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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, first, a federal court ruling on the morning after pill. Then, a Princeton alumnus's advice for college coeds causes a firestorm. Behind the headlines: more adults going it alone.

(Musical break.)

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

A federal judge has ruled the morning after pill should be made available over the counter for all ages in the southern district of New York. The current federal law only allows it for women 16 and older. In his ruling, the judge said the federal government was acting in bad faith when dealing with the requests to make the pill universally available. The decision counteracts the Obama administration's rejection of an FDA recommendation to make the pill available for all ages without a prescription.

So, Congresswoman Donna Edwards, what impact will this ruling have on the Republican so-called war on women?

REPRESENTATIVE DONNA EDWARDS (D-MD): Well, I don't know if it will have an impact there. I do think it's a real challenge for the Obama administration to make a decision about whether they're going to appeal the judge's decision. I hope that they don't because I think the administration got it wrong in the first place, by ignoring the science and ignoring the decision of the FDA.

CHERI JACOBUS: Look, I think this sounds like a left wing war on children. When you're putting children at risk and using them to help promote a left wing agenda, regardless of your position on abortion, I think every responsible adult in this country should be very, very concerned. I find it appalling. It's controversial.

DEBRA CARNAHAN: Well, I don't find it appalling. And I think whether or not it's war on women will depend upon how the Republican Party decides to respond to this.

FRANCESCA CHAMBERS: I think it's outrageous that kids, children, like you were saying, can literally get the morning after pill at the age of 12 now if they just want to walk in there and get it, without parental consent. That's just outrageous to me.

MS. ERBE: All right. Your thoughts. You've come to judge.

MS. CARNAHAN: Yeah. I mean, first of all – you know, you have to make up your mind. Are you against abortion and want availability of birth control and women to be able to protect themselves? And 13 and 14 years olds who are out there having sex,

the best thing is to be able to get that morning after pill, if they're worried that that's happened, instead of having an unwanted pregnancy. I mean, there are homes out there where you don't have parents that you can go to and that you can talk to about what's happened. And so I think this is a very good decision.

MS. JACOBUS: You can say the same thing about any other kind of drug that could be damaging to a child. Look, this is about pushing a left wing –

REP. EDWARDS: It's not damaging to –

MS. JACOBUS: This is a – this is a drug.

REP. EDWARDS: The science says the opposite. The science says –

MS. JACOBUS: Look – but how many children are going to go in and get some kind of medication at their local drug store without the parent's help? This is pushing a left wing agenda and trying to force a square peg into a round hole by saying that this is OK for kids to do. It's not. This is about a political agenda. It's not about the health of children.

REP. EDWARDS: Well, any young woman who goes in to get the morning after pill has already had sex. And so the science says – the science actually says –

MS. JACOBUS: But if you're 13 –

MS. ERBE: Let her – let her finish.

REP. EDWARDS: The science actually says that this is not a danger to children. And I think that the Obama administration made a big mistake in stepping into a purview of overruling an FDA decision. And I think that that's where the judge has come down. And I do still think it's still our responsibility as parents. It's still our responsibility in terms of guiding our young people and the decisions that they make. But the science says it's not harmful and that it should be available over the counter.

MS. JACOBUS: Yeah. But we're – but we're still talking about children.

MS. ERBE: This is – this is – this – well, before we get there, I want – this is a very interesting and weird situation, quite frankly, that's been set up here, because, first of all, you have the FDA saying it should be made available to girls of any age.

Then you have the Obama administration supposedly liberal and progressive, right, and also cordoning women on reproductive choice issues, saying, no, counteracting what the FDA ruled and saying, no. We only want this sold to females 16 and older.

And then, you have a federal court judge in New York. So it's only applicable in the southern district of New York saying, no; girls of all ages should have access to this. And I, by the way, would not refer to a 15 or 16 – having grown up in New York City, a 15 or 16-year-old girl is not exactly a child. She's a young woman, or – you know, it may be different in different areas in the country. But they're pretty sophisticated.

MS. JACOBUS: They might be different – they might be – their parents might have a different view and it should up to their parents and their family members. And, again, this sounds like a left wing agenda being pushed on children and putting their health issues in the hands of the government, which it shouldn't be.

MS. ERBE: OK. But let me ask you this.

MS. JACOBUS: But there's an effort with the Obama administration –

MS. ERBE: No. Let me – let me – let me ask you a question, which is – so you're saying a left wing agenda pushed on the right wing, Obama administration decision?

MS. JACOBUS: This is the left wing trying to push their agenda out there. Look, President Obama is trying to walk a fine line because he desperately wants to still be courting what will be a religiously and culturally conservative African-American vote, which he has, but he wants to keep that for his party. And also, the growing Hispanic vote, which is largely Catholic. So he wants to be able to, you know, throw a bone to that group too. So he is in an awkward position now, where he's going to have to decide to stick to his guns or kind of cave on this so he doesn't get in trouble with the left wing.

MS. ERBE: But, Debra, if Republicans and anti-abortion groups who are – you know, rarely Democrats, almost always Republicans, if they push this and try to get another case going in another circuit, will that play into the Republican, the so-called Republican war on women?

MS. CARNAHAN: Oh, I think it absolutely can. And you're going to have to see who's behind the lawsuit and where they try and go to change this. It's also going to be interesting to see if Congress does anything about this when they come back from their break. My guess is, is that, just like what you said earlier, there's going to be a bill out there that's going to be pushed out on the floor.

(Cross talk.)

REP. EDWARDS: I wouldn't be – I mean, I wouldn't be surprised by that at all. And so, then, I think it is going to be incumbent on the administration to then make a decision about how they want to move forward. But it wouldn't surprise me in the least, especially given the characters that we've had – that we have in the Congress, on the other side, around these issues of reproductive health, if someone doesn't come forward

with a bill that would actually limit what the court has decided. I think it would be a big
–

MS. JACOBUS: And I think that pro-choice –

REP. EDWARDS: I think it would be a big mistake and that women across the country will recognize it for what it is. And then, we can come back and have a conversation about a war on women.

MS. JACOBUS: I think you're going to lose a lot of pro-choice Democrats on this.

MS. ERBE: I want to get Francesca in here.

MS. CHAMBERS: I just don't understand why teenagers under the age 16 need access to the morning after pill without parental consent.

MS. CARNAHAN: Because they've had sex without parental consent.

MS. CHAMBERS: Sixteen is already a young enough age to not have parental consent. I would personally consider that too low already. You know, there's plenty of other issues in which you have to be 18 to have parental consent – to do something without parental consent. That is the standard. So I don't understand why for this particular thing it's OK for 12 year olds. I'm talking – when you said children, 12 is children. I'm sorry. I do think that those are kids.

MS. JACOBUS: And I'd like to just say, first of all, I think you're going to lose a lot of pro-choice Democrats or middle of the road people on this who might generally be pro-choice but find this appalling. And, secondly, you're talking about New York, a place where I guess none of us can walk down the street with a Big Gulp because that's going to be against the law, but, boy, you know, the kids can go into the CVS and go in the drug store and they can get their morning after pills.

MS. ERBE: Last word, Debra.

MS. CARNAHAN: Yeah. OK. Once again, build a relationship with your children. You know, if this is an issue for you, build a relationship with your children that they can come to you. But for many, many, many young girls out there, that relationship is not there and you're forcing them perhaps into an unwanted pregnancy situation. They've already had sex. What the morning after pill is is basically a big dose of birth control pills and the FDA has said it is not damaging to you. So you can have your moral issues, but there's not any basis in science for not offering this.

MS. JACOBUS: I think you're going to lose pro-choicers (sp) on this.

MS. ERBE: All right. All right. Let us know what you think. Please, follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe or #tothecontrary. From Plan B to the MRS degree.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: A letter to the editor in the Princeton University newspaper has gone viral this week after one alumna encouraged women to find husbands while they're still in school. The concept of the MRS degree caused many people to call her ideas old-fashioned. But Susan Patton is glad this has sparked a conversation.

SUSAN PATTON: It was a little piece of advice I wanted to share with the wonderful young women on the campus of my beloved alma mater, Princeton University. And even smaller than that, it was intended only for those women who are thinking that they do want to have children, who want a traditional marriage. So it was intended for a very, very small audience. And the fact that it went so viral so quickly makes me think, you know, this is a conversation that needed to take place. And I'm so glad that women are now thinking about this, talking with each other, talking with their families. I think that's the important thing.

MS. ERBE: Patton wants young women to focus on more than just a career path.

MS. PATTON: The politically popular position to take is career, career, career, have it all, lean in. All of that is great. I'm just saying, don't do that to the exclusion of – and at least an equal investment in the identification with a life partner, with whom to build a family and raise children, if that's what you want.

And, again, I understand. Not all women want to be married. Not all women want to have children. But if you do, start earlier rather than postpone, defer and delay, because you might do so at your own peril. You might – you might rob yourself of the opportunity of having what you want in life.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So good or bad advice, Cheri?

MS. JACOBUS: You know, that's a type of advice you might give to your niece or someone you know quite well. It shows that women have lots of different options, lots of choices in life. But I don't know if it's something that we need to hear from the speaker of a group. And we pretty much have it figured out, you know, what we can and can't do.

MS. ERBE: I know. I was thinking – are young women today so unaware of the fact that if they want kids, they'd better start – you know, you're going to have your easiest time conceiving before 30 so think about it? Most of the young women I know today are thinking very much about that, as well as careers.

REP. EDWARDS: Well, I have to – well, when I heard this, I was baffled, because it was advice that maybe I heard when I was in college 35 years ago but never thought I'd hear it in 2013. And so I just don't think it's really relevant to young women's lives and their experiences. And, you know, what, it's actually not relevant to young men's lives and experiences either, because they all have different expectations.

MS. ERBE: Well, and you know, she married a fellow Princetonian and got divorced – had her two kids who are now – one's a Princeton grad. One's still there – sons, I should say. And so it didn't really work out – she had her kids, but it didn't really work out as a life partnership.

MS. CHAMBERS: As a recent college grad myself – I graduated about three years ago – I would definitely say that the men who are in college, I would not encourage you to marry those guys. (Laughter.) They are immature. What was I was into back – you know, frat guys, that is not necessarily what you want to choose in a life partner is how they good they are at beer pong.

And I would not encourage you to pick a male based on how they were in college. That might not turn out to be a great life partner. You know, you're thinking about having kids, but you need to be thinking about someone you'd want to spend the rest of your life with and who would be there to help you to raise them, in child rearing. And I just don't think most men who are college aged are ready for that type of a commitment.

MS. ERBE: I know I can't count on you to be the one person on this panel who agrees with her.

MS. CARNAHAN: Well, no. And, actually, I did get married in law school, but that's still college. And, you know, I just think this is a very personal, personal choice though. I will say that. I don't mind her bringing up the dialogue. I agree with Donna. I think it's something maybe that you say personally. And, Cheri, agree with you too.

MS. JACOBUS: Usually, over many bottles of wine. (Laughter.)

MS. CARNAHAN: Yeah. And that's – in my family, my great grandmother and my grandmother, who's still alive, always said, Deb, get your education first. You know, these are women who got married at 19. Were they fertile? Yes. But – and they had children. But they, you know, did not get their education. They didn't careers that they maybe wanted to have.

MS. JACOBUS: And we have so many more options now and I think that's what the message –

MS. CARNAHAN: I agree. And adoption is an option. You know, if you go, well, you know, gee, I guess I'm 39 and now I can't conceive, there are a lot of children out there that need good homes.

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: But the other thing I thought she wasn't taking into account is that marriage is very different now from – first of all, she said that your options, even at Princeton, narrow from – your options are better as a freshman than they are as a senior because then you're there with men older than you are versus your own age. Well, now, every age, especially a few years, it doesn't really – women are marrying younger men.

REP. EDWARDS: Also, the older you get, actually, the less it matters.

MS. JACOBUS: I found – part of this bothered me too because as women become, you know, equal or whatever to men with education and the workforce and professions, are we still required to marry up? I mean, why can't we marry – you know, if we become professional women, why can't we marry the secretary, or the plumber, whatever, whatever the equivalent of that is? I have nothing against plumbers because they make a lot of money. (Laughter.)

MS. CARNAHAN: Better than lawyers.

MS. JACOBUS: But she's still operating on this assumption that if you're a Princeton woman, there aren't many men out there, and you must marry up. It's like – well, you know, maybe not.

REP. EDWARDS: Well, I still had to think – you know, as a 25 year old – I was married at 25 with someone I dated when I was in college, not married now at 55 with that same person that I dated in college. And I just think, as a person, I'm very different than I was then. And, as I got older, I think my choices matured as well. And I think that that is really true for our young people, whether they're men or women.

MS. CHAMBERS: Well, I wanted to jump in there for a second and say that doesn't mean that I think that you shouldn't marry young. I am getting married in two months and I'm turning 25 next month. And I intend to stay with the person I marry for the rest of my life.

REP. EDWARDS: I think all of us start out like that, by the way. (Laughter.)

MS. CHAMBERS: I know that they do. But, you know, I'm just saying that I don't think that that means you shouldn't necessarily marry young, but after college, when you've gotten a chance to establish your career, move to a place that you think you're going to be for a long time would be better time to choose a partner then, in college, before your life has even begun.

REP. EDWARDS: Anyway, all personal choices.

MS. CARNAHAN: You know, it's all personal. It's all personal. The only thing I resent is I don't want women out there thinking, be afraid of being an old maid, which

that's what we used to be told years ago. Don't be an old maid. You were an old maid by 24, if you weren't married.

MS. JACOBUS: Well, we're living longer now too so people get married later. They squeeze in more marriages. I mean, 50 is the new 27 and a half. So, you know, life can be long if you do it right. And there's no reason for somebody to feel like they have to jump into it when they're in college.

MS. ERBE: But then, again, the only thing I want to throw in here is there is the cartoon of the beautiful woman – you know, in a business suit, looking at her watch and saying, oh, my God. I forgot to have a baby. So, I mean, does – and, of course, that predated a whole lot of the technology that's out there now that, you know, women in their 60s, whether it's recommended or not, they are able to have children in some instances.

MS. CHAMBERS: But you should just choose the right person. I think that's the most important thing. Before I got married, before I got engaged, people always told, you'll know when you find the right person. And I always said, OK, you know, whatever. And I think a lot of women tended – they don't want to be alone so they end up settling for some guy that they – you know, met in college. And I wouldn't say that. Don't settle for – don't settle.

MS. CARNAHAN: Let me interject here. This is not necessarily about marriage. And this is about having babies. And there are a lot of single family households out there and there are a lot of women choosing to have children. They haven't found the right partner they want, but they found somebody that they would go ahead and would like to have their genes and their intellect, or whatever, and said, OK. I'll parent with you.

MS. ERBE: All right. And I want to add – or they found the right sperm donor or sperm bank.

Behind the headlines: more Americans than ever are living alone. According to a new book, "Going Solo," they're thriving.

(Begin video segment.)

ERIC KLINENBERG [Author, "Going Solo"]: There are over five million young American adults, under the age of 35, who have their own homes. They don't live with roommates. They don't live with family members. They're going solo.

MS. ERBE: Eric Klinenberg teaches sociology at New York University. His book, "Going Solo," focuses on the biggest demographic shift since the baby boom. More Americans are staying single and going solo.

MR. KLINENBERG: When I say going solo, I mean living alone. And that's different from being alone or feeling lonely. And we often confuse that. What I'm really

referring to is the fact that people have the economic security and the cultural independence to have a place of their own.

MS. ERBE: Klinenberg says this spike in younger Americans moving out is caused by the desire to grow up more quickly.

MR. KLINENBERG: There's been a dramatic spike in the number of young singletons. In 1950, about a half a million under 35 people live alone. Today, it's more than five million, even with the dip since the recession started, for this age group. And for this generation, living alone is the way to grow up. It's how you become an adult in a time when we marry later than ever before.

MS. ERBE: More than 50 years ago, states with large numbers of people going solo were Wyoming, Alaska, and Montana. Those Americans were mostly migrant working men. Today, it's more common for people in cities to live on their own.

MR. KLINENBERG: Today, what's so different is living alone is primarily urban. So there are cities like Atlanta, and Cleveland, and Seattle, and San Francisco, and Denver, where more than 40 percent of all households are one-person households. And, in Washington, D.C., and Manhattan, it's almost one in two households.

MS. ERBE: There are 33 million Americans living alone; 18 million of them are female.

MR. KLINENBERG: One of the main drivers for the rise of living alone in the world today is women's economic and cultural independence. When women enter into the paid labor market in mass, they develop the capacity to live for long periods of time, to have flourishing lives without the economic support of a man.

MS. ERBE: Many women live alone because they don't want to care for anyone but themselves.

MR. KLINENBERG: These are situations, where, often, you find women who say, I spent my life taking care of a man. I was responsible for the domestic work. I coordinated our social calendar. And I loved him. I wish he was still with me. But the truth is, at this point in my life, I don't want to get back into a situation where I have to care for someone else.

MS. ERBE: And because women are far better at forming social networks, it's often easier for them to live alone than it is for men.

MR. KLINENBERG: Women, throughout their lives, do a better job of making and maintaining relationships, both with friends and also with family members. And so, they find ways to reinvent their lives and to make new communities without getting remarried.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: All right. So is this a good thing or a bad thing?

MS. CARNAHAN: I think it's a good thing. I don't see a downside to it. And especially with the social media that we have now and the ability to connect, like this gentleman was just saying, it's a positive thing. It means that women have choices.

The women in my family, once again, who were widowed early – I warn people, don't marry in this family if you're male because you're going to drop early – but they didn't want to get remarried. They said, I've had my children. I had my husband. Why do I want a man? I want my own life. So I think – I think it's great that there are choices out there for us.

MS. JACOBUS: I think people now look at homeownership as sort of the passage into adulthood as much as maybe marriage. And, also, in this economy, it's really bad. We just got another really bad jobs report – people need to rely on other things, such as homeownership, to build their financial security – that's women, that's men. And so a lot of it has to do with that. You want to own your own home and you especially want that in bad economic times. It's at least some piece of security. Life is long, as we've discussed, and, at some point, most of us will spend a good portion of our time, of our life living alone. I think we can expect to. They market to us now, so why not?

MS. ERBE: But I'm confused, because he actually did talk about two different age groups. He talked about living alone is growing up. OK. Then, you're talking 20, 30 somethings. And we're also talking here about really boomers, and, you know, widows who are living the last 20 or 30 years of their lives alone. What are the policy implications as a member of Congress?

REP. EDWARDS: Well, I mean, I do think that when you live along, and especially, you know, women living alone into their 50s and into their later years, and you have to worry about taking care of yourself, who's responsible for you, it's a very different kind of relationship. But those are things that you plan for.

And I just love the idea that there are choices and that they are acceptable choices. And we've only just gotten to that point, because we come out of a couple of generations where the choice to live alone was actually not a socially acceptable choice. And that made it really difficult for some women, women who stayed in marriages that they maybe shouldn't have stayed in.

And, you know what? The thing is there's nothing wrong with marriage. That's a great choice as well, but good thing that we have these options.

MS. CHAMBERS: No. I think it's a good thing. I think that the stereotypical view for women is, you know, I want to marry someone so that I don't die alone. Dying

alone would be very terrible, you know, and all that. So I think it's great that more women are saying, you know what? Like I want to live alone, and I don't necessarily need a man, and I'm fine without one. And I think that's great.

MS. JACOBUS: Is that going to hurt – is that going to hurt reruns of the “Golden Girls”? (Laughter.) It has a nice set. I love it was realistic, but it seemed like – (inaudible).

MS. ERBE: It was a great show. But –

REP. EDWARDS: My friends and I have actually talked about – as single women, talked about buying cabins on a – you know, sort of a large property where we share communal space or something, other kinds of arrangements.

MS. JACOBUS: That's the Golden Girls. That's just another version. Yes.

REP. EDWARDS: Right. Other kinds of arrangements that –

MS. JACOBUS: Sure. Build your own family.

REP. EDWARDS: Really validate your being able to live on your own and be independent, but also recognize that, you know, you do need a community of people around you.

MS. ERBE: But doesn't that also require a heck of a lot of saving for retirement? And let me ask you, as a young woman, are you or your friends – you know, young, getting married, are you thinking about saving for perhaps when you're a widow, because statistically, women outlive men by about seven, eight years?

MS. CHAMBERS: I haven't gotten that far yet. Still trying to plan my wedding. (Laughter.)

MS. ERBE: But is it – but is it – that is the point in your life when you should start thinking about saving, right?

MS. CHAMBERS: Sure. We certainly think about things like that. My fiancé and I are planning to buy a condo right now. He really wanted to buy one. I really didn't want to be one because I wanted to be young and have fun.

And that was one of the things that he thought of as if anything ever happened to him, then I would have a place to live that we already owned and that wouldn't have to worry about finding roommates again or something along those lines, which, as a 20 something, I can tell you, roommates are the worst. And that's – honestly, he mentioned Washington, D.C. That's why so many young people in D.C. do not have roommates.

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

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