

The West Wing Weekly
2.11: The Leadership Breakfast

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And my name's Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Today on the show we're talking about Season Two, Episode Eleven. It's called "The Leadership Breakfast".

JOSH: The story was by Paul Redford, this one was written by Aaron Sorkin [laughter] I can't think of another joke to make about the fact that he writes them all [laughter] and it was directed by Scott Winant. A very good director, I know came up, in early *Thirtysomething*, he directed and produced a lot of early *Thirtysomethings*.

HRISHI: He's not the first *Thirtysomething* director to come through.

JOSH: That's true, we've had Ken Olin.

HRISHI: Mm-hmmm. Here's a synopsis of the episode from *TV Guide*:

"With Congress reconvening, the White House is planning a leadership breakfast 'to encourage bipartisan co-operation.' But first, Toby must meet with Ann Stark, the senate majority leader's new chief of staff to go over details, and there are plenty of devils in those details. Ann's boss, it appears, has presidential ambitions. 'They're coming after us,' Toby tells Leo. Meanwhile, Sam wants to move the press corps to new quarters across the street, and Leo, Sam, and Donna embarrass themselves in front of an influential columnist."

JOSH: There it is. What did you think of this episode?

HRISHI: I really liked it. I think it's a great one. What did you think?

JOSH: I totally agree. I just thought it was a all-around super episode.

HRISHI: The performances were good, the writing was good, it's a cool show.

JOSH: Scott Winant did a good job directing.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm. Aaron Sorkin holding his own.

JOSH: Yes, he's often, really always, good.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: What's next?

[Outro Music]

JOSH: Hrishi, are you still there?

HRISHI: I'm still here.

JOSH: Good, ok. People, that of course was, we just wanted to do a version of the podcast for Gail, and for [pause/laughter] others who don't like or nit-picking and I just thought for the other, probably half of the listenership, that wants to dig a little deeper, we'll continue now.

HRISHI: This is a bonus edition.

JOSH: Yeah, this is kind of like extras on a DVD.

HRISHI: You know we just talked to Bradley Whitford and Brad won an Emmy for *Noel*. But he won against his fellow cast-mates, Richard Schiff and John Spencer, who were also nominated for Best Supporting Actor and they were both nominated based on this episode.

JOSH: Get out of here!

HRISHI: Mm-hmm.

JOSH: Why? [laughter] I mean they were both great, they're both always great and they were great in this episode, but this episode doesn't leap out to me as an Emmy submission episode. Does it to you?

HRISHI: Not for Leo, Leo doesn't really do that much in this one I think. Toby has a nice arc.

JOSH: His arc just is from wrong to wrong.

HRISHI: Yeah. [laughter] But, you know, he has some stuff to do. It's no *In Excelsis Deo*.

JOSH: No, but I'm trying to think now...

HRISHI: It's not even *In Ex-chell-sis Deo*.

JOSH: That's so true. It's not even [sung] *Day-o! Day-ay-ay-o!* (*Harry Belafonte Banana Boat Song played in background*). We have to start the podcast for real now. Something happened, we derailed ourselves with our fake beginning.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: Aren't there great Leo and Toby episodes from this season already? I can't remember any other episodes from this season. [Hrishi laughs] This is where you have an advantage on me.

HRISHI: I mean it is really like, 'you can pick any.' You know what you're getting with *The West Wing*. These guys are all good.

JOSH: That is also true. I mean, I think when you get nominated, again I wouldn't know. [Hrishi laughs] But I think when you get nominated for an Emmy, that really you're being acknowledged for the whole season, and they're all always great. But I would think if you were trying to pick your best example for submission, I don't know why it would be this episode. But it's interesting.

HRISHI: I'm going to nominate you for Best West Wing Weekly Co-host.

JOSH: Aww, I was going to nominate you! This is like *The gift of the Magi* [Hrishi laughs].

HRISHI: Yeah, the only problem is that in order to nominate you for Best Co-host, I had to sell the podcast.

JOSH: Ohhh, that's right, and I did the same thing, so now the podcast has no hosts.

HRISHI: Exactly. But we both got each other the same present.

JOSH: And, the listenership rejoiced.

HRISHI: [laughs] What is happening?

JOSH: Let me ask you this. There probably are podcast awards, and if there aren't, why don't we invent them and somehow make money from that.

HRISHI: There are podcast awards, I've won some.

JOSH: You did? Oh tell me about it! I'm most comfortable working with people who are lauded and awarded for their work while I sit in the shadows. So, I'm delighted to hear that even here it's the case.

HRISHI: Yeah, so there are podcast awards that you've never heard of, that I've won.

JOSH: Are they called the Pod-ies?

HRISHI: Uh no, I mean there are [pause] I don't know.

JOSH: Yes, you do. What are they called, and what have you won? and I'm looking at your studio and you have lots of nice stuff, where are the awards?

HRISHI: Eh, I haven't yet moved them over in here. When we get a Peabody, then I'll be excited.

JOSH: Mr Peabody?

HRISHI: Mm-hmm, when somebody gives us, a dog.

JOSH: Don't send us dogs [Hrishi laughs] it's a joke. We're here to still talk about *The West Wing*, right?

HRISHI: Yes, yes, let's start from the beginning. At the beginning of this episode in our cold open, emphasis on cold, Sam and Josh are in buddy-buddy mode, in a way that I feel like we haven't really seen since the flashback in *In the Shadow of Two Gunmen*, when they go and get a hot dog.

JOSH: Yes, early Josh and Sam that's true and I wrote down that they 'looked cute in their winter togs' [Hrishi laughs], didn't they?

HRISHI: They did look cute. I mean the whole thing was cute.

JOSH: Rob Lowe has a good run of cuteness in this episode.

HRISHI: Oh man.

JOSH: I don't want to get you started on his handsomeness.

HRISHI: I know.

JOSH: Let's just talk about his cuteness.

HRISHI: His cuteness. For sure.

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

JOSH: You know what we could use?

SAM: Newspaper?

JOSH: See, this is what I'm talking about, this is teamwork.

SAM: It really is.

[end audio]

JOSH: Yeah, it's another one of those, he has, we need a name for it, there's a thing that Sam does. There's one in *Celestial Navigation*, where he and Toby are driving around and he's so excited when he finally finds the police station. It's that same moment of just pure, genuine, Sam Seaborn delight.

HRISHI: Yeah, I think we can call it, he "Chris Traegers".

JOSH: Nice, so are there Traeger warnings?

HRISHI: Ohhh, very good.

JOSH: Well [laughter], good enough.

HRISHI: Good enough for a nomination. I'm going to, just, stop talking.

JOSH: Why won't you tell me what they're called? What are they called?

HRISHI: It was, uh, the last one that, the most recent thing that I won, it was the Academy of Podcasters.

JOSH: How can, I can't believe you've won stuff and you can't remember what it's called. That tells me you've won too much stuff.

HRISHI: [laughs] It was really, it was the Academy of Podcasters

JOSH: And that was for *Song Exploder*?

HRISHI: Yeah, it won Best Music Show.

JOSH: What if you win an award for this show, and I don't? [Hrishi laughs] And I become just [expletive deleted] bitter and awful, and I won't admit what it is. But I just start turning on you and I'm horribly cruel.

HRISHI: Throughout this whole episode, as I was writing my notes, I kept writing, I wrote it once and then kept writing it over and over again. I kept writing 'Trump-ai-yi-yi.'

JOSH: I did basically the same thing, where, I couldn't tease out...I didn't write ai-yi-yi, but I just wrote 'Trump' down a lot, so clearly, things are resonating. But then I couldn't even think of a second word to add. Which seems that my brain short-circuits as soon as I think of anything to do with the ridiculous circus [laughter] that the pre-Trump administration already is.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: It's like I can't even form thoughts, so lots of little things that go 'ding' during this episode as I watch. And I'm like "argh, what is there even to say about it."

HRISHI: This is an episode where the dissonance between what's on the show, and what we're experiencing in the real world seems like a huge gulf. The whole conflict of the episode hinges on a conflict between what Toby says in the Press about the speaker.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: and uh, it's so damn quaint now. Like, in this context, the whole idea of like, that they're up in arms about the fact that Toby said that they were going to attach an amendment on the wage hike.

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

MALE REPORTER: Congressman, I'm quoting a senior White House aide who says they have the votes. The aide said that unless they get a straight up-or-down vote from the leader, and this is the quote, 'We're gonna attach it as an amendment to everything that moves.'

[[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: This is what the controversy was? This is what the scandal was?

JOSH: I thought the same thing too. I'm like, you guys are adorable thinking this would be a big deal. Like, whoa, if you could transport to 2016 and see what people are saying about each other and what politicians tweet about each other. I mean, it's so beyond the pale that, yeah, this is like a little nothing.

HRISHI: And the things that really ought to be scandals that get, you know, swept under the rug, it's crazy. Like there's a, sense of, politesse in the whole thing that is just completely foreign now.

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

CJ: Traditionally, these kinds of things are done in front of the White House.

ANN: Traditionally, the person in my job has cared what's traditional.

[[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: And the idea that she's bucking tradition and causing all this, like, mayhem by insisting the briefing happens on the Hill instead of at the White House. It's just baffling now.

JOSH: This little argument about optics.

HRISHI: Yeah, so this is one where it's not even just a little detail of like, oh this is a little relic from yesteryear. The whole conflict of this episode now feels outdated.

JOSH: I agree. It felt like small stakes.

HRISHI: Yeah. And, in summary, Trump-ai-yi-yi.

JOSH: Trump-ai-yi-yi. Yeah, I ended up enjoying this episode mainly for its funny moments and light-hearted banter and the underpants story [laughter]...that ongoing Karen Cahill thing I thought was funny and clever. It was almost like a little *Curb Your Enthusiasm* episode, where one thing leads to another, leads to another, leads to a ridiculous denouement. I thought it was funny and well done, but you're right. The higher stakes aspect of it felt depressingly low stakes.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I think that's not a fault of anybody involved in *The West Wing*, but rather the fault of the current political climate and situation.

HRISHI: The decline of western civilization.

JOSH: Yes. That.

HRISHI: That Karen Cahill subplot, Karen Cahill is supposed to be Maureen Dowd.

JOSH: I wrote down, "Karen Cahill = ? Maureen Dowd." So I guess I figured it out. I'm very clever that way. [Hrishi laughs] Well, Aaron Sorkin would, had a relationship of some kind or another with Maureen Dowd.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm. But she is, apparently, very scary to some people in politics, or at least she was back in these milder days.

JOSH: Ha. Yeah, well, I mean she's certainly sharp of pen and very smart, and my wife and I got to spend a little time with her in Jamaica at Dule Hill's wedding.

HRISHI: Geez, you're a movie star. Look at this. Sometimes. Yeah. I cannot [crosstalk].

JOSH: [crosstalk] Look at me and my glamorous. I've never been nominated for a Flodie, Plo-die, Academy of Thing.

HRISHI: I'll trade you my Academy of Podcasters Award for.

JOSH: Aaron Sorkin and Maureen Dowd?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah. All I can say is, she is very, very smart and a delightful person. But I suppose if you're among a group of people about whom she writes, it might be more intimidating to hang out with her.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah.

JOSH: There was no chance I was going to show up in an op-ed piece.

HRISHI: Let's play the story that we were saving from Emily Procter about a possible inspiration for the Karen Cahill subplot, or at least part of it.

EMILY: It's so embarrassing. So, what happened was, Tommy says to me one day, "Would you like to come have lunch in the Warner Bros. executive dining room and discuss your future?" And I thought, well, gosh. Lunch, dining room, and future? That's not even a question, that's just a when and where do I show up. So, I got there first and I remember, that was you know in that time, like jeans, you just always kind of always wore dark jeans and some sort of a top. So I walked into this place, and I remember I had you know, laundromat, washed everything, one big bundle, pulled my jeans out, put them on. I had on some sort of a shirt, and I had this little, tiny grey bag with some sparkles on it and I thought, well I'm going to take this because it seems like serious and fun. [deep breath] But I walked in, I sat down, and the waiter comes over and he was like, "Can I get you anything?" And I was like, "No, thank you. I'm fine." And he said, "You're meeting someone?" And I said, "Yes, sir, I'm meeting somebody, yes." And he walked away, and it was very, you know, heavy-handed, and Tommy comes up and he sits down. The waiter comes to me and he's like, "Have you had a chance to look at the menu?" And it went on enough that he left one time and I turned to Tommy and was like, "What is going on with this guy? He's like being so weird to me." And then he said to me, he came back and he said, "Do you have everything?" I said, "What do you mean do I have everything?" And he said, "Could you, perhaps, have lost something?" And I said, "Oh, something from my bag?" And he said, "Yes," and I said,

“Oh my gosh, I don’t know.” So, it’s about yea-big, and I look in there, and I’m like, I’ve got my money, my key, and my lipstick, and my license...and I’m like, “No, I don’t have anything.” And he said, “You didn’t lose anything personal?”

HRISHI: Oh my God.

JOSH: Oh dear.

EMILY: And I said, “You’re being very [crosstalk] cryptic. [laughter] And I said, “I have to ask you, you mean like some underwear or something?” And he goes, “Yes.”

HRISHI: [crosstalk] I know where it’s going! Oh my God.

JOSH: Oh.

EMILY: And he says, “Look in my pocket.” And [crosstalk] he’s wearing a white waiter’s jacket, and I pulled back his pocket and I was like, “Oh my God, my underwear is in here.” [laughter]

JOSH: [crosstalk] Look in my pocket.

EMILY: And I was like, “Those are my underwear.” And I’ll never forget Tommy looking at me and saying, “Why didn’t you just lie?” [laughter] And to this day, I’m like, I don’t know. I do not know why I did not lie.

JOSH: Oh my gosh, that’s a good story.

HRISHI: That’s great.

EMILY: The only thing I can think is that they were, like, in my pant leg and just sort of like, remained there. [crosstalk] until the perfect, embarrassing moment. Why didn’t I lie?

JOSH: [crosstalk] These things happen, what are you going to do?

HRISHI: OK, back to the present. I love that story and I’m glad that we saved it until now.

JOSH: Can I tell you my real-life story that this Karen Cahill thing reminded me of?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: 1985. Summer after my freshman year in college, and my older sister Toby and I decided to drive cross-country together. Great fun. Had a ball. Lots of adventures. And at one stop, I think in Idaho, I want to say in perhaps Boise, Idaho, we were at a restaurant. And we were living kind of out of our car, and then in motels, and occasional camping. Dirty clothes, and, you know, just kind of, like, getting through the summer. And we had dinner and the waiter came over with the check, and my sister Toby reached into her purse to pay, and pulled out her wallet and a pair of panties. [laughter] And it was incredibly embarrassing. I think it was just because, you know, [unintelligible] laundry or something like that, and we couldn’t even form a sentence. We just laughed and cried and the waiter, this was really, really embarrassing and fabulous. But that’s what this Karen Cahill story reminded me of.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm. Well, it also reminds me, I mean, it does more than remind me, it is an echo of a *Sports Night* episode, *When Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Dan goes and meets Hillary Clinton for a fundraising breakfast and he confuses secular and nonsecular.

[Sports Night Episode 2.02 Excerpt]

DAN: Someone had clearly briefed her on my stuff with the public schools, and I told her about my opposition to secular programs that are publicly financed. I really spoke up and she seemed to listen.

CASEY: You mean nonsecular.

DAN: What do you mean?

CASEY: You don't oppose secular programs that are publicly financed, you oppose nonsecular programs that are publicly financed.

DAN: Yes.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: It's basically the same thing as the Kyrgyzstan/Kazakhstan storyline.

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

SAM: I have to say that I made some very scholarly points regarding the remaining nuclear weapons in Kyrgyzstan and I have to believe.

JOSH: Kazakhstan.

SAM: Mm?

JOSH: The nuclear weapons are in Kazakhstan.

SAM: Did I say Kyrgyzstan?

JOSH: Yeah.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: But in the *Sports Night* one, it was about Hillary Clinton. Trump-ai-yi-yi.

JOSH: I had my first Trump-ai-yi-yi moment, I'm realizing now, during the "previously on..." Leo says:

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

LEO: This president was elected with 48% of the vote, Toby.

TOBY: Yes, but he was elected.

LEO: Without a mandate. The majority of people in the country voted for somebody else.

[End Excerpt]

JOSH: And I thought Trump-ai-yi-yi.

HRISHI: Ai-yi-yi. Yeah.

JOSH: 46%.

HRISHI: Yeah, we've of course discussed that moment in the past, but it now takes on a whole new pitch and darkness.

JOSH: Bartlet is the anti-Trump.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: I mean, the idea. Can you imagine Bartlet sitting in his office bitterly Tweeting at 3 in the morning because he didn't win the popular vote? [laughter] It's so funny, I mean, this, it's just, he's everything our actual President-Elect is not.

HRISHI: They do share some things, in that neither of them knows how to work a computer.

JOSH: Well, there you go. [laughter] That's true.

HRISHI: I had another Trump-ai-yi-yi moment. At least two others. One, there's this whole notion about the press and their proximity to the president.

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

SAM: And we can put a little physical distance between the press and the President, and we can put them just across the street in a state-of-the-art facility.

CJ: By state-of-the-art, you mean...?

SAM: A room with electricity.

CJ: The press doesn't want physical distance from the President, and the American people would prefer the President didn't have physical distance from the press!

SAM: CJ!

CJ: We can't exile the press!

[End Excerpt]

JOSH: Donald Trump, of course, would like to remove them altogether.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. Sorry, American people.

JOSH: Not gonna happen! I did think we're back to CJ being terribly undermined at work by her male colleagues this episode.

HRISHI: Oh my God. Yeah.

JOSH: Right? I mean, just, especially what Toby did to her.

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

CJ: Are you ordering me to move it to the Hill?

TOBY: I don't like doing that.

CJ: You're gonna have to.

TOBY: Do it.

[End Excerpt]

JOSH: I mean, I understand where he's coming from, he thinks he's, for him, it's an easy trade to trade off the optics of this event in return for getting 15 minutes of discussion about a topic that's important to him. But, I loved when CJ just said it to him. She said, but you know, you cut my legs out from under me.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: In terms of Ann Stark. Felicity's good in the role and she makes you kind of hate her and really root for CJ versus Ann.

HRISHI: There was another line, another Trump-ai-yi-yi line. It was just so, so on the nose when the President is reading what Sam has written for the leadership breakfast.

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

BARTLET: There's a lot more that unites Americans than divides them.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: I mean this whole idea of finding compromise and the middle ground. I don't know, maybe that's evergreen, but it just seems like they have no idea what kind of rancour could actually exist.

JOSH: That's true. This whole thing, 'there's a lot more that unites Americans than divides them.' says Bartlet.

HRISHI: There were other clever things in this episode. There were these little call and response moments, I thought, the President says to Charlie:

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

BARTLET: Even though it's a handshake, I'm able to make him feel like a friend and that's a little thing they call people skills.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: When he's talking about meeting the bronze medalist from Singapore.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Even though he gets her gender wrong.

JOSH: That made me laugh out loud.

HRISHI: He says, 'That's a little thing they call people skills.' And then, just moments later, Donna tells Sam:

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

DONNA: I connect with people, Sam.

SAM: Yes.

DONNA: I'm a people person.

SAM: That's great.

[End Excerpt]

[laughter]

HRISHI: I have nothing beyond that. Just that those were two moments that were very similar.

JOSH: Really funny moments.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I found the first evidence I've ever seen that the closed-captioning person fell asleep onto his or her keyboard during the show. I'm going to send you the scene where they're working on the seating.

HRISHI: Yeah, in the cold open.

JOSH: Right. And CJ says that they've been working for seven and a half hours and here's the image. The closed captioning person wrote [Hrishi laughs] "71/////2 hours". I honestly think it was a cardiac arrest or a quick nap, narcolepsy or something and the closed-captioning person fell on the keyboard.

HRISHI: Oh man it looks like it says 71 and then there are 5 slashes and then a two.

JOSH: Yeah. That's not how you write 7 1/2. [laughter] Unless you've been drinking.

HRISHI: I think you're right. That's really great.

JOSH: Yeah, I do. I actually do. They just went [drumroll style noise] and didn't go back and correct it.

HRISHI: Everybody really should watch with the closed captioning on just because there's apparently a whole other show that you could be experiencing at the same time.

JOSH: Right! Yes. The closed-captioning people are trying to say stuff to us. [laughter] I'm being held. [laughter] Send help to this address.

HRISHI: Do you remember in the episode, our episode on The West Wing episode *Enemies*? We talked about stuff and I remember I felt like you were a little impressed by something I said about making the distinction between enemies versus opponents.

JOSH: Mm-hmm. It came from this episode?

HRISHI: Yeah, like everything that might possibly sound smart that comes out of my mouth is just something that I, turns out it's just something I stole from The West Wing.

JOSH: I don't think that's true, but,

HRISHI: I just forgot.

JOSH: I'm starting to think that the things that I believe Aaron has pinched from me, I pinched from Aaron [laughter] Like I do that with that, you know, I'll give you a thousand dollars for, by the way, a lot of people pointed out that that's apparently a prominent line in the movie *Three Men and a Baby*, which I don't think I've ever seen but apparently it's a thing. But there's another line in here and I was thinking, 'I always say that!' Then I thought, maybe this is why I always say that. [laughter] Maybe I'm getting the chronology wrong and the award-winning, famous writer is the one who came up with these things first.

HRISHI: Maybe you're always saying it because you've been cast in so many things that Aaron has written and he's given you that line.

JOSH: It's possible. It's possible. [laughter]

HRISHI: It's a line from *A Few Good Men* that you've actually said on stage hundreds of time. But yeah, Leo says:

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

LEO: The Republicans aren't the enemy, they're the opposition.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: I was embarrassed for myself.

JOSH: Well, maybe Aaron got it from you. No, that doesn't make sense. The timeline doesn't work on that.

HRISHI: Is the thing that you always say, 'I could care less?' Because we get that line again.

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

TOBY: I could care less who says what.

[End Excerpt]

JOSH: I did notice that again! I now believe that that's a character thing. Toby says that because we've heard it said correctly by others.

HRISHI: Right, the President said it correctly.

JOSH: So it's a nice little Aaron/Toby touch.

HRISHI: Yeah. Oh, back to the cold open. We get Ed and Larry there and.

JOSH: Yes! I wrote, we get our Ed and Larry on again. Finally.

HRISHI: I was watching *West World* and I saw Peter James Smith on there.

JOSH: I haven't started watching that yet. I know I'm gonna like it.

HRISHI: It's such a funny response that I have, to see, I mean, I've met Peter when we did our podcast and we've, like, exchanged some tweets, but I certainly don't know him. But seeing him on that show, I just have this feeling of warmth. It was like seeing my family member on the news for something great that they did. There's no logic to it at all.

JOSH: That's very sweet. You felt proud of him. Is his character at all Ed-like?

HRISHI: Not really. I mean, maybe. Yeah. he's sort of like a guy who's in one scene to get something done. Sure, he's Ed-like.

JOSH: OK. I mean, I assume he's not at all like Larry.

HRISHI: No, God no. I mean, nothing like him. God. I liked in the cold open also that between Sam and Josh and Donna, Donna is the voice of reason and then later Charlie is the voice of utter exasperation.

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

CHARLIE: What are you doing?

JOSH: Somebody started a fire in this fireplace, Charlie.

CHARLIE: If the smoke alarms go off, they're gonna make me wake up the President.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: Sam and Josh are talking about the merits of different woods and how to build the fire and Donna's sort of like, 'I think this is a bad idea.' And then, eventually they start the fire and Charlie skips the 'I think this a bad idea' and just comes in and is like, 'What the hell?' Because he has to go wake up the President.

JOSH: Yeah, right.

HRISHI: Just a very fun way to start the episode.

JOSH: Sam is like a little mini Bartlet at times in terms of his knowledge about arcane topics and the amount of information he has, for instance, about wood, very Bartlet-like.

HRISHI: Yeah, but it's really, some of it's pretty specious. It sounds like he knows, like, I always think about the line from the President where he says, 'Sometimes I'm just making it up.'

JOSH: Sam's the same way you think?

HRISHI: We're just going along with him because he's normally otherwise brilliant. I did love, and I think this was the other moment you were referring to in terms of Sam's cute Traeger-warning moment, when he is asked to go speak to Karen Cahill.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And Donna asks him and he says:

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

DONNA: What happens?

SAM: I become unimpressive.

DONNA: In what way?

SAM: In many ways.

DONNA: You don't fall down do you?

SAM: When?

DONNA: With Karen.

SAM: Once.

DONNA: You'll be fine.

SAM: *You think?*

DONNA: *You'll be impressive.*

SAM: *I never have been before, but that's no reason to think I'm not going to do it.*

DONNA: *Right.*

SAM: *You know why?*

DONNA: *It doesn't really matter.*

SAM: *Perseverance. You get right back on the horse. I'm going to sit there and she's going to go home saying, 'That Sam Seaborn's impressive.'*

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: And really in the course of less than a minute, he manages to turn himself completely around and do a 180 and be like, 'I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna nail it.' And Donna's like:

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

DONNA: Reach for the stars, Sam.

SAM: I will.

DONNA: Good.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: It reminded me of, did you watch *Arrested Development*?

JOSH: I did indeed.

HRISHI: One of my favorite parts from that show is when Lindsay and Tobias are talking about having an open marriage.

[Arrested Development Episode 2.01 Excerpt]

TOBIAS: *You know, Lindsay, as a therapist, I have advised a number of couples to explore an open relationship where the couple remains emotionally committed but free to explore extramarital encounters.*

LINDSAY: *Well, did it work for those people?*

TOBIAS: *No. It never does. I mean, these people somehow delude themselves into thinking it might. But it might work for us.*

[End Excerpt]

[laughter]

JOSH: That's hilarious.

HRISHI: It's one of my favorite things.

JOSH: It's a neat trick that Aaron pulls off, actually, that this entire comic Karen Cahill subplot happens off camera and you just see the consequences of each off-camera interaction. And we've never seen, nor will we ever, Karen Cahill and yet it's this kind of creation of a character in our minds and the whole thing works.

HRISHI: There was this little theme in this episode of impressing people. Sam being unimpressive or impressive to Karen Cahill. Leo saying,

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

LEO: I don't like dealing with people who are trying to impress me

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: And then Toby himself trying to impress Ann Stark. It feels a little bit like he's showing off in front of her.

JOSH: Yeah, it felt with Felicity and Richard like there was some sort of either history, some past between these two characters or some attempt or the way she

HRISHI: Oh for sure.

JOSH: Right, it was interesting, it was kind of charged with a little something that was never quite acknowledged explicitly.

HRISHI: They've definitely made out. 'I know her a little' he says.

JOSH: m-hm

HRISHI: She says,

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

ANN: What should I wear?

TOBY: I don't give a damn.

ANN: I've heard different.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: Dripping with subtext

JOSH: But not backstory [Hrishi laughs] Don't create a backstory people. Don't guess what happened.

HRISHI: I don't have a great point to make about this but there's a part where Leo says.

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

LEO: Alexander Hamilton didn't think we should have political parties. Neither did John Adams. He thought political parties led to divisiveness.

TOBY: They do. They should. We have honest disagreements, arguments are good.

LEO: Only if they lead to statesmanship, or it's just, theater.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought - or musical theatre.

JOSH: [laughs] You quoted musical theatre on twitter. People were very excited, people were sensing a conversion, it was a climate change right, oceans rise. [music plays in background]

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: But people were very excited. Are you leaving the dark side and coming over to the light? It's a great song.

HRISHI: It's such a good song. When you saw *Hamilton* was Jonathan Groff King George?

JOSH: No, I saw the original, Brian Darcey James.

HRISHI: Okay

JOSH: And I'm sure Jonathan Groff is fantastic and I've listened to his version of course, eight million times. But at the public off-Broadway, before the Broadway run it was Brian Darcey James. I saw the second preview pre-Broadway. I'm actually quite curious, of course you know what my retention is like so I'm curious to see all the changes are that have been made but I probably won't remember what any of them are. [Hrishi laughs] because my brain doesn't work that way. But, yeah, I'm curious to see the transformation from off-Broadway to Broadway. But yeah I saw the second preview. I'm telling you in a lot of ways I feel like I wrote the show.

HRISHI: [laughs] Well so when I saw it, it was, they were on to their fourth King George 3rd who was played by Rory O'Malley and he was so good.

JOSH: Is he great?

HRISHI: He was my favorite part of the show.

JOSH: Yeah, Really?

HRISHI: And that's saying a lot because so much of it was great but he really, just was amazing I thought.

JOSH: Fantastic

HRISHI: And I've had the King George numbers on a loop in my head since seeing it.

JOSH: I'm hoping that in the final six months of the show's run in the year 2039 that I will play that role.

HRISHI: King George?

JOSH: If I'm still alive.

HRISHI: Hmmmm

JOSH: Yeah, there are some high notes but I think with the right pants, I could play the role.

HRISHI: I could see you playing that role.

JOSH: You're very kind.

HRISHI: I can see your relishing the mischief of that character.

JOSH: You're kind to say, now I don't sing like a Jonathan Groff or Brian Darcey James but, I feel like when the show's running out of air, be a good time to put me in. [Hrishi laughs] They'd be like, 'He was on *West Wing* fifty years ago.'

HRISHI: You should just wear the crown and cape between now and whenever they make that decision. Just to drive it home.

JOSH: Just so that I'm ready.

HRISHI: Exactly, demonstrate that you're ready.

JOSH: I do sing it a lot at home.

HRISHI: On that note, let's take a quick break.

[Ad-break]

HRISHI: Here's another reference outside of *The West Wing*, this is the emergence of the reference to Leo as a wartime consigliere.

JOSH: Yes

HRISHI: Which we talked about when I compared him to Jorah Mormont.

JOSH: Oh that's right. Oh there's another little, I wanted Ann Stark to be somehow related to the *Game of Thrones* House of Stark. [Both laugh] I wanted her to get 'Red Wedding'd'

HRISHI: You wanted her to be executed by the end of it.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's interesting, Leo talks about, It's not interesting I don't know why I started this off with 'This is interesting'

JOSH: Oh I'll be the judge of that.

HRISHI: These are the mad ramblings of ah...

JOSH: This is a weird rambling conversation we're having.

HRISHI: Yeah. Wartime Consigliere, oh that's from *The Godfather*. In *The Godfather*, Michael Corleone says to Tom Hagen, played by Robert Duvall. Tom Hagen is told he isn't a wartime Consigliere, and part of the reason why is because he's not Sicilian.

JOSH: He's Irish.

HRISHI: He's Irish and at the beginning of the episode Josh says to Leo.

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

JOSH: And what stupid-ass Irish thing did you say to Karen Cahill that you now need me to apologize for at Ben and Sally's like a little girl.

[End Excerpt]

JOSH: Dude, not interesting, that's brilliant. That's award winning [expletive deleted] right there. [Hrishi laughs] I would give you a castie in a second [Hrishi laughs] for that little riff. No, actually I buy it, like it.

HRISHI: Castie where you just come over and break my arm and you say 'Congratulations.'

JOSH: Congratulations you've won a castie. [both laugh] Next year I'm going to submit my leg.

HRISHI: At the end of the episode Toby and Leo say, they shake hands and Leo says.

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

LEO: Son of a bitch... Shake my hand...We just formed it.

TOBY: Formed what?

LEO: The committee to re-elect the President.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: Committee to Re-elect the President is an awful lot like Committee for the Re-Election of the President, AKA CREP (Sounds like creep)

JOSH: Wow, Wow.

HRISHI: Right, it's a lot like Committee for the re-election of the president was the name of the organization behind the Watergate scandal.

JOSH: Mm-hhmm

HRISHI: And I think it was supposed to be abbreviated CRP but everybody called it Creep.

JOSH: Creep.

HRISHI: It's funny that Leo invokes that same acronym.

JOSH: Yeah well done. I actually got moved by that moment.

HRISHI: Oh yeah?

JOSH: Yeah. It's like I didn't think, I was enjoying this episode really solely as a like make me laugh, I'm enjoying the laughing moments and then intermittently just writing down the word 'Trump'. And then at that final moment I thought, oh wait a minute, I just got caught up, I got a little, I got a little tingle there.

HRISHI: Oh, that's nice.

JOSH: Like It's on. I like these it's on moments.

HRISHI: Here's a nit-pick for Gail.

JOSH: Bring it. No she had her version, we're all cool with nit-picks here.

HRISHI: Alright. CJ has a deputy that we have never met or even ever heard of, Henry.

JOSH: Henry, yes, 'Henry get out of there, come home, Henry come home'

HRISHI: Who the hell is Henry?

JOSH: I don't know. A less compelling off-camera character than Karen Cahill.

HRISHI: Yeah. But was interesting about Henry's inclusion off-screen, is that on screen Carol gets a lot more to do in terms of her role in the press secretary's office. She's in there negotiating with Ann Stark's Aides on what what they might give and take on the guidelines for the Leadership Breakfast and I thought that's nice, it's nice to see Carol has a role beyond just handing notes to CJ. Like she's not just her, sort of secretary, she's actually involved in decision-making.

JOSH: Yes I agree, that is true. Speaking of Ann Stark, staff aide number one was played by Mark Goldsmith.

HRISHI: How do you know Mark?

JOSH: I don't know.

HRISHI: OK, good story [both laugh]

JOSH: You know how I have trouble remembering earlier episodes? That includes episodes from my life. [both laugh]

HRISHI: I'm glad we talked about it in our first episode, how we met so then you'll be able to remember that later on.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: You do remember how we met right?

JOSH: I may have to go back and listen to it, but that I do remember, I still remember. Oh look, I just noticed as I'm gazing at the IMDB list for this episode that Henry Hansen, I can't tell you who that character is, but he was played by Bruce Winant, little nepotism. I'm guessing he's, I'm guessing I could be wrong, that he's relate to Scott Winant. He seems to be a major casting director, so if you're hearing this, give me work. Bruce Winant, a sometime actor and an oft time casting director and I'm going to guess Scott Winant's brother.

HRISHI: That must be CJ's deputy.

JOSH: But wait a minute, but he's not on camera ever, is he?

HRISHI: I didn't realize it, maybe he's, maybe he's [crosstalk] in the meeting with Ann Stark.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Maybe he's milling around there.

HRISHI: Yep, exactly.

JOSH: Yeah, OK, well, there you go.

HRISHI: So maybe he was actually on.

JOSH: Just blew the lid off some Hollywood nepotism right there.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm. Or maybe he had some scenes and they got cut.

JOSH: Oh wait a minute, the intrigue grows as I notice that on his IMDB page he has alternate names including Bruce Nielsen, Jayce Reeves, Joseph Stills, Loopers Unlimited, Jim Warrington, Bruce Nelson Winant and Bruce Nielsen Winant. So he's obviously also a

felon [Hrishi laughs] of some sort. What is up with this guy and why does he ever refer to himself as Loopers Unlimited even if he has committed horrendous crimes. [both laugh]

HRISHI: Did you know that Neil Diamond.

JOSH: Neil Diamond Phillips?

HRISHI: Neil Diamond's real name is Neil Diamond. A name fit for a rock star.

JOSH: He changed it to his same name?

HRISHI: No he was thinking about changing it, [Josh laughs] he was considering two different possibilities and forgoing his wonderful name Neil Diamond. One, Ice Cherry.

JOSH: What?

HRISHI: Yep, that's real. And the other,

JOSH: Are you making Sh [trails off]

HRISHI: Noah Kominsky.

JOSH: I was just trying to think as a joke. Is that a joke? [Josh laughs]

HRISHI: That's not a joke, Neil Diamond.

JOSH: I was going to say it would be funny if he was considering changing his name to something overtly Jewish.

HRISHI: Noah Kominsky.

JOSH: Because I would believe if you told me his name was Noah Kominsky and he changed his name to Neil Diamond. That seems like the real story.

HRISHI: It's true.

JOSH: That doesn't make any sense.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: How do you know that or why are you making that up, just to make me look stupid?

HRISHI: [Hrishi laughs] I don't know why I know it, but it's one of those things I know. Natalie Hershlag, it's somewhere in the Natalie Hershlag files.

JOSH: Alright.

HRISHI: But that's the opposite, Natalie Hershlag changed her name to Natalie Portman, I get that. Neil Diamond.

JOSH: Yes. That there, that there, there's no pausity of examples of people going, I sound too Jewish, lets change this thing.

HRISHI: Sure, Bob Dylan, what's his real name?

JOSH: Robert Zimmerman.

HRISHI: There you go. But yeah, Neil Diamond was going to give up Neil Diamond and go with the baffling Ice Cherry or the terrifically mundane Noah Kominsky.

JOSH: Wow. Alright that's our show.

HRISHI: We're coming in for a landing even though we never figured out the take off.

JOSH: Just remember folks, in every podcast there's a worst episode. [Hrishi laughs] It can't be avoided, by definition. It might as well be this one.

HRISHI: In closing, Trump,

BOTH: Ay-yi-yi.

HRISHI: Thanks for joining us.

JOSH: We hope you enjoyed whatever this was and that you'll join us for our next, whatever it will be.

HRISHI: Until then, you can leave a comment about this rambling mess on our website, thewestwingweekly.com or on our FaceBook page, facebook.com/thewestwingweekly.

JOSH: You can also follow us on Twitter. Hrishikesh is @HrishiHirway, I'm @JoshMalina, a silent H.

HRISHI: and the podacst is @westwingweekly.

JOSH: It's too late to buy a shirt or a hoodie but thanks to those who did. You can, as always, buy *The West Wing Weekly* lapel pin at westwingweekly.com/pin. I feel like somewhere, what if the person who did the closed captioning for this episode is trying to buy one but they're going westwingweekly.com/////pin [Hrishi laughs] and they don't understand why it won't load.

HRISHI: Actually it would still load.

JOSH: Really.

HRISHI: No it wouldn't load.

JOSH: So you've been lying to me or you just think because you're an award winner you can say anything and I'll buy it. And it's true.

HRISHI: It's one of the qualities I try and copy from Sam, and the President. The West Wing Weekly is a proud member of Radiotopia.

JOSH: Yeah we are.

HRISHI: From PRX, a curated network of extraordinary, cutting edge shows, and we're one of them. To learn more go to radiotopia.fm.

JOSH: I've got a little theatrical appearance coming up in Los Angeles and in a moment we're going to chat with the writers behind *The Thrilling Adventure hour*, Ben Blacker and Ben Acker.

HRISHI: I've been to see you in *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* and I really liked it. I was your guest along with guest star from *Take the Sabbath Day* Noah Emmerich. That was pretty exciting. It was no Jamaica with Maureen Dowd at Dule Hill's house but it was pretty cool anyway.

JOSH: Now let's talk to Ben and Ben.

HIRSHI: OK.

JOSH: Alright, so now we're talking to two dear friends of mine and my sometime bosses on *Thrilling Adventure hour*, Ben Acker and Ben Blacker. Can you explain to people what *The Thrilling Adventure Hour* is?

BEN B: I think we can but I think you would do it better.

JOSH: Well OK, I'll give you my take on it. *The Thrilling Adventure Hour*, until recently has been a monthly theatrical event in Los Angeles. My participation goes back about four years and being one of the regular players has been one of the highlights of my time in LA. It's a live, script in hand, hat tip to old time radio serials and you guys have created these characters and these stories and you've been telling them month by month for ten years.

BEN B: That is pretty much it. There's also a podcast on the Nerdist Network and you were very nice to say how much you enjoy doing it. When we put you in the show, Ben Acker and I have talked about in the past how we would raid ensemble casts of TV shows that we love and *Sports Night* and *West Wing* was the final cast that we really got to raid.

JOSH: So in a way it's yet another job that Aaron helped get me.

BEN B: Yes.

JOSH: He's been very good to me even indirectly.

HRISHI: Who are some of the other people in the cast?

BEN B: The regular cast includes, Paul F Tompkins, Paget Brewster who you know and love from *Criminal Minds* among other things. Marc Evan Jackson who is from *Brooklyn 99*. Craig Crackowski from *Drunk History*, a million people, *Busy Philips*, it's a huge sprawling cast of.

BEN A: Mark Gagliardi.

BEN B: Oh, I have not learned all their names. I think, I've been thinking about this because I listen to the podcast and I'm watching along with you guys and Ben and I often cite as our inspirations *Buffy* and *The West Wing* were huge shows for us, the banter that Aaron writes and much of that is just about people listening to each other and responding to each other in a quick way. But I think the bigger thing that we took from *The West Wing* is, it's about the smartest people in the room.

BEN A: But the idea that these characters who are very very smart couldn't be emotionally dumber if they tried. And that was always a fun juxtaposition to watch, as well as to write.

JOSH: Yeah, that's very well put.

HRISHI: Well thanks guys, I'm looking forward to it, I'm going to come to the show.

JOSH: Hooray.

BEN B: I'm so glad you're coming.

JOSH: So if you're anywhere within driving, or really even flying range to get into town to see it if you haven't seen it live, but you're a fan of the podcast I encourage you to do so. And where might one procure tickets?

BEN B: They can go to the Ace hotel website and look at the calendar there, that's the easiest way, follow us on Twitter @thrillingadv.

JOSH: And wear your *West Wing* lapel pin and do the signal and I will do it back, possibly from stage. [all laugh] OK.

HRISHI: OK.

BEN A: What's.

BEN B: Next.

BEN B: Terrible, terrible.

JOSH: It was semi lifelike, I like it.

[Outro Music]

JOSH: Hrishi are you still there?

HRISHI: I'm still here.

[Outro Music]