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**FRIDAY, MAY 24, 2013**

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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, first, politicians shrug off sex scandals. Then, Pope Francis criticizes the global financial system. Behind the headlines: political trailblazer Olympia Snowe's next act.

(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 end of the era of political scandal?

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: Have American voters and particularly women voters gotten to the point where political sex scandals no longer doom a politician's career? One current and one recent race show that may be the case.

Anthony Weiner, former U.S. House member, who was forced to resign after lewd pictures that he took of himself surfaced on Twitter, is now running for mayor of New York City. In a campaign commercial, he says –

ANTHONY WEINER [Candidate Mayor Race New York]: Look, I made some big mistakes and I know I let a lot of people down. But I've also learned some tough lessons. I'm running for mayor because I've been fighting for the middle class and those struggling to make it my entire life. And I hope I get a second chance to work for you.

MS. ERBE: Weiner's entry into the race comes just weeks after former South Carolina Governor Mark Sanford won election to a U.S. House seat. Sanford's political career was thought to be dead after an extramarital affair became public. But now, he's back.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So Congresswoman Norton, are American voters, particularly women voters now ready to forgive male politicians for their sexual indiscretions?

DEL. ELEANOR NORTON (D-DC): You know, Bonnie, forgiveness is very American, but politicians would do well not to count on it.

GENEVIEVE WOOD: I think voters, men and women, are less shocked than they used to be about these things. But to the extent that people think they can do whatever they want and get away with it now, and there's no consequences, I'm not sure that's a good thing for us in the long term.

KIM GANDY: You know, I think depending on the situation, it's really more about the politics. I think a philandering conservative is more likely to get conservative votes than a faithful liberal and vice versa.

RINA SHAH: We live in this age where everyone is issuing a mea culpa, all the time, especially these past few years. Forgive me for doing wrong. I did it, but I'm back for a second chance. And I think the answer is still a no. We're not willing to forgive because I think a woman who goes to the ballot box, she's still thinking, how dare he do that to his wife?

MS. ERBE: Okay. But, look at Mark Sanford in South Carolina. I mean, you would have thought that. His wife was very popular when he was governor. He was pretty much drummed out of office for what he did. And, yet, here he is back in the House.

MS. SHAH: And I think that's an exception. The political demographic down there in South Carolina, you have to look at that. They were not going to go for the alternative. They were not going to go for Steve Colbert's sister. She just simply was not appealing to them. And I think that's the exception. I think Weiner for mayor, tougher, tougher bet.

DEL. NORTON: No. But he won the primary against other Republicans.

MS. SHAH: He did.

DEL. NORTON: So they had a chance to put in practice their, quote, "morality." And they chose not to do so. This says a lot about southern politics. Southern politicians, male politicians have for a long time had women on the side, beginning with slavery, need I remind us. So I – you know, they've never lived by what they preach.

MS. WOOD: Well, let's not cast all southerners in the stance of Mark Sanford. Let's be very careful there. But, you know, the difference with Anthony Weiner, at the end though, his wife, if you watch that commercial all the way through, it ends with his wife sending next to him on the steps. Mark Sanford's wife wasn't sitting next to him at the end of this.

Look, I do think that we are in this culture of, I can kind of do – people are just living out loud, whether it's Facebook, whatever it is. And so there's less of a shock value than there used to be. And I do think that this is a serious issue. I mean, there's something about public morality that's shaped by whether people think highly of you or not highly. And we have talked earlier in the show about teen sexuality and how public moray shape what people do.

You know, it would be better if our politicians went to bed at night worried about what their constituents thought about how they live their lives and how they treated their families. So I don't think it's a great thing. I mean, I like Mark Sanford's political views

better than the woman he was running against, but I don't think it's great that he didn't pay more of a consequence for it.

MS. ERBE: Would you have voted for him if you lived in South Carolina?

MS. WOOD: If it was down to two people who were going to uphold certain views, I probably would have voted for him. But I don't think that's great that that was a choice that was given. And it's a kind of a sad state of affairs that that's the only kind of folks in that area that we had running for public office.

MS. GANDY: Yeah. Back to my point that it really is more about politics.

MS. ERBE: Well, in a lot of cases, it is, but it used to also about character. Have we really lost – because of what Genevieve is saying that there's so much all over the place, you know, that people won't say things publicly but they'll post it on Facebook, that sort of thing. You're learning so many details about everybody's lives that it almost feels like the abnormal, as in the case with Weiner or with Sanford is becoming normal and like, who cares anymore? And what does that say about the state of politics?

MS. GANDY: Or maybe we're just going back to an earlier time, when male politicians did this all the time and we just didn't know about it.

DEL. NORTON: But look what this guy did. He was not only a philanderer – you know what I mean. Not only that. He lied; he abused his office; he piled one on top of the other, scandalous things that would make people say, this fast-talking dude maybe I don't want him representing me. So I really wonder – and I don't accept this notion, that he was running against a Democrat. Of course he was. They had plenty of choices.

MS. GANDY: And he won in the primary.

DEL. NORTON: Yeah. They had plenty of choices in that Republican primary.

MS. ERBE: And what happened there, do you think?

MS. WOOD: Honestly, I don't know. I don't know all the folks that he was running against, but I do think – I mean, to your point of how could people still – what about character, I mean, the reality is people have very different views now. I mean, Republicans and Democrats are more divided on issues than they used to be.

So, you know, when you've got these two options, here, you've got someone who though is going to vote for things that you want them to vote for instead of a person is really not, that's a little bit different than it used to be. I mean, the parties are more divided and I think that makes it easy to say, well, they're a crook, but they're our crook, you know, or it's an adulterer but it's our – which is not good but I do think it's kind of where we are.

DEL. NORTON: Well, it's going to be tested in New York because it's going to be a Democratic primary. And Weiner is going to have to come up against some good Democrats, and let's see what New York –

MS. GANDY: And Democratic women.

DEL. NORTON: – very progressive city on such issues. Let's see where New Yorkers come out.

MS. ERBE: Now, who – of these two guys, who is worse? I mean, you were talking about Sanford abused his office, you know, had this girlfriend down in Argentina, pretended to be on the Appalachian trail when he was really more on the Argentinean trail, and, you know, lied to a very popular wife versus a guy who for God knows what reason decided to –

MS. GANDY: Tweeted these stupid pictures.

MS. ERBE: Apparently, he emailed these stupid pictures of himself and then it got tweeted, but, you know, which is worse and which is more forgivable?

MS. SHAH: Equally. Equally. It doesn't matter. Democrat, Republican, it doesn't matter. Sanford was absent without leave. I mean, in the military, that's something you get in real trouble for. This guy was governor of the state and you can't be found? How terrible and shameful is that? And, at the same time, Weiner ran a media circus on the taxpayers' dime in the halls of Congress. He held these press conferences lying outright to the American public. Horrible. Equal.

DEL. NORTON: Yeah. So both of them lied. Both of them did something wrong. But I have a hard time saying which is worse of the two. (Laughter.)

MS. ERBE: Well, are women – are women voters going to be less forgiving than men voters in this situation? One would certainly think so.

MS. WOOD: They put Bill Clinton back in office.

MS. ERBE: But not – they put him back in office but not after he was impeached. That was in his second term. So –

MS. WOOD: But he – well, that's true, but the stories were out there in 1996 about a lot of things. And, I mean, that was – there had been Gennifer Flowers and the folks prior. But he remained very popular with women, I mean, even until today. So I – you know, I don't know that – I don't think society as a whole is holding folks accountable publicly as well as we should.

MS. ERBE: All right. Let us know what you think. Please follow me on Twitter at BonnieErbe or #tothecontrary. From sex scandals to the pope's campaign for the poor.

Pope Francis has already distinguished his papacy after a mere two months in office. He's turned the focus of the church back to helping and fighting for the poor in the image of Jesus Christ. Just this month, he's taken on a new crusade. He's trying to steer international finance and monetary systems away from corporate greed.

He recently told a small audience of ambassadors to the Vatican, corporations should stop viewing people merely as consumers and people should control money rather than the other way around. The pope himself abjures the ostentatious trappings of the office and has taken to jumping out of the pope mobile to bless babies. And he also washes the feet of poor women.

So, Kim Gandy, I mean, he's already phenomenally popular. I think he'll go down in history as much more popular than either of his two predecessors. But how is he viewed by American Catholic women?

MS. GANDY: You know, I think that American Catholic women are optimistic about this pope, that they don't have direct signals yet, but his behavior in general leads women, Catholic women in the U.S. to think that perhaps he may be more open about the role of women in the church and particularly in dealing with the sexual abuse scandals, when we know one in six girls, one in three boys has been a victim of sexual abuse, that's something that has to be cleaned up. And there's a sense that he's going to take that on.

DEL. NORTON: There must be a lot of relief from Catholic women because, for example, the sexual abuse scandals have so clouded this great religion that it was hard to get from under them because they keep coming forward.

And here's a man that takes the church back to first principles if ever there were some. And he's such a deeply read intellectual that he applies the theory to, believe me, even the kind of – there are going to be sayings of pope Francis when you come out with words like tyranny of the market, you know, the market, which has been seen as God, especially in the – and so Catholics and people like me are going to hear these phrases, and say, my goodness, he's making us stop and think about everything that is happening in the world today, not just about our souls but about the world in which we live. He is remarkable.

MS. ERBE: How do you – how do you think he's going to do in this campaign to get corporations to be – as he puts it, less greedy? I mean, the point is money is money. Finance is finance. And it's all – I mean, it's fabulous to lobby for poor people, obviously, but are corporations going to listen to him?

MS. WOOD: Well, corporations have people in them. And, you know, I think that you made a very good point in talking about bringing it back to principles, because regardless of what kind of society you're in, whether it's capitalism, whether it's socialism, I mean in terms of economy, the people running it is what matters.

I mean, you know, we've had socialistic countries where people are run into the ground, communists – people run into the ground, and capitalism, where greed can often – I mean, so greed can be found anywhere. And how we treat our neighbors and taking care of each other, that's something individuals in society have to do. And I think that's – so I think he's speaking broadly, that no matter what system you're in or what your beliefs are that those are important, important factors.

But, you know, he's still new. And it's going to be interesting to see – I think so many people like him right now. And – but you kind of – people I think are reading in what they want to hear and we'll see what comes out of it in the next couple of years.

MS. ERBE: Yeah. I want to get to specific policies like, as you mentioned, you know, the role of women in the church in a second. But let me put a little pin in the balloon here. The Catholic Church is, of course, one of the wealthiest organizations in the world, one of the largest landowners in the world, and has a portfolio that was reported earlier in the last decade at being at least \$1 billion invested in corporations, not in corporations such as Pfizer that produce birth control but in all sorts of industrial, banking, chemical, et cetera, industries. Now, should he be putting his money where his mouth is?

DEL. NORTON: No.

MS. ERBE: If he controls – wait, wait. If he controls this – if he's saying that corporations should be more people sensitive and take care of the poor, why is he divesting his portfolio of – the church's portfolio of these kinds of corporations?

DEL. NORTON: And then making sure everybody is poor. No.

MS. WOOD: Thank you. Thank you.

DEL. NORTON: What's really important here is that notice, you cannot – he does not take a position that is anti-capitalism. He does not take a position that is pro-socialist, although he believes that the state has a duty to, in fact, perform for the public good. What he's talking about are the excesses.

Now, what he should be doing, he will have influence. He should be keeping his portfolio, using his portfolio perhaps, using that – those funds to encourage changes in those corporations in which he has invested, taking the money and doing what Christians did in the beginning, feed the poor. So I don't want him to be poor. I just want him to distribute to the poor.

MS. ERBE: All right.

MS. SHAH: Delegate Norton makes a perfect, perfect point about that. And you cannot do good when you have nothing in your coffers yourself to do that good. And I think that's entirely what the church is thinking. They're coming out. He's a vocal pope

as we've seen so early on. And they're just simply putting these thoughts out there. I think it's going to take a while before we see any sort of action, real radical changes. And policy implications, there really aren't that many. Really, how much does the pope have these days? It's very nice to hear thought.

MS. ERBE: All right. Behind the headlines: former Maine Republican Senator Olympia Snowe may have left the U.S. Senate, but she hasn't left the fight to get government back to work. In fact, she has a new book out, "Fighting for Common Ground," with some fascinating ideas of what it will take to get the deeply divided Congress working once again in unison.

(Begin video segment.)

FORMER SENATOR OLYMPIA SNOWE (R-ME): There is a serious disconnect between the realities across America, where people want their elected officials to be in the final analysis, which is to solve problems and the big issues facing this country. I just don't personally understand what motivates people to serve in public office if it isn't to solve problems. And people – you know, are just bewildered and angry that the – you know, polarizing dynamics and the partisan rhetoric is, you know, fueling these legislative deadlocks.

MS. ERBE: Lots of people in Washington are talking about why polarization has created unprecedented gridlock in Congress. But former Senator and House Member Snowe has put together a series of reforms she believes will help to end it. Among her ideas, first, withhold senators' salaries if they don't pass a budget.

FRM. SEN. SNOWE: We have to get back again to rewarding those who are willing to work across the political aisle and a penalty for those who don't. You can do it at the ballot box. You can do it by virtue of your contributions. You can do it during the congressional sessions.

MS. ERBE: She also wants to change the budget cycle so Congress passes a budget every two years instead of every year. This way, she said Congress can evaluate decisions made in year one, and adjust in year two. She also thinks members of Congress need to spend more time working on legislation. Her answer, requiring members of the House and Senate to work five-day weeks for most of the year. She says if five-day work weeks were routine, Congress might have been able to avert the debt ceiling fiasco in 2011.

FRM. SEN. SNOWE: Today I noticed that, you know, Standard and Poor once again didn't see any better conditions for collaboration among policymakers than they did in 2011, when we had the debt ceiling fiasco, and what surrounded that, and the net result of losing a triple A credit rating.

MS. ERBE: And she's so serious, she wants senators' salaries reduced by a proportionate amount for every day they fall short of the five-day work week. But it's

not just how Congress works that needs changing, according to Snowe. One reason she thinks there's so much gridlock is that partisan voters are electing more and more extreme politicians. Her solution, institute more open primaries, where not just Democrats and Republicans but also independents can select candidates for office.

FRM. SEN. SNOWE: These elections are decided long before the election in many ways. And you see the divide, obviously, in the way in which in the House of Representatives we have very few competitive seats today based on all of the analyses in the Senate. You're having few and fewer senators that represent diverse political constituencies. It's either, you know, a red state or a blue state. (And they can use ?) that language because I think that's so divisive.

MS. ERBE: And in one more controversial suggestion, Snowe would like to see independent commissions put in place by the states, deciding how to redistrict House seats. Right now, it's done by state legislatures. And that, she says, makes the process way too political.

FRM. SEN. SNOWE: We need a counterweight to the extremes, you know, in our society. And the only way to do that is to be a force for bipartisanship and to build a strong grassroots effort to make that happen.

If we want our government to work, then we've got to demand it. And we have a right to demand it. And we have a right to demand, let – lawmakers are accountable and they're held accountable for what they do and for what they don't do.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So let's go through point by point what she suggested, the first one being cutting senators' salaries. The first time I saw that, I thought of 20 years ago, Jackie Mason had a routine about if you want Congress to balance the budget, put them on commission. It's the same thing. (Laughter.) She stole Jackie Mason's idea.

MS. WOOD: Well, I'm all for cutting salaries. I don't know if I want them in Washington, what she's calling in for the measure. That's a good idea. But, you know, I mean, look. I think everybody would say we wished that we had, not more in sort of like compromise but more working together on things. But I do –

MS. ERBE: But how can you – I mean, you just said something important. How can you have compromise without working together? In other words –

MS. WOOD: Well, it depends on how you define compromise, you know, because compromise I think increasingly in Washington has been, I'll vote for that stuff over here as long as I get my piece in it. And I think that's in some ways we have the \$1 trillion debt that we do is because nobody ends up giving up anything. They just – everybody gets what they want. I'm not sure that's a good idea.

But, you know, it used to be that you had, you know, some southern Democrats, for example, who were more conservative than northeastern Republicans. That just isn't the case anymore. I mean, so that interparty kind of stuff is not where it used to be. And I'm not – I'm not quite sure how you fix it.

MS. ERBE: Well, that's her point. I don't want to jump too far ahead, but her other point was allowing, instead of just partisan voters to vote in primaries, to allow independents to vote, or something about – something like a third of all voters now identify as independents. So that would really stop –

MS. WOOD: It could mix it up.

MS. ERBE: – a lot of the extreme left or extreme right politicians from gaining the nominations to run for office.

MS. WOOD: But I think that's up to the states.

DEL. NORTON: You know, you could take issue with any one of her proposals. It's what important it seems to me is she is virtually one of a kind. Most of the time, I lament such really valuable people the House or Senate and I did. I must tell you, when Olympia – you know, she was one of the two women who you could count on to be moderate.

But when I think about what she's trying to do, she's going to get more attention than she ever would have gotten in the Senate if she comes forward with these proposals. There would be differences on some of the proposals. She will get people to listening to the moderation that the country lacks. So I – my hat is off to her and I think she will get the attention that almost no one else is getting for moderation.

MS. ERBE: But let's get back to the ideas. I mean, do you think it's a good idea for this – should the states open up primary to anybody to vote in partisan primaries, not just Democrats for Democratic candidates or Republicans for Republican candidates?

DEL. NORTON: Well, you know, that's not a particularly – like most of her ideas, it's not a particularly new idea. There are a number of states that do that. A number of states – and, by the way, these are state-controlled so it becomes more difficult. A number of states don't because they've seen parties take advantage of one another. Like everybody registers Republican for this particular primary or Democratic and so people have become a little leery of that. But even if – and I'd like somebody to look at the states who have done it to see if most of the time it does more good than harm. But I tell you, I wouldn't focus on one or the other. I think they're all ideas that should be – we should pay attention to.

MS. ERBE: What about – I have to ask you the five-day work week. (Laughter.) It wouldn't affect you because you live in – where you work anyway, but for the member

of the California, the West Coast members, the Midwest members, wouldn't that be tough?

DEL. NORTON: It would be very tough for them. And living right here, I really should have the least to say about this, but I do want to say something about whether or not being here five days would have – would have gotten us past the debt ceiling. It would have meant more time to be just as polarized. It's not time spent in Washington. It's the kind of moderation she's trying to offer.

MS. ERBE: And your thoughts, Rina.

MS. SHAH: These thought leaders is why we elect them. We think they should be leaders and they should be thinking. They should be legislating, right? But a five-day work week doesn't do that. I spent time as a congressional staffer. I see how badly folks in the district need them back there, witnessing what's going in the district. And, again, members out West, they need that time to go back. It's time not well spent to be here in Washington entirely.

And I think, you know, as far as Olympia Snowe goes, hat's off to her. She's always been a favorite of mine. But is she really going to garner much attention with this simply because of her stature, maybe, but it would have been far better had she proposed these reforms when she was within the halls of Congress. I think now people like me at least, young folks I believe are thinking, well, here's just an older member of Congress who left and is now talking the talk, sadly.

MS. ERBE: All right. Kim, your thoughts.

MS. GANDY: I have to say I'm one of the people that will miss Olympia Snowe very much in the Senate, because she someone who had the ability to cross the aisle on issues that should not be partisan, things like the Violence Against Women Act, things like the sequester. These are issues that we ought to be able to work out across parties. Maybe she'll be able to have some influence on that.

MS. ERBE: Last word, Genevieve. Yes, no?

MS. WOOD: I think she will have a platform outside if she chooses to really use that. As somebody who didn't always like her views on some of these things, I'm glad she's out there doing it. (Laughter.)

MS. ERBE: 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](http://pbs.org/tothecontrary), where the discussion continues. Whether you agree or think to the contrary, please join us next time.

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