBE: Well, you talked about the – talk more about the findings of that study.

MS. SCHAEFFER: Yeah. Well, there are so many differences between the genders and I think sometimes we overlook how important those are. But it's true that women tend not to engage in the political process quite as much. And maybe we've thought about, well, it's risk aversion or maybe they don't like the process of negotiating in the same way as men. There's talk that they don't like that kind of competitiveness as much.

But all those things aside, this research found that women actually just respond – it's the election process. It's if they have to be in that, that race, that they find that they're not being judged on their skill set or their ability, but it's all the noise and the costliness of this campaign in which you're not really necessarily getting their best face forward.

DEL. NORTON: Yeah. But let's face it. Boys are raised to be senators and mayors, even governors. Little girls are not quite there yet. They have to get there on their own.

MS. ERBE: But wait a second, Eleanor. You know, they're going to college in greater numbers and – yeah.

DEL. NORTON: Yeah. But – I understand that. And I think – by the way, you talk about competitiveness. I couldn't agree with more. And the more Title Nine we have, the more you're going to see women compete everywhere.

MS. SCHAEFFER: And the research bears that out.

DEL. NORTON: Yeah, but I really do think we shouldn't throw away how kids are raised still. And so you have to look at the fact that these girls still want to be doctors, lawyers, and (Indian chiefs?). So why not politicians? So we have to look beyond the notion. We can't say they don't want to be leaders. They clearly do. They just don't turn – (inaudible).

MS. ERBE: So every parent should look to their children, girls, especially, and say, you're going to be president, right? You're going to grow up and be president?

MS. SCHAEFFER: It's a possibility.

MS. KENNEDY: Yeah. Definitely it's a possibility. And it's interesting, because the study also showed that there was less of a gender gap between high school students, that high school boys and girls ran for government counsel about the same

numbers and were successful. And there was a disconnect when it went from high school to college. And I think it's a little bit of what everyone's saying is that the agenda changes. What are the interests when you get to college, the focus, where you want to go.

I mean, and also, again, I got back to – you know, what you're encouraged to do from your household as well as your role models. And, I mean, I grew up in a time when, you know, Shirley Chisholm and Bella Abzug were kind of the big names that I knew of in my household.

Now, young women have, you know, Ms. Pelosi, you have Delegate Norton here. I mean, there are so many women in politics. So there are numbers of role models, but I think part of it is the fear of being attacked, you know, your privacy being invaded and all those nasty things that come along with running for politics.

MS. CONNIFF: The biggest deal in this study is, when they ask men and women, boys and girls, if they've considered running for office, even if they don't feel qualified, the men are like, oh, sure. (Laughter.) You know, 23 percent of them will run for an office they're not qualified for. And the girls say, absolutely not. I mean, women – and this is what Emily's List has been training female candidates in forever, saying, look –

MS. ERBE: And there's a new one that targets high-schoolers, called Running Start that we're actually doing a profile of.

MS. CONNIFF: OK.

MS. ERBE: To start encouraging girls in high school.

MS. CONNIFF: And to tell girls they don't have to meet this impossibly high standard, because boys don't have that barrier. Their hand is up and they are going for it, even if they are completely unprepared. They have overconfidence. And women are still under confident.

MS. ERBE: Yeah. Eleanor, I wanted to ask you, I wonder if – I read online somewhere this week that there is no group that specializes – targets black women to run for office. There's Emily's List, and the National Women's Political Caucus, and the Women's Campaign Fund, all these groups, and others I'm not mentioning, that do it and certainly include black women and other women of color, but there are no groups targeting women of color to run for office at a young age. Why?

DEL. NORTON: Well, but look at the Congressional Black Caucus. More than a third of the Congressional Black Caucus are women. And that has a lot to do with who gets encouraged to do what, when. And black women, since the time they were picking cotton in the cotton fields were encouraged to just move up there and do what had to be done. That's why I do emphasize that you've got to – yes, raise a young girl to say, yes. You can grow up to – you're smart. You can grow up to be president. You could be

governor of this state. And I bet you that even progressive women don't say that to their daughters.

MS. SCHAEFFER: I think you also have to wonder, what is the end goal? I mean – I think we have equality. And is parity the end goal or is it OK that maybe women are choosing doctors in greater numbers than they're choosing to be lawmakers? I think that we have to – at some point, we have to accept that they're going to choose different things. That's OK. I'm not sure I would encourage my children to go into politics. I think it's – it's a very difficult, nasty business where you don't always get things done the way you might hope.

MS. ERBE: Your son too?

MS. SCHAEFFER: My son too. I think that there are other things that they might get more satisfaction out of and that's from someone here in Washington.

MS. CONNIFF: Of course people should have choices. And, of course, not everyone should be a politician. But the fact that we have 20 percent representation in the Senate, and that's a high water mark, and it's amazing after we've had the vote since 1920, it's ridiculous.

MS. SCHAEFFER: It's amazing to you because you (agree ?) with those women. But for me, I see bigger government. I see higher taxes.

MS. CONNIFF: No. No. No. No. But it's amazing that women could achieve 20 percent is not good enough. It's not. We have to our interest represents in government.

DEL. NORTON: What is not explainable is the huge difference between young men and young men. You know, that makes you believe that they don't really think they have the same kind of choices that young men do. And, remember, we're still very early in getting women into public office. How many women governors are there? You know, we've had a woman who's run for president. She had to jump over a lot of offices.

MS. ERBE: We've had several back to Shirley Chisholm.

DEL. NORTON: Yeah, but I'm talking about –

MS. ERBE: And Pat Schroeder.

DEL. NORTON: Where you had – where somebody had a very good chance of winning. And so the whole notion that women ought to understand that the ground is already leveled it seems to me is premature.

MS. SCHAEFFER: Clearly – it’s clearly not leveled. And not only that. The arguments about women maybe choosing not to be involved in politics are exactly the same arguments that were made against women having the vote.

MS. ERBE: Last word.

MS. KENNEDY: I disagree that it’s not leveled. I think it’s accessible to all, but it’s a matter of how much you’re willing to fight for it, and, really, what are you going to put up on the line to do this. And it takes time. It takes money. And if you – whether you’re a man or a woman, if you’re not supported by your party, you’re not going anywhere anyway.

MS. ERBE: All right. Let us know what you think about it. Please follow me on Twitter, @BonnieErbe or #tothecontrary. From running for office to courting marriage.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: However the Supreme Court rules, it’s virtually certain the laws governing same-gender marriages will change. The justices are expected to hand down two decisions by late June. One case addresses the constitutionality of California’s Proposition Eight, a statewide ban on gay marriage. The second is a challenge to the Federal Defense of Marriage Act, or DOMA, which affects federal and state benefits afforded, or in this case, not afforded to same-gender married couples, such as parental rights, Social Security, pensions, and taxes. A recent CBS poll shows Americans generally support same-gender marriage.

KATE RYAN [Gay Marriage Supporter]: Everybody has the right to get married. If you love each other, you should have the right to do that. This is a free country so you should be allowed to do what makes you happy.

MS. ERBE: The justices could decide same-gender marriage is a constitutional right or they could rule Congress should let the states decide in matters of state law, or they could rule on a range of many other legal theories.

But there is a considerable generation gap. While 73 percent of adults under the age of 29 believe same-gender marriage should be legal, opposition grows as people age. Only 35 percent of Americans over the age of 65 support it. The average age of the justices is 67.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So how much – the average age of the justices being 67 and that age group being more likely to be anti-gay marriage or anti-gay rights, how much are the justices going to take into account the cultural shift? And what do we learn from their questions this week about the cultural shift?

MS. SCHAEFFER: Well – and there has certainly been a cultural shift if for no other reason that I think people are exposed to same-sex marriage in a very positive light today. For anyone who watches sort of prime television or the movies, we all see – have been exposed to this. And I don't think that's a bad thing.

What I think is interesting about the opinion shift is just how dramatic it is. And I heard Pew research had a poll the other day that said 58 percent of Americans supported same-sex marriage, which I was wondering if we're seeing a little bit of sort of like a Bradley effect here. Is there so much social pressure now that people are embarrassed to say they don't support it. So I'll be interested to see after some of the cameras go away if we see those numbers sort of level out just a bit.

DEL. NORTON: Well, this much is clear. The Supreme Court is probably behind the people. The people have moved forward so quickly that it's going to be difficult to see anything but a wave coming forward. And the court, of course, is far more conservative in its approach, whatever it comes out with. I think that the great challenge in court is the Proposition Eight California case, because they're afraid to do something in that case that might in fact send a message they do not intend to send to all the states.

MS. ERBE: Well, doesn't it make sense, having covered the court for nine years and having gone to law school, where you were a professor, to – it looks to me like – and listening to the questions, the New York case where the lesbian widow was taxed \$380,000 more than if she had been married to a man. It seems like a lead-pipe loser. They're just going to have to say this is clearly under the constitution being treated not equally and it's a matter of state law. Then we go back to the California case and they say, it's a matter of state law. And the gay rights movement, particularly in that state – my God. San Francisco is the, you know, pretty much gay capital of the United States. They will just have to go back and lobby again and get Prop Eight overturned. Does that make sense to you about how they'll – from a legal perspective, about how they'll rule?

DEL. NORTON: Well, you know, it's really interesting. This may be a win-win in some sense for both sides. And the so-called DOMA, Defense of Marriage Act case, it would be very strange for the Supreme Court not to take the usual stance of courts when it comes to state issues, deferring to the state. And marriage is a state issue 100 percent.

MS. ERBE: Family – all family law.

DEL. NORTON: All the family law. So, without getting into the technicalities, the way for the lay person to understand this is that the state defines marriage – once it defines marriage, how can the federal government treat two different marriages both lawful unequally? It may not have to reach the question of equal protection. It may go off on states' rights. We win, you win.

MS. CONNIFF: It's kind of interesting. I mean – you know, it took until 1967 for interracial marriage to be declared the – (inaudible) – you know, permissible in every

state. The 16 states that forbade it had to get rid of it because of a Supreme Court decision. So there is a fundamental question about fairness at stake here.

And the thing that I think is so interesting, because I'm sure you're right that the justices are likely to punt on this and really – I think both DOMA and Prop Eight are going to go down at the lower court level because of what the Supreme Court decides, and yet, there won't be a sort of a huge precedent. But the issue of standing is the thing that's troubling the justices. They're saying –

MS. ERBE: Anthony Kennedy, the swing vote.

MS. CONNIFF: And they're saying that, you know, the citizens of California who pushed forward this, you know, making gay marriage illegal under Prop Eight, don't really have standing. And the House Republicans, who are behind, you know, maintaining the Defense of Marriage Act don't have standing.

And this is, beyond a legal issue, this is a fundamental issue. Who has standing to say this hurts me? Defending marriage from whom? For what purpose? You know, straight couples are not threatened by gay marriage. And there is no standing to attack.

MS. ERBE: Well, clearly the ones that the church groups – the church groups who are – you know, the Christian Evangelicals are behind this movement. They do feel – they must feel – well –

MS. CONNIFF: And how are they threatened?

MS. ERBE: They must feel threatened. I mean, why –

MS. CONNIFF: But that's not actual harm, right?

MS. KENNEDY: You know, there's so many layers to this, and there's definitely the religious/spiritual level and – where people just, you know, believe that the Bible, I'm quoting other people, that Bible says the marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman.

You know, my thing is – it really needs to go back to the states. And I think that, you know, you vote your legislator in, you know, you go to your ballot, and you make your decision, and it's done. And it bothers me that we're at this – you know, we're at this crossroads, where it's sitting before the Supreme Court because I really think this really needs to be decided at that level – you know, at the state level.

MS. ERBE: At the state level.

MS. KENNEDY: Yeah. Not at the Supreme Court level.

MS. CONNIFF: But if you're married in one state and the next state doesn't recognize your marriage, what kind of a mess does that create? You know, either you're married or you're not married. And then, for the opponents of gay marriage to say, well, all the gay people should just move to states where gay marriage is allowed, I mean, it's an outrage. And it's also bad for business. You know, good luck when all the gay people move out of your state.

MS. SCHAEFFER: I think that when we think about how opinion is shifting on this though, I think that this is sort of an outlier possibility, because not only for a long while we sort of had one flow of information against gay marriage. Now, not only do we have two flows of information, lots more people supporting gay marriage, but it's coming from conservatives. So we have lots of conservative leaders now. We have people standing up at CPAC and saying, this is ridiculous that we're not a more inclusive party and more inclusive movement. So I think as we see this conversation develop, I think that those possibilities are going to be more on the outside.

MS. ERBE: All right. And we're out of time on this topic. Behind the headlines: the Westboro Baptist Church. The church is known for picketing soldiers' funerals and its extreme, almost nonsensical anti-gay stance. In her book, "Banished," Lauren Drain recounts the year she spent in the church before being cast out and disowned by her family.

(Begin video segment.)

LAUREN DRAIN [Author of "Banished"]: When I was first kicked out, you know, I wasn't fully prepared for that kind of ostracism. I wasn't fully prepared for losing, you know, my family, my mother, my father, my little siblings. I was 21 years old. You know, I hadn't really seen the world. Everyone else was labeled as evil to me. I had a very judgmental, you know, personality and mindset. I was fully brainwashed.

MS. ERBE: Drain became involved in the Westboro Baptist Church when her father decided to join the congregation led by Fred Phelps. He had planned to make a documentary mocking the church, but instead, found its doctrine convincing and moved his entire family to the church compound.

MS. DRAIN: About the age 14, my father started making some huge changes. You know, he pulled me out of high school. He took me away from my friends. And he told me that he was going to start raising our family Christian, according to the Phelps, you know, church and their doctrine.

MS. ERBE: Drain participated in Westboro Baptist effort to spread its vitriolic message. But she was ultimately banished from the church because she had been founding chatting online with a boy. Dropped off at a nearby hotel, with a few possessions, Drain tried hard to reconnect with her family. But her family wanted no part of her.

MS. DRAIN: It's a desperate act. You want to save your – you want to save your relations with your family. And at that time, I did, and I was traumatized. But, unfortunately – you know, fortunately for me, I've – you know, grown from that.

MS. ERBE: As time went on, Drain met several people who she once would have condemned as sinners. Due to her church shaped worldview, Drain expected to be castigated. But, instead, she found forgiveness.

MS. DRAIN: I did harmful things and I'm openly sorry for it. I thought that people would judge me and castigate me. Even when I was thrown out, I didn't know the world would encourage me or forgive me or anything like that. And I've met many people that I never would have met before that are, you know, great parts of my life now. And I'm so thankful that I was able to go past that stage in my life and move on. And, you know, I'm very happy now.

MS. ERBE: Drain says she does not want to bring more attention to the church and believes it's best to ignore Westboro Baptist. She wrote the book to reach out to young people in similar situations.

MS. DRAIN: There's a lot of – a lot of cults out there and there's a lot of extreme situations that children get raised in. And it's a horrible thing. It's a form of abuse really. It's a form of emotional abuse. I tried to expound on the good message, you know, that people can change. You know, I try to show how the children are brainwashed, you know, and try to understand that this is like a very evil thing that the children have no control over.

MS. ERBE: Drain hopes sharing her experience gives hope to others.

MS. DRAIN: I would just tell anyone that might be stuck in a similar situation that people are very forgiving, very supportive. You know, they do understand – you know, they might not fully understand what happened, but they can understand that people can change and people do. And there is forgiveness out there.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: It's really hard to believe that, you know, today, so many years after the – when all that group, they all killed themselves in Guyana, that there's still – Jim Jones – that there are still cults like this, lots of them, going on. Should they be regulated?

MS. CONNIFF: Regulating the cults. I'd like to see the office that does that.

MS. ERBE: Or banished?

MS. CONNIFF: I think there is – I think one of the big things that I thought about listening to this story, because it is so poignant and affecting, here's this child

struggling against her family and the whole world that she sees around her and treated so harshly. And who is there for her? And I think it's really an argument for having a strong civil society. I mean, we need teachers and coaches and people who are in kids' lives who may be in really dire circumstances at home, who give them a different view of what's possible and can reach out to them.

MS. ERBE: Yeah, but these – these kids weren't sent out to school.

MS. CONNIFF: Well, no, actually, it's interesting. The Westboro folks do send their kids to public school. But this child was pulled out of high school when her father joined the cult. So she had been disconnected from that network of sane people.

But I think we should really keep this in mind when we think about there's a huge nationwide effort to break up our public schools and to send – you know, send people – send voucher money, our tax dollars into some fairly dubious start-up religious institutions that are educating kids and taking over that role. And there is a role for civil society to just know where kids are and for kids to have some place to turn besides this very hermitically sealed peculiar little environment that they may be living.

MS. KENNEDY: I know we're talking about – I know we're talking about, you know, this young lady's experience. But I have to respond to the voucher thing. And the vouchers are not intended to send kids to some dubious religious, you know –

MS. CONNIFF: But there are some. There really are some that are financed by them.

MS. KENNEDY: Well, that's in all situations. I mean, there are all situations.

MS. CONNIFF: No. In school.

MS. KENNEDY: But – yeah, but I'm saying there are dubious –

MS. CONNIFF: So publicly funded schools that have very peculiar records.

MS. ERBE: OK. But let's – but wait a minute. First of all, don't talk over each other.

MS. KENNEDY: OK. Sorry.

MS. ERBE: Secondly, let's not devolve to the voucher is another issue.

MS. KENNEDY: You're right. It's a different issue. But, you know, with regard to the cult issue, I mean, you know, you think about people who talk about the Mormon culture and whether that is a cult, and, you know, the behaviors of the multi-marrying and things of that nature.

I mean – you know, it becomes a societal decision as to what is acceptable and not acceptable. It's clearly, you know, wrong for these kids to be in this situation. You know, I don't agree with this organization by any stretch of the imagination, but the other side of that coin is this free speech. And as long as they're not physically harming other people, they're allowed to believe in what they believe in.

MS. SCHAEFFER: And it seems like the bigger issue is that there are laws on the books to protect all people, minors and adults who maybe are being held against their will. We have compulsory education standards so people are not being sent to school properly – when they should be. I wonder, if you dig a little deeper why more wasn't done with the existing legal structure that we have to protect these children when they do.

MS. ERBE: Last word, Eleanor.

DEL. NORTON: You know, get used to it. This is a – cults are who started this country. And there is a freedom of a religion.

MS. ERBE: Cults are what started this country?

DEL. NORTON: Cults have started – many cults. Many people came to this country, came and nurtured their cults here. That's the kind of country we are. This was close to child abuse and it would be very hard to penetrate because of the dominion of the family over the child. Very scary.

MS. ERBE: So there's no way to save these people?

DEL. NORTON: And she tried to call in the state.

MS. ERBE: All right.

DEL. NORTON: And then he made her call back and say, she didn't really mean it. She could have gotten help that way.

MS. ERBE: OK. Sorry. We're out of time. 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/tothecontrary, where the discussion continues. And whether you agree or think to the contrary, please join us next time.

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