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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, first, do radical feminism and Islam mix? Then, the passing of the Iron Lady. Behind the headlines: female veterans building small businesses.

(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, sextremism.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: The group Femen is trying to advance rights for Islamic women. It's raising eyebrows worldwide after Femen's video and online protests against Muslim countries went viral. The group's members paint messages on their chests and expose their breasts online and in outdoor protests.

Femen recently demonstrated to show solidarity with Tunisian woman Amina Tyler. She had posted a Facebook photo baring her own breasts to protest religious oppression. But now, the self-described Femen member thinks the group has gone too far after members burned a Muslim flag in front of a Paris mosque. And other Muslim feminists are speaking out and saying these protests do not help them because nudity is not empowering in Islamic culture.

SHREEN EL FEKI [Author, "Sex and the Citadel"]: The problem with these direct confrontations is that not only do they raise the ire of social and religious conservatives, but they also alienate grassroots women and even young women who are pushing ahead to try to achieve political, social, economic rights. They themselves are against this movement.

Now, absolutely, some young women are in favor. And, for example, when Aliaa Elmahdy posted naked pictures of herself in 2011, she went on to be more engaged in the Femen movement after she left Egypt. When she posted those pictures, were there some women who wrote on her blog post, yes, thank you for exercising your freedom of expression and for trying to achieve autonomy, control over your own body.

But large number of liberals wrote in and said, no. This is not the sort of revolution we want, or this is not the way we want to achieve that revolution.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So Congresswoman Norton, is Femen hurting or helping Muslim women?

DELEGATE ELEANOR HOLMES NORTON (D-NC): Perhaps it's hurting. But in the long run, bra burning didn't hurt feminism in America. And Femen's action is a scream against suppression of women in the Muslim world that hasn't moved hardly at all.

CARI DOMINGUEZ: I'm not sure if it hurts or helps. We'll know. But I do think that the media exposure to this unfair treatment is very helpful.

SIOBAHN BENNETT: I agree with Cari. I think that this can only help. When you're trying to make social change like this, anything that gets attention to the problem helps.

HADLEY HEATH: I think drawing attention the plight of women in the Arab world is the right thing to do. But I question the tactic. I don't know if topless protests are the best strategy.

MS. ERBE: But what – strategically, what would make them think that not only baring their breasts but, more offensively, burning a Muslim flag, an Islamic flag, why would – of course, that's going to get immediate attention, but is it strategically the right kind of attention you want to get or you're doing this maybe because you scream, as Eleanor said, about the problem and then the one who comes in behind you or the ones who come in behind you then sit down and try to change the culture?

MS. BENNETT: It's absolutely right. When you're trying to have a social change moving, it's sort of like biodiversity, all of the above. There are different roles that different individuals and organizations can play. But the bottom line is you shouldn't close down any of it, let it all move on forward. And the people behind can do the groundwork, the tactical work to make things move forward. But the folks in the front doing the screaming are helping the movement.

MS. ERBE: Your thoughts.

MS. HEATH: Right. Well, I agree that people's minds may be changed differently, but I think you're much more likely to change my mind by sitting down, having a reasonable conversation instead of what could be offensive, in your face tactics like this. I don't think changing the hearts and minds of the Muslim people is going to happen by showing up at their place of worship, burning their flag, or baring your breasts.

DEL. NORTON: Yeah. None of this is to be condoned. But notice what we're talking about. We're talking about Ukrainian women. We tend to lump all Muslims together. They come from different cultures, the way we who are Americans and Europeans do. And I'm not – it's not happening in the middle of Egypt someplace. And it may be for that country, who are exposed more to Western notions, it may be more all right there than it would be, you know, in Saudi Arabia, for goodness sakes.

MS. DOMINGUEZ: No. I agree. I think that they did – you know, the shock value might have been important in Ukraine. I do think they took it a step too far when they started burning, you know, the flag. And that becomes more political than it becomes rebellious.

MS. ERBE: But you're OK with the chest baring?

MS. DOMINGUEZ: Well, again, if that's the way they want to express – you know, freedom of expression – we used to burn bras in my generation. They've upgraded that.

MS. ERBE: Everything is more open. (Laughter.)

MS. HEATH: It certainly underscores the diversity of women's voices on this issue and on other issues. You know, there's no such thing as the women's vote or the way that women feel about a single issue. Women in the United States may be the most diverse, you know, population of women in the world and so I think we should celebrate that different women's groups are coming to the table to have a conversation about this.

MS. ERBE: But, you know, I do want to get back to what you said about having a conversation being better. I don't know how much time you've spent – you've spent time in India, but you – I don't know how much time you spent in the Middle East. And at least, those Islamic men wouldn't sit down with you they – you know, so how do you –

MS. HEATH: That's a good point.

MS. ERBE: How do you communicate to them?

MS. HEATH: Some of the – you notice some of the backlash against Femen has been Muslim women who I do believe would sit down and talk about the plight of women in the Middle East. I think that there are many, many Muslim people. You know, again, we can't group people together by gender or religion. There are a lot of people out there who are willing to sit down and have a conversation.

DEL. NORTON: Yeah, but many of those that they're screaming against are Muslim women who are sleeping through their own oppression. So I think they're trying to wake them up as much as they wake up the men in the society.

MS. ERBE: Really? You think so?

DEL. NORTON: I think they need to. It has to come from them.

MS. ERBE: There's an awful lot of denial. I mean –

DEL. NORTON: Exactly.

MS. ERBE: And let's say – let us be fair to say that wealthy Islamic women have always had all the freedoms pretty much that Western women have, when they're wealthy, and educated, and have connections.

DEL. NORTON: Right.

MS. ERBE: But women – poor women are treated like sex slaves essentially. I was listening to the radio. An African Islamic guy was talking about a book he had just written, because, in his family, he was raised – his father beat his mother and he was allowed to beat his sisters. Then, one of them got shipped off to Iran for an arranged marriage. Her husband started beating her. She wanted a divorce, which, of course, shames the family. He stood up for her. That's when he realized this is wrong and we have to change this culture. But how often is that going to happen?

MS. DOMINGUEZ: Right. That doesn't happen very often. But, you know, be it politics, be it religion, well, women have always played the inferior role and so it's also a matter of control and authority. And we see it – we see it in a lot of the things that we're still dealing with, you know. A lot of religions, for example, women can't be ordained ministers, so they go back to the biblical references. So I do think that oftentimes it's used as a way to maintain a certain level of power and authority over the other gender.

MS. BENNETT: Well – and, you know, even in our own country, I mean, this sexism, this misogyny, it's in the ground water. And so, in these countries, this is what's normal, passes for normal.

MS. ERBE: Right. Normal is beating – you're allowed to beat your wife.

MS. BENNETT: Beating your wife. That's right.

MS. ERBE: In fact, if you don't, what's your problem?

MS. BENNETT: I think the value of the diversity of outcry around this, the value of that is saying, in solidarity, there are women in other countries that are standing up and saying what's going on in this country is not acceptable. Again, what I always like to say, you attack one woman this way, you attack all women this way. And I think it's a very important role to play for all of us to stand up for women everywhere.

DEL. NORTON: I think something very important here is some women in the Muslim World expected the Arab spring to liberate them. This is a scream against the failure of the Arab spring when it came to women.

MS. ERBE: Last word.

MS. HEATH: Well, I think it's important also to separate what are human rights abuses – no one should be beaten; no one should be attacked – and what are freedoms of

expression. You know, some of these differences are cultural, and I think if a Muslim woman wants to wear the hijab, she wants to cover her face or cover her body, that's her expression, just like it's the freedom of express to go topless if you want to.

MS. ERBE: All right. Let us know what you think. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe or #tothecontrary. From controversial protesters to a polarizing figure, Margaret Thatcher.

Former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher will be buried in her native land next week. She passed away at 87. Even in death, the Iron Lady evokes strong reactions, both tributes and criticism. No one can deny her titanic impact, teaching British girls and other female Westerners they could go grow up to be a country leader instead of a princess or a queen.

While she changed women's history, she was hardly a feminist, saying at one point she hated feminism and called it poison. She appointed only one female to a cabinet level position in almost 12 years in office, as some feminists note, pulling out the ladder behind her.

So your thoughts on Margaret Thatcher, her legacy, especially in terms of women.

MS. DOMINGUEZ: Yes. Well, I think she's someone certainly worthy of recognition and appreciation. She did shatter the glass ceiling in England and then the United Kingdom. When you think you had the queen, the queen, not the king, the queen and a prime minister both women leading. And the kinds of things that she did, you had to have a certain personality about you.

I also think her husband, Denis, is worthy of recognition because, you know, he was portrayed as someone who was meek and sort henpecked and he wasn't any of those things.

So I do think for the times and for the accomplishments that she made, the Falklands, you know, a lot of the things that related to privatizing utilities and some of the other things, she was good for the country at the right time.

DEL. NORTON: You know, most of those accomplishments, I don't have anything to say good about – what I have to say is this woman in spite of herself was a gift to feminism. She did not thing for women, went out of her way to do nothing for women, not even to bring women, talented women into her own cabinet.

But by the force of her personality, she showed us a woman who in every sense was a feminine – a feminine woman by the definition, any definition you want to use, who had the will to move forward no matter what. And it is that kind of will women are going to need if they're going to be leaders at the top end of the society and even in their own working place.

MS. ERBE: Should feminists be taking lessons from Margaret Thatcher's life?

MS. HEATH: Well, as one writer put it, she didn't shatter the glass ceiling necessarily. She just ignored it. She went on about her business. She never played identity politics, which I think is something we can all admire about her. She never said that she owed anything to women's lib, which, of course, is a controversial statement.

But, in the end, I'm afraid we run the risk of reducing her contribution when we talk about her as the female prime minister, because, you know, what she was was the best peace time prime minister maybe in British history, you know. So she's not just the best female PM. She was one of the best.

MS. BENNETT: Great point. And I think that her everlasting contribution is in fact that she served as the prime minister of one of the most powerful nations in the world. You know, when we try to get more women elected, right – the United States ranked 97<sup>th</sup> in the world in the number of women in elected office behind Cuba and Afghanistan – we know that if we simply had more women in elected office at the highest levels of office, that changes everything underneath it and pulls women along. So whether she had articulated good habits around promoting other women or not, her impact and her legacy are irrefutable.

MS. DOMINGUEZ: Look what she did for women. The Iron Lady was helpful working with Mikhail Gorbachev to bring down the Iron Curtain. And how many women benefited by that act. I mean, she got rid of the Cold War along with some of the other leaders.

MS. ERBE: But, you know, there has been, since her passing, a lot of criticism of her from Europe, you know, from feminists, from non-feminists, et cetera, from a lot of people in her country who were upset that she busted unions and did things to – you know, to change the culture of what government should do. You never saw that with Ronald Reagan. You never saw that with any number of conservative male politicians here and abroad. Why?

MS. HEATH: I actually talked to a British friend about this this week. And he said, in America, we have a much higher respect for the office of the presidency than British people do for the office of Prime Minister. So I don't know if that is a cultural difference or if it has to do with her being a woman, but, in the end, you know, I think Baroness Thatcher would have welcomed it. She always welcomed disagreement and she always believed that people attacked her personally, that meant they hadn't any political arguments left.

MS. BENNETT: But I think – if I could, Bonnie, I think your point's well taken. You know, a man is called a man of authority, and a woman is called an ice queen. It's irrefutably sexist. Research shows that. And those kinds of attacks come women's way when they don't come men's way.

MS. ERBE: Well, you know, I just – she’s now seen in death as someone who compromised, someone who – you know, was a great leader and got – listened to both sides. And that was never – no?

MS. HEATH: No. She didn’t compromise. She said, I’m not a consensus politician.

DEL. NORTON: I don’t compromise.

MS. HEATH: She said, I’m a principle politician. I admire that.

DEL. NORTON: I would not like to have lived under Margaret Thatcher, man or woman. And she is going to be judged exactly the way she wanted to be judged, not as a woman, but as a prime minister. And, as it turns out, the way we judge prime ministers, she’s going to rank high, rank high.

MS. DOMINGUEZ: I agree with that.

MS. HEATH: Absolutely.

MS. BENNETT: Absolutely.

MS. ERBE: All right. Behind the headlines: female veteran entrepreneurs. There are more women in the military than ever. And that means a growing number of female veterans coming back home. Count Me In, an organization that spent years helping women achieve economic independence, has launched a program for female vets and military spouses.

(Begin video segment.)

NELL MERLINO [Founder and PRF, Count Me In]: We went back to the women that we’ve worked with and said, hey, what do you think? And more than anything, what they said was there was a real need for women vets and military spouses to be connected with the wider women’s business community. So we decided to do the Women’s Veteran Entrepreneur Corps to really reach out to women who’ve served our country.

MS. ERBE: Caterina Lasome is a 23-year veteran of the Army Nurse Corps. She now runs a health management consulting firm. She hopes that Women Veteran Entrepreneur Corps will help her grow her company, Ion Informatics.

CATERINA LASOME [President and CEO, Ion Informatics]: What I’m going to get out of that is a couple of things. The first will be networking with like colleagues that have come from a similar background so broadening out my network when it comes to female entrepreneurs that are vets that have encountered similar issues or background. I

think the other thing is learning how to engage as a business owner, pitch parties, learning to how to market yourself, how to publicly speak.

MS. ERBE: Later this month, the group will hold a competition where female veterans pitch their business ideas. The winner is enrolled in a training program and receives \$1,000 prize. We caught up with them at a pitch party.

SAUNDRE FLETCHER [CEO and Founder WOTWON, Inc.]: The name of my organization is Women of Today Working Opportunity Network, WOTWON.

MS. : For the next 25 years and 14 moves I was a military spouse following my husband, who was in the Army.

MS. ERBE: The pitch party is a practice session for veterans to perfect their two-minute pitches.

JENNIFER PILCHER [Founder and President MilitaryOneClick.com]: I wanted to test out my skills and get feedback so that I'm able to craft my pitch better for the actual event.

MS. MERLINO: You want to do it in a way that has integrity and all – you don't want to be nasty in it. You want – you want to have some integrity.

MS. FLETCHER: The leadership in that room gave us great advice. And going to the pitch party, and learning the practice, and then actually doing that two-minute speech from that training I think is going to be awesome.

MS. ERBE: Count Me In is already planning future events to help female veteran entrepreneurs.

MS. MERLINO: This is the first event. Our plan is to do the second one in Texas, where there are also a lot of veterans' families and military bases, and then to come back to the Washington, D.C., area the third year.

MS. ERBE: Merlino said though female veterans face distinct challenges, they have special traits.

MS. MERLINO: We did a survey late last year of about 800 veteran women business owners. And what came through more than anything is they felt that their military training prepared them to be entrepreneurs. And that they demonstrated a level of confidence, which is something that so many women need to work on. And these women already have that.

MS. LASOME: Throughout your military career, you're constantly engaged with different leadership courses that help you to analyze situations quick, be very comfortable with decision making.

MS. ERBE: Military women insist what they need most to become business leaders is to counter feelings of isolation.

MS. MERLINO: The thing that women wanted more than anything from us in this survey, they wanted to be in a community of women who all had the same goal.

MS. FLETCHER: I'm a leader. I was trained to be a leader. And this is my opportunity to help other women to become leaders as well.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So, Sam Bennett, how does being in the military – they talked a little bit about it in the piece, but how does it train women to become entrepreneurs when they get out?

MS. BENNETT: Well, having been a small business owner myself, who then became a corporate executive, and came from a military family – I was an ROTC range in college – I can speak a little bit to this.

I think the main challenge, as they cite, is this idea of connectedness. In truth, when women vets come out of service, they are unemployed at rates double that of men. So seeking employment through creating your own business just makes good sense.

Now, the challenges they face, however, as small business owners, are the same as any small business own faces, cash flow, followed by cash flow, followed by cash flow. So I'm happy to see there's an organization that's helping get the founding that they need to be successful. But, as we all know, the fastest growing sector of small business period is women. So I think these women vets are going into a very well-developed slipstream to be successful.

MS. DOMINGUEZ: Yeah. There's no question that small businesses really are the backbone of our economy. But, certainly, to the point in the article – in the story is that when we think of veterans, we think of men. We don't really think of women. And women are – you know, they don't have access to capital. They're so far behind in the information that is needed, but they have the leadership skills. They have the discipline. They the – they have the skills, the technical skills. So it's a perfect combination to try to get these associations –

MS. ERBE: But do they – do they have the – you know, they're taught to be leaders. Sometimes, when you run your own business, maybe you – and you're in with a group or pitching, maybe you don't want to be so out front. I don't know.

DEL. NORTON: I think when you think about women in the military, let's start there, it takes a certain kind of independence to separate yourself from your peer group when you think of going into the military. And that's why I think that these women are

especially equipped to be business leaders. And they don't have any of the background that kind of are pasted on men from the time they are boys. But if you in fact give them the skills and in short order, it seems to me that they have very special skills to be business people.

What we have to wonder though is I still haven't cracked the middle. Why are veterans, men and female, having such trouble getting employment? These people have been trained in a way that kids are not trained, the kind of discipline. This is a great failing of our society. So to channel these women into what it seems to me is a natural route for them, it makes a lot of sense to me.

MS. HEATH: Right. Leadership isn't just about being tough, right? It's about gaining the trust of other members of your platoon. Certainly, if you're serving in Iraq or Afghanistan or anywhere around the world as a part of the U.S. military, I think that would be part of your training. And that's transferable to businesses. Well, you want to gain people's trust to be able to do those deals.

I'm filled with pride watching the segment and seeing these women. It's a private sector program. It's women helping women. It's people helping people. And, you know, 30,000-foot view, we need them. As Sam mentioned, yes, a larger percentage of start-ups are run by women, but overall, the number of jobs created by start-ups has not recovered from the recession.

MS. BENNETT: But maybe another final reality check here. To be a successful small business owner, you have to be able to be very comfortable with levels of risk. And that's the single most important characteristic in a successful small business owner. Someone that goes into the military, I don't think by nature is naturally a risk taker. I think to the opposite. So I think that these women veterans may or may not be especially suited for small business, but –

DEL. NORTON: Sam.

MS. HEATH: I think our soldiers take a lot of risk.

MS. DOMINGUEZ: They risk their lives.

MS. BENNETT: No. No. No. No. If you go – I come from a military family. So my dad was a Marine officer. My uncle is a naval commander. The person that goes into the military, and we talk about risk taking, is someone who is looking for something that's a steady promotion. It's a very – it's a structured situation.

Now, hold on. Let me finish, Eleanor – congresswoman. But that being said, these women veterans are no less capable and no less prepared, but they don't have a natural or implicit leg up in business. They have to work just as hard as anyone else going into business.

DEL. NORTON: Sam, I understand what you're saying. But these are not career military. These are enlisted women who had the guts to go into the military in the midst of a war.

MS. ERBE: Or the economic need, quite frankly.

DEL. NORTON: Well, both of those come together. A lot of women have the economic need and they're not going to sign up to go into a shooting war. And when you enter the military, that's what you risk and that is why more of them are coming home in body bags. So I think in terms of risk, they are at the top of the – they're the top of the list when it comes certainly to women.

MS. HEATH: Right.

MS. ERBE: Why do you feel – just as former EEOC chair, as – we have two of you on the panel former EEOC chairs. Why do they feel isolated?

MS. DOMINGUEZ: Well, first of all, you know, the very few women who've actually lived through the same experience that they're living through. Secondly, we know there's a lot of sexism in the military. And so not only do you have to risk your lives and all that, but, you know, we read in the papers all the time about the threats of rape and other kinds of mistreatment.

MS. HEATH: And I'm glad that this program reaches out to military spouses as well, because they take on a great deal of sacrifice, putting their husbands or their wives in harm's way. So I'm glad to see that part of the program. Ultimately, we owe them a huge debt of gratitude.

MS. ERBE: Terrific. And we owe all of you a huge debt of gratitude too. That's it for this edition of *To the Contrary*. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe and #tothecontrary. And please visit our 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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