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BONNIE ERBE: This week on *To the Contrary*, first, waitress moms and their impact on the battle for Electoral College votes. Then, voted down for being a man. Behind the headlines, actress and women's advocate Kathleen Turner.

(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, political gaffes.

(Begin video segment.)

The last days of the presidential race have become a pitch battle for swing voters in battleground states. Women are the coveted swing voters of 2012. They're called "waitress moms" and are a rung or two down the economic ladder from the soccer moms of the more prosperous 1990s.

Meanwhile, that prickly issue of abortion detonated once more this week, when Richard Mourdock, the GOP Senate candidate in Indiana talked about rape and pregnancy during a debate.

RICHARD MOURDOCK: Life is a gift from God and I think even life begins in that horrible situation of rape that it is something that God intended to happen.

MS. ERBE: GOP candidate Mitt Romney distanced himself from the remark, but despite objections from women's rights groups and the Obama campaign, Romney still endorses Mourdock in his Mourdock campaign ad.

MITT ROMNEY [REPUBLICAN NOMINEE FOR PRESIDENT]: I hope you'll join me in supporting Richard Mourdock.

MS. ERBE: Earlier this campaign season, freshman House Republican Joe Walsh of Illinois insisted there's no such thing as an abortion to protect a woman's life or health because of, quote, "advances in science and technology," end quote. And Congressman Todd Akin's infamous remark lives on about women's body shutting down to prevent pregnancy in cases of so-called legitimate rape.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So Doctor Avis Jones-DeWeever, are these extreme remarks by Republicans, even mainstream Republicans, distancing themselves from these remarks, are they what's keeping abortion front and center in this campaign?

AVIS JONES-DEWEEVER: Well, it's not just the remarks. It's the actions. These words kind of remind women of transvaginal probes, they remind women of people trying to redefine rape, they remind women of all these actions against this country to cut back on access to contraception. The words are bad enough, but the actions are worse.

HADLEY HEATH: I disagree, Bonnie. I think it's actually to the left's advantage to keep rape and abortion, to keep this conversation going, because most women are concerned about the state of the economy and jobs, and that's what they're going to go to the polls thinking about.

MARJORIE CLIFTON: Actually, what we know, according to Gallup polls is right now that abortion is the actually leading topic for women. It's 39 percent to 19 percent with the economy. So with the electorate being 56 percent women, swing voters being a key women demographic, absolutely the candidates and the campaigns need to address the issue and they have to be in front of it, and that's why they're getting out there and trying to make it an issue.

CRYSTAL WRIGHT: You know what, I laugh because Mourdock's comments along with Todd Akin is just stupid. It's men making these dumb remarks and it's not representative of the Republican Party. But what I think it's funny is that –

MS. ERBE: But it's not – Crystal –

MS. WRIGHT: Let me finish.

MS. ERBE: – it's not representative enough –

MS. WRIGHT: It is –

MS. ERBE: – that candidate Romney is willing to drop that out.

MS. WRIGHT: I think it's not representative of the Republican Party and how I'm going to finish answering the question is that what's happening is Democrats and President Obama are doing a trumped up war on women. They started it in March, when they attacked Ann Romney. And what's happening is women are smarter than that. And the poll that came out yesterday, the new AP poll shows Romney tied 47 percent with President Obama for the women vote, because this isn't about our vaginas. This is about our pocket books. This is about our bank account and it's about jobs. And women had been disproportionately affected with the jobless rate under President Obama and that's what it's about. So I think it's funny because it's not working. It's not working.

MS. DEWEEVER: Well, I don't think it's funny. I don't think it's funny at all. And it's not funny because we're not going to fall for the oki doki at the end. In 2010, women were told that the reason why the Republicans wanted to get into Congress is because they wanted to do something about the debt. You know what they did? They

got in there and immediately attacked Planned Parenthood. They got into governors' mansions, they immediately passed 26 laws in 26 states, hundreds of laws to reduce women's access to reproductive freedom. They have here a woman who was attacked called a slut for merely wanting access to contraception, and a presidential candidate who just said – I wouldn't phrase it that way –

MS. WRIGHT: And Ann Romney –

MS. DEWEEVER: I wouldn't have phrased it that way – exactly how would he have phrased it?

MS. WRIGHT: That's a false narrative –

MS. DEWEEVER: That is exactly what he said and you know that's right.

MS. ERBE: I don't want to get off the topic of women –

MS. WRIGHT: I just want to respond to what Avis said –

MS. ERBE: Okay, I'll give you that time, but I want to get to the impact on swing voters, so-called by the "New York Times" waitress moms and what is this going to do to the pitch battle in Ohio, in Florida, in Virginia for women voters in swing states.

MS. CLIFTON: Yes, you're seeing a lot of these voters, these so-called "waitress moms," which we all agreed we do not love that naming. We'd like to help with tagging those parties –

(Cross talk.)

MS. CLIFTON: That's right. But – but these are women who actually typically had voted for President Obama in the last election cycle, but are struggling with – were struggling economically has he upheld his promise, but still don't really love Romney as an option either. So they really are the quintessential swing vote. What we're seeing is and we're talking about these women's issues. They're not just women's issues. They're family issues. These are – these are household issues. They're also economic issues: access to health care, access to birth control, how many kids we have, those are economic issues. And so I think it's going to come down to in some ways a popularity contest. Do I trust this candidate to handle issues related to economy or related to my body?

MS. ERBE: All right. Help us – I want your thoughts on you're a swing voter, waitress mom, whatever you want to call it, soccer mom, security mom –

MS. WRIGHT: I agree with what –

MS. ERBE: – you said something about pansy dads. I heard that. (Laughter.) But what – how does all this talk of abortion affect your swing vote?

MS. WRIGHT: I'm going to agree with what you said that women don't like being talked down to and I think that you make a really important point. All this name calling about women, we were soccer moms, now, we're waitress moms, the idea of the waitress mom and the definition is it's the working blue collar mom. She's struggling to put food on the table. She probably has more than one job, so does her husband. And what the pollsters have found is that they are independent. They're struggling with who they're going to vote for because they want to know who's got the more believable message for the future. But funny enough, a lot of the pollsters found that these so-called waitress moms are leaning to the right. They're more inclined to vote for a conservative. And I think what it boils down to is what Romney is talking about, which is jobs quite frankly, and I think a lot of talk – we can argue about where we think this narrative is coming from about reproductive rights, but when I talk to women, whether they're Republican or conservative or independent, they find it demeaning, because we're not talking to men – we're not saying, men, you're controlled by your penis. Are you going to vote with your penis? I mean, it's really demeaning. I think we can all agree that I want to hear a message of empowerment.

MS. HEATH: And let's not forget that many of those women who may be ranking abortion as their number one issue are prolife voters and that's why they're concerned about abortion in this country. But at the end of the day, in those swing states, I do think it comes down to the pocketbook. I do think it comes down to legislatively what's most likely to happen? Are we going to be talking about federal laws, about abortion next year or are we going to be talking about a budget?

MS. ERBE: That is an interesting question. I haven't seen data. Do we have data on what percentage of those 39 percent of women who rank it as their top issue are prolife?

MS. CLIFTON: Yes. The Gallup poll – they didn't break the Gallup poll down, and I think that is – you're probably right, Hadley, that it does – it's women on both sides of the aisle. But the interesting thing is when you look at polling of women on issues related to abortion – and the term “abortion” in itself is polarizing. But when you talk about reproductive rights issues, women on both sides of the aisle actually poll very similarly in their opinions on instances of rape or what it means to women. So I think the bigger question is what do women feel about, again, economically tied to issues of reproductive rights because –

MS. ERBE: And what's going to sway – I mean, here we are, a week and a half before the election. What's going to sway that undecided woman? Is it going to be Romney cutting taxes and that's his road to creating jobs? Or is it going to be these extremist remarks? And she's saying, wait a minute, I may not be super prochoice, but I'm also – I don't want men telling me what to do with my body.

MS. DEWEEVER: Exactly. I think that women do weigh these issues very, very seriously. Of course, economic issues are bread and butter for women as are the freedom

to be able to choose for themselves how to take care of their own health without having that imposed on them. But women think about this in very broad ways. They wonder why it's so difficult for a candidate to say that a woman should be paid equally as a man for the very same job. They wonder why a question like that can be raised six months ago and we still don't have an answer for it. A woman understands that in order to control how often she goes in to work, how's she able – what types of jobs she's able to get, she needs to be able to space her children and plan her children. And she doesn't understand why women are attacked merely for wanting to have access to contraception.

MS. WRIGHT: But let's talk about Governor Romney's record. I mean, I know everybody wants to seize on the binders comment, but the fact is –

MS. DEWEEVER: The fact that he didn't answer –

MS. WRIGHT: Excuse me, you finished, Avis, and I'm going to get to say my things too.

MS. DEWEEVER: Does he agree?

MS. WRIGHT: Governor Romney made an effort – we're going to talk about this a little later, but Governor Romney said, hey, I'm looking around – when he first became governor – I got a stack full of résumés from men. Give me a binder full of women's résumés. I like that approach rather than a top down regulatory approach –

MS. ERBE: But I –

MS. WRIGHT: Wait, let me finish. Forty two percent he appointed of his people in his cabinet, 47 percent of those people who worked for him were women.

MS. DEWEEVER: Well, that ain't equally as their male counterparts.

(Cross talk.)

MS. ERBE: Let me ask you this because really this is all that matters at this point in time. Women in swing states, particularly Ohio, Florida

MS. WRIGHT: And Romney has –

MS. ERBE: – which is not so much –

MS. WRIGHT: – swing state.

MS. ERBE: Right. But so has Obama really come ahead in Ohio –

MS. WRIGHT: No, he has not –

MS. ERBE: Five points ahead in Ohio. But – and the Electoral College, which, as of late this week, the “New York Times” blog on the Electoral College was showing Obama at 290 and Mitt Romney at 217 or something like that –

MS. WRIGHT: But the AP –

MS. ERBE: Those crucial swing women voters in swing states, whose side are they going to come down on and why?

MS. CLIFTON: It’s a ground game. I think it’s going to have to do with – and I don’t think the Republican comments helped the Republican Party in that way – but at the same, it’s going to be about – I really do think it is who do we trust. And as I’ve said, the ad I would like to see is –

MS. ERBE: But that’s not a ground game. A ground game is getting out the vote.

MS. WRIGHT: Right.

MS. CLIFTON: It is getting out the vote – you’re right. It’s who turns up. It’s whether this Frankenstorm affects the voter turnout, but I would like to see ads of these candidates doing dishes and taking care of my baby, things like that. That’s actually what would win my vote. I’ve had enough with the abortion ads.

MS. HEATH: Well, let’s talk about what has moved some swing women over just the past month. And it was that first debate appearance from Governor Romney, he was excellent. The president was not on his game that night. And I think that event really gave a lot of swing voters permission to support candidate Romney, someone they now see as a legitimate alternative to the president.

MS. ERBE: Your thoughts, last minute.

MS. DEWEEVER: And that’s exactly right, because absolutely no women’s issues were raised in that first debate. But as we saw – but when we saw in the second debate, when the presidential candidate –

MS. WRIGHT: Romney talked about jobs.

MS. DEWEEVER: – answered a question around pay equity, was talking about binders, that shows us once again how the Republican Party fails to really address specifically those issues that are critically important to women.

MS. ERBE: Last –

MS. WRIGHT: That wasn’t true. Romney talked about the fact that when he –

MS. CLIFTON: How's that –

MS. WRIGHT: Let me finish. When he was governor, women came to him who worked in his administration and said look –

MS. DEWEEVER: And that's not true.

MS. WRIGHT: Can I talk? He wanted – women wanted time. They wanted flexible work schedules. Romney – they shared jobs, where they can go home – you know what he said in that debate? It was very important for women to be home with their kids –

MS. ERBE: Okay, people watching this show know what he said in the debate. Your thoughts, one sentence –

MS. WRIGHT: It's not about Lilly Ledbetter.

MS. ERBE: – one sentence, what's going to sway those undecided voters in swing states?

MS. WRIGHT: Continuing discussion about creating jobs, which Governor Romney has been doing consistently and well.

MS. ERBE: All right. Let us know what you think. Please follow me on Twitter @BonnieErbe or @tothecontrary.

From women voters to gender equity across the pond.

The European Parliament has rejected Luxembourg's top central banker for a job at the European Central Bank, an unprecedented move taken to protest the lack of women within the organization's leadership. Parliament members want European Union leaders to recruit more women candidates. There are no women in any of the top leadership posts at the bank. The parliament cannot require women to be considered and governments could still approve the nominee to the post, but they're hoping they send a message.

So what are your thoughts and could or should this ever happen here?

MS. CLIFTON: Oh, don't we wish? Interestingly, we are starting to see a lot of trends of companies trying to address the matter. And it always comes down to this. Are they willing to put their words into action? And I think that it has become very apparent. First of all, the companies and organizations and countries make more money when there is parity on boards. The Swiss Research Foundation found that 14 percent more is how much more that companies make when they have parity on boards. So there's an economic case to be made. As we talk about binders full of women and these issues related to women, the issue is there are qualified women who can fill these posts, but

there is a natural gravitation, be it men or women, to hire people like them. And so we do need to make these efforts. We would love to see these kinds of things happening stateside and I think it is a great and bold move.

Now, there's clear reticence, because while there were 325 votes to not accept the nomination, there were 300 votes to also accept him and 29 people who kind of said, we're not going to weigh in. And so I think there's a cultural shift that happens, but in order to kind of push that culture shift forward, we do need laws. We do need things like this to happen.

MS. HEATH: Yes, it seems to me if you're voting against someone in a position only because of his sex, because he's male, that seems wrong to me. That doesn't seem fair –

MS. ERBE: But wait a second. Wait a second. Let me reposition that a little bit. I don't think it had anything to do with that individual person per se. It had to do with the fact that, A, Europe is in its worst economic crisis in recent history, maybe worst ever. Secondly, there're 11 members of the Central Bank board, not one is a woman. So why do you see it as against the guy?

MS. HEATH: Well, I think that in any position, whether it's on a board or whether it's in a part of government, we want the best people doing the job, regardless of their gender. Now, if parity leads to profit, then we should expect in the private sector to see more women being hired as CEOs and on boards. But I don't think we need to push this legislatively or push it in terms of quotas because that may result in discrimination against men.

MS. DEWEEVER: Well, this is where I agree with the binders full of women comment, because what we're talking about doing is expanding the field to see where you find qualified people that are outside the traditional places that you look. And to me that's what affirmative action is.

MS. ERBE: But I have to ask whether it's qualified people – I mean, you got Angela Merkel as prime minister of Germany. You have Lagarde as head of the International Monetary Fund. I mean, are you telling me that there aren't millions of women in Europe who are credentialed and could do this job and in times of economic distress, maybe since the men have been running things, they ought to look a little afar at somebody else?

MS. WRIGHT: We should mention that a woman did hold the position in 2011 on the European Central Bank board, I believe. But I want to go back to two points that you ladies made, that everybody made. Hadley talked about not just filling somebody with a position for a quota. I agree with that as a black woman and a woman. But we also, to your point, I'm a black woman. I'm going to gravitate to other black women when I'm trying to use contractors or whatever. I might have blinders on. So the point is I don't necessarily – I like the Bob Johnson approach. You all know who Bob Johnson

was. He's a billionaire, made his money off of BET. You know what he said last year? He wants to see more blacks on the board room level and in executive positions with Fortune 500 companies. He said I'm going to give everybody a mission. I want – it's not about government. I want you all as the CEOs of this company to put more blacks, get those résumés to me. So this is what we – and I like what the EU is doing with respect to saying, look, we reject this guy not because he's not qualified, but we know there're women out there who are qualified, too.

MS. ERBE: All right. Behind the headlines, Kathleen Turner, the actress is mixing art with politics these days, playing to packed audience in the one-woman show “Red Hot Patriot.” Turner plays the brash outspoken journalist Molly Ivins.

(Begin video segment.)

MOLLY IVINS: I don't see politics as a spectrum that runs from right to left. I think politics is a scale that runs from top to bottom. And the only political questions we're talking about are who's getting screwed and who's doing the screwing.

KATHLEEN TURNER: My legacy will be helping people be a pain in the ass to those in power.

I took on the role of Molly Ivins because I love the woman. I got to meet her several times over the course of the years. We have many common causes, many – our activism. She was an advocate for women and women's health. So our paths crossed in that way. I had a chance to get a sense of the woman's huge love and enjoyment of life. And that's very attractive.

MS. ERBE: Molly Ivins was a liberal Texan, syndicated columnist, and bestselling author who died of breast cancer in 2007. Through Turner's performance, Ivins' humorous political commentary lives on.

Turner's show ran in Philadelphia last year. She brought it to D.C. before the election to inject Ivins' attitude into the poll star of politics.

MS. TURNER: To bring it to D.C. before this election would be probably the most useful thing I could do as an actor and as presence for women now in this because this is very much – it's also not just doing the play and – which – which ultimately is really about activism, about participating, about taking up your citizenship and using it, being a citizen is ultimately what Molly is advocating for.

MS. ERBE: Turner uses her fame for political advocacy and she takes that role seriously.

MS. TURNER: I feel – when you have a certain amount of fame and you will be attracting attention no matter what, how you use it is a great responsibility. I do not believe in propaganda. I do not believe in proselytizing. I do, however, believe in

making people think. And so if as an actor I can present a piece that makes people think about their own position, think about what might be happening here or what they might do about something, absolutely, you bet.

MS. ERBE: Turner's chooses roles to challenge people's views of women. Her most famous movie, "Body Heat," still has people talking.

MS. TURNER: Body was one heck of a – was an astonishing debut opportunity as a debut. And we thought at the time, again, 31 years ago, that we were breaking new ground, that we were pushing the limits on sexuality in this country, which is – to me always been such a huge area of hypocrisy that we don't approve of so many – of sexuality per se, but we use naked women to sell beer and cars. And I never did like that.

MS. ERBE: Turner acknowledges she's passed what some consider an actress's exploration day, but that doesn't stop her. In "Red Hot Patriot," she took on one of America's most controversial political commentators and the role changed her.

MS. TURNER: One of the things that I've learned from Molly, I think, and I want to incorporate more and more in my own life, she would say or she would write beloved and I think she felt that way toward people, toward Americans, that she had that sense of – it's more than compassion. It's a sort of empathy as well. It felt that she could almost embrace all types and beliefs in this great love of the American people. And I think that's wonderful.

(End video segment.)

MS. ERBE: So Hadley, do you think that it's a good idea when actors and actresses sort of take on political causes like this?

MS. HEATH: I think it's their right to free speech and free expression. I totally support that. We do typically see it more on the left. So for example, "Red Hot Patriot," I'm sure it's an excellent production, but in many ways the left does a better job entertaining people and bringing them into politics in an entertaining way. So I commend them for doing that. I think the right hand side of politics in our country has an uphill climb to do that, but it's certainly something that should be encouraged. I like storytelling. I like being engaged in politics in that way.

MS. CLIFTON: Yes, I don't see Molly's play – Kathleen Turner's play being about right or left, actually. Molly Ivins was really an inspiration for women and I think she brought something into politics that we lack so much right now, and that was humor and the irony, and also, as Kathleen Turner pointed out, a genuine love of people. And she really respected people on both sides of the aisle. Now, this is a woman in a time in Texas that was cowboy boots and these very macho men and she could stand toe-to-toe with them and while she could say some of the most acerbic things – I mean, she was sort of the Texas thing of I can say that is the ugliest dress I've ever seen, bless her heart. (Laughter.) And you drop that "bless her heart" and then it makes it all okay. And that

was – that the Molly Ivins thing. And I think even in just the political discussions we’re having today, we could use a little bit more of that empathy, that relatability, and she created a whole genre of politics, especially in Texas, where truly, being from Texas, it is a circus and something to behold and she really brought a new life to it, which was –

MS. WRIGHT: It’s funny that you say that. I do think we all need to kind of let our hair down and that’s a woman’s prerogative. But we really all need to do that, particularly in this campaign, and have a little fun and a little bit of shucking and jiving is what I say. I know that – I’ll probably get dinged for that. But back to what Hadley was saying, I think Democrats do a great job of making politics a little more sexier because they have more actors and actresses in Hollywood like Kathleen Turner, who come out. And I think it’s sad that we aren’t – Hollywood is a place dominated by liberalism. And when Clint Eastwood showed his support for Romney, he wasn’t welcome in the same fashion. So I think what we need to do as Republicans is get more celebrities on our side.

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

(END)