

The West Wing Weekly  
0.11: Big Block of Cheese Special

JOSH: These cheese episodes have been a cottage industry for us.

HRISHI: There you go.

JOSH: Okay.

HRISHI: You got anymore?

JOSH: NO.

HRISHI: I'm sorry. Ricott-anymore?

JOSH: Boom!

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And mine is Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Today we've got a special episode. It's the return of Big Block of Cheese Day.

JOSH: Yeah, it's been a long time. Big Block of Cheese Day. In the spirit of Andrew Jackson, and I'd like to think probably the only thing we do in the spirit of Andrew Jackson

HRISHI: That's good, although you do give me a hard time and I'd like to think that it's in the spirit of Andrew Jackson that you terrorize an Indian.

JOSH: [laughing] That's a perfect...I'm just going to leave it at that. I can't top that. Well done!

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

*DONNA: Andrew Jackson, while he was president had in the main foyer of The White House – I can't believe I'm giving this speech – a two-tonne block of cheese. In that spirit, Leo McGarry designates one day for certain senior staff members to take appointments with people or groups that wouldn't ordinarily be able to get the ear of The White House.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And we're going to jump right in with a Big Block of Cheese Day question about Big Block of Cheese Day. Liat from Israel asks, "Hi guys. My question is: if you could bring up an issue to present to Leo on Big Block of Cheese Day, what would it be?"

JOSH: Oh, let's see if we can't answer this right to left for Liat. [Hrishi laughs] That's actually a good question. I posed this to my son, who's never seen an episode of *The West Wing*, as he's not a big fan of my work. I explained to him the premise of Big Block of Cheese Day and I told him I desperately needed an answer to this question and he immediately came up with: exploration of the ocean's depths.

HRISHI: Hmm.

JOSH: He's very interested in marine biology. He has pointed out to me on many occasions that, I think, estimates are that only 15 to 20% of our oceans have been explored and only 5 to 10%, they say, of the oceans depths themselves have been explored. So 70% of the planet is water. We haven't looked at much of it and when you go deep, we've looked at very, very little of it.

HRISHI: I remember when I was a kid going to a Museum of Science exhibit in Boston, I believe, if I'm remembering this correctly that was about the ocean floor being the final frontier on Earth and, you know, here we are so many decades later.

JOSH: Hahaha. Well, if we do my childhood it works

HRISHI: And it's still unexplored territory.

JOSH: Yes. It is in fact the case. I read somewhere more humans; a dozen I believe in all, have walked on the moon then have travelled to the deepest parts of our own planet Earth.

HRISHI: Crazy

JOSH: So there are submersibles. It's of course the tremendous amount of water pressure at the depths of the ocean that makes exploration of them so difficult. I believe my son told me the average depth of the ocean is 12 to 13,000 feet, which shocked me,

HRISHI: Hmm

JOSH: Fairly stunning. We all know Mariana Trench, the deepest point in the ocean.

HRISHI: We all know it.

JOSH: You could drop Everest in there and there's still like half a mile of water above it. It's pretty amazing and new species of marine life are found, and with great frequency even despite the fact that we don't explore as deep below the surface as we might or if we threw enough money at it, we could, and that's where I guess my son was also suggesting that there could be monsters down there. There could be enormous-

HRISHI: Now we get to the heart of the real question.

JOSH: This is what made me – exactly this is why you could hire a real character actor.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: For this Big Block of Cheese plea. There could be, you know, Nessie-sized monsters down there, and we ought to get down there and explore them for the safety of our citizenry.

HRISHI: So if we were to pair a cheese with this question, it would obviously have to be a blue cheese.

JOSH: Boom! Nicely done. A deep, blue cheese.

HRISHI: For my part, I think a good Big Block of Cheese Day question – one that I believe in but also I think has great crackpot value – would be sending someone to Leo to argue for the abolition of daylight savings time.

JOSH: Hmm. Nice, I like it.

HRISH: There is a hash tag: lock the clock, for people who are in support of keeping our settings the way they currently are right now at daylight savings time. I think there's, again, a lot of evidence that points to why it would be a good idea. There's one fact – a great storyline in *The West Wing* in “20 hours in America” when they're in Indiana and they're confused by the state's own inconsistencies around sticking to daylight savings time.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

*KIKI: Are you guys stupid or something? It's 1:45 right now.*

*JOSH: It's 12:45.*

*KIKI: No, not here it's not.*

*DONNA: Oh my god, she's right.*

*TYLER: See, we crossed over from Unionville into Dearborn County which doesn't observe daylight savings time.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think it's bonkers. We just changed to daylight savings time and it's a huge relief and I can't imagine why anybody really needs to go back and forth.

JOSH: I think our current president agrees with you. I think you finally found common bond.

HRISHI: That's true.

JOSH: All right, one down.

HRISHI: One down. Next question: “Hello there my name is Francis Reyes from the UK. What was *The West Wing's* cast drink of choice?”

JOSH: That's interesting question.

HRISHI: I don't even know what your drink of choice is Josh.

JOSH: Hmm. Well, I'm guessing back then it would have been beer.

HRISHI: Okay.

JOSH: I like my beers. I like a good craft beer. I like sour beers for which I am sometimes mocked, because they taste a little bit like if you dropped a Sweetart into a regular beer.

HRISHI: Oh, I see. So it's not that they're too hard-core and unpalatable.

JOSH: I think they're just mocked. Sour beers are fantastic. They are mocked because, I mean, some of them are kind of sweetish, some of them just other people find repulsive – they make you pucker up. I like sour candy and I like sour beer. Yeah. I don't know I was going to tell you how a sour beer is made by don't really understand what it has to do: something to do with yeast and bacteria and how they act and lactic acid.

HRISHI: I'm just gonna accept they put a Sweetart in a beer.

JOSH: Okay, fair enough, that's how I make it at home. These days I'm enjoying tequila; a nice blanco. But let me get to the...I went straight to the proprietress of our “not on set but near set” watering hole and that was Allison Janney.

HRISHI: Right, The Flamingo Lounge is what you used to call it?

JOSH: Well, I asked her about it. That was my memory, was the Flamingo Lounge. I wanted to know if during its heyday, each actor had a favourite drink or how it operated and here's the answer I got. So, for a little bit of the origin story of the Flamingo Lounge. Allison said, “I know that my love of playing music was what started me off as having the quote/unquote “party trailer” and then Brad gave me one of those alcohol bottle carriers, the one that hold the bottles upside down and distribute a shot at a time. I definitely loved hosting people in my trailer. I loved being around our cast so much. I just wanted the party to never end.” Her split infinitive not mine. “I believe my trailer was known as The Pink Flamingo or the Flamingo or Janney's trailer.” So I guess I made a Flamingo Lounge. “There was no specialty drink that I recall. I had a fully stocked bar in there though. I believe we drink responsibly though.” This is like, I feel like this should have been in smaller letters, such a disclaimer. “I believe we drank responsibly though. No one was doing scenes loaded or anything, right?” I believe that's true. I think maybe we discussed this too. I have had a tippie or two before a scene where my character is meant to have had a tippie or two. I feel like I never quite pushed the line there to really be drunk when you're supposed to be drunk and I think I would like to do that, but I'm afraid of vomiting at work.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Maybe when the stakes are lower?

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Well, my only way of contributing to this question was to think of what the drinks of choice for each of *The West Wing* characters might have been.

JOSH: I would have been disappointed had you not gone the extra step. I was kind of expecting this, bring it, hit me with it.

HRISHI: Well, as best as I can piece together, for CJ, based on what you orders at the bar in “Mr. Willis of Ohio”, she would like a grasshopper.

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

*C.J.: She didn't bring my grasshopper.*

*JOSH: She didn't?*

*C.J.: No.*

*JOSH: Maybe she just felt really stupid ordering it.*

*C.J.: The grasshopper is a perfectly respectable...*

*ZOEY: I'll get it.*

*C.J.: I'll get it.*

*ZOEY: I want to see them make it. It's called a grasshopper?*

*C.J.: Straight up.*

*JOSH: Make sure they make it extra thick and green.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Nice.

HRISHI: Sure, which I don't know what that is

JOSH: I'm trying to remember what that is. I used to, you know, I bartended briefly.

HRISHI: I didn't know that. Oh, that's right. No, I did know that, when you were working at the Playhouse Theatre.

JOSH: That's right, and I went to bartending school before that and then I briefly was in charge of the back bar to restaurant in Manhattan, but having only trained for two weeks at whatever New York bartending school, I had all the kinds of drinks written down on index cards. So that the waiters would come and they would order all their drinks and I'd say “oh, okay two grasshoppers, sure” and then I ducked down behind the bar. I'd be “Grasshopper? That's crème de menthe, crème de cacao, 1-ounce fresh cream...” and then I'd pop up and I'd pour it. Crème de menthe

HRISHI: Okay

JOSH: I guess the key ingredient. What else you got?

HRISH: Well for the president, it would be an egg cream.

[West Wing Episode 2.03 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Toby, I'm drinking the most fantastic thing I've ever tasted in my life – chocolate syrup, cold milk, and seltzer. I know it sounds terrible, but trust me I don't know where this has been all my life.*

*TOBY: It's called an egg cream, Mr. President. We invented it in Brooklyn.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: In Brooklyn?*

*TOBY: Yes sir.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Not New England?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Nice. Have you ever had an egg cream?

HRISH: Oh, have I?

JOSH: Oh, why, do you have a particular place of choice?

HRISHI: I don't know if you ever went to the Yankee Doodle, R.I.P, back when it was around in New Haven.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: They used to make a really delicious egg cream. And that was the first time, the first place I ever had one, and I believe in fact, actually I was introduced to egg creams by our very own Margaret Miller.

JOSH: No kidding.

HRISHI: She and I would sometimes get egg creams at the Doodle together.

JOSH: Yeah. I think my dad grew up in Brooklyn drinking them. They are, of course, made with milk, fizzy water and syrup. They come – sure you can do an alcoholic version – there must be some cocktail, and Lou Reed, I think, has a song about egg creams.

HRISHI: My preference is the vanilla egg cream. I think the president is drinking a chocolate egg cream. All right, here's a group answer

JOSH: Sure

HRISH: For Mrs. Bartlet, Donna, C.J. and Amy, it's a bottle of wine with plenty of cork in it.

JOSH: Nice

HRISH: In *Dead Irish Writers*, they go off to get boozy.

JOSH: That's right

HRISHI: And they can't get the cork out of the bottle properly. And they just drink it with the cork.

[West Wing Episode 2.03 excerpt]

*C.J.: This is an excellent corkscrew. This slides right in there like power steering. The right...tool for the job. Corkscrew sucks. Should I call a steward?*

*ABBEY: No we don't need to call a steward. I'm board certified in thoracic surgery*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I think you're supposed to pour yourself first when you're pouring wine, in case there are any little pieces of cork.

HRISHI: Hmm.

JOSH: So you get them.

HRISH: Right.

JOSH: I may have made that up.

HRISHI: It's like airplane mask etiquette: pour yourself a glass of wine before you pour one for your child.

JOSH: Right. Very good. Although I'm quite sure if I were in the situation, I would put my kid's mask on first. I can't believe anyone actually does that.

HRISHI: [Laughing] But it's not, oh, I see what you're saying. You would help your child put on their masks not, you would take your child's mask and put it on yourself first, which is what I thought you were saying.

JOSH: Well when you're down to it, I'm not really quite sure. I'd like to think I'd put his or her mask on him or her.

HRISHI: Wow, you'd put your kids mask on first. You wouldn't even put on your own mask [laughing] wouldn't you put on your own mask?

JOSH: All right.

HRISHI: Well, two questions down I think.

JOSH: Okay. Well, yeah two questions well and truly answered. What's next?

HRISHI: Our next question comes from Jamie Rogers: "The one time characters, and their actors, gave the show its breadth and depth, but sometimes their brief appearance left me hungry for more: I'm looking at you CCH Pounder's Deborah O'Leary. Which character or actor is it for you?"

JOSH: Hmm. Great question. We've commented many times on the deep bench on this show, if you will, and the amazing character actors that were hired to play small roles, and frequently in one-offs. Some of mine, I thought, in the spirit of Big Block of Cheese Day were Big Block of Cheese actors. I wish there had been some progress on some of these things that they were pitching. I wish that we saw Nick Offerman return as Jerry to see whether Pluie was getting it's highway, some more Nick Offerman I thought.

HRISHI: That's a good one

JOSH: And then I have a soft spot for just all my friends: Bellamy Young we talked about as MaryLou Meriweather, could have seen her again.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: She brought a fresh energy it to the show.

HRISHI: She definitely could have come back.

JOSH: Jeff Perry, Liza Weil. A lot of these people that are in the Shonda-land universe and we have J.K. Simmons coming up, Oscar-winning Kim Simmons. He's coming up in season 7 is Harry Ravitch. He's a Nuclear Regulatory Commission guy. Can't discuss him at depth yet, but he's an old pal of mine. I would have liked to see him more on the show. He played Colonel Jessup on Broadway.

HRISHI: Of course he did.

JOSH: Not originally, but yeah, and he was rather kickass in the role. Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah. I'm going to agree with Jamie: CCH Pounder's Deborah O'Leary is fantastic. I mean CCH Pounder, as we've talked about in the past, was one of the original considerations for the role of C.J. Cregg.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: And I think she definitely could have been a great recurring character. Her appearance as Deborah O'Leary is pretty memorable and really felt like, yeah; I absolutely could have imagined her coming back many times. If not, even becoming a regular cast member herself. I will also second your mention of Liza Weil as Karen



Larsen in "Take Out The Trash Day." She was the staffer who comes in, and she and Leo get into it because she thought that Leo maybe should not work at The White House

JOSH: Right

HRISHI: And it's because of her own family's history with alcoholism, and they have this great touching scene.

[West Wing Episode 2.03 excerpt]

*KAREN: So, after six and a half years you're still not allowed to have a drink?*

*LEO: The problem is I don't want the drink. I want 10 drinks.*

*KAREN: Are things that bad?*

*LEO: No.*

*KAREN: Then why?*

*LEO: Because I'm an alcoholic.*

*KAREN: I don't understand.*

*LEO: I know. It's okay. Hardly anyone does. It's very hard to understand.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And as we discussed at the time, and this years ago now in the context of our own podcast, but I'm pretty sure it was revealed to us that there was some talk about that character, Karen Larsen, actually being a recurring character, that Liza Weil might have stuck around and come back. She and Leo had their own great dynamic and I would have loved to have seen the two of them get to develop that further. I feel like they had their own sort of sweet rapport, even just in those few minutes together. There was a seed planted.

JOSH: Good chemistry too, yeah.

HRISHI: That's a great question. Thanks Jamie. And people should tweet at us with their votes. I'd love to hear who you'd nominate for more screen time on *The West Wing*.

JOSH: The next question comes to us from Casey Oakes. They ask: "The flashback episodes are often fan favourites. Is there a moment or story arc pre-pilot that you'd like to have seen as a flashback episode?"

HRISHI: I will refer people back to a previous Big Block of Cheese Day episode where I made my case for an entire *West Wing* prequel.

JOSH: Mmm. You answered that question as a flashback. Can we do like [HRISHI laughs] flashback sounds and then a clip of what you said then?

[The West Wing Weekly Episode 0.03 excerpt]

*HRISHI: ...it would just be about two characters simultaneously on their rise up through the ranks: one in D.C., a young Leo McGarry, and one, a young Fitzwallace, rising up through the U.S. military.*

*JOSH: Mmm.*

*HRISHI: And their two paths kind of interweaving, coming in and out, but showing two different parts of these kind of institutions of America, and their rise, and maybe the difference between a young white guy, and a young black guy kind of at the same time.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I still think that would be a great idea. I have very little hope that it'll ever actually happen, but I think would be cool although I did just find out recently that *The Sopranos* are doing that. They're doing a prequel.

JOSH: That's right. And who's going to play young Tony?

HRISHI: James Gandolfini's son.

JOSH: How great is that?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That made me sad when I heard that. It's wonderful and sad. I think it would have been nice if his dad had seen him do that. It's just-

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: ...something heartbreaking about it, but beautiful.

HRISHI: Yeah, I'll say there are a couple moments that I would love to see specifically. The moment where Sam and Josh met, that's a friendship that I really love and we never actually find out how they first linked up.

JOSH: My answer is that, selfishly, I would like Will Bailey to have gotten his flashback, his origin story. I think there's a lot there. That would have been a fertile area to go to, were he important enough for us to wonder anything about him that we haven't seen.

HRISHI: Is there a specific era or time in his life.

JOSH: We know his father was Supreme Commander of NATO Allied Forces in Europe. We know that will himself attended the University of Cambridge and was President of the

Cambridge Union Society, which Society wrote to me to ask for my picture to be placed up on their wall. I'll have to go visit us someday.

HRISHI: Amazing.

JOSH: So I just think he has an interesting and distinctive history that I would like to have seen a smattering of.

HRISHI: And I'll add to my previous answer that I'd also like to see the moment where Jed and Abbey meet.

JOSH: Right, where he smashes into her on his bicycle [HRISHI laughs] and they meet; cute. When he makes a sudden Abigail-stop

HRISHI: "Abig-oreal".

JOSH: Yes, there it is. All right, moving on, moving swiftly through our questions.

HRISHI: The next one comes from Sarah Richmond: "What have you learned about each other as a direct result of doing the podcast and have there been any surprises?"

JOSH: Whoo, that is a very personal question.

HRISHI: Would you like me to take it first?

JOSH: I'm trying to think as we've explored each other's minds and bodies [Hrishi laughs] what we've learned making this podcast. Yeah. Why don't you go first and then I'll figure out how I have to match that.

HRISHI: I think that may be the biggest surprise doesn't really entirely feel fair to call it a surprise maybe, but one thing I certainly enjoyed learning about Josh is what a great dad you are. I mean an obscenely great dad actually; you do some things that I think are just hard to fathom actually, in service of your love of your kids. Like I'm thinking specifically about the time when you passed up the offer to go to The White House because your daughter had a school ceremony. It wasn't her graduation or anything like that, it was just a thing that was happening towards the end of her senior year and you said you'd rather go to that.

JOSH: Ohh? That's sweet.

HRISHI: That's just one example there are many, many examples

JOSH: Let the record reflect that they take all their own tests in the time allotted to an average student.

HRISHI: [laughing] All right. So you're saying you're not *that* great of a parent.

JOSH: Well, right.

HRISHI: There are some things you...

JOSH: I don't snowplough, or hover. Actually, that's actually very sweet thing for you to have said and if there's one area my life in which I hope to excel, that's the area. So I really I take that as high praise. There is a funny story, early, must have been my daughter Isabel, now 21, her first or an early dental appointment. It was like a *Seinfeld* episode. My wife and I were, I guess, in there trying to sort of be with her in case she was in pain or wanted to see a friendly face and at one point the nurse left the room and my eye just happened to fall onto her file and I saw the phrase "parents hover" [Hrishi and JOSH laughing] and we laughed so hard and we've said that to each other many times since. 'Parents hover', it's what they do.

HRISHI: [laughing] That's great. It's a really nice, I think, counterpoint to the public image that I think you like giving off of being cantankerous and caustic. You're actually, clearly, very sweet.

JOSH: Now I want to say how [expletive deleted] you are in real life, because everybody loves you, but I can't. It's just not true. No, I would say that in the actual making of this show, the podcast, I have learned, not to my great surprise, but I've seen it, as a fan of *Song Exploder* which t-shirt I'm currently wearing proudly, I knew you were a good interviewer because, though we don't hear your voice, the meticulous episodes that I listened to, are clearly the result of an excellent and incisive interviewer, but for this show, again, and again, I've actually been on the line with you with an interviewee, an interview subject, and been able to witness how you guide an interview. What I really want to say is that I've learned that you are a terrific interviewer and that's an important skill. Thank God you're good at it.

HRISHI: Well thanks for saying that, although I kind of wish you'd picked something that couldn't be challenged by podcast listeners, by just pointing to different parts of our podcast. Like the nice dad thing, no one can really counter that.

JOSH: I think there are many more instances of excellent interviews that you've lead. Are there any moments you wish you could buy back or things that didn't happen or interviews that you feel didn't go particularly well? I mean, you're very hard on yourself all together so I'm sure if I asked you about any aspect of the show you'd say, there are all sorts of buy backs you'd like to do and things that could have been done better and that's just sort of the nature of you and the nature of an endeavour like this, but is there any specific thing? Like, oh, I didn't quite get that one or...?

HRISHI: Probably. I'm going to not try and think about it too hard in this moment.

JOSH: Fair enough. Now I'm glad to know there's nothing at the forefront of your mind.

HRISHI: No, I think generally I feel like I wish I had more polish in the moment. I always wish I didn't stutter quite so much and have awkward pauses while I'm asking the question.

JOSH: Huh.

HRISHI: But I do genuinely like it. I mean, it's been really, that's one of my favourite things about doing this podcast, is getting to talk to so many different people from so many different parts of the world and you know who are dealing with so many different issues and so many of my favorite actors. It's really, that's been a real treat.

JOSH: It's exactly what I've hated.

HRISHI: Well, I think once that one of the tips to being a good interviewer was to have genuine interest in people

JOSH: Right. I gotta work on that [HRISHI: laughing] Well, you know, I feel like now I'm analysing myself, in response to this question. I do have a genuine interest in people and I love to read about them.

HRISHI: That's true. You do.

JOSH: I do. I just don't want to meet them and ask them questions.

HRISHI: Yeah, I'm going to add this as a part two to my answer. I did not know, again it's not that surprising but, I didn't know how much nonfiction you consume before we started this show and then in the course of just, you know, things coming up, turns out you read a ton of nonfiction.

JOSH: All right.

HRISHI: Yeah. Hey Josh.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Do you know my middle name?

JOSH: I guess the answer is no.

HRISHI: I think you did at one point though.

JOSH: I did? I lost it?

[The West Wing Weekly Episode 3.04 excerpt]

*HRISHI: Chandra is my middle name.*

*JOSH: Do you know what my middle name is? It's very similar.*

*HRISHI: Charles.*

*JOSH: Yes. Similar. Charrles. You have to roll the "r."*

*HRISHI: Charrles*

*JOSH: Charrles*

*HRISHI: Charrles. Do I get any points for knowing your middle name?*

*JOSH: How do you know my middle name?*

*HRISHI: I do my research.*

*JOSH: Wow*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: What is your middle name?

HRISHI: I'm just going to leave that as something to look, for you to learn as we approach the...

JOSH: I'm just going to Google it now, if you're going to be that way about it.

HRISHI: I wonder if it even would...

JOSH: I bet it's out there. Hang on.

HRISHI: It is

JOSH: Chandra. I don't think I ever knew that

HRISHI: Oh, okay. Right.

JOSH: Is that how you pronounce it?

HRISHI: No

JOSH: How do you pronounce it?

HRISHI: Chandra

JOSH: Chandra?

HRISHI: The D is a little more like a TH. Chanthra

JOSH: Chanthra

HRISHI: Mmmm

JOSH: No? Chanthra

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: That was a good one

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: Let's print that one

HRISHI: [laughing] Okay, back to our questions.

JOSH: Sure. Tim Hoffin or Hoffine, or Chanthrra, [Hrishi laughing] I almost had it, says: "Here's a question for your Big Block of Cheese Day episode; in the season 3 episode "The Two Bartlets", aired in January 2002, Josh Lyman is tasked with contacting his friend who was protesting US Naval bombing practices on the Puerto Rican offshore island, how do you pronounce that?"

HRISHI: Vieques

JOSH: Vieques, okay, I thought so – Puerto Rican offshore island of Vieques. Interestingly, Jimmy Smits who would later become Matt Santos in *The West Wing*, was arrested in 2001...

HRISHI: [laughing] I like how they included "in *The West Wing*", like that's a clarification we need

JOSH: ...Was arrested in 2001 for his participation in protest against US Navy bombing practices on the Puerto Rican offshore island of Vieques – source Wikipedia. My question is it possible that the idea of Josh Lyman's friend in Vieques is based on Jimmy Smits' real life arrest?" Yes, it's possible. Next question.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah. That's basically...I wanted to include this question mainly because I think that's a great catch. Yes in fact, Jimmy Smits, I believe, was the inspiration for that character who we never actually see; Josh talks to him on the phone. It's not just a friend of Josh's. It's a friend of his who's an actor, as Leo puts it "a well-loved young man in the Hispanic community".

[The West Wing Episode 3.13 excerpt]

*JOSH: Wait 'em out.*

*LEO: They've got supplies and we don't have the time. He's got a cell phone, we've got the number.*

*JOSH: No.*

*LEO: Yeah.*

*JOSH: Leo, if I wasn't working here, I'd probably be with him down there.*

*LEO: Yeah, but you're working here.*

*JOSH: This is a crappy thing to do with friendship. These things aren't supposed to be personal.*

*LEO: We're at DEFCON 4...*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And we never actually see him. This is Josh's friend Billy. We never actually see him on screen, but I do think that that must be Jimmy Smits that they're talking about so, it's a good connection.

JOSH: So in short the answer is "yeah-ques"

HRISHI: It's not the answer to anything, but thank you Tim for your question.

JOSH: What else we got?

HRISHI: Here's one, Nathan Wall asks: "Do you find that Will Bailey support for Bob Russell unbelievable, or is he just doing his job?"

JOSH: It's a little bit like saying, "Do you think Josh Malina did a good job acting?" [Hrishi laughing] "Was his performance credible or not so much?"

HRISHI: It's true

JOSH: A little bit

HRISHI: And and I would say yes. I find Josh's acting credible. I find his support credible. I think we've talked about this enough in our regular recaps that we don't need to go into it too much.

JOSH: Yeah, I would have given a stronger "yes" to this for the last episode we recapped.

[The West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*WILL: I've spent the last year and a half looking for what you saw in him, you and the president, when you gave him this job.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I've kind of been buying all along, you know, on this re-watch that Will maybe a little bit less of the idealistic hero we want them to be but, it seemed like a plausible career move and also I believed that he saw a little bit more substance in Russell than most of those around him did and then we had the scene with Leo where he's like, "Why am I doing this again?"

HRISHI: See I actually thought that the scene with Leo only added to what you're saying. I also felt like he had this pragmatic aspect to him, but I liked that in that question, you



got to inject some sense of idealism there too. But he was searching for the idealism in that mission that he kind of bought in and had so much loyalty in fact, for these two: for the president and for Leo that he went in that direction. Plus, he's got all the pragmatic reasons as well and he was able to, sort of like, bear all that with a level of self-righteousness and people, you know, like Toby were really against him for it but I think that that scene gave him some credibility with people in the Bartlet administration.

JOSH: All right. Thank you. Thanks for doing a little character rehab for me.

HRISHI: Let's open this up to the live studio audience. Hey, Nick, you have any questions for me and Josh?

NICK SONG: Well as like a general thing, judging from where you are now in terms of the show like production and stuff, how is it versus when you guys first began season 1?

HRISHI: You are the biggest change. You're the biggest difference Nick.

NICK: Am I actually?

JOSH: That's true.

HRISHI: Yeah, here you are in a room with me. That's weird. Let me ask you this question, but I'll answer as well.

HRISH: Yeah.

JOSH: We're kind of...we're nearing the end, maybe I should save this for then, but how long do you think it'll be before you watch an episode of *The West Wing* post *The West Wing Weekly*?

HRISH: The thing is, by the time we finish our podcast in a mere nine months-

JOSH: Wow.

HRISHI: It will have been years since I've seen some episodes from season 1

JOSH: True.

HRISHI: And I think at that point, that would probably be the longest I've gone without seeing it some of those episodes

JOSH: Not really. Truly? How often, leading into this, would you do a full re-watch?

HRISH: I mean maybe not a full re-watch, but...

JOSH: I'm meaning seasons 1 to 4, I mean.

HRISH: Yeah, I've definitely never gone four and a half years or whatever without watching those seasons.

JOSH: That's wild! So *The West Wing Weekly* is keeping you from watching *The West Wing*

HRISHI: In it's place [laughing] Yeah

JOSH: Outrageous. I think in all likelihood, I'll never watch another episode of *The West Wing*

HRISHI: I believe that. What if your kids suddenly get into it though?

JOSH: I was just about to say, because I'm such a great dad, as made clear by Hrishikesh Chandra Hirway, that the one exception I could imagine is if Avi said, "Hey Dad, listen, do you want to watch an episode of *The West Wing*?" I would, you know, papers would fly as I rushed to try to find, actually wouldn't look for the DVDs. I'm donating my DVDs to a library. I realized I'm never gonna watch it on, I have Netflix.

HRISHI: Wait, wait, wait, hold on. I have to stop you there. You're donating your *West Wing* DVDs?

JOSH: Why, do you want them?

HRISHI: No, but I'm just saying you could, you could sign them, auction them off for a lot of money and then give that money to charity.

JOSH: Oh, maybe I'll do that. I guess instead of giving them to the library, okay.

HRISHI: And in any case, you shouldn't just give it to the library like you're some ordinary, you know, plebeian.

JOSH: I was gonna hold it up next to my face so they'd know that I'm *in* this. Anyway, it's funny that you caught the one, I can imagine watching with my kids if they ever showed any interest.

HRISHI: Awesome. I'll come over on that day. Invite me over.

JOSH: Okay.

HRISHI: Oh, you know, what's the question that we got that we didn't answer.

JOSH: What's that?

HRISHI: Tina Marie asks: "Who is or was your favorite actor to work with?"

JOSH: Hmm. That's actually an intriguing question that I refuse to answer.

HRISHI: Out of diplomacy?

JOSH: Out of diplomacy in hopes that I'll work with them all again. Now, also, there's not a bad apple in the bunch. There's nobody I didn't enjoy working with and different people

would be for different things, you know, Brad and Allison – it was a lot of laughs and ridiculousness before action after cut. John Spencer and Martin Sheen – it was like taking an acting class working with them. Richard Schiff – the fact that our, I love him so much, and that our approaches are so antithetical made it fun for me. There is a certain friction you get between his sort of meticulous preparation and feeling that everything must be organic and my just jumping into it.

HRISHI: All right. Well, who was your least favorite actor to work with?

JOSH: Mary McCormack.

HRISHI: Okay.

JOSH: No, I'm just kidding [laughing] what can I say? There were no bad apples and I have worked with bad apples. It can be a bummer. Some people are difficult. Nobody in this show was.

HRISHI: “Who is or was your favorite podcaster to work with?”

JOSH: Hrishikesh Chandra, I can't do it!

HRISHI: It was pretty good.

JOSH: Chunthrra. I feel like I've even had a coaching session on this before. I'm realizing like, I had, did know your middle name. I feel like I've I've taken a lesson on it before

HRISHI: [laughing] I think so.

JOSH: It's like remembering early tennis lessons like “Oh yeah. I took this class.”

HRISHI: Yeah, and like with tennis, I think you need to relax your grip on the racket a little bit.

JOSH: I think you're right. I think it's exactly right. [both laughing] I'm going to work on it.

HRISHI: Here's one from Kate Abbott, she asks a very...

JOSH: [singing] Hey at bat.

HRISHI: She asks a question that shows a very keen eye for detail: “Hi Hrishi and Josh, my question is pure trivia but it's something that's intrigued me ever since I first noticed it. Why does Josh Lyman's switch from wearing his watch on his left wrist in seasons 1 and 2 to wearing it on his right wrist in season 3 onwards? Thanks for answering my question”. That's an eagle-eyed observation Kate

JOSH: Indeed. I agreed when I read that question though I have to admit, I thought there's not going to be good answer to this question.

HRISH: And what did you find out?

JOSH: Color me surprised when I posed the question to our own Bradley Whitford and he had a lovely answer.

HRISHI: What did he say?

JOSH: This is the rather touching, I thought, response from Bradley: "My dad was right handed but he broke his left arm when he got his first watch as a kid and for the rest of his life he wore his watch on his right wrist. He was in the Navy on a minesweeper in the Pacific during World War Two. He called it The Big One; the other guys noticed it and it became a good luck thing for them. Dad died on the Father's Day after we shot the pilot. It was a busy time, babies were coming and growing, and suddenly I was shooting every day, I didn't have time to process his death at the time and it would wallop me in waves years down the line. I was missing him and so I moved it to my right wrist as kind of a memorial. Thanks for noticing my little Freudian forearm dance of paternal connection and separation. His name was George Whitford and he was a great dad: incredibly kind and funny as hell.

HRISHI: Incredible!

JOSH: Incredible, what a sweet answer and amazing that a viewer noticed it and thought to pose the question.

HRISH: That I think this is my favorite question and answer of any Big Block of Cheese Day.

JOSH: It's going to be hard to top.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I guess that does it for not only another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*, but another Big Block of Cheese episode.

HRISHI: Dare I say, our final Big Block of Cheese episode?

JOSH: I think so; we're down to the rind, folks.

HRISHI: [laughs] Josh, normally I leave the cheese pairing up to you but are you going to go along with my deep blue cheese pairing for this one?

JOSH: For the entire episode? Yes, I think so. I think you nailed it.

HRISHI: Excellent. Well, I "curdn't" have done it without you.

JOSH: Nice. Well, I'm "wheying" my options, curds and whey.

HRISHI: Well, thanks for hanging out with us for one more episode and

JOSH: Now I'm getting sad. I'm actually feeling sentimental like, we're never going to do this again, much as I hate it I can't believe we're never gonna do it again [Hrishi laughing] it's sad. I want to do what...you know, the live one was fun. I want to, that's, what I will say, one of my favorite memories of having done this podcast will be the Sketchfest show where Dulé was our guest and we did a live Big Block of Cheese Day and we bought a ridiculous 50 pound hunk of cheese, and we actually served people and then afterwards, we we're cutting ridiculous huge hunks; people were taking bags of cheese away. It was just so daffy and inane that it delights me.

HRISHI: It delights me too [laughs] and on that note, let's never do it again.

JOSH: Okay. Thanks as always to Nick Song, Margaret Miller and Zach McNees for their work on the podcast. Thanks also to all our questioners.

HRISHI: Sorry for anybody whose question we didn't get to.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: It was just a matter of running out of time. *The West Wing Weekly* is a proud member of Radiotopia

JOSH: A veritable cheese plate of the finest podcasts in the land.

HRISH: What cheese what our show be? Also a blue cheese because it stinks

JOSH: And because it may have aged

HRISHI: You can check out all the shows at [Radiotopia.fm](http://Radiotopia.fm)

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

BOTH: What's next?

[Outro Music]