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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, women's special place in the immigration debate. Then, mothers are primary breadwinners. Behind the headlines: surrogacy and the single dad.

(Musical break.)

MS. ERBE: Hello. I'm Bonnie Erbe. Welcome to *To the Contrary*, a discussion of news and social trends from diverse perspectives. This week, some fathers join our panel in honor of Fathers' Day. But up first, how immigration laws affect women.

While the immigration debate rages on in the Senate, a new report suggests current immigration law treats women unfairly.

According to the Immigration Policy Center, gender bias in current law makes it tougher for women to become U.S. citizens. It may even make women vulnerable to domestic abuse. Current law requires women to prove continuous employment if they want citizenship. This makes it tough for stay-at-home moms or women who work for cash and cannot provide pay stubs.

The Violence against Women Act also gives women fleeing domestic violence a path to citizenship, but women who choose that path must document they were married. That presents another hurdle, forcing some to stay with their abusers. The Immigration Policy Center hopes immigration reform will address these issues.

So, Nicole, should women's issues play a role in immigration reform?

NICOLE KUROKAWA NEILY: I think all issues are women's issues. So I'd rephrase it: should women's voices and perspective play a greater role in this debate, absolutely.

TERRANCE HEATH: Women are 51 percent of the applicants for legal residency. It's a no brainer that women's issues should be a part of the immigration debate. They are. They just naturally are.

CHARLES ELLISON: You know, and, obviously, given the demographic and political realities that we're living with today, I mean, this is an issue that should adapt to women rather than the other way around, where women are adapting to the issue.

DEBRA CARNAHAN: Absolutely. We should focus on women's issues. I agree with you. They are over 50 percent of the workforce and they definitely affect our society, childcare issues, et cetera, et cetera, that we all know about.

MS. ERBE: But if it's a uniform requirement that you document, for example, your payroll, is it really fair – I'm going to play devil's advocate here – but is it really fair to say it discriminates against women because more of them are working in – you know, in jobs where they're paid cash, just because they have to document their work?

MR. ELLISON: You know, you can make the argument that it may not be fair to make that sort of characterization because then you have to start talking about, well, what about men who are working for just cash or getting money under the table? I mean, there are a lot of men in jobs like that where in the context of this immigration debate, we're also talking about of Latino men, for example, who do a lot of landscaping jobs, for example, who are getting cash – or construction jobs, who are getting cash under the table. So, I mean, in that respect, you can make the argument that this is – this is not just a women's issue. It's also – it's a dual sort of – multi-gender issue.

But, at the same time, it's affecting women in a very – a very bad way because women are just sort of disproportionately sort of just left out of the immigration conversation. They're not being included in it. And so it's becoming a conversation that's primarily dominated by males. And that's not such a good thing when, right now, half the – over half of the American population is female and that you have all these other women who are coming into the country as well.

MS. CARNAHAN: Yeah. I was going to say – you know, the cash issue, I kind of – I think I know where you're going to with that. I agree with you on. If you're doing –

MS. ERBE: I mean, the law says, in order to apply for citizenship, you have to show a history of payroll –

MS. CARNAHAN: Right. Right.

MS. ERBE: – if you've been working here. So I don't – in some sense, it's not that I'm not sympathetic to women trying to immigrate, but the question is, is that really a gender bias to require documentation because I suppose fewer women applying for naturalization have documentation than men do?

MS. CARNAHAN: Right, because they're in the lower paying jobs. You've got them in the caregiver jobs, the cleaning jobs, and you've got men who aren't in that. They may come in as the secondary people to the application and the men get the primary.

My thing about the cash is it does probably apply more to women since they're in those roles, but you should be reporting your cash. And the employer should be reporting the cash. So I don't want to give too much – I kind of agree with you. I don't want to give too much of a leeway here because we don't want you being illegal as you're trying to be legal.

MS. NEILY: I had not heard about this side of the immigration debate all. I mean, obviously, the bill, as it's written, right now is 1,000 pages. There's some business interests; there's been religious interests that have weighed in and – but I hadn't really heard of the women's perspective. Obviously, there are fewer women in Congress, period, so I'm not surprised that there haven't been – this point of view hasn't been advocated.

But I wish that there would have been more women in the Senate, in Congress, who would have fought to get on the gang of eight, who would have actually – I mean, I think it is incumbent on them to speak for their constituents and to try and really represent this. So I'm glad that this report came out.

MR. HEATH: It seems to me that one of the things that this bill might be doing is getting people out of what's called the invisible economy, people that are working for cash, whose pay is undocumented, whose employment may not be documented, and thus, their rights and their protections aren't clearly defined. And that's something that affects men and women. But I think in this issue, it may affect women disproportionately.

MR. ELLIS: This is why this is primarily a big economic issue. I mean, that's what people are primarily focusing on is economics of immigration.

But, you know, going back to Nicole's statement real quick, it's not surprising that women aren't included in the Senate gang of eight or in the House gang of eight. You know, it's not so much women members not fighting to be in those two groups. From folks that I've talked to on and off Capitol Hill, it's a matter of those groups sort of excluding the women's perspective, the African-American perspective. I mean, there are no African-American members on the House gang of eight, and there are 43 black member of the U.S. House of Representatives. I mean, that's a bit atrocious.

MR. HEATH: Yeah.

MR. ELLIS: And the National Black Caucus is a bit upset about that as well.

MS. CARNAHAN: Well, I mean, everything on Capitol Hill is: one, seniority; and two, protecting your own interests and your own constituency, right? So to your point, this is a very, very difficult issue that they're grappling with. They're going to try and keep tight control of that. You know, every week we hear, it may fall apart over this; it may fall apart on that. But I think you're still right. It's who they trust to be in on this issue who they feel they can control amongst themselves. And perhaps some people in that group are outside that good old boy system that they don't feel so comfortable with.

MS. ERBE: And winding it up, because we're about to run out of time, but I'd like everybody's thoughts on are we going to have immigration reform? Obviously, something is going to come through the Senate. The House is going to be the problem. Is the House going to go along or not?

MR. HEATH: I have my doubts about the House going along. Just the history of this particular House of Representatives does not inspire confidence.

MR. ELLIS: You know, I honestly think that you may have some sort of comprehensive immigration reform passed. It's just a matter of what – even by the House. You know, I think it's just a matter of what are the details. You know, the devil's in the details, as they say. And so – you know, that's what everyone is real curious about. But there's some optimism. You don't see a whole lot of it, you don't see it in the headlines, but there's some optimism that we're going to pass some sort of immigration.

MS. ERBE: And why is that? Because the House Republicans, tea party members, who would be opposed to immigration reform, are feeling the political pressure that the Republican Party has got to try to win back the Hispanic vote, of which it only won 39 percent, 29 percent?

MR. ELLIS: Absolutely. I mean, that's what you're hearing. I mean, there's a lot of political pressure. You know, the Republican leadership in the House really wants their members to kind of – you know, to get disciplined and get behind this thing, you know, because they're worried about the long-term political implications of basically defying a whole voting block of potential citizens.

MS. ERBE: All right. Let us know what you think. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe. From immigration to female heads of households.

The number of mothers who are either sole or primary breadwinners in their families continues to rise. A recent Pew research study finds mothers are now the top earners in 40 percent of families, up from 10 percent in 1960. These women are either married and earn more than their husbands, or they're single.

The study finds big differences in family incomes between the two groups. When married women work, the median family income is \$80,000, but it's only \$23,000 for single mother headed families. Married mothers tend to be slightly older, white, and college educated. Single mothers are younger, more likely to be African-American or Hispanic, and less likely to have college degrees.

So what do men think about this, that women are becoming – you know, moving more and more towards becoming the primary breadwinners?

MR. ELLIS: You know, you've got two sets of men on this issue. (Laughter.)

MS. ERBE (?): At least.

MR. ELLIS: Yeah. At least. Right. You have one set of men who are like, this is just society evolving. This is – you know, they've been kind of growing accustomed to this sort of dynamic and this sort of social change. I mean, they don't even see it as

really any sort of abrupt social change. It just is what it is. This is the direction we're moving in and are very comfortable with it. I happen to be in that group.

But, you know, then there's a second group that's still having trouble sort of accepting that. And sometimes it depends on where they – where they lie on sort of the ideological or political side of the spectrum. You know, and still having problems adjusting or adapting to this new reality that, yes, there are more women breadwinners. There are more single mothers. And this is just the way it's going to be for some time.

MR. HEATH: I think that you're right. I think it's partially a cultural thing that people have this idea that there's women's work, there's men's work, and it's the father's work to go out and earn the pay. And then you have families like mine, where there are two dads, or two moms. And guess what? If somebody stays at home, there's going to be a stay-at-home dad. If somebody goes to work, they're going to be a working mom. And it becomes a debate about that instead of about an economy that supports all families.

MS. ERBE: Well, how – I mean, because in your family, for example, there are two dads, does – do you get emotionally involved in the – you know, in the results of a study like this, or does it just not matter to you because it doesn't affect your family?

MR. HEATH: It's the kind of thing that I kind of shrug my shoulders and go, yeah, that's probably true. And then I look around and see that it's a big deal to a lot of people, when, like I said, in families like mine, there are a lot of moms with are the breadwinners or the primary breadwinners. And there are a lot of families, households where people share the work of parenting and supporting the family equally.

MS. NEILY: Yeah. I think it's important to look at how those numbers break down where it's the two parent household, regardless of gender, or a single parent household. And I think what the numbers point to is that it's better for children to be raised by two people so that there is someone – there are people who are sharing responsibilities. There are – if someone loses their job, there is another – there's another income to fall back on. And so that's really to me where the split is and those demographics are interesting.

MR. HEATH: I can tell you it's – from my perspective, it's easier with two parents because you can share the love, but all families need support.

MS. CARNAHAN: Exactly. And I'm going to say – you know, I'd like to see some breakdowns of these numbers, because what I heard that say was even if you're married and you're working outside the home, you're making more as a woman than you are when you're not married. And a lot of things come into play on that: are you divorced, you know, what's your support system; is the other person paying the child support that they're supposed to? Normally, when you see figures like this, that's what's happening. And these women are falling down into this level of poverty that they can't pull out, and the children are being raised in that. So I think we do need to look at the

support systems and how we as a society support single moms and enable them to move ahead.

MR. HEATH: Or single parents, period.

MS. ERBE: But I do think –

MS. CARNAHAN: Single parents, period.

MS. ERBE: But I do think what the report says is that white college educated women, you know, who are married and share, you know, the economic support with their husbands are clearly doing a lot better economically than their mothers and grandmothers.

On the other hand, Latinas, African-American, single moms – you know, women who get pregnant in their teens, don't finish college, and have kids on their own and starting their own mother – you know, single-headed households, are doing terribly. So what do we do about that?

MR. ELLIS: You already had an issue where you have diminished support systems in, for example, African-American communities on a lot of levels. And we can have another conversation about that.

So, you know, suddenly you're in a situation where you're a single mother; you feel alone, where you are – actually are alone, diminished support systems, you know, maybe in terms of your family, in terms of culture and the community, where you reside, and also diminished support systems like what we're seeing now with all the austerity that's taking place in terms of our social services and social programs.

You know, I think that a big part of the problem why we're seeing so many women kind of, you know, fall into poverty is because we're having this cultural conversation about single women as head of households, and, you know, as far as the culture comes in, about two dads, but we're not having an economic conversation, a more pragmatic conversation about how does society adapt to this new reality, how do jobs, how do employers adapt to this new reality so people aren't stressed out.

MR. HEATH: Because there's an economic necessity in a lot of cases. One of these statistics behind the statistic about women being breadwinners is that men's wages have stagnated or declined. They've dropped 11 percent since 1970 in a lot of cases. So a lot of women, even married women, are going to work out of necessity, and a lot of these women are among the working poor; are among the workers out there who don't earn a living wage, period. So there's a – there's a bigger story behind it.

MS. CARNAHAN: Quite frankly, I just think it shows that the more education you give to women, the more money they can make and more powerful they become.

MS. ERBE: All right. And the morale of the story is wait to have kids until you have your education.

MR. HEATH: But once they're here, we all benefit from having kids grow up in stable, loving homes, and in homes where the parents can be there for them. So we as a society have to figure out a way to support those families in any configuration.

MS. ERBE: All right. Behind the headlines: single dads. There are 70 million fathers in the U.S., of whom 1.8 million are single. This Fathers' Day, we look at how it's becoming much easier for men to have children without partners.

(Begin video segment.)

MS. ERBE: Chris Johnson always wanted to be a dad.

CHRIS JOHNSON [Single Dad]: I think this is a universal desire and that there are many men who maybe aren't married. Whether they're gay or straight, I don't think matters. I feel that that's something that most men would want. The world is changing in a positive way for this, for men to be parents.

MS. ERBE: The numbers bear this out. The 2010 U.S. Census found 15 percent of single parents are men. Thirty percent of them were never married. Their visibility in pop culture is rising too with stars such as Ricky Martin and Clay Aiken becoming single dads. It's a new take on non-traditional families.

MR. JOHNSON: It wasn't as easy to do this 10 years ago. The world is changing. The technology was there, but the cultural awareness maybe wasn't there 10 years ago. And 10 years ago, I was thinking about adopting.

MS. ERBE: But adoption isn't always easy. As time went on, Johnson considered other options.

MR. JOHNSON: I'm gay so getting married would not really be an option. And I discovered that you can father a child through something called gestational surrogacy, which not everybody knows about. I didn't when I started. It wasn't as if I went out thinking that I would father a child with gestational surrogacy.

But the fact that you can find a wonderful anonymous egg donor, and the woman who carried my daughter, Sofia – I call her my earth angel – someone willing to do that for you and you can be the biological father of your child is fascinating.

MS. ERBE: Johnson was fortunate he could provide for a child financially and emotionally.

MR. JOHNSON: I changed my entire life to be a father the way that I felt was best. So I – the business that I had founded and built, I sold; then I changed the way I worked to work primarily from home.

MS. ERBE: After doing some research on where he could most easily find a surrogate mother, Johnson chose Guatemala. Johnson became very involved in the pregnancy, flying back and forth to check on her.

MR. JOHNSON: I was much more involved than I believe most people expect or do themselves. I went to every major exam. I was there as much as I possibly could. I did my best to make sure that her surrogate mother was extremely comfortable and well care for so that she could be very healthy during the process.

MS. ERBE: On the day his daughter was born, Johnson was right there by the surrogate's side.

MR. JOHNSON: It was spectacular. It was an experience that is indescribable, because I personally have never been very comfortable with things like operations and, you know, surgical procedures, because she was a C-section. And I didn't bat an eye. It was – it was wonderful. It was like my heart opened immediately.

And there's a photograph taken maybe 10 minutes after her first bath, when they dressed her. She's looking at me, right in my eyes. And friends have looked at that, and my family, and they say it's amazing. She looks at you as if she knows you already. It was magical.

MS. ERBE: Now, about five months old, Sofia has a large doting family and friends, and a stay-at-home dad.

MR. JOHNSON: I did not anticipate being her primary caregiver in the beginning. I thought that I would have support, and help, and a nanny. That was my plan. But what happened was, when I got her first smile, when I experienced her growth, so to speak, the idea of a nanny quickly moved to the side. I know I'll need help someday, but right now I want to enjoy every minute.

MS. ERBE: Johnson says many people he and Sofia meet want more information about surrogacy and his life as a single father. He's thinking about having another child. Coming from a close family, he believes Sofia shouldn't be an only child. And while Sofia will not have a mother, Johnson says through family and friends, she will have plenty of female role models.

MR. JOHNSON: This was my main personal consideration. When she's old enough to talk with her friends at school and understand the nature of her family structure, her friend is going to say, oh, that's really neat. You only have one dad. Well, I only have one mom. Or another friend will say, oh, I have two dads. Or another friend will say, well, I have two moms. Or another friend would say I have a mother and a

father. I live with them. And another would say, I have a mother and father but the father lives in California and I live with my mother here. That is the nature of the world.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So is it surprising to see a father who not only wants a child – we see that all over the place – but who wants to full time parent that child?

MR. HEATH: Not at all. It's the same desire, the same desire that drives women to find ways to become mothers, even if they haven't found a partner yet. It's the same for men I think.

MS. ERBE: Is it really the same for all men? Is it the same –

MR. HEATH: Not all men.

MS. ERBE: Is it the same for the same percentage of men as it is for women?

MR. HEATH: I don't know. I don't know, but I can speak personally that the desire to be a parent is something that comes from inside of you, just like it does with men or women. It's not a male, female thing. It's not a gay thing or a straight thing. It's a human thing.

MS. ERBE: Do you see that in your husband, with you being pregnant at this point?

MS. NEILY: Yeah. I mean, I'm like really emotional now after seeing that. That was – he's really excited about it, but when we first got married, he said, well, I could take or leave being a dad. And now he's invested in it. And it's amazing to see these feelings develop.

So I think it's terrific that these options are now open to fathers that they weren't before. I mean, we have an adoption in this country. We have foster care problems in this country. And so the fact that this is something that we can – that is not stigmatized as much as it was before is terrific.

MR. ELLIS: Yeah. I think it's a beautiful thing, particularly when we have all these options available. And I'll kind of go out in a limb here; I want to kind of raise some concerns. I mean, concerns first are, you know, one, it's about \$100,000 plus dollars I believe, you know, to engage in that sort of surrogacy setup. And so –

MS. ERBE: It's not for poor people.

MR. ELLIS: It's not for poor people. And then you're going to get into these questions as it becomes more popular and the option becomes more attainable, who can

afford it. And so I'd like to see the breakdowns by race and by class in terms of that. The other thing too is in terms of – you know –

MS. ERBE: And do – but let me – you want to see the breakdowns. OK. Let's assume – make the fair assumption that people of color and low-income white people are not going to be able to engage in this. What do you think we should do about that?

MR. ELLIS: Yeah. So that's the big question right there. I don't know. I know that it's going to become an issue that's going to start – especially as we get into sort of this new generation of children who are essentially the product of surrogacy and so surrogacy becomes a more popular option and then just like we have conversations and we have issues with – regarding wealth and access and assets, we're going to be having the same discussion about 20 years from now. We're going to be having it surrounding the issue of surrogacy and people having the ability and wealth to go to places like Guatemala and pick out a surrogate mother to have a child for them. You know, so there's that one question.

The other question too is the mother is not there so it's – I guess surrogacy might be a little bit different from an adoption or foster care set up, right?

MS. ERBE: There wasn't a donor, right?

MR. ELLIS: Are there concerns about any trauma to the (girl ?) when she gets older. That's the bottom of it.

MR. HEATH: I'm going to jump – I'm going to jump in there because one of the things I've been doing for years is facilitating Maybe Baby classes for gay men through Rainbow Family D.C. that goes through the surrogacy process, the adoption process. And I can tell you the reasons why – the ways that people choose to create their family are as personal as the reasons that they want to become families. For people who feel the need to or desire to have a biological connection, this is an option. And it's an expensive option. And it's not an option that's going to be available to everyone. Some people will do surrogacy here, in the U.S. Some people will be able to do it in other countries. But there are also people like myself and my partner who didn't feel like we needed a biological connection.

MS. ERBE: So you adopted.

MR. HEATH: Oh, yeah.

MS. ERBE: You adopted your child.

MR. HEATH: We adopted domestically.

MS. ERBE: All right.

MS. CARNAHAN: I just think it's great. And I think that there are going to be many costs involved and it might shock some people. But no, I really don't think government should pay for it. And, you know, if you can pay for it and do that, that's great. You're going to have a loving family because you really want that family. If not, you can adopt.

MS. ERBE: All right. And I'd just like to say technology seems at this point in our lives to have no limits. Now, let's hope that it can solve climate change. (Laughter.)

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. And whether you agree or think to the contrary, please join us next time.

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