

The West Wing Weekly
0.02: "Live with FiveThirtyEight"

Guests: Jody Avirgan, Nate Silver, Clare Malone, Harry Enten, Eli Attie

[Intro Music]

JOSH: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. My name is Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Today, we're bringing you a recording of a live event that we did with our friends at the FiveThirtyEight Elections Podcast. If you're not already familiar with the team at FiveThirtyEight, they use statistical analysis to break down and understand politics, sports and culture. You may remember in "Mr. Willis of Ohio," we talked to Ben Casselman about the census. He's the Chief Economics Writer at FiveThirtyEight. So on the FiveThirtyEight Elections Podcast, they have a regular feature called "Good Use of Polling or Bad Use of Polling." And on a recent trip they took to Los Angeles, they had a live event where they invited me and Josh to help apply that kind of analysis to a few moments from The West Wing. And we got to bring back West Wing writer and producer, Eli Attie. He joined us on stage for part of the discussion. The whole thing was a really fun way to bring *The West Wing* out into the real world in a new way. So before we get to that, one word of caution. Coming up, we're going to be talking about scenes from a few different seasons, not just Season 1. So if you've been watching The West Wing for the very first time along with the podcast, that's awesome, but I would wait to listen to this because there are some major spoilers coming up. Ok, here we go.

JODY: We are the FiveThirtyEight Politics Podcast. My name is Jody Avirgan and thank you all for coming. And with us is our usual panel. Editor in Chief Nate Silver. Politics Report Clare Malone. Hi Clare.

CLARE: Hey Jody.

JODY: And of course, whiz kid, Harry Enten. Hello Harry. So here's how it's going to work tonight. We're going to play a number of clips from The West Wing and we are going to discuss the use of polling in them. And to help us do that, we have our friends from The West Wing Weekly. So please welcome to the stage, Hrishikesh Hirway and Josh Malina.

JODY: Hi Hrishi, Josh, hi. So you wanna say anything before we just dive into clips?

HRISHI: Is there anybody here who's never seen The West Wing?

JODY: Oh yeah.

JODY: A few people.

JOSH: There are going to be spoilers.

JODY: Yeah, they talk about polling. That's the spoiler. Ok, we'll try to contextualize each clip a little bit, but mostly we're going to watch and take a look. So this first clip is from Season 4, Episode 7. And it's basically- it's Election Day and they're basically freaking out about the polls and it's pretty straight forward. Anything we need to say about this?

HRISHI: Well this is when Josh joined the show playing a character called Will Bailey and this is his second episode on the show.

JODY: Alright. [cross talk]

JOSH: This is right when the show peaked. It started its slow downward descent.

JODY: [cross talk] So Galen's in the back, let's take a look.

[West Wing Episode 4.07 excerpt]

WILL: How much do you know about exit polls?

SAM: What's there to know? You stand 100 yards away and say, "Who'd you vote for?" You can't afford exit polls.

WILL: Yeah, I've got volunteers out there with clipboards.

SAM: And?

WILL: Something weird's going on.

SAM: What?

WILL: We're winning.

SAM: What do you mean?

WILL: We're down one in Spy Glass Hill, even in Emerald Bay and up three in El Toro Station.

SAM: Ok, can I give you a nickel's worth of free advice?

WILL: Yeah.

SAM: It's not advice, so much as I'm saying this: Democrats vote early, ok? And diehards vote early.

WILL: Ok, want me to call in every couple of hours?

SAM: Every hour.

WILL: Ok.

SAM: Bonnie, Democrats vote early, right?

BONNIE: Yeah.

SAM: Ginger? Democrats and diehards. Vote early, right?

GINGER: Yeah.

SAM: Ok.

[end excerpt]

CLARE: Some of you were laughed early and I know you knew what was coming.

JODY: That's what counts as a laugh line on *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: Do you need more context about who the candidate is?

JODY: Bartlet. Nate already told us that.

JOSH: [cross talk] No.

HRISHI: [cross talk] No.

JODY: [cross talk] No? Oh shit.

HARRY: [cross talk] Even I know that.

JODY: [cross talk] Really?

HARRY: [cross talk] Yeah.

JODY: [cross talk] Who's the candidate?

HARRY: [cross talk] Doesn't Sam run?

HRISHI: Will Bailey is the campaign manager.

JODY: Oh, yeah yeah yeah, right right right.

HRISHI: For a dead guy.

JODY: For a dead guy.

HRISHI: And the reason why it's so strange that they're winning is that this guy [cross talk] who has passed away is still winning. And the reason why Rob Lowe's character Sam is so nervous is because he said that if this guy who died wins, then there's going to be a special election and he said he would run in his place.

JODY: [cross talk] That's right.

CLARE: That's very helpful context.

JODY: That is good context. I stopped watching as soon as he got cast. Alright, so Nate...

JOSH: You and much of America.

JODY: Good use of polling or bad use of polling: do Democrats and diehards vote early?

NATE: I mean there's been some history most infamously in 2004 of exit polling overrating Democrats. 2004, people on the internet thought that John Kerry was going to be President for part of the Election Day, then he was not. You know, whether it's because Democrats tend to vote early or just the exit polls suck, I'm not so sure.

JODY: Which one is it, Harry?

HARRY: I would say a few things. Diehards definitely vote early. But whether or not it's Democrats voting early depends on the state. So in a state like Iowa, Democrats definitely vote early. They vote early absentee. Versus in a state like Colorado if you go to the 2014 senatorial election, Republicans voted very early and that one in fact you saw Mark Udall cutting down that margin day by day by day as more Election Day votes got cast.

NATE: But Harry, you're ducking the question. We're saying on Election Day.

HARRY: [cross talk] Oh, vote early. Vote early in terms of vote early in the day.

CLARE: [cross talk] Right, that's what you guys do constantly.

NATE: Morning or night.

JODY: [cross talk] Early exit polls will probably -

CLARE: [cross talk] I assume Florida has a lot of early voters, early risers, right?

JOSH: Then they have dinner.

CLARE: Exactly.

HARRY: I would not trust an exit poll that was conducted by people who don't know what they're doing. And I barely trust exit polls conducted by those who know what they're doing.

JODY: So when they say in this clip, "You can't afford exit polls." We've talked about this a bunch on the show that good polling is expensive and you need professionals who know that they're doing and so on Election Day to have a reliable exit poll you need to pay people real money and have them go out there and do a good job.

HARRY: It has to be a random sample. Often times younger people are over-sampled. [cross talk] Democrats are over-sampled in exit polls quite frequently.

CLARE: [cross talk] Pick the right precinct, right?

JODY: Oh, go ahead, Hrishi.

HRISHI: Is there any data about diehards voting for people who have actually died?

HARRY: We've had a number of elections where dead people win. I mean Mel Carnahan in 2000 for instance was dead and he won that election. So it shouldn't be so surprising.

JOSH: That might have been the inspiration for this storyline.

HARRY: Is that right?

JOSH: I was going to ask Harry, what do you think of *The West Wing*?

HARRY: I find it to be a perfectly enjoyable program, but you have to recognize...

JODY: I think stop there. Stop.

JOSH: [cross talk] We've got our quote.

CLARE: [cross talk] Wait, I have a question, in what context, was this like under duress, was this like on a date? Why did you watch this small sample of *West Wings* that you did watch?

HARRY: Well because my college roommate was obsessed with the show and when I was actually doing real work while he was watching *The West Wing* every so often I come out of the room wearing very little and I check out the show and then I go back to writing what I was doing.

CLARE: Oh vivid picture of Harry Enten's college life.

NATE: To me, it's like Korean food.

CLARE: Mmmm.

HARRY: Of course.

JOSH: That's a good set up.

NATE: Once every four months, I'll eat Korean food. And I'll say, "I really like Korean food, why don't I eat Korean food more often?" And then I won't eat it for another four months.

JOSH: On behalf of quality TV watchers and Koreans everywhere, I'm offended.

JODY: We have five more [expletive deleted] clips. But Josh, going into a scene like this, [cross talk] they give you your lines and say, "Say this and it's true," or do they educate you about the fact that exit polls are skewed in this way? [cross talk] First of all, how much poli-sci goes into your prep for a scene like this?

JOSH: [cross talk] Sure.

JOSH: None. None poli-sci. This is my favorite kind of scene because I'm on the phone and thus I don't need to interact with another actor. So already I was ahead of the game. No, people always ask me, "Research the role," this and that. By the time I jumped on the moving train that was the hit show West Wing, there was no time for research. "Here are the lines, say 'em."

JODY: Ok. Let's play our next clip. Ok. We didn't discuss what the actual cue would be, sorry. I'm going to set this up. We're going to play two clips from the same episode, which is called Lies, Damn Lies and Statistics, Season 1: Episode 21.

CLARE: Good episode name.

JODY: Yeah, good episode name. I don't know. Hrishi, do we need to know anything about this? Is this where Joey Lucas is kind of first on the scene?

HRISHI: No, she's been introduced already. Do you guys talk about the "lies, damn lies and statistics" joke on your show all the time?

JODY: I don't know. No.

CLARE: No.

JOSH: Do you guys listen to your podcast?

HARRY: No.

CLARE: No.

JODY: Harry has actually never listened to the podcast.

HRISHI: The line is the punchline to a joke. There are three kinds of lies in the world [cross talk]: lies, damn lies and statistics.

JODY: [cross talk] Untruths in the world.

JODY: So there's a poll on Bartlet's favorability and the staff is kind of parsing the framing of the poll. And so let's listen to the first clip which is more about kind of sample size and then we'll play a second clip. Here we go.

[West Wing Episode 1.21 excerpt]

GINGER: Hey, Sam.

SAM: Hey, Ginger.

BONNIE: How's it going in there?

SAM: I popped Mandy with my tranquilizer gun. She's doing fine.

GINGER: Bonnie wanted to know why it takes 48 hours.

SAM: We need 1500 responses.

BONNIE: It takes 30 people, 48 hours to make 1500 calls?

SAM: It takes them about 12 hours to make 1500 calls. We need 1500 responses, which means we need to make 6000 calls.

TOBY: Sam.

SAM: Yeah.

BONNIE: Only 1 in 4 people don't hang up?

SAM: That's if you're lucky.

[end excerpt]

JODY: I want to play the second clip fairly quickly, but Harry, like in terms of, like how out of date already is that?

HARRY: Very.

JODY: Yeah. So the stat again was it takes 30 people 48 hours to make 1500 calls and 1 in 4 people don't hang up, which of that is no longer true?

HARRY: 1 in 10, about now, if you're lucky. Some of the polls you see in the public, especially the interactive voice response, which is the automated polls, now it's more like 3% of people don't hang up.

NATE: So 1 in 4-0.

CLARE: [cross talk] All y'all be screening your calls.

JODY: [cross talk] Does that mean they're making more or that pollsters are living with smaller sample sizes?

HARRY: No, they're usually just making more. It depends on the poll what exactly you're looking for but usually they're just making more calls and it's much more expensive to conduct a poll because of that.

HRISHI: Is it less effective now because it's automated and it isn't people?

HARRY: Well it depends. The live interview polls are about as accurate as they have been despite the fact that the response rate has fallen. The political polls, I should say. There's no real sign, at least in general elections, that right now polling is any less accurate than it was in the year 2000, but let's give it a few more years. 2014 [cross talk] was a poor polling year.

NATE: [cross talk] Mmmm.

JODY: That's a classic Nate "Mmmm."

HARRY: Well you yourself wrote the article that I'm just going off of.

NATE: Well, the article said it's not time to panic, but things aren't going great either.

HARRY: Well sure, but 1998 was a very poor polling year and you know not to judge anything off of one polling year, c'mon.

NATE: Look at the rest of the world, Harry. The UK [cross talk] and Israel.

HARRY: [cross talk] The UK. The Brexit was a perfectly fine polling.

NATE: I'm just saying we had a lot of really good years for polling from roughly 2004 to 2012 and I think that might have been an outlier as far as how well things were going. You know. Having polling surprises should not be that much of a surprise in most contexts. Presidential polls are easier to conduct than a lot of things. But this was accurate at the time it was taped [cross talk] I think.

JODY: [cross talk] Yeah, sure.

NATE: And it's a pain in the butt to conduct a poll. It takes a lot of time to train interviewers to do it and a lot of money.

JODY: Alright, let's watch the next clip from the same episode and this is the staff kind of going over the structure of the poll itself. Let's take a look.

[West Wing Episode 1.21 excerpt]

TOBY: Question six is asymmetrical.

C.J.: Question six is fine.

TOBY: "Would you say things in this country are going in the right direction or do you think they've gotten off on the wrong track?"

JOSH: He's got a good point about this.

C.J.: No, he doesn't.

DONNA: Guys, you know it's five after seven.

TOBY: Should be "right direction or wrong direction."

C.J.: Toby.

TOBY: Direction and track are two different words!

C.J.: Thank you, Funk and Wagnall's.

TOBY: What'd she call me?

GINGER: Funk and Wagnall's. They make the dictionary.

TOBY: I know who Funk and Wagnall's are.

BONNIE: They why'd you ask her?

DONNA: Guys, it's five after seven.

TOBY: The question is asymmetrical.

C.J.: That may be so, but the question originated two decades ago and has proven to be a consistent predictor of a voter's potential behavior. So it stays the way it is.

JOSH: I have a problem with fourteen.

C.J.: What's your problem?

JOSH: "When making policy decisions, do you think that President Bartlet puts the needs of average people first?" "Average people" is a pejorative phrase and occurs about six times in the polling model.

C.J.: This may come as a shock to you, but 80% of the people in this country would use the word "average" to describe themselves. They do not find the term deprecating. Indeed, being considered an "average American" is something they find to be positive and comforting.

LEO: C.J.

C.J.: Yes.

LEO: *"Jed Bartlet cares about people like me."*

C.J.: *Leo, we went over this.*

TOBY: *We need to talk about the asymmetry of question six.*

C.J.: *We really don't.*

TOBY: *Since when are you an expert on language?*

C.J.: *In polling models?*

TOBY: *Ok.*

C.J.: *1993. Since when are you an uptight pain in the ass?*

TOBY: *Since long before that.*

LEO: *"Jed Bartlet cares about people like me. Agree or disagree?"*

C.J.: *Again, we went over this.*

LEO: *Can't "people like me", when read off the script, be taken to mean people like the interviewer?*

ED: *When we ask that question, we usually say, "People like yourself."*

LARRY: *Or "people like you."*

ED: *I've seen it both ways.*

LEO: *Fellas.*

LARRY: *"Yourself" is a little softer.*

ED: *And softer is bad?*

LARRY: *Softer is better.*

LEO: *But the point is....*

C.J.: *The respondent isn't confused by the question and separating the respondent from the interviewer with "people like yourself" is pejorative. So, Ed, Larry, you can take this up with Josh. Leo, Eastern Standard Time is sitting down to dinner. The poll is fine.*

[end excerpt]

JODY: So there's a lot to go into there. But Josh, I have a question for you about the structure of this scene. Like it starts very kind of mundane and it's like about the polling but then like C.J., which I think is often a role for her, like sneaks in some like incredible insight, you know, with her line of like, "most people are proud to call themselves 'average Americans'" and then like it dives right into the mundane and it feels very *West Wing-y* in that way.

JOSH: It is *West Wing-y*. I don't think people devising a poll usually move that much when they're discussing it. That's my guess.

JODY: Yeah, that's true.

JOSH: They probably just sit.

JODY: In watching that and that structure, like is that a role for C.J. often? [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] This is more of a Hrishi question.

JODY: Really?

JOSH: Yeah. He's the *West Wing* expert.

JODY: Then why are you here?

JOSH: I'm just here to meet people and take selfies afterwards.

JODY: Ok.

JOSH: I know my crowd.

HRISHI: Josh describes himself as the eye candy of our podcast.

JODY: Ok.

JOSH: Yeah. I didn't want to say it, but thank you.

HRISHI: I think they kind of trade off. It's a role that is played often where one person kind of takes the trajectory of the narrative and the plot, and then gets this nice didactic little soundbite in there too.

JODY: So as use of polling, there's a lot there, but how much does the actual wording of a poll matter?

NATE: This is a pretty good clip as far as use of polling goes.

JODY: I think we're winning Nate over. I think you're going to go watch *The West Wing* after this.

JOSH: Watch the show. [trying to start chant]

NATE: No, because you know, right direction versus wrong track, that is asymmetrical. And that question, often people say, you know, "wrong track doesn't sound so bad." Wrong direction sounds much more firm, right? And so often the response to the question tend to be maybe more negative than people's mood is but as the characters are saying if you've been asking the same question for a long time then a flawed measure that you knew how to correct for might be better than a new measure that you're in the dark for what it means in context.

CLARE: Well I was just thinking. I just recently wrote a piece of American's perceptions of a woman as President since 1937 and Gallup, which started in 1935, has actually been polling that question in some form or another since 1937, which I thought was pretty shocking. And I think the first way they phrased it was, "Would you vote for a woman if she was qualified for President?" Surprisingly, not a lot of people would. But I think they did it five years later and they said, "Would you vote for a woman if she were qualified and the party that you usually supports supports her?" And then, it sort of, that phrasing kept for many many years. And when Hillary Clinton came about you know, as her own separate political entity in the late 90's, early aughts, it sort of changed to kind of mold to Clinton, you know. And so I think it's kind of fascinating to watch the way pollsters manipulate language because it does, you know, you are getting at the same gist of things but you might get slightly different responses.

JOSH: How have the numbers moved on that?

CLARE: Positively. Although there was a time like in the early 2000s where people were

supporting a woman president in theory and then Hillary Clinton came around and they were like, “Hmmm.” And then it sort of popped back up a little bit. But you know, once you put a face to the concept, it did take a hit.

HARRY: All I know is I often get when I try to Google or poll search right direction or wrong track I frequently do it incorrectly because I want to make it symmetrical. And in fact, it’s an asymmetrical thing.

JODY: When you are writing a piece based on a poll, is this part of your process? Like going in and looking at the actual wording?

HARRY: Sure. Of course. Words matter.

JODY: Thank you, Harry.

JOSH: Well said.

JODY: Yes. Good words, Harry.

HARRY: Strong words. Only the best words.

JODY: Are you often throwing out a poll because you think the phrasing is [expletive deleted] and it’s corrupting the poll?

HARRY: Of course. You know, for instance on ballot measures or stuff you know that maybe Donald Trump has said. I’m always looking for questions that ask the exact thing that he has said because otherwise you could get a tilted field. I think that pollsters should just stick to what is actually being said and don’t try to get too smart and summarize. Just try and stick to the actual wording and that’s usually the best method.

JODY: But that would involve having to say the words that Donald Trump said out loud, which is just...

HARRY: Nothing wrong with laughing occasionally.

HRISHI: There’s one thing I wanted to mention about this clip. So I realized one thing that gets pointed out on the show is, despite the fact that these characters are presented as brilliant, passionate, righteous people, they do have a level of cultural elitism. And watching this clip the first time I saw it, I realized I probably was on the Josh Lyman side of things, thinking that “average American” might be a pejorative term. But in this context with you guys, I realize that I had taken that [cross talk] C.J. fact, you know, about 80% of Americans find that comforting. You know when I watch the show, I was like, “Oh, great. My mind was changed by the show not for the first time.” But now I realize that could completely be made up. There’s absolutely...

JODY: [cross talk] You’re an elitist.

JODY: There’s an elitism in assuming that about the average American that they’re ok with being an average American.

HRISHI: And the 80% of it and stuff, I was like, “Oh yeah, I was on the wrong side of this, I was with Josh.” But now I’ve been corrected. But there’s no reason why that should be...

JOSH: Someone just wrote that.

HRISHI: Good TV.

JODY: Let's move onto the next clip. Hrishi, you picked this one for us. You want to set this up? This is from Season 1 Episode 14.

HRISHI: Yeah, so here this is one of my favorite episodes. It's called "Take This Sabbath Day" and in it the President, and the administration in general, are wrestling with the death penalty. There's a federal inmate whose execution is supposed to happen. They have 48 hours to make a decision if they're going to stay the execution or let it happen.

JODY: And this is a scene with President Bartlet and Joey who we haven't seen yet so Joey is...

HRISHI: Joey Lucas is play by Marlee Matlin. She is, in this episode, this is her first appearance and she is running a campaign for some low level candidate but she's managed to, through luck, she's in conversation with the President. The President is struggling with this idea so much that he's basically talking to anybody. He's talking to someone just randomly.

NATE: So she's the Corey Lewandowski of...

HRISHI: She has not pushed anybody in this episode.

JODY: Let's take a look, go ahead.

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

BARTLET: Well, where did you go to school?

JOEY [KENNY]: UCLA and Stanford.

BARTLET: There's a guy named Simon Cruz on death row. He's going to be executed in about 36 hours. What do you think I should do?

JOEY [KENNY]: Stay the execution.

BARTLET: Why?

JOEY [KENNY]: Because the state shouldn't kill people.

BARTLET: He was found guilty of a double murder and drug trafficking.

JOEY [KENNY]: Send him to prison.

BARTLET: You're against capital punishment.

JOEY [KENNY]: Yes sir.

BARTLET: Did you study St. Augustine at Stanford?

JOEY [KENNY]: Yes sir.

BARTLET: Thomas Aquinas?

JOEY [KENNY]: Yes sir.

BARTLET: Two pretty smart guys, right?

JOEY [KENNY]: Yes sir.

BARTLET: They believed in that part of the Old Testament which said, "Who sheddeth a man's blood by man shall his blood be shed."

JOEY [KENNY]: And Immanuel Kant said that the death penalty is a categorical imperative. But, Mr. President, those writings are from other centuries.

BARTLET: I've got a Harris poll says 71% of the American people support capital punishment.

JOEY [KENNY]: That's a political problem.

BARTLET: I'm a politician.

JOEY [KENNY]: Yes sir.

[end excerpt]

JODY: Classic dilemma between Harris poll and St. Thomas Aquinas. What do you make of this scene? Why do you like it?

HRISHI: I like it because it sets up something that I think happens a lot, which is that the administration has to run between their righteous idealism and the pragmatism of governance. And so, do they act in a way that follows their own heart or do they follow popular opinion?

JODY: Is following raw popular opinion ever the right answer in Aaron Sorkin's world?

JOSH: No, I think generally not. One of the things in preparing for tonight, [cross talk] (this took place about 45 minutes ago) I called my friend Eli Attie, who was a special assistant to Bill Clinton and then Chief Speechwriter for Al Gore and then a great executive producer and writer for this show. And I was asking him about polling generally in the West Wing universe and his take on it was that the show as created by Aaron tends to view polling, not as a finger in the wind, which way should we go with things, but rather as an opportunity to overcome an obstacle and to change hearts and minds and to push them maybe in the right, more righteous, direction.

JODY: [cross talk] You prepared?!

HRISHI: There's a line in an episode that we don't have a clip of that is kind of a hallmark of this where the President says our job is not to appeal to the lowest common denominator, our job is to raise it.

CLARE: Yeah, I think it's interesting. I mean, first of all, I'll drop some West Wing knowledge. Bartlet is a devout Catholic, right. And so this is a problem that's close to his heart. But this actually, the idea that polling sort of gives you the feel of what's going on in the culture, there's zeitgeist but shouldn't be. I mean you if you relied on polls, which a lot of politicians do obviously, but to completely form your political opinion, I mean you know, people can smell disingenuousness. But we talked a couple of weeks ago about the poll of Native Americans or American Indians and how they felt about the name of the Washington Redskins. And the majority of Native Americans / American Indians, I'm not quite sure which one I'm supposed to use but I'll use both, said that they were not bothered by the name. Now, I would say, fine, that's the way they feel but also say it's a racist name. So polls, you know I think and probably a lot of American Indians, especially those living on reservations are like, "I don't give a [expletive deleted], I've got like worse things going on right at home." High rates of alcoholism, a terrible sexual assault problem on reservations. And so maybe things that people, the elites in Washington, you know are paying attention about and getting riled up about, regular people are just kinda like, "I've got bigger problems." And I think in that way polling can be really interesting because things can be wrong, but people can feel that they want to have them happen.

NATE: I mean I was a reading a good piece about Brexit on Medium before I came over. It's not a joke. It made the point that, look, if you believe in democracy and the wisdom of the crowd, so

to speak, then not only do you have to live with something like Brexit occurring, you also have to say “and maybe people got it right, and maybe my position this is wrong and the collective understands more than individuals do”. You know, that seems like maybe relevant advice in an election when you had a lot of populism rising potentially, I don’t know.

JODY: But do you think in this situation where morality or your values versus polling, do you think more politicians should just look at the raw numbers?

NATE: Well what I’m saying is that at some point, you say you know what, I believe in more of a republic and I believe that elites should have more input. But you should go there and kind of make the logical argument. Instead of saying, “Oh people are just misguided, if only people were better educated on the issue they would think differently.” That to me seems like kind of an elitist view too.

JODY: Harry.

HARRY: I would just point out two things. Number one, I don’t remember the last time I actually saw a Harris poll being publicized. They’ve gone off and done their own things. Lou Harris though I believe is still alive at like 96 and living in South Florida.

JODY: Shocker.

JOSH: 65% of his family believes him to be [cross talk] still alive.

HARRY: [cross talk] That’s right.

HARRY: And then the other thing I’d say is that 71% has dropped 10 to 15 points depending on the poll you look at, so the trend has been away from [cross talk] capital punishment.

JODY: [cross talk] Away from capital punishment since the show.

NATE: A lot of times too you’re doing work that’s very kind of long term in nature. You’re not going to change opinion overnight. But you know the death penalty is an issue for example, like gay marriage, or like marijuana legalization, where there has been a trend that’s moved a couple of points every year. Usually in the same direction and people start off with very modest expectations of what they can accomplish and they kind of can push the needle gradually. I mean, any time you use metrics then, we face this if you’re running a website, or running a TV show, or anything else, right, where you kind of know what’s going pay off in the immediate term, what’s going to get the best ratings for this week’s episode. And it might not be the best move in the long term.

JOSH: It’s actually funny that you mention TV because when Eli was telling me Aaron’s take on polling, it made me think that it probably does fall parallel in line with his take on getting input on his TV shows and listening to either you know what a network has to say or [cross talk] what the general public thinks.

JODY: [cross talk] Which is basically like, “That’s nice. Now I’m going to go do my thing.”

JOSH: I think so.

JODY: Ok. Next clip. What context do we need for this, Hrishu?

JOSH: Also from *The West Wing*.

JODY: Also from *The West Wing*. This is like a spoiler, I guess. The President has MS.

HRISHI: And they're trying to figure out the best way to disclose it. Or the least politically damaging way.

CLARE: Man, I can't believe he got re-elected.

JODY: Should we just spoil everything [cross talk] on *The West Wing* right now? Ok, so again this is with Joey and with Josh Lyman and they're trying to figure out how to start to do some polling that will give them some hints as to how to disclose this information. Alright, let's go.

CLARE: [cross talk] Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 2.20 excerpt]

JOEY: *When are you going public?*

JOSH: *Probably in about a week.*

JOEY: *A week? How?*

JOSH: *We're deciding. Probably a live interview, followed by a press conference. So we need to know what we're talking about. Joey, we need you to put a poll in the field. You got to come up with a model that gets us the answers we need without asking the questions we can't ask. You gotta come up with the model by yourself, you got to break down the results by yourself. Not even the callers can understand the questions they're asking. And you got to do it all in 96 hours. Is what I'm describing possible?*

JOEY: *We make it a Governor.*

JOSH: *A Governor?*

JOEY: *Of an industrial state.*

JOSH: *I don't...*

JOSH: *The Governor of an industrial state.*

JOEY: *Michigan.*

JOSH: *And you give him a degenerative illness?*

JOSH: *Joey, you understand that before this is over we're probably all going to be spending some time in front of a grand jury. You can do this?*

JOEY: *No problem.*

[end excerpt]

JODY: Joey clearly doesn't know what a grand jury is, I guess. Does this like skulking polling, teasing polling, fake polling happen in the real world? I guess by definition we wouldn't know. Nate, Harry? Is this realistic?

NATE: I'm sure it does, right? I mean, people get calls from pollsters all the time. Relatively few of those calls are from polls that are going to be reported at FiveThirtyEight about the upcoming election. You know, I think in the real world, there probably wouldn't be this kind of moral dilemma over this. It would be like, "Of course we can do that poll. Yeah and we'll do it 12 different ways. You know, and we'll do it as quickly [cross talk] as we can."

JODY: [cross talk] People are doing push polls. People are doing all sorts of non- who's winning

type polling all the time.

HARRY: Sure. Of course. They're message testing. This doesn't seem all that crazy to me.

HRISHI: I'm most interested in that idea that you can switch some of the facts around and still feel like you can trust the results. Is that possible?

HARRY: I mean, this is not going to be perfect. It's a, you know, a hypothetical that they're describing.

JODY: So we should have mentioned, this is a fiction, this show.

HARRY: Right, the show. Yes. I was trying to think of something clever to say, but unfortunately the time zone change is killing my sense of humor.

JODY: In three hours, he's going to have a great line.

JOSH: We'll come back.

HARRY: But I mean, you get this type of stuff all the time. You try to test it different ways. I mean, if you think about it, right, there's a Republican way of describing a certain issue. Sometimes, there's a Democratic way of describing an issue a certain way. So the idea that anything is going to be a perfect measure of what people actually end up hearing is a fallacy so we shouldn't take this and say, "Oh we'd would expect a perfect measure." No, we shouldn't expect a perfect measure but this probably gives a rough enough gauge to figure out what's cooking.

JODY: That was my "do you want to say stuff" face.

JOSH: Oh sure, I was just going to say. Piggybacking on this. Again, Eli gave me something from the sacred archives. I probably should be wearing gloves.

JODY: To read this. Eli is here.

JOSH: Eli is here. Spoiler alert.

JODY: Yes. So let's bring him up. Where are you? There he is. And re-contextualize Eli for us.

JOSH: I love it. He sat in the middle of an aisle as if he didn't know as if I was going to make him come up.

JODY: So Josh, tell us again who Eli is and then we'll look at this document.

JOSH: Eli, who are you really? Well, Eli is the real deal. Again, he was a special assistant to President Bill Clinton. He was Al Gore's chief speechwriter all the way through to the concession speech. [inaudible] I'm going to give you two Junior Mints, the microphone and the chair in a minute. You can speak more substantively about the raw material, the type of stuff you would give to Aaron to discuss polling. Because this was followed by, again spoiler alert for those that haven't watched, President Bartlet does in fact tell the populous that he has MS. [cross talk]

CLARE: [cross talk] And he does it to a really great Dire Straits song, I believe.

JOSH: Indeed he does. And then further polling is done.

ELI: Hi, first of all. Pleasure to be here. No, I can stand. I mean, the first thing I was going to say is that, so I worked in the Clinton White House for both President Clinton and Vice President

Gore and I think it's true that there probably is some inherent elitism in this kind of the show's view that, you know, polls are problems to be overcome and we sort of lead our way to getting people to see our point of view. But I actually think some of it had to do with the times the show was on the air. And having worked in the Clinton White House, there was almost like an addiction to round-the-clock polling. And the one little anecdote I wanted to share about that when I started in the Clinton White House, it was right as President Clinton was about to be up for re-election. A few months before that. And I remember going to a meeting in the offices of our pollster, this guy named Mark Penn. And we were sitting around trying to come up with answers Bill Clinton could give to difficult debate questions and I didn't really realize what was going on. This sort of structure of the meeting. But we were brainstorming, and literally people were coming in at the end of the meeting telling us how things we'd said at the beginning of the meeting had polled. So we could figure out - I had no idea that this was happening. Something I had thrown out randomly, like an hour and a half earlier, at one point somebody came in and said, "Oh, 57%" and that's how round-the-clock. It was like they had a sweatshop of pollsters. And as I'm sure you all know, it's a very famous thing, I think it came out when Dick Morris wrote a book about the Clinton years. At one point they had polled where Clinton's family should take a summer vacation when he running for re-election in 1996 and the winning result was where he went. So, I think *The West Wing* [cross talk] was trying...

CLARE: [cross talk] Which was?

JODY: Yeah, which was what? Which was where?

ELI: I think it was the Grand Canyon.

JODY: Yeah, that makes sense. Which Obama just went to, right? No?

CLARE: Another National Park, I think.

JODY: Yosemite. Same thing.

ELI: That's right, Yosemite. So you know, before speaking to this, I just wanted to say in defense to some degree of that *West Wing* posture. And obviously it's a TV show and the flags billow in the wind and we do the, you know, righteous, patriotic thing and that's why the fans of the show I think love the show. But it was I think a reaction to those years in where polling was seen as so craven and tactical where almost every scene where it's discussed in the early *West Wing* seasons, it's this thing to be overcome and rejected and we just lead our way through to the solution. And you know, it's a bit of a trope, I'll admit.

JODY: Well I want to talk about the artefact in your hand but do we have any sense of whether the Obama White House is as poll obsessed as the Clinton White House was?

ELI: My sense from people I know who worked in the Obama White House, more in the first term. I mean it's funny because the joke about George W. Bush after the Clinton years was that, whereas Clinton did way too much polling, George W. Bush didn't do enough. Which is to say he didn't really care what anybody thought. He didn't care what the voters thought. At least Rove and Cheney and his whole apparatus would just do what their supporters wanted and not really pay attention essentially to their constituents. So, there's good polling that tells you just what, as what Nate was saying, just what people think so that you, these are actually the people that elected you. I think Obama does a lot of polling. I mean, I think they have pollsters that do a

lot of polling but that it's less venerated maybe than in the Clinton years. That they look at it, certain people look at it. But that appears to be a White House where Obama is much more decisive than Clinton was. Makes decisions quickly. Doesn't revisit them. Tends to get his head around a policy idea and he just thinks they've come up with the solution. So I think polling in the Clinton years was also because you had not just Clinton himself, but a team of people who were weighing everything, revisiting everything. "Should do we this? Should we do that? Let's cut a deal." Which is not a horrible thing, it's just a personality trait, I think.

JODY: Ok, tell us and then we'll get you guys in on this as well. [cross talk] What are you holding?

ELI: [cross talk] Well basically, this is from the first, or first and second, I think it was a two part episode from the third season, which is when I started on the show and I was a writer on the show and went on to write a lot of episodes of the show. But when I began, I was just right out of the Clinton White House

basically, I operated almost like a consultant. And so Aaron would come into the writers' room and say, "Ok, we've got these polling numbers about, I think this is actually about the President's speech admitting to the country that he had MS and he'd never disclosed it when he first ran for President. So these are the numbers and like tell me what we can do to sort of get around them." So you know it's just basically looking at numbers. 34% would re-elect him. 39% want a new candidate. 26% don't know. So I had a written something along the lines of if it's just Bartlet running against himself, you know, it would just look like we're dead. We should get people to poll match-ups against actual Republican senators, people who would run against him. He'll do much better than just would you re-elect him against nothing or against a fictional view. So this was just so Aaron when he sat down and wrote the scenes, could basically push back against the numbers. I sent this to Josh today, just to kind of say it sort of supported my memory of the posture of the show being kind of anti-polling, in a way. You know but I guess depicted realistically. I feel like I should yield the stage to people with chairs.

JODY: You should get in here and then you can yield the stage. Any reaction to that?

NATE: It is true that any poll that tests someone against themselves, I'm not really sure how to interpret that result. Elections are a choice. You know, one of two candidates who's really unpopular is probably going to become the next President. More likely Clinton because she's less unpopular than Trump. But it is a choice and I tend to prefer head-to-head numbers over anything else. Sometimes people look at the right track, wrong track numbers or something else. Who do you trust more on the economy, for example. What are you doing, Harry?

HARRY: You said right track, wrong track, that you did the wrong thing.

JODY: Oh yeah. [cross talk]

HRISHI: [cross talk] It's too symmetrical.

CLARE: It's direction.

HARRY: Too symmetrical.

NATE: Right direction, wrong track, yeah. But the point is, there's kind of a presumptuousness where you say oh well Clinton leads this question by five points overall but Trump leads her on

the economy therefore maybe he'll win because people care about the economy. In some ways, you're saying oh these people can't make their own minds up, they can't weigh these factors themselves. Like that's not just elitist, it's probably also quite wrong and usually the head-to-head numbers are the most accurate number in a poll.

HRISHI: One thing that I love about this document that Eli has [cross talk]

JODY: [cross talk] Which Clare joked earlier is from the Bartlet Presidential Library.

JOSH: Should be handled with gloves.

HRISHI: [cross talk] It is a memorandum.

JODY: Oh, it says, "Memorandum."

HRISHI: It says "Memorandum" on it.

CLARE: Was it faxed?

HRISHI: Is just the way that you would write notes to the staff? Because of your background?

ELI: I think we all did...

JOSH: Aaron didn't know it was a TV show. It had to be handled very delicately.

ELI: We did actually, when it was this kind of stuff, when it was basically research on an issue. Something he would do a lot when he was just simply writing an episode was he would say to us, "I just need a pro and con on an issue." Or, "What would be five things that, you know, somebody would be looking for in a pile of legal documents relating to this scandal?"

CLARE: Josh, can I interrupt here and ask a *Scandal* question? Are there memorandum written for the writing staff?

JODY: Is it [cross talk] memorandum?

CLARE: [cross talk] Memoranda?

JODY: Memorandi? Memoranda?

CLARE: Memoranda sounds like a girl you went to high school with or something.

JOSH: Memoranda was on *Sex and the City*, I think. [cross talk]

CLARE: [cross talk] Yeah, that's true. Correct.

JOSH: You are such a Memoranda.

CLARE: Correct.

JOSH: What's the question? Can we go out on that?

CLARE: In the *Scandal* writing room, are there ever things like this written where they kind of try to give the writers context for...

JOSH: That's a fascinating question.

CLARE: I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare Eli off the stage.

JODY: Thank you, Eli.

HRISHI: Eli Attie, everybody.

JOSH: Eli Attie!

HRISHI: Thanks so much.

JOSH: Actual substance! But back to me. I'm not allowed anywhere near the *Scandal* writing room. That is true. They keep actors away because the walls are covered. I would occasionally sneak into *The West Wing* writing room because there's index cards all over the place, actual ideas, scripts that need to be written, maybe ideas. And I would just write little things and put them on the wall. None of which ever actually happened. "Will learns to fly!" Things like that. So unfortunately I cannot answer your question because, again, I'm not allowed anywhere near the writer's room.

CLARE: That's fair.

JODY: Is that common or uncommon for there to be a huge divide between the writers' room?

JOSH: I believe that is common. They don't want the actors anywhere near the people creating the show. Which I think that's a very good idea, as an actor. I think it's probably for the best.

HRISHI: Except, Bradley Whitford.

JOSH: Bradley Whitford wrote two episodes of *The West Wing*. Most famously, I think, having written an episode in which Will Bailey, my character, has to get up in public and tell some non-truths. And he wrote me that storyline only so that my character could then, in a panic, say, "I can't act, I'm a terrible actor!" It was literally like the most irresponsible use of a public platform just to give a little zing [cross talk] to a friend.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Didn't he give you a dig in the stage direction?

JOSH: Yes, there was also a stage direction that said, "Will is talking to Toby and playing the scene badly." It was kind of embarrassing at the table read.

JODY: Ok, we're going to play one more clip and we'll have a chance to have some questions from the audience. If anyone wants to ask us about almost anything really, you'll start to line up maybe up here and maybe Galen can come and grab this mic when that happens. We'll watch this one clip. So this is, well, Hrishi, you really like this, right? This is Season 2, Episode 14, "The War at Home." [cross talk] You flagged this as one of your favorite moments.

HRISHI: [cross talk] I liked this in terms of polling because they're able to talk about polling. They manage to talk about polling and the ways in which a poll can be interpreted, numbers can be interpreted incorrectly or correctly based on who's doing the interpretation. But they manage to do it in the context of Josh and Donna's romance.

JODY: Right. So Josh is trying to conduct a poll to sample reaction to the State of the Union speech which he hopes will provide support for a new gun protection law. And yeah, let's take a look.

[West Wing Episode 2.14 excerpt]

JOEY [KENNY]: *They're just preliminary numbers.*

JOSH: *They're not gonna change.*

JOEY: *No.*

JOSH: *Five day waiting period...*

JOEY [KENNY]: *It tested well nationwide.*

JOSH: *Yeah.*

JOEY [KENNY]: *58%.*

JOSH: *I didn't need nationwide. I needed those five districts. Now we're gonna have to dial down the gun rhetoric in the Midwest.*

JOEY: *Why not dial it up?*

JOSH: *Because these numbers just told us that...*

JOEY [KENNY]: *You don't know what these numbers just told you. I'm an expert. I don't know what these numbers just told you.*

JOSH: *We know.*

JOEY: *Really?*

JOSH: *Numbers don't lie.*

JOEY [KENNY]: *They lie all the time. They lie when 72% of Americans say they're tired of a sex scandal, while all the while, newspaper circulation goes through the roof for anyone featuring the story. If you polled a hundred Donnas and asked them if they think we should go out, you'd get a high positive response. But, the poll wouldn't tell you it's because she likes you. And she's knows it's beginning to show and she needs to cover herself with misdirection.*

JOSH: *Believe me when I tell you that's not true.*

JOEY [KENNY]: *You say that these numbers mean dial it down. I say they mean dial it up. You haven't gotten through. There are people you haven't persuaded yet. These numbers mean dial it up. Otherwise you're like the French radical watching the crowd run by and saying "There go my people, I must find out where they are going so I can lead them."*

[end excerpt]

JODY: I think they're talking about more than just polling.

JOSH: I feel like it was getting awkward for the interpreter guy. Also, whoever picked these clips has a fascination with Marlee Matlin.

JODY: Yeah, [cross talk] but she's the pollster.

JOSH: [cross talk] How many episodes was she in? Ok, but still...

JODY: When we had a talk with like, I don't know, maybe 15 options of clips to play and Hrishikesh took a look at it and immediately flagged this one and was like, "This is for me the like the quintessential *West Wing* scene in a way," right? Maybe I'm overstating what you told me. But why?

HRISHIKESH: About polling.

JODY: About polling, to be clear.

HRISHIKESH: That for me like illustrated in very clear terms the idea of how a sample could be, the numbers can say one thing but actually they're talking about something else. And that idea

Donna's gonna say that's she's for it. We talked about it earlier, about how people might lie on the poll.

JOSH: Is there normally that much sexual tension among pollsters? Harry?

JODY: We'll see, where are we going after this?

HARRY: Get some drinks up here.

JODY: Earlier today we were doing a show at Politi-Con and Harry was telling a story about the 2000 election about how the all the pollsters were very eager to release the numbers and sort of get the call out into 2000 on election night. Clare said, "Well maybe all the pollsters, you know, had hot dates later that night." And Harry just goes, "Trust me, they did not have hot dates later that night. You don't know these people."

CLARE: Geek is chic now.

JODY: Is that right?

CLARE: Yeah.

NATE: There is a story here about one member on stage at FiveThirtyEight the night of the Indiana primary, probably the most important night of the campaign so far. [cross talk] One of those people on stage, who might have been me, but probably isn't me and probably isn't Clare or Jody, scheduled a date for 9 p.m. assuming Hillary Clinton would win the state of Indiana. He or she, I should say.

CLARE: [cross talk] Donald Trump may or may not have...

HARRY: [cross talk] No, that Donald Trump would win the state of Indiana. At least get it right if you're gonna tell the story.

JODY: How'd it go, Harry?

HARRY: No comment.

JODY: Ok, we can take some questions. I don't know if anyone has any questions. But you can ask a question about the election, you can ask a question about the Indiana primary night, or whatever you want. I don't know. This is a wireless mic. Galen, I don't know, do you want to come up here and maybe help us out? Or do we want to use you as our mic handler, Josh? Ok, this is great.

JOSH: Who's got a question? Come on.

JODY: Josh is our spotter. No, go out there, man. Come on. There we go, I like it. Alright, right there. I don't know, well we didn't think this part through.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Have you had a chance to look at the Democratic Party platform that I think was earlier today or maybe late yesterday and digest it and do you want to react to it?

CLARE: I don't know. I have not read it yet.

NATE: I mean, I know I think there was a \$15 minimum wage in there, for example. Actually, in having complimented *The West Wing*...[cross talk]

JODY: [cross talk] Say that again.

[indecipherable audience comments]

JODY / HARRY: Index.

HARRY: Oh, maybe it's not index, I don't know.

NATE: One of the things that wasn't realistic was the notion that people care all that much about the State of the Union, with some exception certainly when Bush tried to introduce the case for the Iraq War, you know, that mattered. For the most part, it's something that kind of insiders care about. And likewise with party platforms, it's something that insiders care a lot about. So, you know, Clinton might be signalling with the platform, that from my understanding didn't have a lot of time to read, but was pretty darn liberal, pretty darn to the left. She might be saying, "Look that's the inside audience I'm concerned about. All the moderate Democrats I already have in the bag," so you know it's all about some complicated dance with Sanders and his supporters. Even though Clinton is leading Trump by a fair margin in the polls, she's still only at about 43% and a lot of it's because Sanders supporters haven't come home fully.

CLARE: And a lot of that probably has to do with how the convention is going to unfold and what part Sanders will play and people that support him, did support him, will play in the convention itself. So to me some of it is kabuki.

HARRY: I would just say that there was a real split in the reaction that I saw. There were some parts of the platform that progressives or liberals (I don't even know anymore, these words) really liked and then there was other stuff on, you know, on fossil fuels, the Israeli / Palestinian conflict that perhaps they didn't like nearly as much. So I think it was kind of a split. But I agree, it's insider baseball. No voter cares about this stuff.

JODY: Really?

HARRY: No. They don't care.

CLARE: [cross talk] People care about issues.

JOSH: I think Phil Donahue used to do this. By the way, if you're scoring at home, that was a one mint question.

JODY: You do get mints, right? Ok.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hi there. So I just wanted to ask, there's been a lot of emphasis recently about the prominence of white voters and what they mean as far as polling goes. And I read an interesting tweet by Ron Brownstein and he said that no Republican nominee in modern polling has lost college whites and right now, Donald Trump is trailing with them. So I just wanted to know kind of what your thoughts are on college whites and how they're going to affect the election.

JODY: How many mints does that get?

JOSH: That's a two mint-er.

JODY: That's two Junior Mints.

JOSH: As a white voter, I just felt tickled.

JODY: Someone?

HARRY: [inaudible] Fine, I'll start. I mean, look. I wrote an article a few weeks back, basically saying that Donald Trump wasn't getting enough white support, if it held, to win the White House and a large part of that reason is that even though he's doing fairly well among non-college, whites without a college degree, he's not doing well enough with whites with a college degree. But I think we oftentimes we break down the electorate so far down, you know it's like, how do, you know, women under the age of 35 who, you know, like cats [cross talk] like Junior Mints, and so on, so forth. I think you get the number of votes that you need to win and that's how you win an election. The person with the most votes wins. And there's many [cross talk] different ways to get there.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Like Junior Mints.

JODY: [cross talk] Not always, but yes.

HARRY: The most votes in the state that mattered. But I think, you know, you could slice it a lot different ways. I could draw a scenario in which, you know, Donald Trump won the election despite losing college whites. Do I think it's probable? No. And he's not winning enough non-college whites right now in order to do so. But you can splice it and dice it different ways, and the fact the only thing that matters is getting more votes than the other people, at least in enough states to get 270 electoral votes.

JOSH: Somebody in the cheap seats!

JODY: Yeah, head on back there.

JOSH: Here we go, here we go, stay with me.

HARRY: Run!

JOSH: I was running.

HARRY: You look like a Jewish runner, as one, I can say myself.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: So I was wondering, in California this year, we're going to have for the first time two Democrats running in a general against each other for the Senate race and how would you try to model that if it's not quite the same as a regular general election and it's not quite the same as a primary? I mean, what would you look for and will FiveThirtyEight just treat that as an automatic Democratic hold or will you try to look at that and try to make a prediction?

NATE: Boy, things like that are things that will, at some point in August or whatever, take up 24 hours of me having to adjust the model for. But yeah, obviously it's a Democratic hold for sure. And we'll still run numbers on which candidate is likely to win. To be honest, most people are interested, outside of California, not in who the Senator is from California, but in terms of where Democrats have a chance of picking up the Senate, but yeah, I'm sure they'll be quite a bit of polling on it.

JOSH: I went four mints, but mainly because they were all stuck together.

JODY: Four?!

HARRY: That's a lot of mints.

JOSH: I'm working up some heat now. They're really starting to melt.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Hi, so one of the warmer Brexit takes I've been seeing is that now that

the “Leave” campaign is kind of like a dog catching a car theme and the take was that now that they have the result, that they might be like, “No, we’re not going to take Article 50. We’re just going to stay. We didn’t want this, we just wanted to make David Cameron look bad or something.” Just wondering what you might think about that happening.

CLARE: Well it’s too late, isn’t it? [cross talk] It’s not going to be, it’ll take a while for them to actually leave. Something like, two years, I think.

JOSH: I’ve had relationships like that.

JODY: We talked earlier today, not as much about the mechanics of possibly going back in or whatever, but about this take that’s floating around about like instant regret among voters. And that, I don’t know.

CLARE: Did we talk about that here? [cross talk] Sorry, it’s all blended together.

JODY: [cross talk] No, no. We’re in a live show fugue state right now.

NATE: There’s been polling that suggests that there isn’t that much regret, necessarily.

CLARE: Right. There was a Washington Post story, which this might be what you’re referring to, that Google said that three times as many people were searching, “What is the EU?” today. And we talked about this a bit earlier today. And I retweeted that tweet with some like snark, like you know, the morning after regret or something. I’ve changed my tune because I actually think that that is sort of, it’s a bit condescending I guess, right, you can say. [cross talk] This guy who’s a PhD student at Stanford [cross talk] sort of said these people who Googling that could just be sort of saying, “What’s the next step? Like what are the intricacies of the EU?” And this guy pointed out that the European project is a complicated one. It’s bureaucratic and that people haven’t been brought in enough to understand it, to understand its institutions, to give a shit about its Parliamentary elections. And so it’s not necessarily that people regret it, it’s more trying to understand what this new world is gonna be.

JODY: [cross talk] A bit.

JODY: [cross talk] It’s Josh Lyman levels of condescension.

HARRY: Well, I could say they can hold another referendum. There’s nothing that’s stopping. This is under advisement. I don’t believe that there’s actually anything that forces them into this decision. But I would say that, you know, I think we don’t trust voters enough, in all honestly, to know what they’re doing. They knew what they were doing, they heard the arguments from both sides. And the polls, as Nate suggested, that have come out since then says most people who voted to leave are very satisfied with that decision. Most voters were, they stuck with their choice. So if you want to go ahead and defy the voters, be my guest, but don’t be surprised if the voters then bite your tush off.

NATE: I mean, to me, and you kind of, it’s a little bit like how the very late in the game moves you hear, “Oh, can we still deny Trump the nomination at the convention?” I mean, you know, I think Trump is a bad nominee for the Republican Party. If I were Republican, I would not have voted for him. But still, you know, that die was cast and it seems like really dangerous now to try to override what, in the end, was a fairly clear plurality, but still a fairly clear mandate for Trump because they could never find an alternative option. I mean, look, there are a lot of things that, a

lot of ways it could play out. You know, there's some notion that, well, maybe Scotland and Wales and Northern Ireland actually have a veto over this. I mean, it certainly does seem like Scotland is likely to not be a part of the UK for very much longer. You know, maybe it's kind of dragged out in the bureaucracy and then Boris Johnson becomes the Conservative leader and you have a Labour leader, but Corbyn's also in trouble, who runs on being part of the EU. And then you have a mandate that way, in a complicated way. But to just have a do-over unless you had very strong polling suggesting people had changed their mind I think is a pretty dangerous precedent to set even as dangerous as it might be for the UK to leave the EU.

JODY: Ok, let's do two more questions. We'll try to get through them.

JOSH: I've got my next two. First, I'm awarding this gentleman the rest of the box because I'm tired of the mint bit. Here you go.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: So for Josh and Hrish, first time, long time. And, awesome, love it. And when you guys get to "The Women of Qumar" and you can't get Allison Janney or Anna Deavere Smith, I'm your guy. It's my favorite episode of the entire series. I'll drive myself there. But for the rest of you... [cross

talk] But for the rest of you, so many pundits and talking heads say of people who might not support Donald Trump, that's what they're saying to pollsters, that's what they'll say to their friends, but there's this undercurrent of yeah when they get in the voting booth, will they... So yeah. So Harry, how do you quantify for it? How do you account for it?

JODY: [cross talk] That's a real head fake towards actually asking them a question.

HARRY: Well alright, let's talk about it. We had a Republican primary, right? [cross talk] We had contests that occurred in that Republican primary, correct? Did Donald Trump do better on Election Day than he did in the polls? The answer is no, he did not do better on Election Day than he did in the polls. In fact, he did a point worse in the average state. We thought we heard the same thing in 2008, oh a lot of people say they'd vote for a black man and Barack Obama, and then they wouldn't vote for him. And what happened? Barack Obama pretty much hit his polling average in 2008 and then 2012, he actually did slightly better than his polling average. I understand it, there's still a lot... [cross talk] Right, people aren't embarrassed. There's no shy Trump effect. I mean I've said before, what Donald Trump supporters do you know that keep their mouths shut about voting for Donald Trump?

JODY: [cross talk] Literally why we're here.

CLARE: [cross talk] People aren't embarrassed.

NATE: I mean look, it could be true. There could be a shy [cross talk] Dude! Dude! Dude! You can't interrupt my nuanced answer. [cross talk] It could true. I mean, you know, what we do know is that there's more error in polls, empirically, than you get for the margin of error alone. The polls can be systematically wrong and in my view, they're about equally likely to be wrong in both directions. And so, if Trump is down three points in our polling average going into Election Day, he could quite easily win. He'll be an underdog, a significant underdog, but he can win. And one reason why might be that his voters were under-pollled, he won undecideds. Likewise, Clinton could win by eight points given that polling average. Maybe the polls did not include enough Hispanic voters, for example. Maybe because Trump voters are very vocal, they responded to polls when Clinton voters didn't. Sometimes polls can overrate the more enthusiastic side. In the Scottish referendum, for example, where the polls overestimated the "Yes" vote for that. Clearly more enthusiasm on the "Yes" side a couple of years ago, but "No" wound up beating the polls. So it's very hard to guess in which direction the polls will be wrong. It's useful after the fact if the polls are wrong to try to figure out why. But the answer is that could true, that could give you five reasons also why Clinton could beat her polls instead.

JODY: [cross talk] What?!

CLARE: [cross talk] Yeah, nuanced. Nuanced, Jody. [cross talk]

JODY: [cross talk] That was good!

JODY: Who liked Harry's answer better? Ok, last question. We should take a poll. Last question from you. Hi.

AUDIENCE QUESTION: Alright. I'm actually married to a *West Wing*-aholic and we watch it religiously. Do you think that *The West Wing* could have predicted this and do you think Aaron Sorkin didn't go far enough with having Trump be the nominee?

CLARE: They kind of predicted Obama, right, with the Jimmy Smits?

AUDIENCE: They predicted a lot in the future, so I was wondering if you thought... [cross talk]

JODY: [cross talk] I think it's that all of the people who watched *The West Wing* and like obsessed over it then went into politics and thought that's how it actually works. Hrishi? I guess we can give the mic back to Josh too, who could answer this.

JOSH: Hi!

JODY: Hi!

HRISHI: It seems like, I don't know if it could have been predicted. It seems, like, too far off the scales. It looks like the chart where you see what the pound is doing now against the dollar. Just like the idea of Trump is too far away from the world that's been established by *The West Wing*. You know, the kind of rhetoric that you actually hear on TV from a candidate, it's just... Even though it clearly could happen in real life, it's too unbelievable for TV.

JODY: Josh?

JOSH: I'm winded.

NATE: But politics has gotten really dark. I'm not trying to be dark.

JOSH: As have political shows.

CLARE: Political shows, but like television in general, if you think about it, if we're going to get dark and existential, have primed the American public to be ok with Donald Trump. Like you know, the Republican primary electorate and, to a certain extent, news media, have normalized Trump. This is a thing that Americans, you know, universal name recognition. People kinda like the fact that he's got, he's almost got this like, in his like Rococo decor, it's almost like down to earth richness. It's your idea of what it's like to be a rich person, but also sort of be attainable. Television has primed America to vote for Donald Trump. And I think that that is, I mean I know it was a lighthearted question, but like think about that. Think about who the Republican nominee for President is.

HRISHI: I think [cross talk] TV definitely [cross talk]... I should say, it's not so unbelievable for TV. I think TV definitely primed America because of *The Apprentice* for this possibility. But the question was, could it be predicted by *The West Wing* and I think there's just too much decorum on the show.

CLARE: [cross talk] Hollywood.

JODY: [cross talk] Your fault.

JODY: Interesting. Alright, well on that note, we're going to end. I just wanted to thank the folks from the Crest, like this space is amazing. We didn't really know what we were getting ourselves into. This has been really really fun. So thank you all for coming and thanks to Peter and James and Aponte and Choke and Dana from the Crest Theater. And thanks to Galen Druke back there, our producer.

HARRY: Love you, Galen!

JODY: And thanks to all of you for coming out!

JOSH: And that's it for our episode.

HRISHI: Thanks so much to our friends at the FiveThirtyEight Podcast: Jody Avirgan, Nate Silver, Clare Malone, and Harry Enten. You should go right now and subscribe to their podcast. You can find it on iTunes and all the other usual places. Or on their site at FiveThirtyEight.com.

JOSH: Thanks very much for listening, we hope you'll join us next time.

HRISHI: We'll be talking about Episode 15 and we'll be joined by former Obama White House Press Secretary Jay Carney.

JOSH: And in the meantime, if you have comments or questions, you can discuss this episode with us and with the other listeners at TheWestWingWeekly.com

HRISHI: Or on our Facebook page: facebook.com/TheWestWingWeekly

JOSH: You can also find us on Twitter @JoshMalina and @HrishiHirway

HRISHI: And the show is @WestWingWeekly.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: What's next?

[Outro Music]