

The West Wing Weekly
2.01: In the Shadow of Two Gunmen - Part One
Guest: Tommy Schlamme

[Intro music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Today, we're talking about the season premiere of Season Two. It's called, "In the Shadow of Two Gunmen: Part One."

JOSH: It first aired on October 4th, 2000. It was written by Aaron Sorkin. It was directed by Thomas Schlamme and today our very special guest is one of the two big dogs behind *The West Wing*. His work as director and executive producer played a major role in making the series into the show that we all love. He's a Texan Jew and so much more. It's Thomas "Tommy" Schlamme.

THOMAS: Oh, such a pleasure to be here, guys.

JOSH: This is major.

HRISHI: This is major.

THOMAS: And from this point, it can be Tommy Schlamme.

JOSH: Ok. Yeah.

TOMMY: Ok.

[HRISHI laughs]

JOSH: Well, that's interesting. I go by Joshua in credits and nobody calls me that.

TOMMY: And I always had Thomas as credits and I think part of that was because the only person who called me Thomas was my father and so I thought, "It's a nice homage to my dad. He'll think it feels a little bit more adult."

JOSH: I have the exact same thing, which is that my parents occasionally call me Joshua and that's the name they gave me. So to honor them, [cross talk] that's what I am in credits.

TOMMY: [cross talk] Yeah, that's what I do, exactly the same.

JOSH: That's nice.

TOMMY: And also because there's so many other Tommy Schlammes in the Director's Guild that I just needed Thomas I guess.

[JOSH and HRISHI laugh]

JOSH: Yeah, take it.

HRISHI: I had the same thing. There were so many Hrishirway in the music world I had to officially change it to Hrishikesh.

JOSH: There you go. That happens.

HRISHI: I would be Hrishikesh everywhere except that it's too long for a Twitter handle. Hrishikesh Hirway.

TOMMY: You could have been on my little league team. I played on a little league baseball team and the first three batters were Toby Coby, Tommy Schlamme, and Ronald Montalbano.

[JOSH and HRISHI laugh]

JOSH: Not really?

TOMMY: Honest to God.

JOSH: The last thing can't be someone's name.

TOMMY: Ronald Montalbano. It was Ronald Montalbano but it was [said quickly] Ronald Montalbano.

JOSH: That is brilliant. Boy, I'd like to hear somebody [cross talk] do the play-by-play.

TOMMY: [cross talk] Yeah, the announcer, some southern guy. "Well, here we go." I mean it was like tough enough for Smith, you know, for them, so...

JOSH: That is hilarious.

HRISHI: So my first question is actually not directly related to this episode but there are lots of things while watching this episode that made me think this thought - Are you Leo?

TOMMY: You know, look, I don't have any idea if I'm Leo. I would be complimented to say that I was Leo. I do think that that relationship that was played out in the series was not far from a kind of relationship that Aaron and I had. So, you know, I've always referred to Leo as the mother and President Bartlet as the father. I'm not sure that anyone would talk about my maternal instincts necessarily. Do you know - but, I do think there is a similarity in the idea of two people who have very strong points of view that I always knew from the very beginning that I was being handed the thing that had once started as a white piece of paper. And so my

obligation was to take that, be respectful, incredibly respectful of that, but then add to it whatever I could as well as all the other hundred and fifty people that were going to add to it from that point on, which is a little bit what Leo's job was in dealing with the president.

HRISHI: Yeah, I was thinking about the scene in this episode where Leo says to the president:

[West Wing Episode 2.01 excerpt]

LEO: You're gonna open your mouth and lift houses off the ground. Whole houses clear off the ground.

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: And Leo's there to make that happen and make sure it happens in the right way.

TOMMY: Right.

HRISHI: And Leo's a little bit of the unsung hero. Of course everybody who knows, knows how important he is.

TOMMY: Right.

HRISHI: But everybody talks about President Bartlet and then, I don't know, it felt like a parallel between the way the show is made.

TOMMY: Well, here's one difference. I don't think my job ever was to build Aaron up. I think Aaron had a very healthy ego. But I think my job was to build everyone else up and was to try to create an atmosphere that everybody felt as protected and safe as possible so more the staff than it was my relationship with Aaron. Aaron had such a strong point a view. But we did have a very open relationship and this goes back to *Sports Night*. You know, when we started that relationship, it took a while, but once that trust was created, I know that people have always said, "You know, he's very particular about his words and he's very--" but the truth of it is I found him extraordinarily collaborative for me. You know, he knew I was going to protect his words and I was going to make a TV show. You know, so in both cases, he was very satisfied with that.

JOSH: And was your working relationship on *Sports Night* pretty similar to what would become your working relationship on *The West Wing*?

TOMMY: By the end... by the end of the first season, but midway, I mean there was a moment in *Sports Night*. There's an episode about a fly and I had wanted to do a fly cam. You know, I was going to do a fly cam and it created such conflict between the two of us. You know, it was like, "We don't need that. You know, people will get it." And I was like, "Ok." And I realized from that point on, I had to be very honest to his material without putting as much saccharin on it. I mean and still find a visual motif for the way to translate his words. I mean we can go to the pilot, sort of the biggest sort of conflict in the pilot and possibly for quite a while on *West Wing* was the last

shot of the pilot. The crane shot that goes up and you see the dollhouse and you see the place that we're going to play in for the rest. You know, it was written as a brilliant playwright that he is that the curtain would drop as Josh closes the door.

[*The West Wing* Episode 1.01 excerpt]

BARTLET: "Too busy being indicted for tax fraud?"

[JOSH takes a deep breath]

BARTLET: Don't ever do it again.

JOSH: Yes, sir.

[End excerpt]

TOMMY: And Josh closes the door. Hard out. You know, black out, curtain, audience sits there, has to, you know, meditate what just happened. Well that would have been great on stage. It wouldn't have been great on a television show where you're going to go to a car commercial right after. So I had always wanted to sort of expand the world and not contract the world at the end and really see this world. And that's where Aaron came up with, "What's next?" He just had to come up with the line because God forbid someone's not talking for a while

[JOSH and HRISHI laugh].

TOMMY: But he was right to do that and that's where the president, you know, sort of leans back and, "What's next?" And, you know, to me it was "here's the dollhouse we're going to play in for the next four episodes," which is about as much as we thought we were ever going to do.

JOSH: That's a fascinating example. So would that be a recurring battle of wills you would have or would he [cross talk] did he eventually start writing to your vision?

TOMMY: [cross talk] It became less and less because I think it was like, I saw it first at that fourth or fifth episode of *Sports Night* and then we kind of danced around that. What he did always feel was I really did understand what he was going for. And if I didn't, I could be really honest to say, "I don't quite understand this scene. I don't." But it wasn't like we had to tone everything. It just seemed to be pretty quickly, I connected very strongly to his written word. And he so appreciated that and he knew that I was going to protect it, that then he felt safe as a playwright. I mean that was my first job is, "I want you to feel safe as a playwright." Once that could happen, we could move forward and then look at all the many things we can do with the show besides the language of the show.

HRISHI: So can we go back actually then to before *Sports Night*? How did you guys first meet and start working together?

TOMMY: It was, um... I got two scripts from Ari Emmanuel who was my agent at the time and was also Aaron's agent at the time. And he sent me these two pilot scripts and they were *Sports Night* and *West Wing*.

JOSH: Wow.

TOMMY: And I'm dyslexic and I'm a terribly slow reader and so I kind of put off scripts as long as possible and it was like, Sunday at about eleven, I went, "You know, I should read these two scripts." I know Aaron Sorkin. I know *A Few Good Men*. We had had kind of a weird crossing ten, fifteen years earlier or something and so I read both the scripts. I remember sitting in my living room reading both these scripts that night and I called Ari at midnight. I mean I hardly ever talk to an agent, you know, if I can avoid it. And I said, "Look, I don't know how you're going to get me meetings or how you're going to get me these shows but I want to do both of them and I want to do them immediately and it's the most excited I've ever been about any scripts." And it was. After I read *Sports Night*, I went, "This is the best half hour television show I've ever read." Then I read *West Wing* and I went, "Holy [expletive deleted]." And so at that point, *West Wing* was kind of on hold. And so I got a meeting with Imagine to talk to them about *Sports Night*. They'd already met and we'd kind of danced around this but they met with Jimmy Burrows. That's who ABC wanted. I mean as well, I understood. I love Jimmy and *Sports Night* could well still be on the air if he had done it. But nonetheless--

JOSH: It would have been a different show.

TOMMY: It would have been a different show. Aaron met with Jimmy and I think he'd met with the people at Imagine. And Jimmy was sort of saying, "It's a great script but I think there's a couple of things that we need to sort of do to sort of separate Peter and Josh's characters and, you know, maybe one is a black guy and one's a white guy. Or, you know, how can you do some things that are a little bit more touchstone for television shows." And I think Aaron listened. I don't think it ruffled his feathers at all. And then the next day I came in and met and Aaron actually asked me, "What would you do to kind of ground this piece?" And I went, "Nothing. And here's how I would shoot it." And I described exactly the way we ended up shooting it probably in the second season or the end of the first season without a laugh track: a much more traditional, somewhat single camera show that we could contain and shoot in three days. And I left the room and I think he turned to the Imagine people and, "Well, I'm not doing the show unless that guy's doing it." So it started from a really positive place. I wasn't put about him. I won it in the room. And then, as I've said often, you know, thank God Monica Lewinsky [expletive deleted] Bill Clinton because it allowed me to do *The West Wing* because I wouldn't have done it if there wasn't the sort of the Clinton fatigue that was going on at that point and NBC sort of holding off on *West Wing*. I wouldn't have gotten an hour pilot to go do at that moment in my career. But the relationship that Aaron and I set up during *Sports Night* and by the fifth or sixth episode, we just knew that was a great partnership that we had. So he felt, "It's crazy for me to do *The West Wing* without Tommy." And then it was just a given. They didn't meet anybody else and I was fortunate enough because they put it off for a year because at that time, both scripts were out there, you know, and they could have done them at the same time.

HRISHI: What was the conversation like with your family when you said, "Hey, you know, I've been doing this TV show full-time. Now I'm going to add another one."

TOMMY: You know, my wife's an actress so they were sort of used to us as working folk, you know? And all they saw was a dad pretty happy, you know, pretty excited. There are a lot of conversations now in our lives, which were, "*The West Wing* years" or, "That year when you did both shows." Or, you know, that I didn't realize how much I was probably going to have to sacrifice, which was, you know, if there's a drawback to the enormous gift that was given to me by getting to do these two shows, it was that you miss out a little bit on your family. And, you know, especially for that year that we were doing both *West Wing* and *Sports Night* at the same time, which was the first year of *West Wing* and the second year of *Sports Night*. It was pretty consuming. You know I remember at one point, it was a Friday night and we were over at *West Wing* and somebody else was directing both the episodes but I was on the set at *West Wing* and it was like three o'clock in the morning and there was not one other soul at Warner Bros. Nobody else was shooting. It was just us. And then John Amodeo or somebody called about something that was going on at *Sports Night*. It was three in the morning.

JOSH: Line producer, John.

TOMMY: John, yeah, the line producer who said, "You might come over here now." And I don't remember what the situation was but I remember going over there at three in the morning and Disney was shut down except for *Sports Night*. And I thought, "We might be the worst producers in the history of television."

[HRISHI and JOSH laugh]

TOMMY: You know that no one else is working. Crews, meanwhile, are looking at catalogues to figure out all the extra Christmas gifts because of the overtime that they're getting.

HRISHI: And Aaron is essentially writing all episodes of--

TOMMY: All episodes. I mean the second year of *Sports Night*, I have to say, you know the writers there were able to get Aaron at least to the thirty-yard line, you know, and then he would take it-- his own thirty yard line -- he'd have to still carry the ball seventy yards. But the writers of *Sports Night* were really able to help Aaron a great deal where he was starting from the one-yard line on *West Wing*. It's still a monumental feat that is kind of extraordinary in the, you know, history of television.

HRISHI: One of the things we touched on earlier was what a pilot director does and then what subsequent episodic directors are expected to do. In other words, my sense of it is that, you know, once you've really set the look and the feel and the style and the type of shot, it's on subsequent directors to stay in that ballpark.

TOMMY: Yeah, I mean, look, you're hoping that every director that comes in is finding something of themselves in it to sort of do. But you have a pallet that you're painting with that is

established if the pilot works. And also, if in this case, this was a partnership. It was a bilateral partnership between Aaron and myself that was an ongoing process as opposed to, "I did the pilot. Good luck, guys. I'm going to sort of go away," that, you know, the reason that by the third season I had to bring in Chris Misiano and Alex Graves, two extraordinary directors as producers, co-executive producers, was because there was so much to handle in trying to maintain the quality of that show. But I think part of it is hiring directors that I believe could work within the structure that we had. And then they kept finding different things that I could steal from. But it was being honest to the template that had been set up. And look, the other thing about having a pilot director who's also an executive producer and stays with the show is the relationship you have with the actors because I remember we had Blackberries. You know, it was the very first Blackberries, which were the pagers because we had seen them on our tour of the White House.

[JOSH and HRISHI laugh]

TOMMY: Brad wanted one and everybody had them. But then they started using them and I'd get these 911, which meant get to the set immediately, which was they would have, I'm not sure, they would question a little bit more what the director might be doing--

JOSH: Sure.

TOMMY: --Than I would be, do you know? And they just needed to feel safe again--

JOSH: A reassurance.

TOMMY: --and be ok and reassurance. Or, you know, what would happen is I would always see a rehearsal. It's either Aaron or myself or both of us would see a rehearsal of the scene, which we always did. And then once that happened, you know, I kind of knew these directors were competent, how they would shoot it. You know, people were intimidated a lot by the Steadicam and these long walk and talks. And we had put a reel together of all the different walk and talks so every director could come and sort of look at it. And I would be reassuring to them that, "If you think that I had choreographed all those in my head completely before we started, you're wrong." It was like I had a big idea of what it would be and I always called it like it was a square piece of clay and you would keep molding it until it became a circle. And so they felt a little bit safer about that. And the Steadicam operator, Dave Chameides and the other guys who did it were incredible artists themselves and would help the directors. But the long-winded answer is, yes, they do come in and watch the pilot and then watch subsequent episodes and try to stay within the framework of that show. And I do think our show had a real consistency, you know? Now part of that was there was one writer and that helps so that you're not, "Gee, would somebody do that or somebody do that?" Didn't happen very often.

HRISHI: How would you actually choose the directors? What's the process for finding a director?

TOMMY: Either people I'd worked with before. I mean a lot of the first season directors were people who had done *Sports Night*. And oddly enough, I mean it's a half-hour comedy to an hour drama but there was a lot of similarities. And a lot of people who hadn't done that before, Mark Buckland, who had, you know, is a wonderful comedy director, but I knew he could ground this thing and have it. And Alex Graves who had done *Sports Night* and Bob Berlinger; and so that first year, there was a little bit of a carry over from *Sports Night*. And then other directors that I either admired, had seen their work, had kind of felt like, you know, I would meet with everybody if I didn't know them before I would hire a director. And then when Chris and Alex came onboard, then the three of us would sit around and talk about directors that we admired or thought about and who I thought had the ability to both give it a visual style. But most importantly, could tell the story that Aaron had written. And that was really the essence of it all. It wasn't, "Can you do the style of the show?" It was really, "Can you find the nuggets within every scene that you have to explore and make sure that get exposed?"

JOSH: Without naming names, any ever go badly? Any horror stories?

TOMMY: No. There was only one director that really I think had a very hard time with the show. I will not say the name.

JOSH: What was the nature of it?

TOMMY: I think it was a really tough show to do. I mean, John Wells once said, I think it was after the first or second year, and he was doing *Third Watch* and *ER*, you know, both action-packed shows. He said, "Those are much easier to direct because you know you could be falling down but those doors can slam open at any moment." You know, the emergency door and then the audience just picked up again. Well that didn't exist in *The West Wing*. You had to sort of find those moments to bring the audience in. So it wasn't an easy job to direct. For instance, we had Jessica Yu who later did a couple of great episodes. She was supposed to do her very first episode; I think the penultimate episode of season three. I think it was. And we didn't have a script until the day before and I had called her up and I said, "We will pay you but you shouldn't direct this. We'll give you an episode next year. I'll step in and direct that one because it's not fair to you. You're not going to have a chance to do your best work to shine to sort of do it."

JOSH: Normally, how long would a director have the script for pre-production?

TOMMY: Eight days. They would have eight days to prep. And we were not always that fortunate with our shows so they had to have somewhat of an ability to think on their feet and to be pretty quick with it. And then in the first year, there was one director who thought, "You know, I'll bring my own unique style to it," and even used his name "--ize it." You know, whatever his name was, I'll, let's say, "Schlamme-ize it." But I won't use the name because then you'd know. And I thought, "Eh, it's not really necessary. You know? We're kind of ok here." And then he kind of met some resistance with the DP and the actors and kind of went back to [cross talk] sort of what we were doing.

JOSH: [cross talk] Maybe I'll just " *West Wing*-ize it."

[HRISHI laughs]

TOMMY: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

HRISHI: Well, on the other side, you said there were sometimes some moments that directors found something new and then you kind of incorporated that as like, that would be part of the language. Is there any specific examples that you can think of? Something that a director found that you were like, "That's great and we're going to keep that."

TOMMY: No, I was just lying about that [all laugh].

JOSH: Just being gracious.

TOMMY: Yeah, just trying to compliment all those people listening who were the directors. You know, I don't know but it wasn't so much about incorporating. It was about a different way of telling that story.

HRISHI: Right.

TOMMY: You know? And the really fun thing that happened later when Alex and Chris were aboard, it was the first time I could, you know, we could share, "God, how would you attack this scene? How would you--" you know? That doesn't happen that much. It happens as an executive producer with the director that might be coming in and going, "So, if this was your episode..." But it just, it was fascinating to just see. It's a completely different approach. The point of view was still the same but where the camera was placed, how they did it. I mean Chris Misiano had this incredible ability to shoot masters that turned into seven different shots. You know, and I think he learned it at *Law and Order*. And it was expeditiously smart, do you know if that's the right word there. It was like it got you home on time because I heard that that's basically the whole challenge of being a good director [JOSH laughs]. By the way--

JOSH: I kid.

TOMMY: By the way, that was one of our directors that came in who basically used the phrase "Rusha-homa."

[JOSH and HRISHI laugh]

TOMMY: And I thought, "That's not good here." You know, nobody needs to get home quick. We're here for the night. Accept it. Everybody's accepted it.

JOSH: Credit to Dulé Hill who had some sort of superpower at figuring out a way of like, sneaking out of scenes. [Laughs]

TOMMY: "Put me in there early on."

JOSH: Be like, [cross talk] “We’re still shooting the scene. Dulé’s going home.”

TOMMY: [cross talk] But he didn’t know that at the beginning. He learned that really quick.

JOSH: I’m sure, yeah.

TOMMY: So I would sort of watch that and I would remember sitting in the editing room, kind of watching, “Oh, how he blocked that scene.” It was really interesting and I think Alex had a very -- Alex has a massive visual vocabulary. Massive. And in fact, sometimes, “Slow down, thoroughbred.” You know, and it was great for me to sort of watch how he worked, too and steal ideas and sort of steal ways in which he approached work. So it was just, you know, far more collaborative than, “You’re supposed to do it this way and we don’t use 75mm lenses and we only use Steadicam.” It wasn’t that at all.

JOSH: There was a creative brain trust.

TOMMY: Sort of in the way that a writers’ room would work and that was the desire by bringing two other directors in, which really hadn’t been done, was, you know, “The writing staff. Let’s take some money out of the writing staff because Aaron’s writing them all and let’s build up a producing staff of directors so that when I’m in the editing room, somebody else can go on scouts with the new director who sort of knows the show already.” And I think it was a really smart way to do the show.

HRISHI: That’s really fascinating.

JOSH: You directed the finale of season one and both parts of the opener of season two. And they’re incredible episodes. It’s like a three-hour movie if you look at them back-to-back. And so you wanted these, right? I mean it must have been--

TOMMY: Oh absolutely. Yes. I absolutely. The finales and the season openers, that’s sort of the gift for being an executive producer and you’re part of the show, which is also what I think was the most charitable thing if I have to be charitable at all, which I’m usually not. In season 3 / 4, which was that Chris and Alex, who I brought in, were able to do the finales and the season opener and it was like, Chris won an Emmy for a finale and Alex did some amazing work. But in those first two years, those were the sort of big ones. And especially knowing that in season 2 we were going to do a two-hour piece and it was going to be a two-parter. That was very exciting to be able to do basically a movie. You know, it was a two-hour. We boarded it together. We shot it as one. I never wanted them to be broken up. It was a continuation the way that I was telling the story was trying to be a continuation of it, a little less so with the finale because we didn’t even know what, you know, I shot that finale not knowing who was going to be shot. Aaron didn’t know. I didn’t know. We had talked about it but we weren’t completely sure. So it was like, “Tommy, do you mind shooting that sequence so that I can choose any one of the six or seven characters?” So we had to do that little reprise at the end of it to make sure. And then

we had to go back to that location and recreate the whole piece again, which is what we had to do.

HRISHI: Right with the same wardrobe and everything.

TOMMY: Yeah, I mean, we went back there and it was the Newseum that was at that time that they were across the river. And that's the Berlin Wall, pieces of the Berlin Wall when you see from the shooters looking down, that sort of colorful concrete piece in the background is slabs from the Berlin Wall, which I thought was kind of cool that that was there.

HRISHI: Right.

TOMMY: Yeah, so then in the season opener we had to recreate that clearly knowing that Josh was shot and how we would sort of set that up.

HRISHI: So going into the season premiere here, even just the fact you could just do a two-hour episode, had things changed for you guys going into the second season, the scale and scope of what you could accomplish? Had that changed? Were your conversations different with the network?

TOMMY: It had only changed that we didn't get as many phone calls, especially the first six or seven episodes. You know I remember actually being at the Biltmore when Michael Lehmann did that long Steadicam shot, which, by the way, we had thought about during the pilot. I had taken Aaron through there and it wasn't the exact shot. But it was like, "Look what we could do if we ever came back here with a speech." And I remember getting a phone call from John Wells going, "You know they're really worried about the overages here and this and that." And I was like, "Oh, I'm really so sorry." And then hung up and we went back and--

JOSH: Let's go again.

TOMMY: --I went, "We need another hundred extras." And so I was not the best partner at that moment to be fiscally responsible because I thought the show just needed all of this weight for it to succeed. And I thought if it did succeed, this would be a small amount of money to be paying, which was proven by the end of the season. The studio certainly understood that what we were going for and they were pretty supportive of it even though they were nervous about the overages. When we did "Shadow," you know, we hadn't won the Emmy yet. You know, we'd been nominated and that was incredible but we hadn't won the Emmy so it wasn't like, "Oh, you've now won an Emmy; you're validated. Here's more money." We were still fighting and struggling for that. But I remember shooting the finale and Aaron and I were at the Newseum. I had a bullhorn and there was all these people and we had cranes and--

JOSH: Were you wearing a beret?

TOMMY: [laughs] Well, I did wear a beret sometimes but not because I was a director, just because I was embarrassed by my hair. [HRISHI and JOSH laugh] But regardless of that, but

both of us looked at each other and went, “Look what we have here. Look at this. Look at what we’re getting to do.” And then Aaron went, “And we have to recreate it again next season.”

[HRISHI and JOSH laugh]

TOMMY: And I’m like, “[Expletive deleted] you!” You know, “What are you doing?!” But I remember that feeling. And so by the end of the season we had that feeling. So

we sort of went into the second season with a great deal of momentum. And then I think “Shadow” premiered the week after we won the Emmy. You know it was like this glorious little moment. And I honestly thought, “Oh my God. I really messed up ‘Shadow.’” I thought, “We just won the Emmy and now it’s going to be on and I don’t know if it’s any good.” And I honestly hadn’t seen it in ten years probably and I watched it.

JOSH: Pretty damn good, isn’t it?

TOMMY: Yeah, it was really good.

[HRISHI and JOSH laugh]

TOMMY: I was like, “I’d hire that director and these actors are so good.” And Aaron’s writing was unbelievable. And it was a little bit at ATX when I had seen that opening shot. I think it takes a decade for me. That’s my statute of limitations. It’s like a decade to step away from my own work. I even turned to Christine, my wife, you know, “Watch this sequence. This sequence is like, really good.”

HRISHI: Which sequence was that?

TOMMY: The opening sequence.

JOSH: Was I hallucinating? Did you have a camera on a helicopter?

TOMMY: Yeah, we had a helicopter, the very opening shot.

JOSH / HRISHI: Yeah.

TOMMY: Yeah, it was a helicopter.

JOSH: That’s unbelievable.

TOMMY: [false bragging] Yeah, we had a helicopter shot.

JOSH: What am I watching?

TOMMY: By the way, we spun the big limousine around. We were shooting something else. We were on a tarmac. We weren’t on that particular thing.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Right.

TOMMY: We just sort of got that little piece. But it was really the sequence after that. It was the sequence with Allison finding Josh -- that whole creating that and when Jorja Fox comes up and finding Josh. And there was a whole scene after that. There was a scene where a medic came over and everything and we just knew that was the button. In fact, when we found, just from a shooting point of view, that moment where Richard finds Josh and he's with Josh. You might look. The sky's a little blue because the sun was already coming up. We had shot all night. The sun was coming up. The officers had said we have to wrap out. People are wrapping. They don't know I'm still shooting that sequence. [HRISHI laughs] And Richard was game for it. And, I mean, they're loading trucks. They're doing everything. We didn't call action. I was just rolling. And I said they want us to pack up and leave and that moment that he catches him and that look that he has was pretty much under the gun at that moment.

JOSH: So this giant production turns into a guerrilla unit.

TOMMY: Completely, that's exactly right. [HRISHI laughs] We were a student film that didn't have a permit and we just have to shoot really quick before the police came and threw us out.

HRISHI: That's amazing.

JOSH: Wow, one of the things I wrote down, and I think I watched it three times 'cause it's just so great. I kept, you know, "Maybe I'll watch it one more time, see if I can take more notes." It must have been a tricky challenge because you had to create chaos, I mean utter chaos, but also guide us through it in a way where we can understand the little pockets--

TOMMY: Right

JOSH: --of what's happening. How do you approach something that--

TOMMY: Well that's what I was impressed with myself about.

JOSH: Yeah. It's incredible.

TOMMY: To be honest with you, it was that thing of, well, first of all, the Steadicam is incredible and it's a tiny trick with the Steadicam: foreground crosses. Just not crosses. I used to have people just right next to the camera who would go just right by the camera because that image just creates -- it just startles you. So by having those in there that certainly helps. I did it as a play. I staged this big thing and that's what took us most of the night, you know? So the choreography had to be there. So that's the first thing I start with. Rob has to show up and meet Allison. And then Jorja has to come behind there and then the guy has to come there. Then, you know, there's still one moment that I hated that an extra does. An extra, right before when we're

with Richard and we're going to find Josh, there's an extra who's walking and, "I'm doing a hand over my mouth like 'Oh my God, I'm so distressed.'"

JOSH: [cross talk] Overdoing it.

TOMMY: It just felt like bull [expletive deleted].

JOSH: We'll bring that person in.

TOMMY: [laughs] Yeah, yeah. [HRISHI laughs] Bring her in and chastise her for that.

JOSH: Get her take on it.

TOMMY: We just had a lot of extras and you have sirens and, you know, there's just a lot of things that are touchstones that an audience will feel immediately. Chaos is created by people moving fast and bubble tops and a moving camera.

HRISHI: The thing about the crosses is something I had noted as well. There's a scene later when they have the president in the hospital and there's this really beautiful edit that happens where they're wheeling him in and you cut from a sort of wider shot to a closer shot. And I watched it a couple times because it happens so gracefully and I realized that's what was happening if that you have people cross in front and you kind of use that as a way to--

TOMMY: It's a great way to edit. By the way, I did that in the opening of the pilot. In the opening of the pilot, the people think that a really long continuous shot. Well, there's a moment where John and Brad are walking out of his room and going into the lobby. And we're coming across and I change lenses in the middle of it. I'm on a wide lens while they're going and then we go through a wall basically. It's a doorway, but it's just two frames that it's dark. And in that darkness, it's a different move so now it's a different lens on there but you're in a different room so you're not aware that it's a different lens. But we're much closer to the characters than we would be. So there's things like that. And the opening of "Shadow" the shot of Allison when she's going, "I hurt my head," that's two shots in there. There's a jump cut in the middle of that because the beginning of that Steadicam was so much better than the one we ended up using. So I needed to find a place to put a jump cut in there. But it's happening with so much other visual information that the audience isn't really that aware of it.

HRISHI: Hearing you talk about staging the stuff like you're on a stage like it's a play--

TOMMY: Right.

HRISHI: --seems so antithetical to the mindset that you have to have to think of it like in the future when you're in the editing room. But it sounds like you were doing both. You were thinking of what the edit might be--

TOMMY: Right.

HRISHI: --while you're shooting it as well.

TOMMY: Yeah, I do. I mean I started as an editor.

HRISHI: Oh really?

TOMMY: I was an animation editor but my very first jobs were cutting stuff, cutting commercials. Never did movies or anything. I wasn't even in the union. But it was the sort of beginning process and I've also been doing it long enough that, you know, I do have a sense of how this whole thing can get put together. Or what else? Or the many opportunities even though when I shoot I never circle takes. I don't tell an editor, "Go from there to there," ever. I want to see what they--

JOSH: Look at everything.

TOMMY: "Here's my footage. What are you going to come up with?" Much like, "I'm not going to tell you what the scene's yet about. Try it once." "Oh, there was something I had no idea about." But it's all driven by, without a doubt, story. And there's never a moment of, "God, the camera would be so cool if that happened," even though there's a lot of visual information. It's really how to tell the beats of the story. Even all those many walk and talks, if you'll notice, on most of those walk and talks, there'll be moments where people stop. It will be the information that you got to get. You should hear all of it, which is why I love when people go, "The show's better the second time," because it's so dense. I mean Aaron's writing is so dense that you cannot absorb everything so you got to give signals to the audience of, "This action's going to come back. This one's going to come back." So you better hold on to that in this long litany of other stuff.

JOSH: You're so often ahead of us as viewers.

TOMMY: Yeah, I mean my theory of directing is that every script I get, I think of one person that I'm telling that story to. I grab their hand and I'm going to walk you through the whole story. And sometimes it can be my daughter who's sixteen. Sometimes it can be my father. Sometimes it could be my wife, a friend. I somehow personalize it.

JOSH: Always in the key demo.

TOMMY: Well who knows what the key demo is anymore.

JOSH: Ha.

HRISHI: There's one shot of Josh Lyman when he's being pulled out of the ambulance. It's an overhead shot from above the ambulance and it's very specific. And of course you only use that setup for that one shot. But that little example indicated to me how meticulous and how time consuming it must have been to make this episode because you got to do a whole setup just for that one...

TOMMY: Right.

HRISHI: It's not even one second long in the episode.

TOMMY: I have to say, it's funny you would say that one shot. I stole that shot from an episode of *ER* that I did.

JOSH: That's funny.

TOMMY: I did an episode of *ER* where I shot and I thought, "It'll work perfect in this." And so it's actually stealing from myself at one point. But it was, you know, look, that show and so many of this season, you know, I realized looking at this that I didn't tell a linear story of a script of Aaron's for that whole season because I did "Noel." I did "Two Cathedrals." They're all playing with time.

HRISHI: Right.

TOMMY: And Aaron's so good about playing with time. But when you play with time, you have to be pretty specific about your transitions and helping the audience get a place of where they are each time. Just seeing the ambulance, we don't know who it is yet so rather than the traditional it just comes out, if we just immediately saw that it's Josh. And that was the reason for the shot was that it's hard to bring somebody out on a gurney and know who it is unless you're overhead. And even though we've already been told that Josh has been shot, Leo doesn't know and it was a way to remind the audience and keep them current with what the story is.

HRISHI: Yeah, there's something that you avoid in this, which you see so often in TV where there's a title card saying, you know, "Present Day," "Four Years Ago," or whatever, you know, to indicate to the audience where you are in time.

TOMMY: We did have some title cards. I mean...

HRISHI: But not every time, [cross talk] what I mean, when you're switching back and forth.

TOMMY: [cross talk] No, no, no, not at all. But we had one in particular and it was the most important one, which was when Josh goes under the first time, it goes to white. And the whole idea of going to white is it comes out of white at the end of two when he's giving the speech going down LAX. But it goes to white and then it has to go, Senator Hoynes, I think, his office--

HRISHI: Yeah.

TOMMY: --and the thing.

HRISHI: Yeah.

TOMMY: The night of the premiere, we were at Aaron's house for a premiere party. He always had these premiere parties where he had a bunch of screens. And we're watching it and I could

never watch it with groups of people. I could barely even watch it. So I was in his bedroom. You know, it's like, I think my wife was there and one other person and that's it. You know, and we're watching it. And that comes up and the title's not there.

JOSH: Uh.

TOMMY: Title is not there and I went, "What the [expletive deleted]?! What just happened?!" And come running down the stairs. And meanwhile, I think it was Mike Hissrich, who was the post-production supervisor and producer, and went, "I have no idea." You know, somehow it got lost in the chiron between the online version and what it was. And so the premiere night, it didn't run. That was the New York feed. It ran in the LA feed. It was just the weirdest thing. But it wasn't on. I just remember that and the chaos that ensued at that party. And everybody else was like, "They're fine. They got it." [HRISHI and JOSH laugh] And I was like, "No one's gonna know that we're in Hoynes' office and it's four years earlier."

HRISHI: But I was wondering if there were other things in the way that you were shooting that you did to differentiate. I've seen the episode so many times now I know where we are. I can't see it the way I first saw it but I was wondering if there were things you did to specify, you know, the pacing or something to make sure that you knew--

TOMMY: Well, it was an acting challenge and it was an incredible-- that cast is just so amazing and, you know, when we started *The West Wing*, we had a week of rehearsal. And we looked at *The War Room*, that documentary and lots of other documentaries and we talked. And we talked about the campaign and part of what it was all about was we always had lunch together. If you look at the pilot, when we shot the pilot, everybody was called everyday. Like, in the background, you'll see Allison going to her office in the background. They're all background artists. Everybody had to be there all the time because it was trying to say, "You've been in the trenches now for two years, intimately." It's sort of what you feel the second season of a show, you know? It's like those relationships are rather intense.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: To get them the pilot is difficult.

TOMMY: Yeah and we worked so hard to be, "You already know each other's habits." That's why they could talk. They could jump on top of each other. In "Shadow," in the flashbacks, especially in the ones where we're in the campaign office, I'd love that people would say, "God, what did you do prosthetically? They all felt younger. They felt--"

JOSH: I thought the same thing as I watched it.

TOMMY: --And it was only acting. There is nothing, nothing. There was no makeup. Nobody went, "Okay, pull their, you know, wear a string." Nothing! [HRISHI laughs] It was just, "Guys, remember, you don't know each other. You're awkward. You feel like you're freshman at school at this point." And if you use that as the acting challenge, it will feel youthful.

[*The West Wing* Episode 2.01 excerpt]

SAM: Hey, you look fit.

JOSH: You made partner?

SAM: Next month. Listen, I'm hungry. You want to go get a hotdog or something?

JOSH: It's 9:30 in the morning.

SAM: Yeah, they'll be fresh. Come on.

[End excerpt]

TOMMY: Bartlet's a different guy, you know, he's so mean to them. So that was just brilliant acting, you know? And a great care that that's what we were going for. So that was the easiest way for the actors to sort of jump into how do you distinguish one from the next, you know, contemporary time to past time. And even that scene between Richard and Allison when she falls in the water and, you know, if you like -- was that in one or two?

HRISHI: That's in part two. But that's ok. Yeah, let's talk about it.

TOMMY: That same thing that they kind of, you realize, "Oh, they have had this same relationship that they've had." And that was important to sort of remember, "You guys have had this kind of brother / sister ex-lovers, [JOSH laughs] whatever it might be relationship that's so intense and you even had it back then."

HRISHI: I had written down a note. "How did Rob Lowe get even more handsome for the flashbacks?"

JOSH: [laughs] He does look...

TOMMY: I used the handsome filter. [HRISHI and JOSH laugh]

HRISHI: That's a smart director film move.

JOSH: [cross talk] You never offered that to me when we worked together.

TOMMY: [cross talk] But it might have been the same thing that Rob was incorporating the sort of, even though he was the most youthful character within the ensemble and somewhat the most naïve, even then, you know, he was sort of how entitled am I in those meetings at the, you know...

HRISHI: Law office.

TOMMY: The firm that he worked in.

JOSH: There's a moment that I love because I think of this episode, it's a little bit like superhero origin stories and we get the backstory of each character. And there's a great moment where he's talking to Josh on the New York sidewalk, he turns and he bumps into an African American woman and then we're back in the present day, he's bumped into the African American woman who works in the ER.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I felt like his superpower is if he bumps into a black woman he can time travel. [All laugh] Like it's a real niche superpower.

TOMMY: [cross talk] You got it. You got it. You got it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That's amazing.

JOSH: [cross talk] It's actually a great visual moment that jars us back into the chaos of what's happening in the ER.

TOMMY: I had sort of known that would be the way to get back once I had cast that woman on the B-side of the cut.

JOSH: In the ER.

TOMMY: She's the first one who gets on the phone.

[*The West Wing* Episode 2.01 excerpt]

[*Dramatic music*]

NURSE: Station one.

[*Police Sirens*]

AGENT BUTTERFIELD: We're coming in.

NURSE: I copy that. Is this a drill?

AGENT BUTTERFIELD: No!

NURSE: The thing is, I have a few patients, not many but I do have a couple of kids with alcohol poisoning. We're expecting more in a bit so if this is a drill I'd just as soon...

[*More sirens arrive*]

[*Beeping*]

NURSE: Trauma One. Trauma One! Blue! Blue! Trauma One! Blue! Let's go!

[End excerpt]

TOMMY: And once we had cast her and I went, “Oh, that’s how I can get--“ because I was struggling with how do I get back in a really powerful way and it would be, you know?

HRISHI: Yeah.

TOMMY: And you know, that’s the thing you don’t know until you edit it. You go, “Oh, this is really going to not work.”

JOSH: Yeah, that worked perfectly I thought.

HRISHI: Sam Seaborn’s superhero name is Flashblack. [JOSH and TOMMY laugh]

JOSH: That’s good. That’s good.

HRISHI: And then a Flashblack.

JOSH: He’s stuck at a yachting race and he can’t [cross talk] jilt himself out of time.

HRISHI: [cross talk] He can’t time travel [laughs]. Let’s take a quick break to thank our sponsors.

[Break music]

[Commercial break]

[Return music]

JOSH: I have a left turn question even though we’re deeply into the episode. We’re at the beginning; season two is starting. Janelle Maloney as Donna is now in the credits. She’s a regular and no more Mandy.

TOMMY: Mmhm.

JOSH: Can you -- will you talk a little bit about how that happened? Would you rather not?

TOMMY: You know, look, here’s the deal. I think, without being too diplomatic about this, but I do think that Aaron’s language is not actor proof and I think there’s a very specific kind of actor that has the ability to be enormously condescending and you like them. It’s just an incredible quality that that language, that is without malice. It’s without malice. [HRISHI snickers]

JOSH: Josh Lyman can be incredibly arrogant.

TOMMY: Unbelievably so and yet somehow it’s charming and it’s funny and it’s sort of Aaron’s sense of humor and sort of repartee. It’s the way that therefore, you didn’t really hurt my feelings so I can keep going because we both were all sort of driven for the same thing. And it never

seemed like Moira, who's an incredible actress, really was able from our point of view, not necessarily hers or anyone else's, kind of find the rhythm that was necessary between her and Brad that would create the kind of relationship that so clearly got dominated by Donna and Josh. And I've listened to the podcast. It's right. Her job itself was kind of an interesting job who was basically saying, "what are the optics of everything?" And that's an interesting character to have in the show but the basis of where that was supposed to go was a relationship between her and Josh. And if that wasn't going to be there, it was tougher and tougher to figure out how to sort of make that character work. And since that was replaced by something else, it just seemed to be easier to not. There are a lot of mouths to feed and Aaron was unbelievably diligent in making sure, in every episode--

JOSH: The ball got passed around.

TOMMY: All the time. All the time and even those singular episodes that you seem to be fond of -- see I have listened to the podcast [JOSH laughs]

HRISHI: You really have, that's so awesome.

TOMMY: And we'll talk about some of that later.

JOSH: We'll do a "bone to pick" section.

TOMMY: But -- but those singular episodes, everyone always has something to do. And he agonized about it. He would never not -- I mean it was almost like in his brain he knew, "Wait a second, I don't think Donna's had anything to do in three scenes so I need to do that." And he would find a way to integrate every character into every story or give them their own story all the time.

HRISHI: Did you guys have a conversation about the idea of addressing her disappearance? You know, saying like, "Well, we need to come up with some kind of piece of plot to explain why she's no longer--"

TOMMY: Well, you might notice in the show sometimes people come and go and we don't really explain that. And I think, yes, we did have conversations and probably I thought a little bit more they should be addressed, but I think Aaron's feeling, and he probably was right about it, which was, "I can't keep addressing, you know, what happened last. You know, I'm going to tell this play and the play can exist by itself." And that was the thing. Even though this wasn't procedural television and every episode can be taken away, that there was a real story arc. He really wrote so each one was a play. Each one is a contained piece that could set up something else and does, you know, so that Lord Marbury, there's two parts or, you know, two-parters. But for the most part, he's so contained so he doesn't want to spend time on, "I need to now address what happened in the last episode that's not even there anymore."

JOSH: Yeah, we've remarked on that before that he's less beholden to the bible of a show than most other people are.

TOMMY: Absolutely. Absolutely.

HRISHI: I want to go back to that notion of the condescension in Aaron's writing and how hard that is for some actors. Do you think there's any part of it that's--

TOMMY: I'm not sure that's the right word.

HRISHI: Okay, it sounded right to me. I think we know what you mean. I was wondering if it's at all an issue with gender? Like, is it harder for a female actor to do that? You know, like, the idea of likeability is this loaded thing and I'm trying to remember if there are examples, whether in *Sports Night* or in *West Wing* or in other things where there is a female character who's able to pull off that kind of line--

TOMMY: Oh yeah, I think Felicity, Allison. You know, brilliantly, I mean Felicity in *Sports Night*--

HRISHI: Right.

[*Sports Night* Episode 1.04 excerpt]

DANA: Every time your life starts to spin out of control, you come after me. And you make me feel like you feel a certain way when you really don't. You did it in college. You did it in Dallas. You did it in LA. And you're doing it now. I don't think you're cute. I don't think you're funny. I don't think you're smart. And sometimes, I don't think you're very nice.

CASEY: You don't think I'm funny? [Laugh track]

DANA: I'm leaving now.

[End excerpt]

TOMMY: I mean she had the upper hand with Peter Krause. I mean she would constantly say something that would, you know, cut his knees out from under him. And yet, you knew she loved him. So, you know, look, I think a conversation about gender and Aaron's writing and, you know, is not an issue that I've ever had because, you know, had Felicity and Allison, which were as two of the most powerful female characters, dimensional... two of the most dimensional actors I've ever worked with, you know, that found everything possible in it. So look, I do think the sort of locker room, "I dismiss you." "It's ok. You dismiss me." It feels a little locker room-ish at times, you know, in a fun way, the best of your best buddy. It was not both for Aaron and I not unlike the language we would use with each other so that there's a male camaraderie that could be part of it. But I do think any good actor who embraces the language of it can do it. Not all good actors can do it though.

HRISHI: You need to find the right...

TOMMY: Yeah, and that's part of casting his stuff. I mean it's very unique. Brad Whitford and Josh Malina are built for Aaron Sorkin. Yeah, they are. They're just, they are. Other people --

Richard Schiff is not built for Aaron Sorkin but he's brilliant in doing it. He's brilliant in doing it. And that's part of, for me, casting Aaron's work, which is you have to be careful because everyone does need to play a different instrument. Casting Ainsley Hayes and casting a southern person, I mean, that was a struggle between Aaron and I 'cause can a southern person do his language, you know?

HRISHI: Ha. Can she ever.

JOSH: [cross talk] She's terrific. We're gonna have her in some...

TOMMY: [cross talk] And that's exactly right. It created such a different energy even though it's the same language.

HRISHI: Right.

TOMMY: It's the same enormous gift for words.

HRISHI: Yeah, I love the scene in this episode where Toby is sweet to Ginger. That felt like suddenly, I was like--

JOSH: He hugs her.

HRISHI: He hugs her. Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: It seemed like I was wondering if that was a difficult scene to get because it had to be so different for that character.

TOMMY: Well I think it was probably harder to get for Ginger, you know? I mean, a lot of these people, which we were incredible to have Margaret and to have Ginger and to have, you know, those supporting actors. It's like Preston Sturges movies, you know? Everybody's important. Everybody's got a great face but not everyone has to carry the same weight. They're supposed to not have to carry the weight of, "Oh my gosh, I'm frightened to death and I'm just an ordinary person who has a job that somebody just got shot at." And so for her to access that, and she did it brilliantly. I mean I think and--

JOSH: Kim Webster.

TOMMY: That's Kim Webster and that's why I think Richard was such an incredible actor for her work to with because he is incredibly generous when he believes somebody is really working hard and is there. He will give them everything that he has. And he did for her. And therefore I think that hug probably came out of she was struggling so hard to get there and to do all of that and he just wanted to comfort her. And honestly, it doesn't feel completely out of character to me.

HRISHI: Right.

TOMMY: I think that's part of what Toby's all about is that he can cut to the truth really quickly. But, you know, there are moments -- my favorite moment in "In Excelsis Deo," mentioned this many times is him saying he's an important man.

[*The West Wing* Episode 1.10 excerpt]

[Sad music]

TOBY: Your brother is entitled to a proper funeral with mourners and I think he deserves an honor guard and you don't... you don't know me but I'm an in... I'm an influential person. I've a very... powerful person and I would like to arrange it.

[End excerpt]

TOMMY: Out of anyone else, it's like, "It costs me everything to have to tell you this man who's homeless and is there that I'm important. That's not something I do. But somehow, I need to do that for you." And it was so generous and loving and it was so humble saying something so unhumble. It was an amazing piece of acting.

JOSH: A Toby Ziegler hug means something.

TOMMY & HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: They're not given out willy-nilly.

HRISHI: [laughs] I also love that Sam and Josh's dynamic has changed in this two-parter.

TOMMY: Right.

HRISHI: I mean they've had great camaraderie in the first season but here it's established that they're, basically, they're best friends. They almost have like a mini Leo/Jed kind of relationship, something between them that's a new wrinkle that comes up in this.

TOMMY: Right. And I think a wrinkle that probably came up much like, you know, my theory of doing pilots is for actors is to come up with any back-story you want. Any back-story you want to make the forty-five minute play work but just know it might change. Just use what you have to use to make the scene work. In other words, Jed Bartlet didn't use -- I think I have a, you know, MS. "I'm going to use that as my background."

JOSH: Right.

TOMMY: Have no idea. And truthfully, don't share it with Aaron or any other show that I've done since. Don't share it with the writer because it puts the writer in a situation that now I've defined your back-story. So when I get to a moment, if it would be the back-story was, "I never met Sam

Seaborn. I was jealous of how handsome he was and that's what I'm using and I told Aaron this." Then Aaron wouldn't been able to come up with, "You know what I need? I need that you two guys knew each for a really long time."

JOSH: You go way back.

TOMMY: "And maybe you went to college together or maybe you were, you know, much like Richard and Brad were in the past in their own lives." But that's what I need for this so it worked perfect.

HRISHI: Right.

TOMMY: And it didn't have to be operating for the twenty-two episodes before because you didn't need to be playing that--

HRISHI: yeah.

TOMMY: --You know, to sort of trust that, "Oh, you've known each other for a long time." it wasn't a hiccup. It was just a new piece of information but we hadn't talked about it before that.

HRISHI: Your future proofing for stories that might come later.

TOMMY: Right.

HRISHI: How long did it actually take -- you said you shot it like a movie--

TOMMY: It's always longer if I'm shooting than it should be, but --

JOSH: Well a normal *West Wing* shot in what?

TOMMY: A normal episode was eight or nine days. So I would say, I don't remember, but I would say it was maybe eighteen to twenty days.

HRISHI: I mean even in just the first half of this two-parter, you've got so many things that are clearly on location but even things that might be on sets, completely different set ups like Hoynes' office, like the emergency room.

TOMMY: Right, so Hoynes' office was just a redress of one of our hallways. We just repainted that hallway. So it was just a different color. It's the same arches. It's a different, you know, all the different artwork was there. The *ER* set, you know, John, we went over to the *ER* set and changed part of that.

JOSH: That makes sense.

HRISHI: Really?

TOMMY: John Well's office is Gage. You know, those were the--

JOSH: Oh, the law offices.

TOMMY: Yeah, the law offices. The, you know, Vermont or--

HRISHI: New Hampshire.

TOMMY: New Hampshire is *The Gilmore Girls* set.

HRISHI: It is!

JOSH: Oh, you thought so?

HRISHI: I thought -- I was like --

JOSH: He's a big *Gilmore Girls* fan. [HRISHI laughs]

TOMMY: It was that *Gilmore Girls*' street.

HRISHI: It's Stars Hollow? That's awesome.

TOMMY: By the way, it bothered me endlessly because it didn't feel completely -- I wanted to go, "Can we just shoot it when we're in Washington in some little town somewhere, you know--

HRISHI: Right, go to Maryland.

TOMMY: --which is what we did later in the third season, "Manchester," when we shot in Pennsylvania somewhere. And so it still felt a little bit like a back lot to me that you caught it. That one even more that it was a back lot.

HRISHI : I, I did. Heh.

TOMMY: Little bit of frustration.

[HRISHI laughs]

TOMMY: And then there were, you know, the rest were on location that we would find in LA.

HRISHI: Yeah.

TOMMY: But we used everything but the oink at Warner Bros. You know, it was like we dissected the pig.

[HRISHI laughs]

JOSH: That's a good line. I thought it was a great little Aaron touch to have Hoynes hosting the USC women's volleyball team when he finds out that the president's--

TOMMY: When they take him away.

JOSH: --been shot. So there he goes from just a regular, he's been sort of shunted aside and he's doing the most ridiculous thing, you know, hosting a volleyball team to the most important moment a vice president might ever have, which is finding out he might be--

HRISHI: Declaring war.

JOSH: --having to step in as president and there are military things pressing. So that was a just a great choice to contrast it.

TOMMY: There's no wasted real estate.

JOSH: Right.

TOMMY: There is no wasted real estate with him. I mean that's exactly the point that this is your job. Your job is to host the USC volleyball team. That's it. And then, the next time we see him, he's in the Sit Room and he has to walk by that chair. It's a little bit more of a moment that we ended up taking out where, you know, there's the chair that Bartlet sits in. Does he sit in that chair now? Does he go around and leave that--

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Right. They leave that chair open.

TOMMY: There's a little bit of a moment. I had kind of protracted that moment and it didn't quite work. But it was, you know, that's the next moment you see him. Holy [expletive deleted], you're making the decision and has to rely on Leo.

JOSH: Yeah, and you have a great shot of all eyes on Hoynes--

TOMMY: Yeah.

JOSH: --as after those who are going to brief have briefed and, ok, sir, you know, what's it going to be?

HRISHI: What's your answer, yeah.

JOSH: There's a great just moment and then he defers.

TOMMY: There's a moment that again, you know, you sort of remember, I'm sure, for you, too, must be, Josh, that, you know, you'll look at scenes that you did and you'll remember more the incident of the day.

JOSH: Sure.

TOMMY: There's a shot where everybody's looking at Hoynes and it comes down--

TOMMY & HRISHI: and the last guy--

TOMMY: --does not look.

HRISHI: Right.

TOMMY: We did that shot five times to the point where I'd go, "And look." [HRISHI laughs] And he didn't look. And I went--

JOSH: Dude.

TOMMY: It's ok, now watching it this time; I was glad that he didn't look. It actually made it not so choreographed.

JOSH: Right, right.

TOMMY: And it was better.

JOSH: It seemed like more of a real moment.

TOMMY: It was absolutely.

JOSH: It's a very real moment.

TOMMY: it was an overthought moment but I remember that I couldn't get him to -- and then I remember turning to, I think, Andrew Bernstein and going, "Does he have a neck problem? [JOSH and HRISHI laugh] Can he [expletive deleted] not turn his head?"

JOSH: Can we put him in a swivel chair?

TOMMY: And yet, maybe he knew better than me. "Tommy, in ten years, when you see this cut, you're going to be happy I didn't look left."

JOSH: That's a great little anecdote.

HRISHI: When you said, "Holy [expletive deleted]," earlier, it made me think about the nurse again. The nurse says, "Holy [expletive deleted]," when she sees the motorcade pull up.

TOMMY: Right.

HRISHI: You don't hear it but she clearly says it.

JOSH: Yeah, you can see her mouth it anyway.

TOMMY: Right.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Did you have to slide that past the network or anything like that? TOMMY: No, we just took out the--

JOSH: The audio.

TOMMY: You know, I think Marley says, “[expletive deleted] you,” in sign one time, too. You know, occasionally the language barrier of doing network television was frustrating, you know, but not that much. You know, I mean Aaron occasionally realized, “Boy, the word [expletive deleted] can really work here with the president.” You know and [expletive deleted], you know, just judiciously it could have been incredibly powerful tool that we couldn’t use. For me, what was frustrating at that moment in network television was the idea of commercial breaks. I’ll give you an example. *The Sopranos* episode where -- it’s a great episode -- where you know, she was raped. And at the very end of the episode, it’s like, you sure you don’t have anything to tell me? And you’re just waiting for her to tell Tony Soprano that she was raped so he could take care of it. And she says, “No,” bam, to black, and then this piece of music with the credits. And it allowed them to just sort of let the show settle and be there. That’s the part that was always frustrating, which is why I still, I’ve never seen, other than the premiere episodes, never seen a *West Wing* episode on television when it was supposed to be on television. I couldn’t watch it. I could not watch it because I had been working in an editing room with it going to black and you kind of have a minute and then you go on.

JOSH: Right.

TOMMY: And you mix it that way and you do everything that way. That’s the way you sort of watch the show. Now I made endings to sort of be a little bit protracted so that you had a moment, two seconds of detoxing but I’m not sure I’ve seen almost any episode I’ve ever directed.

JOSH: This is why we urge people to turn off the auto play feature on Netflix because it goes right--

TOMMY: Right to the next one.

JOSH: --[mimics closing theme music]

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah, can we talk about that for a second--

JOSH: [cross talk] it’s really bad.

TOMMY: [cross talk] Yeah, I don't know. I don't know. It's a mistake. Go on to the next one. I don't [laughs] honestly, I didn't -- I had forgotten about it. And it was again, I had already left the mix room by that point, you know?

[HRISHI laughs]

TOMMY: Like, who gives a sh--

HRISHI: You weren't thinking about that part.

TOMMY: That was after the commercial--

HRISHI: That's after the commercial--

TOMMY: And again, because there was a commercial break--

HRISHI: Right.

TOMMY: Because there was a commercial break, it didn't really matter. I mean you would just -- that music was pale compared to the, you know, Coca Cola--

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Right.

TOMMY: --or whatever might have been before that. So I honestly, now when I go, "What was I thinking? Why did I let that be the music for this all the time." And I think I didn't care. I didn't even think about it. I didn't even think, "Okay, uh, the episode's over with." And I never saw it.

HRISHI: Right, and there's ninety seconds between the flentl and the fade to black before we get to the--

TOMMY: Commercials, three thirty second commercials and then you come into whatever that-- is it a Snuffy piece?

HRISHI: It is. Yeah, it's from the pilot.

TOMMY: I'm telling you, it's one of those, "I've just blanked the whole thing out." It's just like-

[HRISHI and JOSH laugh]

HRISHI: But this is also the origin story of the flentl. You realize that the reason why the -- the flentl is term that Josh has come up with for the audio--

TOMMY: Frontal?

HRISHI: Flentl.

JOSH: Quick side anecdote, this made me think of. My mother was in college before she realized that there was no word, “defugulty,” because my grandfather, may he rest in peace, used to say that instead of “difficulty.” And so, one point--

TOMMY: She thought it was a real word?

HRISHI: “Defugulty!” And a friend said, “What in God’s name are you talking about?” She said, “Defugulty! I’m having a hard time.” The friend was like, “You mean, ‘difficulty?’” [TOMMY laughs] She knew that word as well, she just thought--

TOMMY: There were two for that.

JOSH: Anyway...

HRISHI: [laughs] Flentl is Josh’s term for the audio -- the post-lap audio after the fade to black and you go to the credits, the executive producer credits--

TOMMY: Right.

HRISHI: --When we’re still hearing audio from the scene.

TOMMY: Oh ok.

JOSH: Lord John Marbury is lighting a cigarette.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: They’re powerful. I like them.

TOMMY: I can tell you the best one but hasn’t been on yet.

JOSH: Let’s hear it.

TOMMY: The best one is “Noel.”

HRISHI: Okay, we’ll look forward to that one.

TOMMY: Yeah.

HRISHI: But now we realize that that was a directorial choice in order to avoid the jarring transition to commercials. That was part of you -- that protraction.

TOMMY: Yeah, that was exactly right. That was exactly right.

JOSH: Yeah, we’re unpacking the flentl.

HRISHI & TOMMY: Yeah.

TOMMY: And we would call it flentl. I mean that's a --[HRISHI and JOSH laugh] that's a -- did you not know that?

HRISHI: That's an industry term, right? [Laughs]

JOSH: How dare you claim to have coined that term.

TOMMY: I hear in the music business, you don't know [HRISHI and JOSH laugh] but this is the film business.

HRISHI: Our hope is to institutionalize that so that becomes--

TOMMY: The flentl.

HRISHI: Yeah, now people start to refer to--

JOSH: We're gonna merchandize the [expletive deleted] out of that word. [HRISHI laughs]

TOMMY: I can't wait for my flentl T-shirt. [HRISHI and JOSH laugh]

JOSH: I have a pin for you. I also found a little, I thought, knowing that Lin Miranda is a huge *West Wing* fan, I think there's a little scene that foreshadows a couplet or a line between Burr and Hamilton. Hoynes being Burr, Lyman being Hamilton and Josh is complaining and saying:

[*The West Wing* Episode 2.01 excerpt]

JOSH: I don't know what we're for. I don't know what we're against.

[End excerpt]

JOSH: There's a great line in *Hamilton* where Burr advises Hamilton, "Don't let 'em know what you're against of what you're for."

[*Hamilton: An American Musical* song "Aaron Burr, Sir" excerpt]

BURR: [sung] Don't let them know what you're against or what you're for.

[End excerpt]

JOSH: I think there's a tie between those two scenes.

TOMMY: I didn't know he was a huge fan after I spent like, six weeks trying to get a ticket and finally got a ticket [JOSH and HRISHI laugh] and went to go see it and I thought, "I could have just called him. Damn."

JOSH: "Why didn't I..." -- Yeah, you could have.

TOMMY: This was early on but...

JOSH: That's funny.

TOMMY: Pretty flattering that he is in fact such a big fan.

JOSH: Right.

TOMMY: I wanted to get in touch with Snuffy for that final curtain call. Did you see the final curtain call?

JOSH: That was fantastic.

HRISHI: Yes, yeah.

TOMMY: Which was the theme.

JOSH: Lin's last...

HRISHI: Yeah.

TOMMY: And it was Snuffy's music and I was just so happy for Snuf.

HRISHI: Yeah, it was really sweet.

JOSH: That was beautiful.

HRISHI: I want to end a little bit by going back to the beginning here about you as Leo. So I feel like in this episode, Leo's really his whole thing is--

TOMMY: You're creating this podcast like an Aaron Sorkin script.

[HRISHI laughs]

TOMMY: We're going to come back and...

JOSH: He's good, that Hrishi.

HRISHI: Well, now I'm flattered.

TOMMY: Very good.

[JOSH and HRISHI laugh]

HRISHI: Leo--

JOSH: He just meant, "last minute."

HRISHI: I got it, right. [Laughs]

JOSH: We do it at the last second. [TOMMY laughs]

HRISHI: Leo's spent this episode sort of establishing that he likes to bet on underdogs or he's willing to bet on underdogs, both with Jed Bartlet and then also with Toby and he fires all these guys and he keeps the guy who's never won an election for a candidate. And did it feel like that for you at all with this knowing that *The West Wing* had been shelved, that there was some resistance because of Monica Lewinsky and all that stuff? Did you feel like you had to champion the show and sort of bring in -- we talk a lot about the casting of the guest actors and, you know, that there's no stunt casting. You have--

JOSH: Incredible characters actors throughout--

TOMMY: Yeah.

JOSH: --no matter how small the role is. There's Grace Zabriskie--

TOMMY: Jane Lynch.

JOSH: [cross talk] Jane Lynch, that's right, I read that. "Shadow."

HRISHI: Yes, exactly, yeah, as a reporter. All that feels very Leo-like as well to me that idea of like, willingness to -- I don't care what the name is, we're just going to go with the best person for the job.

TOMMY: Are you asking me if that's the way I feel?

HRISHI: Yeah, does that feel -- does that relate to you?

TOMMY: Here's the deal. I didn't feel like I had to champion *The West Wing*, that part of it. But I have an incredible connection to underdogs. I feel blessed myself. I look at my own life and I go, "How the hell did all of this happen?" You know, I'm playing with that house money at this point. And even in Aaron's writing, it's like, Janelle Maloney, a character in *Sports Night*, the reason that I remembered that -- the reason that I cried in an audition, the only time I've ever cried in an audition is that she would have to step up and say, "Hey, you know what? This tie, it wouldn't have hurt you so much to say Maureen's name." And I thought that was so beautiful and I think the moment, I don't know if it's one or two where we first meet--

HRISHI: Donna.

TOMMY: Janelle, Donna. I think it's at two, right? Or is it--

HRISHI: Yeah. Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah.

TOMMY: In two but it's like, why not? Why can't you find yourself here? Why not? And when Aaron writes that, I have an incredible connection to it. It just feels -- and that's the way I feel about actors in general. I mean it is, as a profession, it's so [expletive deleted] hard. You know, it is -- you're so vulnerable. You're so exposed. Most of your acting comes from trying to get a job, you know? It's going to auditions. It's going to another audition. Only one person is going to get it. You're not going to get it. So supporting that, too is why when there's misbehavior, I have a very short fuse because I feel like we're all so lucky to get to do this. So I do have a connection, which is where I thought you were going and I thought, "It's quite astute," but then you [expletive deleted] up.

JOSH: You blew it.

[HRISHI laughs]

TOMMY: No, so and when, in the material, the more that I can bring that stuff out of the material, even people who are as powerful as Aaron's characters are, they're very human and they're very vulnerable themselves. And when their vulnerability gets exposed, that's the part of all of us that's the underdog, the minute we expose ourselves. And I have a real strong connection to that.

JOSH: Speaking of Janelle, she has an exquisite piece of acting in this episode where she has to come into the emergency room, concerned, find out the president is fine, awash in relief, then she finds out that Josh has been shot and she acts the hell out of that scene.

[*The West Wing* Episode 2.01 excerpt]

CJ: The president's going to fine.

DONNA: Oh, thank God. Oh thank God -- that's the best news I've ever heard. I got here as fast as I could. I had a hard time getting in. I had to, I had to find an agent who knew me and I was shaking... I was just... I didn't know anything...

TOBY: Donna. Josh was hit.

DONNA: Hit with what?

TOBY: He was shot -- in the chest.

CJ: He's in surgery right now.

DONNA: I don't understand. I don't understand. Is... Is it serious?

[End excerpt]

TOMMY: Once again, I will tell you something about that. Directorially, those are two different takes.

JOSH: Ah, this kind of thing is interesting.

TOMMY: That there -- I mean, not that Janelle couldn't have but it was, one was a take of Janelle just come in here, covered, and try to keep cover. Just try to keep the cover so that first half of that scene. The other is, you're walking through the door frightened to death that something else happened and you don't know it. That's not the first half of the scene. That's the second half of the scene.

HRISHI: Right.

TOMMY: So it's two different objectives. Play two different objectives in there. And after a while, so you don't have to go from zero to a hundred even though she was fully capable of it. And she was able to do it. But editorially, I ended up using two different takes.

JOSH: Though that's fascinating. I always say, you know, the performance isn't the actors. The actor, the editor, the director, I mean, it's a collaboration among a variety of people and that's a perfect example.

TOMMY: Yeah, I mean that's exactly that. She was capable of doing both quite brilliantly and even combining them but it was just, I realized, to get to the end of that where she's really devastated, and walking through the door with no knowledge of it whatsoever, is a really tough thing. So try one where you somewhere in the recesses of your brain, I think something happened to my child. They're not saying it, but I think something has happened to my child that's that. And if you come in that loaded, by the time the shoe falls, you're right there with it. Do you know, so...

JOSH: You asked me a while back what makes a great director? That.

HRISHI: There it is. Thanks so much for joining us.

JOSH: It's so much fun. Wait -- do you want to do a bone to pick?

TOMMY: A tiny bone to pick.

JOSH: A bone-let. Let's pick a bone-let.

TOMMY: Yeah, this is not a bone to pick but it's the response -- I think I heard it a couple times -- about the music and about, "I don't think we needed music in that scene." Of which, I don't disagree in hindsight, but I think what, for me at least, for that first season of *West Wing*, there was -- it's hard to watch that show without the context of where we were as a nation and how ambitious we were trying to be by doing a sort of Frank Capra show about government at that moment in time, which is not, I mean it's much worse today. But it was a similar sort of feel, a kind of incredible distrust of government -- the Clinton fatigue. And our job was to send these valentines to public service. So in the process of that, I felt like Snuffy's music, at times, was necessary to keep reminding the audience and probably erred on the side of scoring a little

more than if you look in the third and the fourth season. It's not. And you also look at the level of orchestration. The music became much simpler and easier because I didn't think we needed to now let you know this is the most important building in the world with a group of people who are trying to make the world a better place. And so that plaintive oboe was kind of--

JOSH: I knew that was sticking in your craw.

TOMMY: No, but I understand it. But I think in the context, if I look back on it, it's not one of those things that I go, sometimes makes me cringe a little that, "God we didn't need score there." But when I think about that moment, I'm so glad we put score there because I think it brought a lot more people into the show. Look, I think our distrust of government, which has reached an apex, which is a whole different podcast right now, came from Reagan saying, you know--

[Excerpt from President Ronald Reagan's First Inaugural Address, January 20, 1981]

PRESIDENT REAGAN: Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem.

[End excerpt]

TOMMY: And from that point on, we started to think that somehow, the words "government" and "politician" was a bad thing, you know, where that wasn't the premise of the show. So there was a little bit, you know, crane moves and there's quite a bit of a directorial hand that probably pushed things a little bit more in that first season than was necessary. But it's in the context, so...

JOSH: Fair enough. Bone well picked.

TOMMY: And we're also, by the way, with cable television and with the absence of music, you know, that there's so much less music in some really interesting shows and it's powerful. It's really powerful, especially cable shows. So we're also--

JOSH: Been conditioned. I think that's true.

TOMMY: --Gotten a little bit conditioned than we were in 1999 to how music is used in storytelling.

HRISHI: Yeah.

TOMMY: That's it. No more bones.

JOSH: Thank you so much.

HRISHI: This is part one of our own two-part episode so just tune in to the next one.

JOSH: We're going to have a far less interesting interview with Bradley Whitford. [TOMMY laughs]

HRISHI: If you have any questions for us, you can leave a comment on our website, <http://thewestwingweekly.com> or on our Facebook page, [Facebook.com/thewestwingweekly](https://www.facebook.com/thewestwingweekly). You can also reach us on Twitter.

JOSH: I'm @JoshMalina . Hrishi's is @HrishiHirway. Tommy, are you on twitter?

TOMMY: I am not, but I'm a voyeur. But I'll go and I'll look at your Twitter feed of anyone who mentions.

JOSH: You should look at thewestwingweekly.com where people will weigh in on that amazing talk you just had with us.

HRISHI: Yeah, and if you want to respond to any comments, you can respond on our website.

JOSH: And whereas, we're going to give you a pin, Tommy, others listening can order one--

HRISHI: --At thewestwingweekly.com/pin Josh and I both tweet from @WestWingWeekly and-

JOSH: --Go download the second part right now.

HRISHI: Ok

JOSH: Ok.

TOMMY: What's next?

[Outro music]