

The West Wing Weekly
0.14: Veep
Guests: Gary Cole and David Mandel

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Well, we're done with season six and as a result, we're done with Vice President Bob Russell. That was his last episode last episode.

JOSH: That's right. But before we start season seven, we've got a bonus episode and we could think of no better way to honor Bingo Bob, and one of our other favorite shows about politics, than with a special episode on *Veep* with special guests Gary Cole who played VP Russell, of course, as well as Kent Davison on *Veep* and *Veep's* show runner: Dave Mandel.

HRISHI: *Veep* is an amazing show and you should all be watching it or you should be done watching it now that the series is wrapped. If you don't know *Veep* has been nominated for a total of 59 Emmys and it won 17 of them. It just ended this past May and like *The West Wing*, it's going to be missed. But we were thrilled to get the chance to talk to Gary Cole and Dave Mandel.

GARY: This is Gary Cole and I play Kent Davison on *Veep* and on *West Wing*, known as Bingo Bob. What was his last name? I don't know [crosstalk]

JOSH and HRISHI: [crosstalk] Russell

GARY: Bob Russell

JOSH: I love that you had to ask that.

GARY: Yeah. I did. It's been a while

DAVID: And this is David Mandel, Exec Producer of *Veep*. I remembered the Bingo Bob, but I couldn't remember why. I know at some point you were the congressman from like the mining interest or something like that.

GARY: Yeah

JOSH: Very good.

[West Wing Episode 5.03 excerpt]

WILL: Who is Robert Russell?

JOSH: He's the congressman from Western Colorado, and I don't mean the state, I mean the mining company.

TOBY: Bob Russell is not presidential.

JOSH: Are we actually discussing the list?

CJ: We're dissing the list. Wasn't Russell...? Is he Bingo Bob?

TOBY: That's Russell.

[end excerpt]

DAVE: Right? But what was...why Bingo Bob? Why, what was Bingo?

HRISHI: It's actually never explained.

DAVE: Excellent. I like that a lot.

GARY: Yeah-yeah.

HRISHI: I love that.

JOSH: But it shows the effectiveness of just having the sobriquet. Nicknames work.

DAVE: Yeah, and you remember them.

GARY: Yes.

JOSH: The one thing you still remember is nickname

GARY: Yes

HRISHI: And something about just that word Bingo had some connotation that made you feel like you shouldn't take this [crosstalk]

GARY: [crosstalk] Right

HRISHI: character. Seriously.

GARY: Yeah, it delegitimized him enough.

HRISHI: Yeah

GARY: Yeah

HRISHI: Without any need for explanation.

JOSH: Maybe you guys don't gamble [crosstalk] to me

GARY: [crosstalk] Yeah

JOSH: Bingo means that I won.

GARY: Right.

JOSH: I've only positive connotations. [crosstalk]

DAVE: [crosstalk] You're having a good time? Okay, fair enough. Good.

HRISHI: This is a very, very exciting episode for us. *Veep* is, I think I can speak for you Josh, our other favorite political show besides *The West Wing*. I didn't know that we would get a chance necessarily to talk about it in this context. It is kind of the dystopian inverse of *The West Wing* in a lot of ways.

DAVE: It's like its bad child or something.

GARY: Yeah

HRISHI: Yeah

DAVE: I would argue even though I did not create *Veep*, I would argue there couldn't have been a *Veep* if there had not been a *West Wing* first. That *West Wing* taught people about a certain kind of political show and then that allowed *Veep* to invert it, but A had to exist before B. That's my own theory having had nothing to do with either show.

GARY: Right

JOSH: And you could argue that *Veep* is an inversion of *West Wing* and *West Wing* is an inversion of actual politics.

DAVE: There you go.

JOSH: Therefore *Veep* is closer to actual politics [crosstalk]

DAVE: [crosstalk] to reality at the end of the day

JOSH: Yes, exactly. You guys flipped it back.

DAVE: And now the time has probably come with what's going on in the world and as *Veep* kind of comes to an end, I think we could use sort of another *West Wing* kind of show on television dare I say

JOSH: That's interesting

DAVE: Just because of the times, I think there's some connection to that.

JOSH: Politics itself swings like a pendulum, as does politics on TV.

HRISHI: Yeah. Actually, let's start maybe with going back a little bit. Gary, could you tell us how you first got on *The West Wing*?

GARY: I think it was season 5.

HRISHI: Yep.

GARY: You know so that by then *West Wing* was, firmly established and doing really well. It was just kind of a traditional phone call from an agency and saying we got the shot for you; went in and read what was to be Bingo Bob's first appearance, which was basically, it was really weird because it was like a pitch to the president, it was Bartlet, that was is name right?

JOSH: Right.

GARY: See I've got a terrible memory.

JOSH: [laughs] This delights me.

GARY: And just kind of his first meeting in the Oval Office kind of feeling out each other and you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.

[West Wing Episode 5.03 excerpt]

BOB RUSSELL: I wasn't close enough to say for sure about your relationship with John Hoynes, but as your vice president, I would want more access.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Uh-huh

BOB RUSSELL: Direct access. A weekly lunch or drinks. Especially since we don't know each other.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Sounds like you'd be a vice president who'd be looking to move up.

[end excerpt]

GARY: I'll remember always doing that scene because that was the first thing and it was really intimidating because I was a fan of the show and it was as if I knew what, I had this gig but I was like literally going in there pitching myself as the vice president in this part and it felt like another audition except on camera.

HRISHI: Yeah.

GARY: And here we are in this, in the Oval Office and I've been a huge fan of Martin's for years and never had, never met him before so that was my launch but it was something I really remember.

JOSH: Was it clear from the beginning how often you'd return? Or how long the gig was going to be there?

GARY: Yeah, I think initially the fifth season that was my first season. I think I was told I was going to do about eight. I don't think that was firm, but then it was firmed up later. And then the following year I knew when I would be there; would be ten shows and I had you know, it was clear how they were going to use the character, he was you know, the butt of a lot of people's jokes.

HRISHI: Did they explain that to you? When you first when you first got [crosstalk]

GARY: [crosstalk] Oh sure!

HRISHI: the role they said...

GARY: Yeah, I knew from his initial meeting with him there was this whole; first of all there was this whole thing with his cowboy boots.

JOSH: That's right.

GARY: They were, he was talking about his boots to the president in a meeting about trying to be on the ticket. So you knew his priorities were a little misplaced from the get-go and he was a little bit of a political slug and lightweight but I liked that, it was fun about the character.

DAVE: He was actually sort of smart though.

GARY: He was.

DAVE: Yeah, I wouldn't say, he's not a lightweight he-

GARY: No

DAVE: I mean I was sitting at home watching, so let me be very clear about that [Hrishi laughs], but it was kind of interesting because you kind of like assumed he was an idiot and then he would surprise you [crosstalk]

GARY: [crosstalk] Right. He was kind of rolled out that way [crosstalk]

DAVE: [crosstalk] with some pretty cagey moves. Yeah. [crosstalk]

GARY: [crosstalk] then later there were moments where it was revealed, "Oh, okay."

DAVE: He was a solid operator. I'm gonna give him credit.

JOSH: I think that was one of the clever things about casting Gary.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: Because you're able to sort of create the illusion that this guy is an utter buffoon. And then sometimes you get below the surface and you realize the guy's quite a bit shrewder than most people give them credit for.

HRISHI: So across your career you've been in both great dramas and great comedies and with a character like Bob Russell, I was just wondering how you were thinking of approaching it knowing that he was going to be the butt of jokes and things like that. Did you come into it feeling like you were coming from a comedy background? or I don't know if that kind of mentality even entered.

GARY: I think I've always operated this way and maybe but I know that especially in the last decade or so, I do not look at them differently. Comedy or drama, that doesn't enter into my whatever I'm doing, that's up to the audience.

HRISHI: Yeah.

GARY: So it's really about the story and how that character fits into the puzzle that is the show or the story you're telling. Because in reality, there's people that are just kind of, you know, there's humor at the expense of them. I mean that's just human too. So I don't and I never, I've never been a stand-up comedian or anything like that, I've never thought of comedy like that. It's just a character to me because any time I've tried to be funny like actually consciously tried to be funny. Just deadly. So to me it's writing always and that's how I've looked at it.

DAVE: We have a line in the final episode, which people have seen by the time this airs where the character of Kent says to President Meyer,

[Veep Episode 7.07 excerpt]

KENT DAVISON: I haven't been funny since 1987.

[end excerpt]

EVERYONE: [laughs]

DAVE: While it was a great joke unto itself, it was also deadly serious.

GARY: Yeah

DAVE: And I feel like every line you've ever delivered on Veep, although they are often very funny-

GARY: Right

DAVE: you are delivering them with the same level of, "Ma'am a dam just broke and loads of people have been killed." [crosstalk]

GARY: [crosstalk] Right, strictly data, yeah.

DAVE: Yes, exactly and there is no...it's the straightness that makes it so funny. I would kind of argue [crosstalk]

GARY: [crosstalk] Yep, right, I forgot about that line. But that's yeah, that's a perfect example.

HRISHI: I was felt that Kent, in some ways, is a character who could have existed in both shows.

DAVE: Yes very much so, yeah.

JOSH: Mm-hmm

DAVE: And I think you know, it's something *The West Wing* occasionally I feel like, hit upon like in terms of like, you know sort of that the attitude of like sometimes the numbers, like they were guys that are so number-y, like wasn't like in Bruno with his polling and like things like that where it was just like, "Let's not worry about the numbers." They weren't exactly maybe the same level of robotic-ness of Kent maybe but like there was definitely sometimes that pull-push between heart and numbers which I think you know, we are reflecting with the Kent character, the numbers guy. Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: Kent I think at one point was on *Statistics* magazine's "*Thirty under 30*".

[EVERYONE laughs] Or it was something like that.

DAVE: It was "*30.3 under 30.3*" [laughs]

JOSH: [laughs] There you go

HRISHI: Yeah, especially characters who kind of come in and out of episodes who might be a little bit broader than some of the regular characters.

DAVE: It's funny Gary and Kevin Dunn spend sort of a lot of time together as her advisers and both of them sort of perhaps more so than other characters end up with straighter lines, end up being very funny because of both their skill, and also just the sort of you know, especially with Kevin, 'the seen it all' or the kind of cold precision that Gary brings to it, but both of them probably because there perhaps a little less jokey I almost feel like you lift them up and [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] Drop them down

DAVE: and put them in *The West Wing* and not think twice about it.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Right.

GARY: Yeah, they always seemed, especially in the last – maybe more so this season, because we were kind of put together again and hanging around with Julia is that there was such a laser focus on what's going to work for her or against her and their concern was always **that**, even the morality of it they could juggle us...

DAVE: [crosstalk] they could figure out how to explain it

GARY: [crosstalk] ...and then say we'll worry about that later

JOSH: [crosstalk]...that later

GARY: How will this work now, will this make our numbers rise or fall? But to me that's, I think about *The West Wing* and one of the things I liked about when I first was watching it, was always when we saw shows about the president or politics person, it was always

about the guy at the podium, you know, and the focus was there and this was a show about the people standing off, and I remember there was literally a scene where you saw out of focus Martin delivering a speech to some huge hall but the scene was either you or Brad or somebody in the forefront speaking about how they finally got him to this, how they escaped another disaster, and what they were going to do next, and that...

JOSH: Shifted the perspective.

GARY: Yeah, right

JOSH: To the team

HRISHI: One thing that *The West Wing* and *Veep* both share is that the original creator, since you alluded to this, left after the first four seasons and then new show runners came in

JOSH: Right

HRISHI: And so Dave could you tell us what your experience was coming into *Veep*?

DAVE: Sure, sure. It's funny; I hadn't thought about that but yeah, that's really interesting. You know, it's funny. I had a long-standing relationship with HBO; I'd been doing *Curb Your Enthusiasm* for a number of years. I was an old *Seinfeld* guy, that got me to *Curb* and so I was sort of a known quantity to HBO and I was a fan. I was watching the show like anybody else. I mean I had known Julia from back in the day. I was watching the show and I had no idea that Armando was leaving. I mean, maybe I don't know, maybe you guys also had no idea that he was leaving to some extent.

GARY: No, not until the very end of that season

DAVE: But usually on a show in LA like rooms talk, like writers' rooms talk, and you hear like, "Oh I hear they're really behind," like but like *Veep* was in its own weird like Baltimore vacuum, so I knew nothing. The phone rang one day and it was kind of like. "Armando's thinking of leaving," and it was, I was taken aback by it because the fan in me was just like, "Wait, I don't understand like, what is who's going, what's going on? What's gonna happen to the show?" "They want you to take over the show?" "Oh, okay." So it was it was strange. It was weird. There's no other way of saying it. Despite the fact that we're talking about two shows where it happened. It's not normal. It's not everyday, especially I think with shows that people really, really like and I kind of approached it very slowly because I wasn't sure, but I'll be honest, as I sat down with Julia, sat down with HBO and started just talking to people, as I got filled in on kind of the cliff-hanger that Armando had left, which was basically at the end of season 4; it's the statistical, it's the Electoral College tie, and it was such an exquisite prison [Josh laughs] from which it seemed like there was no escape. I got very excited to just solve the puzzle.

HRISH: Yeah.

DAVE: And in my attempt to solve the puzzle, the next thing I knew I had sort of one way or another laid out like two or three years of show and then it was just sort of like, "Alright, I'm doing it" together, but honestly it was that cliff-hanger that I think really made me want to do it. I mean beyond the sort of like, I love the show.

JOSH: That's intriguing. Aaron left a similar situation for John Wells behind him at the end of season 4. He left him a bit painted into a corner.

DAVE: I think it really helps because it just forces the hand. The other thing about *Veep* that's always been very interesting, which is maybe a little different than *West Wing*, although not so much in the very back end. If you think about *Veep*, it started as *Veep*, then she became president, then we did a year of sort of like solving the tie, then made her former president, and kind of put her at ease with it, and then everything changed so she could run again, and so even though the show's called *Veep*, it's been four or five very different shows

JOSH: Was Armando Iannucci involved in hand over the baton? Or just it's just kind of, "I'm done"

DAVE: We emailed. I think we spoke on the phone. I flew to London to sort of say hello and sit down with him and in the best way possible, I never heard from him again. I mean, we occasionally email each other and he's always great about it. But I did appreciate his willingness to kind of-

JOSH: Hand it over

DAVE: Just check out and be like

GARY: Hand a blank slate over

DAVE: Exactly. Yeah, and he says he enjoys it and I'll take it at that and be very happy.

GARY: Yeah

HRISHI: Besides your experience with HBO and *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, you wrote a pilot I think for a show called *The Vice President of the United States*.

DAVE: I did a very little known for a pilot and I want to be incredibly clear about this before anyone loses their mind. When I was done with *Seinfeld*, I signed a three-year deal with Touchstone Television to develop shows and I pitched I guess the sort of a network version if you will, I wrote it too. Sort of a network version of a very, who's the Vice President of the United States and it kind of played within the world, of it was a man and that sort of; it was a man with a family very sort of, you know aggressive politically sort of like actually probably sharper wife, but as I said, it was the network version but it definitely had that sort of sense of the vice presidency is not worth a warm bucket of spit. So that was about the only thing that had in common but again, nobody ever saw it, it never went anywhere. This has nothing to do with anything. It's just a very weird coincidence

JOSH: Odd coincidence

HRISHI: So you never drew anything from that when you were writing on what you were for *Veep*?

DAVE: There is one thing in it that I always remembered that I sort of almost tried to play with as an idea and it was the notion, it was this is the joke, it was the idea that the vice president goes back to his high school reunion and is not voted the most successful. [Everyone laughs] That was the one great joke

JOSH: That's a good nugget, yeah, that's funny.

DAVE: And we didn't exactly do that, but that spiritually guided certain sort of "Selina adventures" I guess a little bit. That was the one good joke. Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah. Gary, did you feel like there was a sense of continuity between the beginning of the show and now the end of the show? It has it felt like because to me, I feel like the show has changed but it felt less like a reflection of a change in writing or anything like that and more, to me it seems like a reflection of the times that we live in.

GARY: Yeah, several things. When Kevin and I arrived was in season two. We were working for the president whom you never saw [crosstalk]

DAVE: [crosstalk] You were working for Hughes. You were sort of adversarial to Selina.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Hughes. That's true.

GARY: Right. So I was kind of a villain to Selina, I really, we had some confrontational stuff and he really looked down upon her

HRISHI: Right.

GARY: And felt that she was insignificant and a nuisance and, but as in DC reality circumstances shifted, she was getting next to power look like she had it and he changed his skin. So that was different for me because that was a big shift for me, for my character personally. And then we were all part of the same kind of team going through and I think several things, the fact that Armando left and Dave took over. That in combination with the times and then certainly-

DAVE: This last year

GARY: This last year.

DAVE: You almost have to separate, I think, this last year.

GARY: Yeah

DAVE: From the previous two seasons post Armando.

GARY: And the fact that we were off that length of time and you guys were still in the room.

DAVE: Yeah

GARY: You know, percolating that whole year off, informed a lot of what took place this season, yeah.

DAVE: I honestly believe, when I try and step back and look at it. Look I'm a different person, I'm not Armando the show definitely changed a bit just in those first two years. I don't think this is a criticism. I was a Gov. major at Harvard. So I, for fun, I read things like Robert Caro's Lyndon Johnson book, so I definitely mind real American history and real American politics. I think a lot more than the Brits did, I think probably just from a knowledge base, but also from a joke base. I mean, I'll make Spanish-American War jokes and try and get them in there. We have a joke this season, I won't take credit for it, Reid Scott, the original joke in there was something about it was the greatest cover-up since like something about FDR walking or something and one of the writers pitched this joke, which is in the show,

[Veep Episode 7.02 excerpt]

DAN EGAN: "Ma'am, Felix Wade's sexuality is the worst best-kept secret since Clyde Tolson's hysterical pregnancy."

[end excerpt]

DAVE: And that is a joke for nobody [Everyone laughs] and it's my absolute favorite thing in the world. For those of you listening, Clyde Tolson was J. Edgar Hoover's alleged lover.

HRISHI: Oh, right, right, right

DAVE: Yes, and so, he of course, did not have a hysterical pregnancy and like I said, it is a joke for no one. That is not a joke, I didn't write it, but that is also not a joke Armando or the Brits would have done

HRISHI: Right.

DAVE: And then dare I say having the advantage of coming in on a season 5, for a show that had done very little, I think on purpose, about sort of scratching a little beneath of who these characters were, and by the way, you which maybe you couldn't have done in season 1, in my season 5 we were able to sort of start digging a little bit; and then the fourth episode where her mom dies you start to understand her and by the time you get to Catherine's documentary and we find out Kent rides in a biker gang and look, a little tidbits but again, allowing a little bit of who these people are to kind of sink into the show a little more. And so I think those for me were hallmarks of sort of my first two seasons and then we wrote what became the last season in sort of early/ mid-2017, we were all set to shoot when Julia got her cancer diagnosis and we shut down and so we wrote it during the first couple of months of Trump and Trump was Trump. But by the time we started to loop back around, meaning, I guess like I started thinking in like February 2018, knowing we were going to be back in like July 2018. Everything had changed. I mean it, just in ways like just the basics of the show. If you think of the average episode of *Veep* is Selina publicly screws up and then gets sort of blamed for it and has to take a step backwards. That entire notion of publicly screwing up and actually suffering

DAVE: Yeah, is gone

JOSH: No longer credible

DAVE: The idea of a president that talks foul mouthed behind closed doors. Well, first of all, there are no closed doors and foul mouth? I mean, yeah, so. All of these things; the incompetent staff had just become the realities of our daily life. And so, especially in this last season, the show had to change except we're also living through it. So it was trying to, I always say like we're trying to get like as high as we could and look and try and figure out what does some of this mean, we're not necessarily doing Trump, but what are the symptoms that led to Trump and I know people just want to go, "Oh, you're just doing Trump," and it's like I beg to differ we're trying to get above it in a way that it'd be great, if we were making the show 10 years from now maybe we could figure this all out. But you know there is this theory, sorry I'm getting all over the place,

JOSH: No, it's great.

DAVE: So there is there is this theory, you know, and it's scary when you think about it, which is Trump an aberration or is he the beginning of our-

JOSH: Our new normal.

DAVE: Yeah, just our Roman emperors, yeah, exactly. And so that sentence like what if he's the beginning is something we definitely thought a lot about with Selina and this season, so yeah.

HRISHI: Watching this season has felt to me like a comedic exploration of the end of the world. It feels like the end of the world [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] The wheels are coming off [crosstalk]

HRISHI: [crosstalk] is beginning, watching this.

DAVE: You look around and I don't know if it's because I'm a comedy writer, but also, I'm not afraid to say this, as a the father of a 9 year old and an 11 year old, I'm like scared and so it's like, I don't know what to do about school shootings other than to figure out a way to do some horrifying comedy about it. I mean, I don't know how else to express that, yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah.

GARY: Yeah.

HRISHI: It is so bleak, it does sort of feel like they're cracks about to erupt underneath the characters and like the entire world is going to be swallowed into an abyss.

DAVE: Thank you.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

JOSH: Mission accomplished.

DAVE: No, but I mean, yeah, that's, I mean I hate to say this, that is exactly what we were unfortunately going for.

HRISHI: Yeah, one of the things I love about *Veep* is something that we're talking about a lot now as we're in the campaign parts of *The West Wing*, which is this idea of characters changing skin. In *Veep* they have to do it so often and it's such a funny way of recontextualizing people and things that they said maybe one episode or even earlier in the same episode, they have to suddenly reframe it for their new job

JOSH: They'll turn on a dime.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: So there's a great shot of you guys backstage watching the debate and turn and go, "So what are you gonna do next?" immediately, "Whoa, we're out of a job".

HRISHI: Yeah, and now I think there was something in the first four seasons of *The West Wing* where there was a sense of stability and continuity. And again when new blood came in, there was I think an understanding that you could try and move the pieces on the board into a new configuration. I think that's really interesting and it's got to be a little bit scary to do that to an audience that's already established. But also somehow liberating.

DAVE: Sometimes it is just like trying to think of things like, "What would be interesting?" and so like for example, with Kent last year, the idea was, "Well, what if the world's most reasonable man goes to work for the world's most unreasonable man?"

GARY: Right.

DAVE: That's, we've never, you and Jonah had not [crosstalk]

GARY: [crosstalk] No.

DAVE: [crosstalk] done a lot of scenes together, you and Tim and so it was just like well, there's an idea unto itself that I haven't seen on this show or in a lot of other places and we can embrace this idea.

GARY: The choice, just to the choice, you were talking about that's what happens in DC; an administration dissolves and people scatter and they just do whatever they do, and they wind up whoever they wind up with, that season blew it up. And we were in places and dealing with people and all the all the other actors that came in and I think that was really effective in setting up this season, because everyone kind of found their way back to each other, even though there was variations; people were not always together, but I thought that was interesting.

HRISHI: Gary, on the subject of people coming back together and after periods of time away. I was wondering if you could tell us about your relationship with Tim Matheson as two vice presidents in *The West Wing*, but you've also been on *The Good Fight* together

GARY: Right.

HRISHI: and *The Brady Bunch Movies* together. How is it that you both keep ending up in these projects together?

GARY: I think if you're an actor, you use that phrase: the usual suspects. When you go to auditions and it's interesting, you will run into the usual suspects because more so than not you arrive looking for a role and the list is similar, you know that you always run up against. I have run into Kevin Dunn, not only on *Veep* but probably 15 times at auditions going for the same part [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] [laughs] They finally got you both. Isn't that funny?

GARY: and Tim the same thing so I think that was part of that

JOSH: Because the capital of imagination of the entire world has little imagination [laughs]

GARY: Right but I mean, Tim was the VP on *West Wing* and so they needed another version of that

JOSH: Do you guys like each other?

GARY: [tongue in cheek] No, can't stand him

EVERYONE: [laughs]

JOSH: I sensed that, that's why I asked

GARY: No, Tim is a great guy. I mean he's the best.

JOSH: Is there a contrast between the acting approach of *The West Wing* as compared to *Veep*, I know *The West Wing*, particularly during the Sorkin years, but afterwards as well, whereas famously you know word-perfect; do you ever get to ad-lib on *Veep* because...

DAVE: We're famously not although [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] I thought so

DAVE: You, you maybe more so [crosstalk]

GARY: [crosstalk] For two reasons; Kent has a very specific vocabulary

DAVE: Yep.

JOSH: Indeed.

GARY: And Gary Cole has a very limited improvisational ability [Josh laughs]. So that spells pretty much by the script. Kent's unlike anything I've ever played before, the term robotic has been used and I think that's fair to say, but he's also like being in scenes with people, it's as if he's sometimes observing others as if they're, I don't know in a zoo or something, it's just like watching this human thing take place fascinated because he's not really on the level with them; either whether he thinks he's above or not even in the same universe, so playing it is very, it's the most kind of distant I've felt when actually in front of a camera with people.

JOSH: That's interesting.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: Another great crossover actor, where we are in the in *The West Wing*, we were just recently introduced to Stephen Root. He was in *Veep* as well and then he was in *Office Space* with you as well. Is that, are they're just people who just come into your orbit by chance where this is just what happens?

GARY: I just really think that's just math and you go like, how long have I been doing this?

JOSH: I was gonna say with your [crosstalk]

GARY: [crosstalk] You're bound to

JOSH: When you work as much as Gary does, it's going to happen with a lot of people.

GARY: You're gonna circle back [crosstalk]

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Sure.

GARY: And find people that you've been involved with before.

DAVE: Also, I mean, I can't speak as much for the drama side, but just in terms of comedy, there's like sort of three categories of people. There are: "enemies of comedy" that you just have to stay away from, I'm talking about actors now [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] [laughs] Fair enough

GARY: [laughs]

DAVE: Just absolute enemies of comedy that just kill the comedy, and then there are "friends of comedy", who like can play it but don't necessarily bring you more than what you give them and then they're like actual like "comedy people", you know what I mean? And so when you're actually getting into the category of "comedy people", while there are constantly new people getting churned out and people arriving on the buses in California, you know, you do start to go, "Boy, we need somebody to play Tony Hale's dad who is slightly effeminate. We're not quite sure what's going on there and he's got to be old enough..." but you know when you start to like, whatever, and very quickly

JOSH: Gets narrowed down?

DAVE: the list [crosstalk]

GARY: [crosstalk] The list gets shorter, yeah

DAVE: doesn't get very long you know, and you just feel like, yes, Stephen Root. I mean, so you do get to those things in that way.

HRISH: Yeah.

DAVE: Quickly. Yeah.

HRISHI: Is there also an element ever of stunt casting, of just you know, knowing that outside of the narrative that you're making there's just going to be something that's going to delight the audience. Like I couldn't help but feel that way when Tim Matheson showed up in *The Good Fight* that in some ways the creators, or the casting people were saying: there's an extra layer to this that exists outside of this universe where people are just going to be delighted about seeing these two on screen again.

GARY: Yeah that maybe the, I don't know how, I'm not sure how many people that would be.

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: Just me.

GARY: You know what I'm saying?

HRISHI: Yeah

GARY: It might work for you

JOSH: It's an Easter egg like the Starbucks cup on *Game of Thrones* [laughs]

GARY: [laughing] Yeah

DAVE: [laughs] That melted the Internet. Yeah.

GARY: Yeah, there's always yeah, there's always that kind of trivia question, sure.

DAVE: We wrestle with it on *Veep* because there's so much for us that, I don't know, we take some pride in which is a, lot of times what makes somebody great in a role, and yes, funny is important, but also like you believe that that guy could be the head of the Secret Service and that's a sometimes a very hard line because sometimes really funny people, you don't believe, are the head of the Secret Service, and you know, I'm just making up a role and so it's very tough because sometimes there are people we go "That guy's great", but he's never not that guy. I'll give you an example that we wrestled back and forth with and I think it worked out great. Three years ago, my first season, when we introduced this sort of billionaire, sort of sort of Jamie Dimon character, we wrestled long and hard with whether John Slattery, who is wonderful and doesn't get enough credit for being a real comedy ad god, that it just felt like it was, whatever was Sterling right? That was Roger Sterling, you know, and again, this is obviously all actors have to deal with this is like, was he so well known as that that bringing him on our show wouldn't allow him to be the character we needed him to be because it just seemed like we brought the guy in from *Mad Men*, and it worked out great. But we wrestled with it.

HRISHI: Yeah

DAVE: I'll tell you; he doesn't know we wrestled, now he does but,

GARY: [laughs]

HRISHI: [laughs]

DAVE: He's a huge fan of this podcast. Um, but I think you know, we definitely like long conversations about it before we pulled the trigger.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: That's where your success ends up becoming baggage.

DAVE: Yes, exactly.

HRISHI: When you were writing your seasons, how much, if at all, did *The West Wing* enter the conversation?

DAVE: A lot actually, I don't know about the conversation as much as my maybe my own private conversation. I was a huge fan of the show and at some point or other, especially with this last season, I went back and basically watched the final, I guess the final two seasons all the campaign stuff, but for sort of maybe three reasons: number one, just to sort of like, where they're just things you guys brought up, like issues. Not necessarily the execution but just some aspect of something that might make me go, "Oh, there's a funny version of that". So that was number one. Number two, I also just wanted to see how you handled stuff and we take that stuff very seriously. So I wanted to just look through, to see how you guys handle stuff, specifically the live debate. I had this idea to do; she's losing debates, she's losing debates, so they put together one of those rooms where they build the exact debate stage like in a hotel ballroom, and then they were going to have the real debate in real time, but with our people playing the other people and it ended up actually oddly enough being too close to an old *Veep* debate episode which is why we didn't do it, but I looked at the debate episode a lot and as people will have seen by now, our final episode is a brokered convention. And so I watched the convention episodes, again not only to see what you did, also to see how it looked, like I wanted to see like, try to figure out where you shot like, what could we do? What, how do we make it look right? And then also, both I guess in my own mind, to make sure we didn't like, there were going to be certain things that overlap because it is a brokered convention. But I also just wanted to make sure we were doing our own thing that they were distinct, that people weren't going to go. Wait a sec. That's the exact, you know, the teachers union, that's the exact moment from, so I sort of also want to make sure I was steering clear but so, a big influence

JOSH: Any re-evaluation of *The West Wing* watching it again after having worked on *Veep* for so long?

DAVE: I don't know if it was re-evaluation because I was an honest-to-god fan. I think I probably, back around the second time, I think I really appreciated those final two seasons that much more. I really, I really got into both the campaign for the Democratic nomination and then the choice of Alan Alda as Vinick

JOSH: [at the same time] Vinick

DAVE: By casting the world's most likable human being as the dreaded Republican, obviously you guys did party we never do party, but it was such a perfect move because it would have been so easy to pick some draconian, horrible guy and be this is good versus evil. And what was kind of wonderful was how much it wasn't, like how grey those last two seasons were.

HRISHI: There was a line in an episode recently that I mean, even for the show, shocked me just because

DAVE: [laughs]

JOSH: Wow, want to hear it

GARY: Impossible!

DAVE: Ok

JOSH: Bring it

HRISHI: You mentioned consultants and there are ways where *Veep* avoids real historical figures or present-day figures.

DAVE: We sort of go up to a point.

HRISHI: Yeah

DAVE: We kind of up to basically Reagan

HRISHI: Right and *The West Wing* had a similar kind of attitude, but every now and then there would be contemporary figures that would come in here and there, and one of the consultants on *The West Wing* in the first few seasons was Peggy Noonan

EVERYONE: [laughs]

DAVE: Uh-huh and what line are you referring to?

EVERYONE: [laughing]

HRISHI: And so...

GARY: I remember what we said that wasn't in the scene, in the car.

HRISHI: [laughing] And so how does it work when you have Selina say

[*Veep* Episode 7.06 excerpt]

KENT DAVISON: The story is everywhere. Peggy Noonan has a column about Babar and American exceptionalism.

SELINA MEYER: Well she's a dumb [expletive deleted].

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: I mean, just I...

DAVE: Well she's in good company the only people that Selina has called a [expletive deleted] are, I believe, Peggy Noonan the Queen of England.

EVERYONE: [laughing]

DAVE: So, she's in good company, and I guess what I would argue and I just think it's what we do, is the precursor, dare I say, to calling Peggy Noonan a [expletive deleted] is when Kent describes the sort of the opinion piece, the op-ed that she's written about killing elephants and Babar

HRISHI: Yeah

DAVE: And whatever...

HRISHI: American exceptionalism

EVERYONE: [laughs]

DAVE: Come on, that is a really, really...I didn't write that line. That's a really smart, really, almost brutal, parody of a Peggy Noonan piece.

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: Yeah

DAVE: And so we giveth and we taketh.

JOSH: Yeah. Fair enough.

GARY: [laughing]

DAVE: Come on. So, yeah, I guess let me put it this way, is what I would say, Miss Noonan if you're listening, we would not have simply just called you a [expletive deleted] unto itself, [Josh laughs] without having done the first line. To call you a [expletive deleted] for no reason, would have been just sort of untoward, but doing the first line justifies the second line [crosstalk]

HRISHI: [crosstalk] My God

DAVE: for me.

HRISHI: I'm so deeply uncomfortable now.

JOSH: You asked

HRISHI: I know, I had to ask because, you know, it's another moment. It's another point of overlaps.

DAVE: [laughing]

JOSH: That's true.

HRISHI: Oh, and so for the brokered convention, did you have actual political consultants for that as well?

DAVE: Oh, yeah. I mean we have them I guess for, we have them full-time. I guess like *The West Wing* did and from both sides of the aisle and also, beyond our consultants. We also just you know, wonderfully so, we kind of you know, and I'm sure *The West Wing* was the same way, most people return the call when it's like, "Hey, you're you know, whatever. Can I, do you mind like answering some questions about *Veep*?" and so in the beginnings of all of our seasons, the *Veep* writers room kind of becomes this little, I don't know it sounds pretentious, but kind of salon where we often, especially like the first month, really try and bring in somebody either in the morning or for lunch and we've had people. We've had John Dean come in, we had Mitt Romney and his wife came in, to talk about losing, that was to talk a little bit about losing.

HRISHI: No kidding?

DAVE: I've never forgotten one of the things he said and it felt like an honest answer he talked about, obviously he had his money. I mean, he didn't say it that way but you know, he's a successful guy and he's got a whole bunch of wonderful kids and a whole bunch of wonderful grandkids and you kind of understood it and of course for us sitting in the writers room, you just go, "Oh, wow, he's got all of these things that Selina doesn't have, this is going to make her cry." We're not asking them to come in and be funny. They're just telling us stories and pieces of their lives. We got our opening scene this year. This is a known fact if I guess you're paying attention to like our Twitter feed and whatnot, a couple of the *Pod Save America* guys came in and told a story about Obama landing at the wrong airport-

JOSH: It's a great scene.

DAVE: and we heard that story and just went that's the opening scene of the season. I mean it was one of those like, oh, that's the opening scene we don't even have to write it

JOSH: Cedar Rapids

DAVE: and yeah exactly.

[*Veep* Episode 7.01 excerpt]

SELINA MEYER: Amy, where are you?

AMY BROOKHEIMER: At the airport. Where are you?

DAN EGAN: I mean there's only one [expletive deleted] runway.

SELINA: I'm at the airport. We just landed.

AMY: That's not possible!

SELINA: Right now I'm standing here with my [expletive deleted] in my hand in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

AMY: Ma'am, we're in Cedar Rapids.

SELINA: No! This is supposed to be new Selina!

[end excerpt]

DAVE: So that's where it kind of comes from. And so especially with the convention, Norm Ornstein was of particular help just because he swims in that world of real like the Constitution and stuff, and so he was very helpful there. But yeah, we just talked, we talked to a lot of people to try and get it right. Yeah.

JOSH: The entertainment world is fascinated with Washington, but

DAVE: and vice versa

JOSH: It goes both ways.

DAVE: Yeah.

HRISHI: It's funny that we have, so we had David Axelrod on our podcast.

DAVE: I listened to that one actually. Yeah, yeah

HRISHI: And there's something that he said when he was talking about the spirit I think of *The West Wing* and what he got from it in terms of his real life experience. He said that people got into politics for two reasons: either because they wanted to do something or because they wanted to be something. And the spirit of *The West Wing* was that all these people who wanted to do something and I think that the, you just split that line on *Veep*, it's people who want to be something.

DAVE: Except probably for Richard, I would say, Richard Splett who I do believe maybe you know we were talking before about people you could put into *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Mm

DAVE: I mean obviously probably not exactly, but I do believe he is inspired by the same; like I'm guessing Richard Splett loved *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: Right .

GARY: Right.

DAVE: Like the rest of them didn't watch it but Richard loved it and in that kind of JFK, LBJ, Great Society kind of-

GARY: Peace Corps way

DAVE: That government can help people like. I do believe he is a believer in that and often sort of in our world of just horrible, horrible people kind of gets to sometimes be that sort of one little bright star.

HRISHI: It is funny that the one person who has a heart of gold in the show is also the most clueless

DAVE: But his cluelessness is so clueless that it kind of loops back around [Everyone laughs] into possibly...

JOSH: Laps itself

GARY: Yeah

DAVE: Like it maybe, there is a plan there and that's what I've started to feel. Yeah.

GARY: He may unintentionally solve a lot of things

[Veep Episode 7.06 excerpt]

REPORTER: Governor, now that you are a super-delegate, have you given any thought as to you you're gonna be endorsing at the convention?

RICHARD SPLETT: Isn't there any way I can endorse all of them?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: So sweet. It's so sweet and it does feel that [laughs] feels like a very *West Wing* kind of sentiment. That's basically where President Bartlet is as they're going through the primary debates.

DAVE: And dare I say, Richard genuinely sees good in both Selina and Jonah, which is wild if you think about it.

HRISHI: Yes, yeah.

GARY: That's digging deep.

DAVE: Right.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: It's a superhuman level of goodness. So what's going to happen now? Are you looking for another political show to-

DAVE: No!

HRISHI: make?

DAVE: No

JOSH: Take your time

GARY and JOSH: [laughs]

DAVE: No. No. No. No. No.

GARY: Did he say no?

EVERYONE: [laughs]

JOSH: Are you sure?

DAVE: I need a little break. I need a little break from politics. I need a little break from everything.

HRISHI: I mean, in the same way that you talked about certain actors getting may be stuck in a rut because of particular thing that they did really well, is it something you have to actively avoid because people are coming to you with things-

DAVE: I get pitched a lot of bad political ideas. Yeah. I think it just obviously why not? Why not try and get me to go onto one of those? I love it. I mean, I love as I said before, I mean this is sort of what I would like, this is what I sort of think and do in my spare time. I like politics. I like American history and all that kind of stuff. So sure, something that has an element of it, but I don't think it's necessarily going to be about DC or running for office or I don't necessarily know what it will be. And look I'm not gonna lie. I enjoyed every second of this, obviously, I would like to create something of my own that isn't necessarily taking obviously over somebody's next show.

HRISHI: Yeah.

DAVE: You know, that kind of thing.

JOSH: Would that potentially be for HBO? You have a deal-

DAVE: Yeah, I signed a deal with HBO. So I will be continuing on there and they have been, just the support for this show and things that people don't really think about with everything that Julia went through obviously and obviously she took the brunt of it. But we were like a couple of weeks from production when she got the diagnosis and so I say this half-jokingly, but like I don't want to know what our final season cost. Our final season went on for about two years. I always had, for the most part, my writers on set. I mean, they're backing of the show and ultimately letting us end it the way we wanted to, it just never it never came up like, oh my God, don't go to a convention place, you know what I mean?

HRISHI: Gary do you feel like having been on now these two very political, three, I mean *The Good Fight* also is just dealing head-on with Trump too; do you ever get jealous of actors who when they do interviews they never also get questions about politics. Because invariably I feel like it comes up because of the nature of the shows that you're on.

GARY: Yeah but I think, the one thing about, I've always thought about shows that work, shows that last, shows that have an impact. They always had or at least a lot of them had, stakes. How high are the stakes? Whether they were a comedy or drama and I've always just felt lucky to be involved in both *Veep* and *The West Wing*, and *The Good Fight* which is really addressing everything that is going on in a head-on way. That's the style that they've chosen, which I also think is walking kind of a high wire. So I like that, you know and whatever, you know, you get asked about it. I don't really think about it in terms and I don't really do all that much anyway in terms of doing interview and stuff, but that element just heightens everything to me and when it works, I just think it's, there's really nothing like it. I've been around long enough to know the both of those things that I've been involved with and especially coming off these seven years, it's the exception. It's not the rule and you can feel it. I certainly felt it and we all felt it as it was coming to an end, that at this was, you know, you kind of look back and god what just happened? We were we were all involved in this but you see the impact that it has and that's a good feeling, because it's not always, not always the case

DAVE: When we got to our last scene. We we're shooting with Julia. She was in the last scene and the video village had like 300 people; I mean families were there [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] They all wanted to be there

DAVE: But it wasn't just everyone it was like people, I mean the kids that had been born during the seven years [crosstalk]

GARY: [crosstalk] There were several children that were born during the time

JOSH: That's great.

DAVE: Just like, families were there. It was like the most intense thing I'd ever seen and it was just this sense of, I think it was built in Baltimore, especially where you guys all got really, really, really close

GARY: Yep

DAVE: Because you had no choice-

GARY: Yeah, we were in camp,

DAVE: But it just kept going and it was just really amazing to sort of be a part of.

JOSH: That's beautiful.

HRISHI: Thank you both so much for talking to us and thanks for letting us get to see the other side of the pendulum swing. Hopefully this is where the pendulum swing stops

DAVE: Right, yeah, God I hope

HRISHI: And we can-

DAVE: Boy, I hope.

JOSH: Everyone hopes.

GARY: [laughs]

DAVE: Yeah.

JOSH: And that's it for this very I think, you have to agree, very special episode of our show

HRISHI: Go watch *Veep* if you haven't already or more likely go re-watch *Veep*. It stands up to multiple viewings.

JOSH: It does indeed and looking forward, we're going to take a week off. We're going to celebrate America's independence with a little independence of our own and then we'll be back for the beginning of season 7.

HRISHI: Thanks so much to our guests Gary Cole and Dave Mandel. Gary isn't on Twitter, but Dave is he's @DaveHMandel.

JOSH: You can find us both on Twitter and Facebook and Instagram too. Maybe before it's all over we'll be on Pinterest as well.

HRISHI: What would we put on our Pinterest boards?

JOSH: I don't know. Pictures of big hats from Texas, good Latin inscriptions and maybe old maps of Israel

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: An old map. An old map.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: We remain a proud member of Radiotopia, a jaunty parade of popular podcasts. You can find out more about them at Radiotopia.fm

HRISHI: Thanks so much to Zach McNeese, Margaret Miller and Nick Song for helping us make this show.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

GARY and DAVE: What's next?

[Outro Music]