

The West Wing Weekly  
0.18: Small Block of Cheese Day (The West Wing Weekly Forever)

[Intro Music]

JOSH: You're listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. I am Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. And today we have a special episode – we're calling it Small Block of Cheese Day.

JOSH: That's right! Not that it's less important, or less palpable, or less substantive...

HRISHI: But it is short.

JOSH: But it's shorter, that's what it is.

HRISHI: At the time of this recording, we're in the middle of the 2019 Radiotopia Annual Fundraiser. The theme of this year's fundraiser is 'Radiotopia Forever'. And, more specifically, for our show, *The West Wing Weekly Forever*, as we're coming to the end of our podcast.

JOSH: Yeah. But as the series we celebrate and discuss each week is evergreen and is forever, our podcast will, we hope, remain accessible and stay evergreen as well.

HRISHI: So, to that end, we're hoping that you will support Radiotopia's fundraiser, because they are the architecture, really, for *The West Wing Weekly's* existence. Through Radiotopia we're able to publish our episodes, and maintain them, have advertising on our show – they're really the support system for our podcast.

JOSH: That's right. And they've supported us all the way, the entire time they've allowed us to make the show we wanted to make.

HRISHI: Yeah. There's no corporate oversight or anything like that that we ever have to deal with, they're just wonderful people who are really supportive of independent creators, and we've talked to them about this and we're all on the same page – we just want to have our podcast live on and be accessible and be free, for anyone who wants to listen to it, any time. So, before we even go any further, we want to point out the link – it's [radiotopia.fm](https://radiotopia.fm). A monthly donation of \$7 or a \$35 one-time donation, you get a special *West Wing Weekly* crossword.

JOSH: The crossword, whose clues revolve around things *West Wing* and things *West Wing Weekly*, was created by Hrishi, and Robyn Weintraub, celebrated *New York Times* crossword creator.

HRISHI: Whose comments we featured when we were talking about crosswords in "Welcome to Wherever You Are."

JOSH: We've also got a big ticket fundraiser item, yes?

HRISHI: That's right.

JOSH: The first person to donate two grand, two large, as we say in the gambling business, you'll get lunch with me and Hrishi.

HRISHI: It's quite the commitment.

JOSH: Right? I was gonna have lunch that day anyway, you might as well be there.

HRISHI: [laughs] So we had this idea of wanting to keep the show alive for the future, and we thought to go along with this request for you to help support this endeavor, we would include some messages that we got from people who told us stories about the podcast having some significance in their life – having some connection to an important moment in their life. And hearing some of these stories just blew me away.

JOSH: Yeah, I completely agree, I was knocked out by the number of people that responded and what they had to say about what the podcast has meant to them.

HRISHI: We got an overwhelming number of emails –

JOSH: And please, if your nugget of cheese was not selected, understand that we have read everything that was sent in to us and appreciated them, and we're trying to create a selection, and if yours wasn't chosen it doesn't mean it meant any less to us.

HRISHI: That's right. And so without further ado, here are a few messages from *West Wing Weekly* listeners.

EDILE: Hello, I'm Edile, and I'm from Istanbul. It was the first day I moved into my dorm in France. I was scared out of my mind and very much out of my comfort zone. I had moved to a country whose language I spoke but whose traditions were all a mystery. I was there to attend my dream school but was nervous about this whole 'friends' thing. While moving in, my neighbor Cat came on over and we started chatting. It turned out she was a *West Wing* fan and I suggested she listen to the podcast. It turned out not only was she an avid listener but also contributed to the transcripts. *The West Wing Weekly* was the first thing we bonded over. I think we talked for an hour just about the podcast and the series. After that conversation, I felt a little more at home, and a little less nervous about the friends situation that awaited me. That was a year ago, and now she's my best friend. We still talk about the newest episodes when they come out. Thank you for helping me make a friend, and a best one at that.

JEFF: Hi, this is Jeff Cohen, in New Jersey, I listened to *The West Wing Weekly* every time I had to undergo chemotherapy treatments for Hodgkin's lymphoma. And you guys helped me get through the procedure which wasn't quite the worst of it, but wasn't exactly fun. And listening to you and hearing the interviews, the critiques, the banter – it all helped me distract myself from what I had to endure on those days, and I saved episodes when I knew I was going in for chemo, just to be ready. Today, I'm two and a half years removed from chemo and I'm in remission. And now, I wouldn't say *The West Wing Weekly* healed me, but it made the time more bearable, and that was a lot. I'm misting up a little just saying this, but all I can offer is sincere thanks. And I will miss you after the last episode. Thanks.

SHIRA: My name is Shira, and my mother's name is Lynne. And both *The West Wing* and *The West Wing Weekly* have provided a great way for my mom and I to bond over the past few years as we lived apart from each other – her in Toronto and me in Charlottesville, where I was finishing up my PhD in American Political History at UVA. Here's my story. My mom was driving me to the airport at the end of one of my visits home. Now, I should mention that I'm very afraid of flying. So for most of the car ride, we sat in that comfortable quiet that occurs between two people who know each other very well. As we drove, I could sense her silently telling me that the flight would be fine, that she was sad I was leaving, but happy that I enjoyed my new life, and that driving me to the airport was her way of showing that she will always look after me in the big and small ways of parents and children. And I was silently telling her that I knew it would be fine, but I was still scared, that I was sad and happy to leave all at once, and that sitting next to her in the car made me feel safe, like a kid again. But we didn't say those things and before long, we arrived at the airport. At the

departures curb, we hugged and said goodbye, still leaving unsaid all of the things we wanted to confess to each other. But as I walked away, she called my name. I turned around to see her give me The Signal. I returned it, a little teary-eyed. Then walked into the airport feeling calmer and reassured. A few weeks later, a package arrived on my doorstep. My mom had ordered me The Signal shirt. I wear it every time I fly.

KATE: My name is Kate, and I'm from Omaha, Nebraska. I moved into a new area and I wanted to meet with my state legislator. We met up for coffee at a local place and talked about local issues, politics and resources. My seven-year-old daughter noticed a pin on her lapel and asked if it was her senator badge. The senator blushed a little bit and said "Well... actually it's a pin from a show called *The West Wing*, and it says 'What's Next?'" She seemed a little embarrassed about it, but I had just got my Francis Scott Key Key keychain, so I immediately pulled it out and we had a little bit of a geek moment, both gushing about our *West Wing* obsessions. On a serious note though, it was so special to me that my local government representative has felt inspired by the same show I love so much.

LISTENER: G'day from Australia. My daughter was soon to sit her Year 12 exams and was very stressed. She has a serious anxiety disorder and even saying the word "exam" would make her retreat into a dark hole. We were trying to come up with another word that we could use, that instead of causing stress would be fun. Playful. Whimsical, even. I was listening to your podcast and the perfect word popped into my head: Whiffenpoofs! Thus it was decreed, with great amusement, that from hereon, exams would be called Whiffenpoofs, and she passed Year 12 with flying colors. We honestly didn't know if she was going to make it through that time, and every little contribution was a big help. This last week she finished her Whiffenpoofs for her first year at university. Many thanks.

CRYSTAL: Hi, this is Crystal Michael Morris. I am currently sitting in a hotel room, on my honeymoon, and just three short years ago we swiped right on each other on Tinder. Our very first conversation, he told me that he would love to grab a drink with me, but not tonight, because he was watching *The West Wing*. I immediately replied with "I love *The West Wing*," and didn't even question his decision. He then came back with "Do you know about the podcast?" "Of course I do." Our early dates consisted of *West Wing Weekly* Wednesdays. We would watch the episode, listen to the podcast, then make a meal to complement the episode. And for him to keep these dates going, he would low-key brag about meeting Hrishi that one time.

KATIE: This is Katie. *The West Wing Weekly* podcast helped actually save my life. In May of 2018, I went to the hospital thinking I had the stomach flu. Turns out, I had three serious medical conditions all at once. One of which was being diagnosed a Type 2 diabetic in DKA. When I went home, I was weak and easily worn out. But, I had to make some serious changes in my life, including getting serious about doing more exercise. Even walking just a small amount every day could help save my life. And the way I was feeling? Walking anywhere wore me out. So, I made myself a deal. I could only listen to my *West Wing Weekly* podcast if I was walking. Every day, I had to walk, and each week I had to walk for a bit longer, and longer. And the way I motivated myself was to focus on the show. And, it worked. And because I didn't want to turn off the episode I was listening to, I ended up walking longer and longer. So with great gratitude to everyone involved with *The West Wing Weekly* podcast, thank you for everything you've done to help save my life.

CLAIRE: Hello! My name is Claire and I've listened to *The West Wing Weekly* since the beginning, and I would sometimes listen in the car, when my two youngest kids were otherwise occupied in the back seat. Or, so I thought. Then one night saying goodnight at bedtime went a little like this. I said "Say goodnight to Daddy?" and they, ages 2 and 4, said

“Goodnight Daddy!” and then I said “Goodnight Mommy?” and they say “Goodnight, Mommy!” Then there was a pause, suddenly followed by “Goodnight, Tommy Schlamme!”... and hysterical giggles. Now every night ends with “Goodnight, Daddy! Goodnight, Mommy! Goodnight, Tommy Schlamme!”

[music]

HRISHI: Goodnight, Tommy Schlamme!

JOSH: That was incredible! Thank you again for everyone who shared both the messages we aired and those we could not. I’ve got – look, Hrishi! – a tear.

HRISHI: I know! I saw you getting a little verklempt as we were listening to those.

JOSH: I am human! Thank you listeners, for reminding me that I’m human.

HRISHI: [laughs] It’s nice to be reminded about how people use something like a show or a podcast to connect with their lives and with other people in their lives, and I just feel really grateful that we got to be that thing for anybody. If you feel so inclined to help us keep the show alive in the months and years to come, please go ahead and make a recurring donation to Radiotopia at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm).

JOSH: And of course, remember that in addition to ours, Radiotopia features a host of other wonderful podcasts. Check them out.

HRISHI: So, thank you listeners, thank you Josh, thanks Zach and Margaret. And thanks especially to Radiotopia for everything that they’ve done.

JOSH: Yeah, thanks for making The West Wing Weekly possible.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

CHILDREN: Goodnight Tommy... goodnight, Tommy Schlamme!

[Outro Music]