

The West Wing Weekly
2.16: "Somebody's Going to Emergency Somebody's Going to Jail"
Guests: Ben Casselman and Rob Lowe

[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 "Somebody's Going to Emergency Somebody's Going to Jail." It's episode 16 from season 2.

JOSH: It was written by Paul Redford and Aaron Sorkin, and it was directed by Jessica Yu. It first aired in the second month of the year, on the 28th day [crosstalk] [laughing] in the year 2001.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] [laughing] Coming up later we have a very special guest joining us, Rob Lowe.

JOSH: Oh yeah, finally.

HRISHI: We've been saving this episode up for him.

JOSH: That's right, it's a Rob-centric episode.

HRISHI: This is a very Rob-centric episode, in fact for this episode Rob Lowe was nominated for an Emmy.

JOSH: Well deserved.

HRISHI: Well here's the synopsis.

JOSH: Can we do a little tech talk before we even jump into the episode? I wanted to give a shoutout to our mixer and editor Zach McNees for realizing that I [laughing] on occasion was speaking into the wrong side of the microphone.

BOTH: [laughing]

HRISHI: And from where I'm sitting I couldn't tell because the logo on the mic which indicates whether it's front or back is covered so I couldn't actually see.

JOSH: And from where I'm sitting who the [expletive deleted] knew that microphones had a front and a back.

BOTH: [laughing]

HRISHI: It's so endearing.

JOSH: Secondary shout out to somebody on Twitter who notices that I have an unfortunate habit of- what do you call this thing that [crosstalk] the pop filter - the little shield in front of the mic- what does it do? Makes the plosives less plosive?

HRISHI: [crosstalk] A pop filter.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: I sometimes, just out of kind of a nervous habit, while we're chatting play with the little arm of the pop filter and it makes a kind of a creaky noise and I'm going to stop doing that.

HRISHI: But why don't you demonstrate it right now so people know [crosstalk] what it is when they hear it.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yeah, good idea.

[creaking sound]

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Can you hear that? I feel like now that I want to I can't even get it to make any noise.

HRISHI: Oh yeah, no, that's making a lot of noise.

JOSH: Yeah. My body makes the same sound when I stand up.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I've just reached that age. Ok, so carry on.

HRISHI: OK, so here's the synopsis from *TV Guide*:

"It's Big Block of Cheese Day which means that Leo sends grumbling staffers to meet with organizations who are not usually heard from at the White House. Toby, for instance, meets with World Bank protesters, while C.J.'s assignment is the Cartographers for Social Equality. Meanwhile a friend of Donna's asks Sam to pursue a pardon for her grandfather, a White House staffer in the '40s who was convicted of perjury in a McCarthy era spy case and died in prison."

JOSH: So this is our second Big Block of Cheese Day episode.

HRISHI: Yeah, that's right.

JOSH: And rather different in tone.

HRISHI: Yeah, it really doesn't have the same kind of lighthearted feeling that "The Crackpots and These Women" did.

JOSH: This episode is interesting I think- it's tonally different from a lot of other *West Wing* episodes, just from the get-go it feels-

HRISHI: Yes, it's a very unusual opening, it starts with a song and a montage. Starting with a song is very different and a big creative move compared to what we usually get.

JOSH: Mhm, and then we get the montage of early morning *West Wing* and the whole thing is very effective.

HRISHI: Mhm, it starts off with the song that the title of the episode comes from "New York Minute" by Don Henley, which is a song from 1989.

["New York Minute" by Don Henley begins playing]

JOSH: We wrote to Aaron to ask him about the use of this song.

HRISHI: Yeah, because this was such an unusual move- the song figures so prominently that it, you know, it starts the episode off and it has the title it seemed like something that would be worth asking Aaron about. So here's what he said:

"That's an example of the half dozen or so times I've worked backwards. You need to write next week's script and you don't have any ideas because if you did they'd've been last week's script. You go out driving in your car and turn on music because that's sometimes worked for you in

the past, you hear the Don Henley song which you've heard a hundred times before, but this time it puts you in a certain mood and you want to write something that has that mood. More specifically, you want to write something that earns that lyric as the title, you actually have a title before you have a story, but at least you have a title and that's something. And something, when you're writing, is always better than nothing."

JOSH: What a great response.

HRISHI: Even his e-mails, [laughing] I mean we've said it before, his e-mails are so good.

JOSH: [laughing] Yeah. Beautiful and an interesting insight into how he, I guess, occasionally, works.

HRISHI: Yeah. Like you've said that he's a sponge and that it- you know I think when you were talking about that you were talking about how he draws upon stuff from the actors in the show. That he'll use characteristics of the actual people or stories that they might bring or things that they might do will figure their way into a script, but here you see the sponge-like quality of his process extends to everything in his environment.

JOSH: He knows how to - sort of - jumpstart a script, I guess, by finding inspiration in a variety of places.

HRISHI: Yeah. I like the idea of thinking about Aaron Sorkin being in the car and turning on the radio like this is another insight that the station that he puts on in the car is one that would play Don Henley.

JOSH: Yeah [laughing]

HRISHI: We're not listening to the same radio station, me and Aaron Sorkin.

JOSH: There's a Cool Sorkin Jams station -I think - on XM.

HRISHI: [laughing] With Don Henley, and Dire Straits, and The Who.

JOSH: Mhm. I do like the song and I like the choice of it and almost without really being able to articulate why there's something haunting- it adds a haunting element to Sam's personal story, this opening even- there's slo-mo in the montage, well directed by Jessica Yu, and then the discovery that Sam has been sleeping, possibly for three days, in Toby's office on the couch.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's really neat how the music is woven into the episode because it starts off like a song that we're hearing like it's a soundtrack to an episode and then later it is revealed that it's actually diegetic music from the world of the show when Sam turns off the radio in Toby's office and that's the source of the music.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

LEO: You sleep here last night?

SAM: I'm sorry?

LEO: You slept here?

SAM: I don't have a couch in my office.

LEO: Yeah, but you have a bed in your house, right?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's really clever, and then also Snuffy Walden then weaves the song into the score for the episode, it happens a couple of times actually. It happens when Josh and Sam are talking about Agent Casper, Josh's friend at the FBI, and then there's this really beautiful moment that comes in later on in the episode when Sam's practicing his sugar tossing and in that scene those opening chords to New York Minute are echoed in Snuffy's score.

[excerpt New York Minute by Don Henley begins playing followed by excerpt from Snuffy Walden's score]

JOSH: It's also getting back to the point that it's- the music is playing practically in the show. So we learn, in this episode, that Toby's favorite station is Cool Sorkin Jams [crosstalk] on XM.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] [laughing] Exactly.

HRISHI: Yup.

JOSH: It's kinda cool.

HRISHI: There's kind of an aside in the beginning of the episode that I wanted to mention when Leo's coming into work he has to do all this crazy rerouting and he's telling Sam about it because of these protesters and he said that there was a barrier around the National Geographic Society and Rob says:

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

SAM: Who has a problem with the National Geographic Society?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought that it could be a kind of cute way of foreshadowing C.J.'s meeting with Cartographers for Social Justice. Because maybe they're the ones who are protesting in front of the National Geographic Society.

JOSH: Yeah, that's excellent. That didn't occur to me at the time, I was getting there as you brought it up, that's a very good point. Yeah, they would in fact possibly draw the ire of that trio and their people.

HRISHI: And the reason that we find out that Sam has been sleeping in the office and why he believes in the magical power of a new shirt, even though it might have a messed up monogram as we've discussed.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Maybe that's where it derives its power, maybe that's the secret.

JOSH: Ah!

HRISHI: You should check the monogram for a dweomer.

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: Boom!

JOSH: Nicely done, nicely layered.

HRISHI: [laughing] We find out the reason why he's been sleeping in the office is because his dad has been having an affair with a woman for 28 years, which brings to mind- speaking of

layered echoes- brings to mind the “Sword of Orion” episode from *Sports Night*.

JOSH: Yes, indeed. Where Jeremy, the character that I played, is dealing with a very similar situation with his dad.

[Sports Night Episode 1.18 excerpt]

JEREMY: My mother and father are getting a divorce.

NATALIE: I know that.

JEREMY: My father’s been having an affair with another woman for 27 years.

NATALIE: I know that too.

JEREMY: That’s since before I was born.

NATALIE: and someone - I’m not saying who - has a little birthday coming up.

JEREMY: Natalie, stop walking. Nothing is the same anymore.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He’s in a similar to Sam- in the *Sports Night* episode Jeremy gets obsessed with a sailing race gone awry and in our West Wing episode Sam of course takes up the cause of Daniel Gault.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And this is one of those things where I’ve occasionally- I mean Sorkin fans will have noticed the similarities between these two episodes and occasionally somebody’s critical about- as if, you know, he’s lazily repeating himself. To me there’s no fault in it, it’s fascinating to watch the two episodes and to compare, to contrast, and to ponder why certain issues and certain interpersonal types of relationship continue to intrigue him.

HRISHI: Yeah, for me it would be kind of similar to someone saying, “oh, Bob Dylan wrote yet another song with both a C and a G chord.” I mean, come on.

JOSH: Yeah, I’m with you, I’m completely with you.

HRISHI: What’s interesting in both “Sword of Orion” and in “Somebody’s Going to Emergency” there’s an issue about navigation, right? Because “Sword of Orion” is about this boat and they’re never heard from again there and they get lost at sea.

[Sports Night Episode 1.18 excerpt]

JEREMY: They were right here when all their onboard computers, including the sat nav radar, malfunctioned. And not only did they not know where they were but they had no way of knowing that the call for 40 knot winds was off by more than half. So, it was a few minutes [fade]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then, in this episode, even though it’s not part of the storyline about Sam’s dad there’s still also this thing about the maps being created for sailors so that they could sail correctly.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

DR. FALLOW: The German cartographer, Mercator, originally designed this map in 1569 as a

navigational tool for European sailors.

HUKE: The map enlarges areas of the poles to create straight lines of constant bearing, or geographic direction.

CYNTHIA SAYLES: So it makes it easier to cross an ocean.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I really like this episode and I think there's so much going on and it's again one of those super multi-layered episodes and it's funny that you bring up that similarity because I felt there's a- at one point C.J. has a line.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

DR. FALLOW: You're probably wondering what all this has to do with social equality.

C.J.: No, I'm wondering where France really is.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's almost this slightly somewhat comic subplot although from what initially seems like a three wackos and their niche problem I think they make a very good case during that scene and we go from seeing essentially our heroes who roll their eyes generally at the idea Big Block of Cheese Day. I think it's funny always too that they're doing this wonderful thing about bringing people in and allowing them for their voices to be heard but the entire staff [laughing] is just in a communal eye roll over it they really, um, kind of look down on the people that they're going to be hosting and they're arguing in that scene in the Roosevelt Room.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

LARRY: Excuse me, Leo, C.J., I got NIH research funding for cancer treatment using shark cartilage if you want to trade

ED: I'll take that.

LARRY: What d'you got?

ED: Citizens for D.C. statehood.

LARRY: Forget it.

DONNA: I've got the Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtle Society, but I'm keeping it.

LEO: You're all keeping it!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Only Donna's happy because she's clearly interested in turtles. She's like, I'm not giving that one up.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: But I like that, one, that in this scene about cartography their message and their point really lands in a way we don't maybe expect. We expect it just to be sort of a whimsical comic relief moment. But also I'm trying to get back to when C.J. says that about not even knowing where France is to me it all reflected on back to Sam's [crosstalk] mental state in his episode where just who he thought his dad was, what he thought his life was, what he thought his

parents relationship was. Just up is down and you know it's like at that moment where they flip poles and say:

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

C.J.: But, wait, how- where else could you put the Northern hemisphere but on the top?

SAYLES: On the bottom.

C.J.: How?

DR. FALLOW: Like this.

[beep]

C.J.: Yeah, but you can't do that.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: There's a little button at the end of this big scene with Sam and Donna where he says:

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

SAM: It's just there's certain things you're sure of. Like longitude and latitude.

DONNA: Sam, I don't know if this is the best time to tell you, but according to C.J. I wouldn't be so sure about longitude and latitude.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But I really didn't even need that explicit connection because I, like you said, the line from C.J. is such a- is already such a beautiful poetic way of connecting the two.

JOSH: Yeah, I felt the same way, and particularly Donna's response [crosstalk] Sam mentions latitude and longitude I was like, ok, I was already there but ok [crosstalk] and then oh, ok, she's really gonna to tie it up with the bow.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right.

HRISHI: Yeah. Why don't we go back to the scene where they're getting the assignments.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: As you brought up, and Margaret's- [crosstalk] we haven't had as much Margaret comic gold as we had in some earlier episodes, it's been a little while, but this is so good when Leo's like:

JOSH: [crosstalk] Uh!

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

LEO: I'm sure Margaret worked long and hard to make sure that the appropriate petitioner went to the appropriate staffer.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's a great little piece of visual comedy. That same scene also has one of my just all-

time favorite Aaron- and this episode was co-written by Paul Redford- so you can't weed out who wrote what line although it feels quintessentially Aaron but could be a Paul Redford line-

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

JOSH: And a wheat thin the size of Lake Tahoe

[laughing]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: For some reason I love that line because it's perfectly written, it's the perfect image. Lake Tahoe is flat, a Wheat Thin is the perfect [laughing] I don't know why the image- it literally makes me laugh out loud even when I just say it.

HRISHI: [laughing] That's great, that's great. I don't actually care for that line that much. [crosstalk] I like it more knowing that you like it.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Oh really? I love that line.

HRISHI: Before we move away from the Organization of Cartographers for Social Equality, the main spokesperson for them, this guy Dr. John Fallow, I love that character and that actor so much and the writing for him in the very beginning of his- of their scene- there are a couple of things that makes me feel like he is so real and so fully realized even though we've never- you know we're only gonna get just a couple minutes with him. C.J. comes in and she introduces herself.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

C.J.: Hi, I'm sorry.

DR. FALLOW: Hello!

C.J.: I'm sorry to be late.

DR. FALLOW: Not a problem.

C.J.: I'm C.J. Cregg.

DR. FALLOW: Of course you are.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then like a little bit later Josh walks in, you know, doing this- his thing of like "I want to see this ridiculous exercise."

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

C.J.: This is Josh Lyman

DR. FALLOW: Indeed you are.

C.J.: Josh, this is Dr. Fallow.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: In both instances of being introduced to someone he has this similar- little like- verbal foible, that's so specific and it's almost unnecessarily good for this little role but this guy's so three-dimensional that you already- this is how this guy talks [crosstalk] and the way that those

lines are delivered, there's so much depth to it.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yeah.

JOSH: I love that you're giving him a nod because I love this guy too. It's John Billingsley and I actually worked with him in multiple episodes of a short lived TV show called *The Nine*.

HRISHI: Oh!

JOSH: Yeah, that Tom Verica, directing producer of *Scandal*, was also part of. It was a good show that somehow didn't quite take off. And John is a terrific actor, and I think you're right, especially this kind of role could very easily have gone to somebody- an actor who would overplay it or an actor who's an immediate sight gag or over the top. We should probably talk to the casting people of *The West Wing* because they did a tremendous job. I also know and really like one of his two associates, Brent Hinckley, who played Professor Donald Huke, the guy with the- who's the- he's got the pointer and Brent is a fantastic actor, he's part of the Actor's Gang Company here in Los Angeles. I saw him a couple years ago on stage as Harpo Marx in *Animal Crackers* at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival and go back and take a look at Brent's face and you could see the Harpo in there, and he was brilliant in this incredibly [crosstalk] yeah, he was hilarious in this production. And I- do you have the woman's name?

HRISHI: [crosstalk] I totally see that. It was Jordan Baker as Dr. Cynthia Sales.

JOSH: Yes, she was good as well. And again, like I said earlier, just that what you expect to be this trio of crackpots amusing us for a couple of minutes absolutely make a point that I'm guessing a lot of people haven't considered, that there's an inherent inaccuracy in portraying a spherical world on a flat surface and that there are ramifications about how those inaccuracies are relayed. I happen to also, I'm going to give one more book recommendation which I like to do, although it's premature because I just started this book that happened to coincide with this episode. I'm reading a book called *Prisoners of Geography: Ten Maps That Explain Everything About the World*, it's by a guy named Tim Marshall, and it's pretty fascinating. It's kind of a good primer on geopolitics seen through the filter of just the geography of the world and it's a nice complement to this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah. There's a piece on *The Washington Post* about an interactive map that lets you actually play with how the Mercator projection map works versus more accurate map and we'll put a link to that as well so you can play around with it.

JOSH: Oh, I want to do that. Also, it appears to me, from doing a little bit of research, that the Mercator map is out as is the Peters projection mentioned in this episode. They seem to be both, I think, largely phased out use.

HRISHI: Hm, yeah, this is a relic from the past. But I think they really knocked it out of the park with the casting for Dr. Fallow because he really- as much as you do have this expectation of these guys being a joke or being crackpots he comes across as so reasonable and erudite and yet also delivers this information in a completely neither hostile nor condescending way.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

DR. FALLOW: It distorts the relative size of nations and continents.

C.J.: Are you saying the map is wrong?

DR.FALLOW: Oh dear, yes.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I just love every one of his lines. I love the tone, and the personality behind it.

JOSH: Yeah, he just lays it out.

HRISHI: Yeah. One of the reasons why I love this episode is there are these little moments that again seem like they could be ignored or done away with in a lesser show that just give the world of the show like a texture that feels real. Like that character Huke, Donald Huke.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

SAM: Professor Donald Huke.

C.J.: Huke?

SAM: Huke.

C.J.: Ok.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's an unnecessary detail in a lot of ways but it just gives it something real and there's another example of this later on that I love. There's a scene with Charlie and the President and Leo.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Let's do calls in the Residence, OK?

CHARLIE: Yes, sir.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I think there were a couple of late memos.

LEO: Good evening, Mr. President.

CHARLIE: They're on your desk, sir.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Thanks

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Just this little back and forth that's actually not really plot-specific at all between the President and Charlie gets interrupted by this thing- this introduction of this plot. Like the fact that it isn't that this exchange happens and it's buttoned up and it's done and then we move to the next scene and we move to the next scene. These things are- there's something a little messy about them in a way that resembles the way a busy fast-paced office life would actually reflect.

JOSH: I think that's part of why I often feel, as I'm watching the show, this doesn't look like any other TV show. It has a life to it [crosstalk] that is different from the TV worlds we're used to seeing.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Yeah.

HRISHI: Right. Like I think those little moments are inconsequential.

JOSH: In and of themselves but taken together, yeah, it helps.

HRISHI: Yeah, it makes it feel real and alive. So, we're recording this episode on January 22, the day after you and I both marched in Los Angeles here, in the Los Angeles chapter of the Women's March and it's interesting to think about this episode and Toby's meeting with the protesters and the fact that there are 30,000 protesters in DC for the WTO and the timing of it- it's just one of those moments where the timing of this and our watching of it coincide with something that happened in the real world that it's interesting to tie the two together.

JOSH: Indeed, I initially watched this episode a week ago and I went back and rewatched it again today because I wanted to- for that very reason- I wanted to do a rewatch and see how it felt, the protesting subplot. Toby has an interesting relationship to these protesters [crosstalk]. One of admiration, in a way, one that's a little bit patronizing, they're amateurs in his eyes and he's calling out all the mistakes that they're making.

HRISHI [crosstalk]: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

TOBY: Hey, Solzhenitsyn, come here. You're the group leader?

TERRY: Yeah, I am. I'm Terry Webber.

TOBY: You know what you did today that was really stupid? You gave away the cameras. The cameras in here I've got a problem 'cause I don't want to look like I can't control the crowd. Without the cameras I can sit here, read the sports section for two hours, walk outside, and say we talked.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You think Toby had some feeling of admiration for the protesters?

JOSH: He just kind of admits to being, you know, sort of an old lefty himself and that in '68 as a kid his sisters took him- and he takes some ribbing for it in the Roosevelt Room.

HRISHI: Yeah, 'cause he would have been like 13.

JOSH: Right, so somewhere in there, yeah I felt a sense of 'ah, they're not quite doing it right' but you know he gets them.

HRISHI: Yeah. How did his complaints about these protesters stack up with your feelings about the Women's March? How would you compare Toby's characterization of the protesters compared to the march that we participated in and the people who we saw?

JOSH: I guess, I mean his initial critical take on them is that they're not playing it right, they're not getting the optics, they've let C.J. negotiate them out of cameras. I think we've all seen the video and the pictures from around the world yesterday and that's now one of the bread and butter aspects of an effective march or protest, is that you're going to see these images and they're going to be tweeted and facebooked and snapchatted and instagrammed, all over the place.

HRISHI: Yeah, that's one interesting thing about this episode is, here's another example where the kind of somewhat crucial tactical element to the subplot here is outdated [crosstalk] because there's no way that this scenario would play out the same way because everybody has a camera

JOSH: [crosstalk] True.

JOSH: Right, now C.J. would have to negotiate them out of bringing phones.

HRISHI: Yeah, he could never have this kind of dynamic with them now.

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: But I thought that there was some comparison to be drawn out about the message of inclusionism here. Here there's a sense of the message being blunted by being inclusive because you've got in this room of just a hundred people, you know, it seems like maybe a hundred people yelling a hundred different slogans at Toby. They're talking about free trade but they don't have the sharpness of a single leader, or a single voice, or a single unifying [crosstalk].

JOSH: [Crosstalk] message, yeah, that is true. Although he also singles them out for being non-inclusive of minorities of any kind.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

TOBY: But here in the blackest city in America I'm lookin' at a room and no black faces, no Asians, no Hispanics. Where the hell's the Third World they claim to represent?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah, and that was a concern with the Women's March early on, you know, that there was a sense of this was being organized by white women, and I thought that they were very nimble in the way that they pivoted immediately to be like "no". It felt like a contrast to me because the march didn't feel so much like a protest, it didn't feel like a negative reaction against something, though of course it was born out of reaction to the Inauguration. It felt like, at least in the participating of it, like I don't know about how other people experienced it or the message that came out in the public, but while I was there it actually felt much more like a proclamation of unity or something more so than- like it wasn't an angry feeling so much as like a nice- it was a very nice happy atmosphere.

JOSH: Yeah, no, I came home and I said to my wife who wasn't able to attend, much to her dismay, I said "look, I feel hopeful for the first time since November 8th" and so it buoyed me. All that said, I saw plenty of nasty signs, I heard some nasty chants, and some of the speakers had real edge, and I understand that and I don't necessarily object to all that, but I do feel the net feeling there was "look at the numbers and look what we care about and these are our issues" and it was a general positive hopeful vibe.

HRISHI: Yeah. It was funny to see the diversity of ideologically narrow signs represented at the march.

JOSH: Well said.

HRISHI: My favorite sign though was one that Helen Zaltzman from the podcast The Allusionist posted, she posted a photo of someone who [laughing] held up a sign that said "too much to fit on one sign."

BOTH: [laughing]

JOSH: That's wonderful.

HRISHI: But yeah there was a difference I think here of course, besides the very obvious material difference between them protesting the World Bank and the WTO and the march yesterday, but there's a difference between protesting against something and solidarity. Solidarity really wasn't a part of the message going on in this episode. When Toby does do his thing with the cop at the end where he's building his own rhythm about why the World Bank and why the World Trade Organization is necessary it did strike me as interesting that he has to- you know he formulates these arguments that do seem more centrist or even maybe center-right once again than where I think his heart might be sometimes. He like protests to Josh because he's not allowed to get arrested but he can articulate the side of the argument too where he says:

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

TOBY: The WTO is undemocratic and accountable to no one, decisions are made by executive directors and the developing world has little to say about institutional policy.

JOSH: What was that?

TOBY: I protested to you.

JOSH: Why?

TOBY: 'Cause I'm not allowed to get arrested anymore.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's really clear in this episode, too, how centrist the Bartlet Administration really is.

JOSH: Indeed, I was waiting for Toby to say "corporations are people".

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: It's like, "oh no, wait a minute."

HRISHI: Because of course there are also conservative objections to free trade. We were just talking about Smoot-Hawley in the last episode [crosstalk] protectionism yeah, but that doesn't really come up in either side of the arguments here. Maybe if the President was there he could give a little lecture on that side too.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Right, protectionism. Did it upset you that when Toby finally goes in to do his spiel he throws his cigar in the ground, like littering Toby.

HRISHI: [laughing] No, what upset me is that I didn't get to actually hear it.

JOSH: Yeah, well there you go sometimes you're a strong proponent of the off-camera dramatic moment and this is the time where you wanted to see it, huh?

HRISHI: I wanted to see it.

JOSH: You don't need the Corey Sykes joke but you had to- you wanted the Toby spiel.

HRISHI: Yup, that's true.

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: Because this was- I thought that there would be a chance for some really great Toby oratory and I don't know I wanted to-

JOSH: Well didn't we get it in mini form with wise cop Rhonda Sachs?

HRISHI: Yes, that's true.

JOSH: As played by Roma Maffia, we should point out her contributions.

HRISHI: Who is in so many things.

JOSH: Yeah she's got a huge resume, she's always terrific. *Nip/Tuck*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Profiler*, [crosstalk] *Pretty Little Liars*, I guess currently or recently.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] *Pretty Little Liars*.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I like Josh's reaction to it, we don't get to see it but we get to hear from Josh.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

JOSH: You know what you are? You are old school.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: So for more on free trade and the arguments for and against it we're joined by Ben Casselman. Ben is the Senior Editor and Chief Economics writer for FiveThirtyEight. Thanks for talking to us Ben.

BEN: Happy to do it.

HRISHI: So, Toby argues that these are the benefits of free trade-

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

TOBY: Food is cheaper.

SACHS: Yes.

TOBY: Food is cheaper. Clothes are cheaper, steel is cheaper, cars are cheaper, phone service is cheaper. You feel me building a rhythm here? Free trade stops wars!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But the TPP, the Trans Pacific Partnership, free trade agreement that was championed by Democrats like President Obama as well as Republicans like John McCain. But then there's also Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders who are united against it and then Trump just signed an order pulling the US out of the TPP. So I was wondering what would these different factions say to Toby and his arguments?

BEN: Yeah, I mean it would probably be basically the exact same argument today that we were hearing back then and during the NAFTA debate which you know this episode was clearly calling back to. I mean, so Toby is right about a pretty good list of those things, right? Food is definitely cheaper, clothes are definitely cheaper, steel, cars, all of that; it clearly lowers prices, it raises incomes and creates jobs, that's the thing that they kept wanting him to say, right, on average. But that on average part is really critical, because there are people who lose. You know if your factory is shut down and moves to Mexico and you lose your job you are clearly not better off because of free trade. If you're in a community where the big factory closes and all of

a sudden, you know, a lot of the best jobs in town disappear then you're not better off. And I think that there has been sort of one shift in the economic conventional wisdom in the 10 or 15 years since this episode aired which is that we've always known that there were those losers in free trade but we tended to think, or economists tended to think, that the impact was relatively short-lived, that they could go and find a better job or at least their children could move out of town and go find a better job somewhere else, and so the downsides were kind of limited and I think that we're increasingly realizing that that's not altogether true, that these downsides can last a pretty long time, can last generations, that those communities often don't recover and so, you know, that creates a different set of tradeoffs than maybe we fully understood 15 years ago.

HRISHI: Hm, so what about the 'free trade stops wars' part?

BEN: So, there's this old idea, right, that two countries with a McDonald's have never gone to war with each other; this is something that you might've heard a while back [crosstalk] is kind of not true anymore. Russia and the Ukraine both have McDonald's and they pretty clearly went to war by most definitions. It's probably broadly true that free trade and opening up trade relationships has reduced conflict, right? When countries have a strong economic interest to remain on good terms then they're more likely to do so. It's not necessarily clear that one more free trade agreement is gonna make a difference and in fact the TPP is an interesting example because in a lot of ways the US goal of the TPP had much less to do with economics and much more to do with sort of geopolitical positioning against China to try to make other Asian nations kind of side with the US against China. You could argue that that was going to add to tensions and I don't think anybody suggested the TPP was gonna start a war with China but it didn't necessarily make one less likely.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Mhm.

JOSH: And doesn't the inverse get argued, aren't there those that say Smoot-Hawley and the quid pro quo protectionism of the '30s escalated into WWII?

BEN: Yeah, so certainly this idea that some of what Trump is proposing, for example, could start a trade war- we've certainly seen plenty of times in history where what starts as a trade war turns into a real war, and so if, you know, Trump sort of pursues some of his more extreme policies then we could see that. I don't know that the debate over the TPP is kind of the thing that was going to launch you know World War III in either direction though.

HRISHI: So, is it fair to say that the center left and the center right are unified on this and this is one of those issues where the spectrum bends into a circle so that the far left and the far right end up being united?

BEN: Yeah, certainly to a degree. You know, we had sort of 20 years here where what was known as the Washington consensus, this sort of bipartisan alignment between sort of moderate Republicans and moderate Democrats, sort of that free trade was good, they disagreed a little bit around the edges about sort of how much help you had to give to displaced manufacturing workers, but they were all kind of on the same page and then you had the more extreme right and the more extreme left opposing free trade though in some cases for somewhat different reasons, you know there's sort of a classic protectionist position on the left and then more of a sort of isolationist position on the right. But yeah, it is sort of a place where these bend and then what we've seen over the last few years and obviously especially in this last election was those

sort of outsider views becoming central and you had, you know, Bernie Sanders come pretty close to on the Democratic side and obviously Donald Trump kind of picking up the Pat Buchanan mantle and actually winning the nomination and the presidency.

HRISHI: As a *West Wing* fan are you surprised at all about where Toby falls on this spectrum?

BEN: Yeah, I kind of would've pegged Toby as a little bit of a free trade skeptic here. Especially, you know, his sort of working working class 'cred', you know you might've thought that he would have come down a little bit more on the union side, the anti-free trade side, but you know it seems that he's toeing the party line pretty well.

HRISHI: Awesome. Ben, this was so great, I feel like I want to come to your class every week.

BEN and JOSH: [laughing]

BEN: Happy to do it.

JOSH: Thanks for being a friend of the podcast.

[outro music]

HRISHI: You know, when C.J. says to Toby

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

C.J.: You want to make out with me right now, don't you?

TOBY: Well, when don't I?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think maybe it's because of Richard's now, in my mind, infamous moment on our podcast where he told the story about thinking about sleeping with Allison Janney to get like to have a look of blank emptiness on his face I never really paid attention before this rewatch to the sexual chemistry or potential sexual chemistry between Toby and C.J.. But now because he said that and like now I see it everywhere, this idea that like "oh did they have a- is there some back story there between the two of them? Or is it just they have this flirty relationship?" I never really thought about it until this time around.

JOSH: Yeah. When I watched and rewatched that moment in preparation for the podcast I thought the same thing which is also not a particularly comic moment, she doesn't actually smile in response. It's kind of [crosstalk] realer [crosstalk] it's realer than it is just a funny one liner and I thought "I wonder if they were- if that's a response, what they were getting from the actors or something they thought might come into play in the future, like keeping certain romantic avenues open," but it's real.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right. [crosstalk] Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah. Let's talk about the Daniel Gault part of the story.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: It starts off with Donna has this friend whose grandfather was Daniel Gault, by the way, I like that she says to Sam:

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

DONNA: Stephanie and I were at Wisconsin together and we bonded as a result of mutual loathing for the same ex-boyfriend.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Even in undergrad Donna was doing really badly with the Bechdel test

BOTH: [laughing]

JOSH: Oh, wow.

HRISHI: But Daniel Gault in our show is a kind of fictional version of Alger Hiss [crosstalk]. In both cases, you know, it's a person who was suspected of treason, they couldn't make treason in both cases, instead he was found guilty of perjury. He's this fictional character but then there are plenty of like real life contextual parts of the story to give it reality, you know like they do talk about McCarthy and they talk about Ring Lardner, who's also a member of the Hollywood Ten, and who was actually blacklisted

JOSH: [crosstalk] Mhm.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

SAM: Ring Lardner just died, how many years does he get back?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And that's real, like in this episode it came out in 2001, Ring Lardner had died the year before.

JOSH: Yeah, I like that scene also, between Sam and Clark Gregg, whom we know as Agent Coulson.

HRISHI: Right, and another mighty Sorkin player.

JOSH: Indeed, we've seen him in *Sports Night* as Calvin Trager, we saw him in the play *A Few Good Men*, he's done all sorts of Aaron stuff. He's a great actor, dear friend of mine, and he's pretty great as Agent Mike Casper. What I like about- well I like the scene altogether just the dynamic between them is interesting and Sam is kind of scoring some of these points. I like that we're later going to discover that there's much more to it and in fact in that scene in the sit room we're going to find out that in fact Gault was guilty, which thinking back to the scene with- I assume Agent Casper knows that- it kind of makes you reassess that scene between them where Sam sort of seems to be steamrolling Casper a little bit, or leaving with him being a little bit this 'I'm not gonna back off' which is what Casper wants him to do. They sort of argue a bit about the FBI's track record. I like Casper's line, "we made more than we missed".

HRISHI: Clark Gregg, obviously, is such a great actor and can carry a series on his own, has got *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* which is a huge hit for ABC, and here he's in this little part and I love how deep the bench is on this show.

JOSH: Yeah, deep bench is the exact term that was flitting through my mind. Is that Aaron has these people he can go to, it's such a treat to be able to speak that kind of dialogue, that I'm sure for some guessing most people say yes without looking 'cause they know it's going to be great stuff and I'm sure Clark was delighted with this one great scene that he had to go mano a mano with Rob Lowe. There's a lot of texture there between the two beyond the words they're

saying and I like discovering later that Casper had weapons to deploy that he couldn't, I mean there's certain information that he can't share that Nancy McNally later will. But he's actually- although you say he's worked up and there's anger there, and there's a hostility to the meeting, part of it I think is the frustration that he can't just put it in Sam's face.

HRISHI: With Hiss it's actually very similar here as well where there was this controversy about whether or not he was guilty or innocent but then years and years later these cables were declassified and decrypted that made it seem like actually he was probably guilty.

JOSH: Oh, is that right? I guess I didn't realize that then. So the ultimate take is there is a similar- similarly- damning evidence?

HRISHI: Yeah, there was evidence that ended up coming out later but it isn't like clear cut exactly, I think that there are still arguments to maintain his innocence. In 1995 there's this thing called the Venona Project that had been this decryption of telegrams and because of that in '95 some of the stuff that came out from that- stuff that had been secret- there was stuff that came to light about the Hiss case. So, without getting so deep into the weeds of about Alger Hiss, but in any case there are parallels I think here too with Gault where at this point, especially in 2001, that was relatively new information and there was a sense of like "oh, everybody has to reexamine the stance that they had had on his guilt or innocence."

HRISHI [continues]: The scene between Sam and Nancy is also so good and this is- I want to give a shout out to the props department here too because that sense of textured- of realness that's layered into the episode extends here like I noticed that in the sit room in all the seats that are currently unoccupied there are these- there are glasses of water that have been drunk from that are not full but they haven't been cleared away, like there had been a meeting earlier that had gone on for a long time and everybody's left but Nancy is still in there doing her call and so they haven't had a chance to clear up the room. Like that's just such a specific little visual detail.

JOSH: I agree it was another- for me this scene was another tonal shift in this episode as opposed to most which is normally the Sit Room is filled with high-powered, largely men, and this is usually a crisis unfolding. Here we have Nancy McNally on a phone call making asides to Sam and kind of comic asides about her voice

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

NANCY: I'm saying he's gonna wanna distinguish readiness and force protection. No, that was me again. [Aside to Sam] I'm the only woman on a conference call, Delaney can't tell when it's me talking. Do I have a bizarrely androgynous voice?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Sam doesn't actually indicate an answer

BOTH: [laughing]

JOSH: Right, he doesn't say yes or no, I noticed that as well. [crosstalk] It just feels different. This is a lower stakes sit room feel. [crosstalk] That said, when it's time to get to brass tacks she doesn't beat around the bush and she just says.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

NANCY: *Drop Daniel Gault, do it right now.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughing] Right.

JOSH: Which I like also to have that for an opening conversational gambit and you an kind of see in her face, I thought Anna Deavere Smith played it well, she knows she's got that enormous document and probably knowing Sam, she, I'm guessing that she suspects, she'll have to produce it. But the opener is like "well, maybe I can just shut this down without having to [crosstalk] show it to him." And Sam being who he is is gonna have his say and he gets a little snippy, even, with her.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right. Yeah. There's a third layer to this, you've got Sam's own issues with his father and the things that he's learned about his father's affair, you've got the Gault pardon, and then you have the longitude and latitude that nothing is where you think it is. Once you're presented with the evidence it's a lot harder to dismiss these things that you have assumed have always been true, like where France is and where you've been living this whole time.

JOSH: And who your dad is.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. The fidelity, he mentions the fidelity of an idea, and when Nancy McNally drops that file in front of him, suddenly that is a thing- you know this is a thing he's been looking for which is evidence. And then as soon as she presents him with this the horror of the incontrovertible truth of that file, he knows what it is and he thinks "I don't want to see that. I shouldn't see that, that's like something I should not be looking at" even though that's the thing that he has been seeking.

JOSH: Sure, and it made me think that there was probably a similar moment with his parents. I'm sure [crosstalk] he would not have wanted to believe the situation with his father and I'm sure there was a similar moment where it just couldn't be denied. And then of course his instinct right out of that room is essentially to hit the granddaughter in the head with it [crosstalk] and let her see the truth and hold up a mirror and- emotionally, entirely understandable.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

SAM: There was a translator in the Hungarian trade mission named Shaba Demsky, she was murdered in 1952. She was about to reveal the name of a Soviet agent called "Black Water." This girl is gonna find out who her father was.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought that was an interesting way to take it because suddenly it takes this idea of is this person guilty or innocent of being a thing and makes it about the victims, the consequences of their actions, and Shaba Demsky is a victim of Daniel Gault's actions. And I think, you know, whether it's Sam's mom or Sam himself he's acknowledging that like having this this affair with this woman is not just about his dad and the woman, there are victims as well.

JOSH: Right, not a victimless crime.

HRISHI: Yeah. Funny hearing that the codename for Gault was “Black Water,” especially right now with the confirmation for Betsy DeVos happening in the news right now and Blackwater, which I think did not exist yet when the episode is made, but that’s a private security contract firm started by Betsy DeVos’s brother, Eric Prince. There’s something about that term that just seems like- sinister.

BOTH: [laughing]

JOSH: Yeah, sinister is the exact word, yeah I thought the same thing too. It’s a- you know- intentionally sinister.

HRISHI: Made me think of the Bourne movies and all the different codenames that they end up having for essentially the same project that Jason Bourne is involved- every [laughing] installment of movie they have to come up with a new one [crosstalk] like “Treadstone” and “Blackbriar” and they all have the same kind of [crosstalk] quality and yeah “Black Water” is really right up there.

JOSH: That’s funny. How about the Sam sugar tossing scene?

HRISHI: I love that scene.

JOSH: I like that scene too. It’s such a weird activity to be found [laughing] [crosstalk] but it- sort of pensiveness as he just does this mechanical task over and over worked in that scene for me. And he has one line that I was really touched by in that scene

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

SAM: I came down here to practice my sugar tossing. ‘Cause if you don’t practice you might as well give the clarinet to a kid who’ll use it.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I thought it was- that was- I was actually touched by that line because that played to me like maybe something his father had told him as a kid. Like he’s just [crosstalk] in this frame of mind of nostalgia about his dad and [crosstalk] it’s just such a parent to kid thing to say.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right. [crosstalk] Yeah. Oh, did you like- I meant to ask you this when we were talking about the Cartographers for Social Equality, this really gratuitous example of Lymanspreading?

JOSH: Mm, I didn’t pick up on it!

HRISHI: First he does it to kind of nudge C.J. instead of nudging her with like an elbow he just spreads his knees all the way across and like bumps her leg with his leg and she like slaps his leg back and then for the rest of the scene he’s just like fully laid out there [laughing].

JOSH: He’s disgusting, that Brad Whitford.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: The only other thing I was gonna say- maybe it’s petty- but I loved that final scene with Sam and Stephanie and I a little bit wish that as Sam makes the turn and decides to tell Stephanie that in fact he’s learned nothing and she can come back in three weeks to petition

again, thereby giving her a little bit of good news to share with her father, Donna kind of moseys into the shot over Stephanie's shoulder just before Sam decides and I little bit wish she hadn't 'cause I don't think he needed her to be the final push to do the quote unquote 'right thing' [crosstalk]. There's a great little moment- the hug at the end of that scene that Donna gives Sam is very sweet [crosstalk] I kind of was like "ok I get why she was there but I little bit- as I watched it and watched it a second time wished that she hadn't so conveniently arrived into the shot at that moment

HRISHI: To nudge his conscience into doing [crosstalk] the right- or the kind thing, [crosstalk] I see that. We talked about this in the last episode too, the dynamic between C.J. and Charlie, you know, that there are all these different combinations of pairings of characters and here there's this dynamic between Donna and Sam that is also very specific and really just their own and this is the first episode where we really get to hang out in that dynamic and it's really sweet and interesting, she knows how to push his buttons, she knows him well enough that she can suggest this kind of manipulative tactic to her friend, and she is also close enough to him that he can take real offense to it.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Right.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

SAM: When she said that from what she's heard I'm the one to talk to, that I have the ear of the President, you told her to say that, right?

DONNA: This was so important to her. I wanted to give her- yes, I did, I'm sorry, I-

SAM: I don't know why you would think I was like that. I mean for fun but, I don't know you'd think I was like that.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I like those few lines actually. There's something odd about those few lines, it did feel like a very personal moment between the two of them where there's this sort of tertiary issue of 'why'd you say that, why'd you have to go there?'

HRISHI: Yeah, like that she knows- she tells her friend "play on his vanity" and it worked and he acknowledges that it worked but then he also he acknowledges that she used it against him.

JOSH: Mhm, yeah, I love that moment.

HRISHI: Yeah. It takes a lot of self-awareness of the characters but it also takes a lot of awareness of the characters that you're writing [crosstalk] to be able to put those words in their mouth [crosstalk].

JOSH: [crosstalk] Right.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Exactly.

HRISHI: And now we're going to take a quick break.

JOSH: Let's. And then we'll talk to Rob Lowe.

[Ad Break]

HRISHI: Joining us now is Rob Lowe who really needs no introduction but here's one anyway. For his role as Sam Seaborn he received an Emmy nomination and four Golden Globe nominations.

JOSH: He was unforgettable on *Parks and Recreation* for his role as Chris Traeger and he currently stars on *Code Black*. His many other credits include *Behind the Candelabra*, *The Austin Powers* films, *Wayne's World*, and of course, *The Outsiders*.

ROB: Hey, man.

JOSH: There are the dulcet tones.

ROB: The dulcet tones you've missed so much.

JOSH: I have missed you.

ROB: Well, listen you guys, congratulations on the podcast I just love that it keeps the flame burning.

JOSH: Yeah, it really- it stokes a flame that never went out because, boy, do people still love the show.

ROB: It is true and I could be wrong about it but it feels to me like *West Wing* was the first show that, like, people streamed and watched on Netflix. I mean I think that's what made them want to do *House of Cards*, I'm almost certain of this.

HRISHI: It's certainly the first show that I- pre-Netflix- it's the first show that I ever binge-watched. I mean it was the first DVD box set that I ever bought and with my family sat and just watched disc after disc.

JOSH: So, let's start at the beginning. How did this project come to you?

ROB: I remember a junior agent at my agency sent me a copy of this pilot and literally just said "read this" not "it's good" not anything, no backstory, no nothing - so much so that when I saw the title *The West Wing* I thought it was some sort of spin off of the then popular syndicated show *Pensacola: Wings of Gold*, legitimately did.

JOSH AND HRISHI: [laughing]

HRISHI: Amazing.

ROB: I thought it was going to be about a fighter squadron.

JOSH: But you read it.

ROB: And I read it and then I turned it and saw "Aaron Sorkin" and I was like "oh, that guy," 'cause I desperately wanted to do that- play that part that Alec Baldwin played in that sort of very forgotten Sorkin script *Malice*.

HRISHI: Josh, you're in *Malice*, right?

JOSH: I am, briefly.

ROB: Are you?

JOSH: I'm trying to remember my line.

[*Malice* excerpt]

RESIDENT (JOSH): Mr. Safian?

MR. SAFIAN: Yeah, what happened to my wife?

RESIDENT: She's bleeding internally. Dr. Hill will come out and talk to you soon as he has her stabilized.

MR. SAFIAN: Is she conscious?

RESIDENT: I'm sorry, Mr. Safian, that's all I know.

[end excerpt]

ROB: That's your milieu.

JOSH: Yeah, there you go, that's right in my wheelhouse.

ROB: This is right in your wheelhouse. So I remembered Aaron's- the name, I was like "oh, ok" and the first scene had Sam Seaborn in it and I remember liking the name a lot. I was like "wow, Sam Seaborn, had a nice ring to it, alliterative, I like it".

JOSH: [laughing]

ROB: And also nobody had told me what part to think about when I read it. I mean I had no idea, you know, who I would potentially be right for but immediately- maybe it was 'cause Sam was the first character, you know and that first opening scene [crosstalk] at the bar is so interesting, maybe it was that I liked the name, but by the end of reading the first scene I had my eyes on Seaborn even though - you know- Josh came up later and that would've probably also been something that I could've been interested in [crosstalk] or whatever. And I read it, it's amazing, and I mean look, it's every bit as good in its written form as it is in its- you know- completed form. And I was like, "I'm in, I wanna be a part of this" and they said "well you gotta come in and you have to audition. And Aaron [crosstalk] everybody is auditioning for this."

JOSH: [crosstalk] Really?

HRISHI: Was that surprising for you?

ROB: It was surprising in that it was still that era where there were guys and gals like me who weren't doing television yet.

JOSH: Mhm.

HRISHI: Right.

ROB: How great and antiquated is the phrase "doing television" by the way.

JOSH AND HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: It was easier for guys and gals like me to do television then.

ALL: [laughing]

JOSH: Before guys and gals like you started doing it.

ROB: Yeah, the movie folk, the fancy [crosstalk] high-falutin movie folk [crosstalk] had not sullied their hands in the television industry yet- so much. But I was game to read because A: I like to come in and read, I'm very competitive that way and I was always kind of feel like "wait a minute, I actually get to compete with the other people?"

JOSH: [crosstalk] That's right.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Mhm.

JOSH: You're a game day player.

ROB: Yeah, I'm like great. Bring it.

JOSH AND HRISHI: [laughing]

ROB: And I also remember- this is gonna sound really corny and actor-y but I remember, maybe for the only time in my career, thinking I am the only person who can play this part.

JOSH:Huh.

ROB: I mean it wasn't like "how am I going to play it, what could I do with it, this could be interesting, wow what an opportunity." It wasn't any of that, it was literally this is my part and I'm just going to go in and blow the [expletive deleted] doors off of it for these guys and I came in on a rainy horrendous day to Warner Brothers to read. I'd never met anybody, it was packed, we had negotiated that I would read once and once only and I came in and met Aaron and Aaron read Mallory and we read the dig sequence with giving the tour of the White House to the school kids and Sam's big speech [crosstalk] about that he accidentally slept with a prostitute and was having a bad day.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right.

JOSH: [laughing]

ROB: And I had it committed to memory but I held the scripts 'cause you never want to have them think that you- that they're getting the absolute best, you wanted them to think [crosstalk] there's still more to come so [crosstalk] I remember halfway through the audition throwing the script down, like [expletive deleted] it, I was on a roll it was going great and I threw the script down like "yeah and by the way I know it cold, how do you like them apples?"

JOSH: [crosstalk] Right.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Smart.

JOSH AND HRISHI: [laughing]

ROB: And I finished it and there the last line is you know "this is bad on so many levels" and everybody laughed. And laughed hard. Then everybody looked around the room at each other and then it got really quiet and nobody said anything and Aaron turned to John Wells and said "See, I told you the scene was funny".

JOSH AND HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: That's a classic Aaron story.

ROB: And I walk to my car and by the time I had driven to Lankershim Boulevard they had called to offer me the part.

JOSH: Nice.

HRISHI: That's awesome.

JOSH: Nice. And how soon would it be before you shot the pilot?

ROB: Gosh, I think I read in January and we shot the pilot in March.

JOSH: So were you hearing role by role who else had come aboard or was anyone on board when you joined?

ROB: Well, you know they couldn't- they famously couldn't make my deal so I took a giant pay cut to be in it and we still weren't anywhere near close to making a deal. They literally just wanted to pay sort of, effectively, scale.

JOSH: Hm.

ROB: And when asked they were like "Well, we don't want any stars. We don't care about stars. We don't want stars. We just want people who are great for the parts." Fine, I totally get it, but I've been working for forty years and I've got a family [laughing].

JOSH: Right.

ROB: So I cut half my price, they did not cut any of their price, and so we agreed to disagree and they read everybody in Hollywood for Sam Seaborn. And I would hear so-and-so read for Sam Seaborn, so-and-so read for Sam Seaborn. And I would run into Aaron at The Palm restaurant and he would look at me with tears in his eyes and I dreamt about the part every single night I dreamt about *The West Wing* and the part, every single night. And I would hear that they read this one and they read that one and finally 48 hours before they were ready to start shooting they came back to me and as I had met them halfway they then met me halfway on their end and we made the deal. I signed my deal in front of Tommy Schlamme in Lyn Paolo's wardrobe department trying on my suits.

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: That's awesome.

ROB: And the next day I was on the set.

JOSH: Oh, so it really went down to it.

ROB: Oh I was fitted at 5 o'clock on a Sunday afternoon and Monday morning- and I'll never forget- I don't know why we had such an early call time- we were downtown at the Biltmore shooting the very first scene of the pilot in the bar. I remember we shot that scene and the sun hadn't even come up yet when we were done.

JOSH: Huh.

ROB: Early!

JOSH: And what was the feel on set? Was it clear you were- I mean you knew it was something special from the script, was it clear it was something special once you guys got in front of the cameras?

ROB: Oh my God, it was magic, magic from day one. I mean everybody- it was like, I don't know, if you're a musician and you're in a jam session for the first time and then everybody is immediately in sync and killing it on their individual instruments and the music itself is great and we absolutely knew we were making something special.

JOSH: Yeah, it's funny that you compare it to music 'cause we have said from the downbeat this show was what it was- it didn't find its legs, it was there.

ROB: It was there- I mean there may be another pilot in television history that's as good as *The West Wing*, they say *The Wonder Years*- is the one you'll always hear. They'll say *The Wonder Years* pilot is the best pilot ever made. Maybe it is, maybe it isn't, but there's- for my money there's no other show that arrived as fully formed and [crosstalk] as great from day one as *The West Wing*. Like you watch the first six episodes of *The Sopranos* and you're like "uh, I guess?" [crosstalk] and then by episode- I think it's like episode six- it's the episode where Tony Soprano goes on a college tour with his daughter and you're like holy [expletive deleted] this show is great.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yeah.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] [laughing] Yeah.

JOSH AND HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Yeah, that's the case with most great shows, they find themselves, they kind of get their legs, they figure out what they want to be.

ROB: I mean I think the only way *The West Wing* found itself was in the time in between the pilot when it was done and then the four, five, months in the interim before we go and shoot the first official episode of the series. And in that interim they figured out "you know what gotta have the president in this" [crosstalk]

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right.

ROB: Because the design was the direct quote from Aaron [imitating Aaron Sorkin] "Ah, but the president's gonna be like the neighbor from *Home Improvement*".

ALL: [laughing]

ROB: [imitating Aaron Sorkin] "I mean you might see the back of his head, maybe he'll come by and get a donut in the middle of a scene."

JOSH: [laughing]

ROB: And wisely he went, wait a minute, that President Bartlet guy, he's got some game. I think we need more than one scene of- per episode of that guy. But other than that it was fully formed.

HRISHI: Well you know we've been wanting to talk to you about this episode "Somebody's Going to Emergency, Somebody's Going to Jail" because I had read that this one is a particular favorite for you, is that right?

ROB: Well, look, it's always like a *Sophie's Choice*.

HRISHI: Sure.

ROB: It's impossible, I love- there's not a bad episode that we ever did. This one I think is probably special for a couple of reasons. Really it was the one time that Aaron consciously said I'm giving you the ball on this one and let's see what happens and it was the one episode that got me my only lead actor Emmy.

JOSH: Awesome, and well deserved, it is a great performance.

ROB: Oh thank you. And you know for me, though, it just proves the old saying that an actor is

only as good as his material and opportunity.

JOSH: Mhm.

ROB: And you know, God bless Sorkin, he was like- he gave me a perfect part, perfect story, and it sort of is close to an episode that is centered on one character for the sort of almost the entirety as they ever did. He was always so great at making it an orchestra and this kind of was as close to a solo as he ever really wrote.

JOSH: Yeah, that is true, it is a little bit of a departure episode, also in weaving in more of the personal with the professional than is often the case.

ROB: It's just even the opening to the Don Henley song [crosstalk] in the title is very unlike any opening of any *West Wing* show. And it also is- it's sort of I believe a standalone script. I think that there are no trailers of storylines from any other episodes throughout it which also in terms of the writing of it is really interesting because it's kind of like if Aaron was doing a traditional procedural show this is maybe what it would be like [crosstalk], which is I think, really interesting.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Right.

HRISHI: Did you and Aaron Sorkin have any kind of conversation before that moment of, you know, him handing you the ball and asking you to lead with it? Was there any kind of precursor?

ROB: No, and in fact, during the show, during the filming of the episode Aaron was conspicuously quiet and conspicuously absent and I ran into him finally one day and I said "how are you feeling about it?" and he goes [imitating Aaron Sorkin] "Ah, kid you're throwing a no-hitter, I don't want to talk to you while you're doing it."

JOSH AND HRISHI: [laughing]

HRISHI: How did you feel while you were shooting it? Did you feel the same way, that you were- that this was a no-hitter for you or was it harder to tell from your vantage point?

ROB: I mean when I look back on it what I felt was just so- it's what an actor dreams of. I shot the big moment for that episode is Sam wheels on Donna in the staircase and gives the big speech.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

SAM: It was high treason and it mattered a great deal. This country is an idea, and one that has lit the world for two centuries, and treason against that idea is not just a crime against the living. This ground hold the graves of people who died for it, who gave what Lincoln called "the last full measure of devotion." Of fidelity. You understand the last full measure of devotion to- treason against them is-

DONNA: Sam.

[end excerpt]

ROB: and we shot this at four o'clock in the morning and my coverage was at the end of an 18 hour day but I didn't care, I loved it, I think that I knew I had something really, really, special and that I was just so grateful for the opportunity to do it, really. I mean it was electric, I mean it was- very, very, few things have been like that.

JOSH: Do you have good memories of working with Jessica Yu as director?

ROB: Yeah and it's funny 'cause you know we had so many great directors and so many great recurring directors, right? Oh great, this is a Chris Misiano director, oh great, this is an Alex Graves show, it's gonna be great- you know. And then every once in awhile we would have the one hit wonders.

JOSH: Right.

ROB: And, at least during my tenure on *The West Wing*, Jessica only directed 1 episode and that was this one and I remember she was really smart, she was really young, and she was I think a- John Wells had a young filmmakers program, it might even have been young diverse filmmakers program, and she came out of that, that's how she got the job. And boy, did she inherit an amazing script [crosstalk] and she did a great job with it. I will say that the hallmark of *The West Wing*, just in terms of the behind the scenes, that separated it from anywhere else is *The West Wing* was like being and practicing for the New England Patriots. There are a lot of NFL teams. And a lot of them are good. And a lot them win Super Bowls. But there's a very specific culture and you don't even have to know much about it to know that it's real. And it was the New England Patriots and everybody came in, we won, it was a culture of winning, it was a culture of your best work, and everybody- you know- gave blood, from the minute they showed up to the minute they left, and every year we expected to go to the Super Bowl and in the four years I was there we went and we won.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yeah. Then I showed up.

ALL: [laughing]

ROB: And then Josh showed up.

JOSH: And the ethos changed.

ROB: But, you know, they made it to the playoffs every year [crosstalk] and that in and of itself it is good.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Josh is there to deflate your balls.

JOSH: Yeah, no you're right I understand. It's like the players may change but it's the franchises that have a certain ethos that win again and again and again and that did exist at *The West Wing*.

ROB: And just the little things, there are countless times in our horrendous schedule- that's the only thing- *The West Wing* was known for its horrendous schedule, and frankly unnecessary, but again, we didn't care. I didn't care, I mean I didn't love it but I didn't care, I wasn't like "can I get out of here, hey can't you shoot me out or- I mean all of the tricks and all those things that people do in one hour drama to survive [crosstalk] nobody did on that show, and I mean nobody. I mean you didn't wrap out at the end of an 18-hour day because now you're only off camera and you only have one line, any other show you're doing that, you're not doing it on *The West Wing*. And by the way, you're not even thinking about doing it or asking.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yes. Yeah, that's right.

HRISHI: I was actually trying to see if there might be a silver lining to the 18-hour day story in that scene Sam is really at the end of his rope and it has been exhausted, could that have been

fuel for the scene?

ROB: Well, it certainly was fuel for the scene, whether it was intended on the schedulers' parts or not I don't know, but it certainly helped. I think they even use a take where I kind of like slur slash stammer my words in the speech. They definitely don't use the cleanest version of it and I think that's great. It was definitely one of those- it was one of those times where that culmination- and as good as that speech is, Donna has the best line in the scene-

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

SAM: This girl's gonna find out who her father was.

DONNA: Sam, you meant grandfather.

[end excerpt]

ROB: and as good as that is, when I go into the office and then I don't tell her [crosstalk] is great. And I remember when Donna comes in and hugs me- I remember just weeping. It's just not gonna get any better than that, it just isn't. That was- it was really special for me and for Janel was just amazing. You know, the other thing is, I think there was nothing better than disillusioned Sam. Disillusioned Sam I never tired of playing and Aaron never tired of writing and when he says that thing that you said earlier about 'I have the ears of the President' [crosstalk], you know, I hope you don't think of me as that guy, you know. That he's hung up on that minutiae of the perception that he would be nothing but a conduit to the- it's just great writing.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Yeah.[crosstalk] Right.

JOSH: I like that he busted Donna on that and that was sticking in his craw, that he was, you know, sharp enough to have sort of figured it out.

ROB: Yes, I did have to ask Aaron what the sugar tossing was all about. I was like, "so like there's a pot? Like on the floor, right?" And then I guess "I'm like throwing things?" I'm like "Is it like beer pong? "

JOSH: [laughing] That's very funny. Yeah, later on in my days we would do some card tossing. I thought like maybe he was working his way towards it.

ROB: He was totally working his way. We spent more time figuring out where the pot in the sugar tossing went than we did on almost anything else in the entire episode.

ALL: [laughing]

JOSH: I watched that scene and I wondered, "is he as accurate as the clanging suggests?" Were you putting in packet after packet?

ROB: And by the way, all of that is unbelievably deliberate, as you can imagine. You know, where clangs are, where the tosses are [crosstalk], none of which are in the script. That's the fun of what we get to do as actors [crosstalk], you know, underscore it with that stuff. How long on the sort of aiming, arching, and stuff, that was a very fun part. But yes, by the way it was all- no special effects, there was no- [crosstalk] It's all me, baby.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Sure.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Right.

JOSH: [crosstalk] So it's all Lowe.

JOSH: It's "Sweet and Lowe"

HRISHI: [laughing]

ROB: Yes, it was.

JOSH: I brought my B game. Let me ask you this, so did you rewatch the episode for our discussion or when's the last time you saw it?

ROB: I actually haven't watched it in a while but I've watched it a bunch. I mean, I have such great memories of it, I mean the other- Anna Deavere Smith is amazing in it and [crosstalk] I love playing when he finally gets when she sort of slides over the lost Ark of the Covenant to him [crosstalk] and he won't open it.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] I love your scene with her.

JOSH: [crosstalk] This massive file.

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

SAM: That's not an FBI file.

NANCY: It's an NSA file.

SAM: Nancy, I'm classified but I don't have codeword clearance.

NANCY: I know.

SAM: I'm saying I'm not allowed to see that and you can get into trouble for showing it to me.

NANCY: I could go to jail for showing it to you.

[end excerpt]

ROB: We tried to like- Sam doesn't want to open it 'cause I think he knows on some level.

JOSH: Yeah.

ROB: And again, disillusioned Sam.

HRISHI: I really like that we get to witness you going from this state of utter defiance and righteousness at the beginning to, by the end of the scene, you're completely turned around and we get to clock every single beat, every little emotional beat, and move that it takes to get you there by the end and I believe every single turn.

ROB: Oh thanks. That scene with the FBI agent, Clark Gregg, by the way [crosstalk] Agent Coulson, that's right! He was so good in that scene [crosstalk] and that's one of those- that's the thing *The West Wing* did great too. I mean at that point people loved the show so we got our pick of people coming in, but every single person who came in and had some scenes was a crusher.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yes, Agent Coulson.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah, that's right. We've always talked about they could've stunt cast any number of smaller roles but instead they just cast great character actors always.

ROB: Yeah, and Clark is unbelievable in that. You really believe he's an FBI guy [crosstalk]. And you believe that relationship.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yeah.

HRISHI: Can I ask you another question about the director actually?

ROB: Yeah.

HRISHI: I know that Jessica Yu also directed the pilot of a series you did later of *Lyon's Den* and I was wondering if that, at all, had anything to do with how it went, you know, with this episode turning out so well.

ROB: Yeah, I think she directed Episode One of *Lyon's Den*. I thought she was great and also thought she was a sort of good luck charm.

JOSH: Sure [laughing].

ROB: I mean, you know, look *The West Wing* behind the scenes, there were three very intense personalities, any one of which on their own alone would have been quite enough for any one show. We had three of them, we had Sorkin, Wells, and Schlamme. And it takes a very particular person to navigate that day in and day out, and for a young, inexperienced, woman to come in and do that with like no sweat on her brow I thought was really, really, great.

JOSH: You raise a really interesting point, Did you think that the great triumvirate functioned well with each other always or was there ever any kind of tension among those three?

ROB: I don't have any empirical evidence for this but I always felt that there was very respectful competition. You know, again I always talk about *The West Wing* like it's The Beatles a little bit and you know it's like everybody wants their songs they've written to make it onto the album. You know, there was John, you know knew how to make the trains run on time and protected Aaron from the powers that be. So if Aaron wrote "five destroyers are in Los Angeles harbor" or whatever there are five destroyers, real ones, not four, not two, that's John [crosstalk]. And Tommy was like the Aaron whisperer.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Right.

JOSH: [laughing] He had the president's ear.

ROB: Yeah, he had the ear of the president, that's right. You know, and then there's Aaron, the president. And also the energy on the set, I swear to God, it might not have been actual bleachers but it sure seemed that way around *Video Village* 'cause on any given day you'd come in and it would be like the entire team from NBC News, including Brian Williams and his family watching. Or it would be you know, Chris Rock was there- I mean it was just always a cavalcade of people stopping by to watch the shoot and that was always really fun. But it was a lot going on- a lot to navigate.

HRISHI: I've never totally understood how a director actually fits in there. As you said Tommy was there to make sure things are running smoothly and Aaron is there to make sure the words are said correctly, but would you ever have moments where a director would try an idea and you, as an actor, would say to yourself "whoa this is a terrible idea" and you'd have to go find Tommy and say "can you fix this" or "can you make sure that this terrible idea doesn't happen"?

ROB: I don't know if I have an exact answer to that but I will tell you this: I hadn't worked with Alex Graves since *The West Wing* and I had the opportunity to about 3 weeks ago and we barely got any work done because all we did was sit and talk about *The West Wing* and laugh and it was just the best and I said "Alex, you're the guy who brought the 360 to *The West Wing*." So I'll never forget it, I think it was Noël, there's the big- one of our famous walk and talks and Alex does a 360, which had never been done and it was a big deal. And Tommy came down, and this one came down, and everybody went to the corner and everybody talked and- you know Alex is nothing if not lacking in confidence so you know he's fought for it and Aaron at the end of the day looked at a take and said [imitating Aaron Sorkin] "Ah, I think it's great, no problem" and that was that. But there were just certain things you did and didn't do on the show, I mean close ups, there are no real close ups on *The West Wing*. the biggest close up that was ever shot in the history of *The West Wing* is Brad Whitford's opening credit shot that he demanded be put in.

JOSH: Oh, snap.

ALL: [laughing]

ROB: It's the biggest closeup ever shot in the history of the show which, by the way, looks like a keylight- that like is like Scavullo must have designed.

ALL: [laughing]

JOSH: That's fantastic, we're going to take a close look at that.

ROB: But Malina, with all- you have a career of beating up on Whitford.

JOSH: This is true, I haven't really picked up on that [crosstalk] I'm gonna have to take a closer look.

ROB: [crosstalk] How have you not picked up on that?

ROB: Go right now and look at the opening titles for the first one or two episodes of *The West Wing*.

JOSH: Wow, oh my God, yeah I really- I didn't realize this is what you were saying [laughing].

ROB: Now go and look- I feel like it was mid first year and now he's got a gooey gigantic shot through a cheesecloth [crosstalk] vaseline-covered lens, beauty shot the likes of which does not exist in the canon of *The West Wing* in its history.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Vaseline-covered lens.

JOSH: Oh wow, we're gonna analyze this as if it were the *Zapruder* film.

ROB: As you should.

JOSH: Yeah, yeah, I'm gonna go frame by frame. I did not realize- wow.

ROB: My fantasy of it is that he and Tommy, who were always in cahoots [crosstalk] did it on a weekend, that they broke into the soundstage.

JOSH: [crosstalk] I see.

JOSH: Maybe no one will notice.

ROB: Maybe no one will notice that there's a new element to the credits.

JOSH: Oh that's fantastic, thank you for that.

ROB: Yeah, Josh, I remember Brad used to say- I said "how great are the opening credits, aren't they amazing" and he said "I look like an exhausted Rhesus monkey."

ALL: [laughing]

HRISHI: In the original version?

ROB: That's what he said, I'll never forget it.

HRISHI: Rob, I read a quote from you in an interview where you were talking about this episode and how there's this fictional spy, Daniel Gault, and there was a real life inspiration from Alger Hiss and I was wondering is that knowledge of Alger Hiss and Nixon and that era of American politics is that stuff that you already had before you were working on the show or is that stuff that would come out from research that you would do for a particular episode or is it just generally something that you were already interested in?

ROB: I was already interested in it. I think, although the cast made up for lost time very quickly, when we first started shooting *The West Wing* I was the only cast member that had ever been at a president's side or campaigned with the candidate or walked a rope line or been in a spin room or been in debate prep or been at a debate or been in a motorcade, I'd done all those things. So, I can remember being with Allison Janney at the upfronts for season 1 when we hadn't been on the air yet and people were milling about and we were talking I was like "this is your preparation, what you're doing right now, this is the spin room post-debate, this is what it's like." Incidentally, the upfronts are where you know the show is unveiled to the critics and the media buyers and it's a big rhubarb and it's in New York and honestly a lot of shows are put on the schedule and very few of them make it and it is the most jaded insider baseball [crosstalk] horrifying Bataan Death March you could ever possibly imagine and *The West Wing* ran a 30 second clip, one of ten 30 second clips that I'm sure they ran, and at the end of the clip it got a standing ovation, something that I've never heard of or seen before or since.

JOSH: [crosstalk] So true.

JOSH: Back to the Emmy's. Do you have an Emmy memory, that must have been a good night.

ROB: So many. I remember the first Emmy *The West Wing* won was because it's always the first category, Best Supporting Actor so I think Richard won the first Emmy for *The West Wing* and I knew then it was gonna be a big night. And then Aaron won and I remember him getting up and I got up to hug him and his bow tie was facing completely the wrong way and I remember adjusting his bow tie before he went up on stage. And then when it was announced us for Best Show, we were a new show, we were a rookie show, and they play that theme and you walk up and it's unbelievable, but I will tell you I was present when they recorded the theme with a full orchestra at the Clint Eastwood dubbing stage at Warner Brothers and to be around a full orchestra in and of itself was always amazing and that theme was written by my longtime friend Snuffy Walden.

JOSH: Oh yeah, we want to talk to him, we want to get him on. So, because you were pals with him you just said "hey can I watch this?"

ROB: Exactly, and I was sitting in the back of the room and they're like "alright, and take two" or

whatever, and they- and it's literally that theme comes up and they're playing it and I've never it- I'd never heard it, it's the first time I'd heard it. I was sitting next to Tommy and you know I still get goosebumps when I hear the theme, you can only imagine what it felt like the first time hearing it, and it finishes and I turn to Tommy and I said "you know what that is?" Tom goes "what?" "that's walking music."

JOSH AND HRISHI: [laughing]

ROB: And he goes "what do you mean?" and I said "that's the music you walk to in your tuxedo to get your awards."

JOSH: So you really called it with *West Wing*, you knew it was gonna be what it became?

ROB: Absolutely. There was a little bit of an element of are we going to be like a six and out legendary critical darling, there was absolutely that. I knew what we had but I just didn't know you know if a lot of people- how many people would like it and I'll never forget the night it aired we had a big party at Aaron's house or John Wells, I can't remember who. Great party and we all talked and we all watched it together and it was all great and I went back to Santa Barbara and my phone rang. Out of a dead sleep I looked, the sun hadn't come up, and you know when your phone rings then it's either really bad news or really good news.

JOSH AND HRISHI: [laughing]

ROB: And I picked it up and it was Scott Sassa, president of NBC [crosstalk]. He said "I needed to call you and tell you about these ratings," and the ratings were amazing. And that's the other thing, we were a rating hit from day one and that's the thing we didn't know [crosstalk] but we did know it, after the very first episode.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Nice.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Right.

HRISHI: Right. Is there one thing that you remember for this that was the most difficult, the hardest thing to pull off?

ROB: Yeah, for sure it was the speech on the staircase. It's got- first of all it could be stagy, I mean from the minute he- Sam, gets up and doesn't want to talk to Donna and is walking away from her and she's chasing him down you're working on three different sets. Just the stupid, you know, architecture of it, forget the performance. Like, how far do we get before we get to this dialogue, you know, at what point of the staircase are we, where do I turn around, am I two steps too high, am I too far away from her, should we be together, am I walking too fast, I don't want to walk that fast, should she put her hand on my shoulder, should I spin on her, you know? All of that choreography was unbelievably hard to do because it gets really bad really quick if you don't get it right, it gets very soap opera. So there was that, and it's a mouthful, you know, but we were used to that, and it's late and I know it's a big show for me, and you know, it's one of those things where the entire script and episode has been building to. I always feel like it's like you're a gymnast coming up with- it's like a triple aerial dismount and that's all fine and good but if you don't stick the landing it doesn't make any difference.

JOSH: This is true, yeah, a lot of pressure on that scene. And you're a very good match to Aaron and you would go on to play Kaffee in London in *A Few Good Men*.

ROB: Which was so fun. I mean I know you did this show [crosstalk] and it's the creative highlight of my life, it really truly is, and it's the most fun I ever had with Aaron and I learned a lot about him. *The West Wing* was fraught with personality and sometimes that made it a very tense undertaking. The work was always great but it wasn't like a real user friendly place to work, it just wasn't, which is fine 'cause we're making great work and nobody cared. But Aaron as a playwright was like a dream and just you realized that is truly what he was born to do. Incidentally, I'm dying to see his directorial debut, I bet it'll be great.

JOSH: [crosstalk] That is true.

JOSH: I know! I know! [crosstalk] Very interested to see what he'll do as a director of his own material, yeah.

ROB: [crosstalk] Right?

ROB: Well, I'll never forget the day, you remember, he'd sit with the earphones on and chew the gum, the Nicorette I'm assuming, and mouth the words, right [crosstalk] and direct with his hands. And then slam the headphones to the ground and exit. Literally like no one exits like Aaron Sorkin, nobody, he exits like- I dunno- like Norma Desmond, it's amazing. And Janel was doing something, I don't know, and Aaron was- and he's watching and he throws the headphones down, runs onto the stage and says [imitating Aaron Sorkin] "Janel the line is 'thank you, Josh', that's the line, doesn't mean you wanna [expletive deleted] him, it doesn't mean anything like that, it's just 'thank you, Josh' ok?".

JOSH: [crosstalk] Oh, yeah.

JOSH AND HRISHI: [laughing]

ROB: I was like that's the kind of direction actresses love.

JOSH: Yeah, don't they? I wonder how Idris Elba and Jessica Chastain are responding.

ALL: [laughing]

ROB: Isn't that an amazing one?

JOSH: That's awesome. Thank you for joining us, this has been an awesome interview.

HRISHI: Yeah, thank you so much.

ROB: Oh this is great, are you kidding me, it was so fun. But for sure, guys, reach out to me and we'll do the next one for sure.

JOSH: Alright, will do, thanks, man.

HRISHI: And that's it for our episode.

JOSH: Thanks for listening.

HRISHI: Thanks so much to our guest Rob Lowe for joining us.

JOSH: Woo, he even sounds handsome.

HRISHI: [laughing] It's true. You could follow Rob Lowe on Twitter @RobLowe and you can follow us as well @WestWingWeekly. Josh is @JoshMalina and I'm @HrishiHirway.

JOSH: You can listen to Hrishi's other fabulous podcast Song Exploder wherever fine podcasts

are given away for free.

HRISHI: [laughing] And if you want to discuss this episode with us or with other West Wing Weekly listeners feel free to get into rousing debate on our website thewestwingweekly.com [crosstalk] or on our Facebook page facebook.com/thewestwingweekly.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Bring it.

JOSH: Bring it there, too. I was delighted to see at Women's March LA many West Wing Weekly lapel pins.

HRISHI: That's so awesome. I didn't see anybody with any *West Wing* stuff.

JOSH: You gotta look harder, Hrishi. I think the phrase "what's next" featured on the pin is really landing with people these days. And so if you want a West Wing Weekly lapel pin, and buying one does help the endeavour that is our podcast, you can go to westwingweekly.com/pin.

HRISHI: The West Wing Weekly is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a curated network of extraordinary cutting edge shows. This episode was produced by Josh and myself, with help from Zach McNees and Margaret Miller.

[New York Minute by Don Henley playing in the background]

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

ROB: What's next?

[Outro Music]