

The West Wing Weekly  
3.11: "100,000 Airplanes"  
Guest: Dr. Leo Mascarenhas

[Intro Music]

JOSH: You're still listening to The West Wing Weekly, even though you don't like it that much. I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm...

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*Toby: Just the guy who does the thing.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [cross talk] "Just the guy who does the thing."

JOSH: Of course, that greeting wasn't to everyone, but to those of you who don't like the show that much but are sticking with it, I salute you.

HRISHI: Even if you baffle us a little bit.

JOSH: Right. I wanna start right off the top with a mea culpa.

HRISHI: Oh, I wanted to start off the top by wishing you a happy half-iversary.

JOSH: That's right, now that 3.11 is behind us we are officially halfway through the third season. I made a bit of a mistake, hence my mea culpa, or my mea stupida, as I like to think of it. The funny thing is, it is slightly unlike me, I have a pretty good math head, but making a stupid mistake is not unlike me. I'm more disappointed in you.

HRISHI: I know. I went back and listened to it, and you said, "Happy half-iversary," and I just said, "Wow." I was a little surprised and taken aback, and I think I felt a little sheepish that I didn't realize it, you know, like I'm pretty good with the anniversaries.

JOSH: Oh, you felt bad because I was pointing something out and you were like, "Oh, how did I miss our half-iversary?"

HRISHI: Yeah, I was like, "Oh my gosh, I wasn't thinking about this at all!" And then I just went with it and I kinda started to try to think about the math while also still talking about the episode and then it just went past us. I'm gonna pass the buck onto Margaret Miller and Zach McNees, who also listened to the episode before it went out. None of us are apparently that attentive.

JOSH: But then amazingly, we will get back an initial audio draft of the show, and I listened to it in its entirety, and it never occurred to me. So the number of opportunities to catch what was a pretty moronic mistake were many and yet, there ya go. So let me own that. Of course, halfway through seven seasons would be midway through the fourth season, not midway through the third season. I was thinking, third season, eleventh episode, like we've done three seasons and 11 episodes, that of course is not true. So I guess the positive takeaway is that there's so [expletive deleted] much more to do before this podcast is complete.

HRISHI: Yeah, in 2019.

JOSH: There ya go.

HRISHI: Okay, well, in this episode we're discussing season three, episode 11 of *The West Wing*, the title is "110,000 Airplanes."

JOSH: You know what half of that would be?

HRISHI: Three hundred and eleven airplanes.

JOSH: That's right! This episode first aired on January 16th, 2002, just one day before my 36th birthday. I'm gonna have to fact check that now.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah. Who knows with you now, we have no....

JOSH: [cross talk] I might be wrong on the math.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] You've lost all credibility.

JOSH: Yeah, that's right! This episode was written by Aaron Sorkin, it was directed by David Nutter. Are you aware of his work?

HRISHI: Yeah, that guy's crazy.

JOSH: He has directed tons and tons of fantastic TV: *Sopranos*, lots of single episodes, a single episode of *The West Wing* -- this is it -- 10 *Entourages*, six *Game of Thrones*, or is it *Games of Throne*?

HRISHI: *It's Entours-age.*

JOSH: Very nice. He's just a terrific director. And he does a good job with this one, I think.

HRISHI: In this episode, there are two timelines. In the present, President Bartlet gives his State of the Union address while Sam's being shadowed by a *Vanity Fair* reporter who turns out to be his ex-fiancée. And in flashbacks to a couple weeks earlier, the staff tries to accommodate the president's desire to announce a crusade to cure cancer. Oh, and Josh is still making goo-goo eyes at Amy. Also for this episode, editor Janet Ashikaga was nominated for an EPPY. Whoa! Editor Janet Ashikaga was nominated for an Emmy.

JOSH: I actually thought there must be something called the EPPYs. I was like, "Wow, another [expletive deleted] thing I've never won."

HRISHI: Nah.

JOSH: The EPPYs. Janet is a terrific editor, she edited many -- most I wanna say, of *Sports Night*, most episodes. And although I can't recall the exact episode, maybe it'll come to me later on in the podcast, I know there was one scene I was shooting with Allison, and for some reason Allison was cursing up a storm, very creatively, and really, really foul language. And I can't remember whether it was my side of the scene, and Allison was trying to get me either to laugh or have some sort of reaction, but for some reason she was improvising super vulgar language. And I remember that Janet was offended by it. She was in the editing room watching take after take after take of what was funny in the moment, but she found it less so at the time.

HRISHI: This episode, these are the first three words, if you wanna call them that, that I have on my notes.

JOSH: Yes...

HRISHI: FRONTL. POTUS. SOTU.

JOSH: Nice. And I understand.

HRISHI: The flashbacks in this episode take place one day after our previous episode, one day after "H-Con 172."

JOSH: One hundred and seventy-two is half of 500.

HRISHI: Right. It's the happy half-con-iversary.

JOSH: I like that we open, or we get in the cold open, a little of Bartlet actually delivering the State of the Union...

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: *...within the last half century, America won the Cold War and modeled freedom for a waiting world.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I always love Bartlet the Orator. He's good, that Martin Sheen.

HRISHI: Mhm. Yeah, it sounds like a real State of the Union address.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: But we're not there with him, we're hearing him through the TV. And we're actually with Sam and his former fiancée, Lisa, as he's going through watching the C-Span feed of the president, and he's kind of guiding her through what they're hearing, and what she's seeing, with these focus groups that they're monitoring.

JOSH: Right, Sam, like everyone, is super eager to get a little feedback from the participants in the focus groups.

HRISHI: So, instead of telladonna in this episode, we really get an extended tellalisa.

JOSH: Yes. Lisa, who, by the end of the show, sensing Sam's discomfort, will promise to pass her notes to a colleague who will take over the piece, never takes a note, that I notice. Although she gets a fair amount of information from her subject, she writes nothing down. So I don't necessarily blame Sam for not wanting her to write the piece. She admits to no preparation, and then she refers to notes that she hasn't taken.

HRISHI: Right. Maybe she's got a phonographic memory.

JOSH: There you go, perhaps so.

HRISHI: This little joke that goes on through the episode:

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*C.J.: Hey, is the reason you guys didn't get married because her name would've been Lisa Shureborn-Seaborn?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I liked very much. And it also reminded me of Murphy Brown. Did you ever watch *Murphy Brown*?

JOSH: A little bit.

HRISHI: There's a character played by Faith Ford, Corky Sherwood. And somewhere in the course of the show she ends up getting engaged to a lawyer, his name is Will Forrest, and then she has the horrible realization that she's now going to be known as Corky Sherwood-Forrest.

JOSH: Ha! That's good.

HRISHI: I think Shureborn and Sherwood are pretty close anyway, but then the Shureborn-Seaborn, Sherwood-Forrest...

JOSH: Are you saying there might be a link?

HRISHI: I was wondering if Aaron might be a *Murphy Brown* fan and maybe picked her name.

JOSH: Perhaps so. I could see that.

HRISHI: In the initial scenes as the president's going through his address, you can see little glimpses that Sam is actually proud of himself. He's proud of the language, and he's proud of the reaction it's getting. He doesn't really let it show, but you can see a little bit in his eyes and the hint of a smile, but then he almost immediately tamps it down in the face of anybody else's admiration. Especially Lisa's.

JOSH: That's right

HRISHI: Lisa says, "Hey, great job!" and he shuts it down completely.

JOSH: By the end, and the good news that in fact it's been a rousing victory for the president and the numbers are spectacular, he's back down in the dumps again, as he's with Lisa in his office. But you're right, a little bit earlier in the evening as it's happening, he seems to take a little pleasure in his work.

HRISHI: Mhm. Sam is really in a funk the whole episode. He's really moody in a way that -- I actually like it. There isn't a great, like, perfect explanation for why he's in such a funk, but he has this kind of angsty quality that feels very real. It's kind of -- and I attribute part of it to just being in the presence of his ex-fiancée. I think that's messing with him.

JOSH: Yes, I agree with you. And I think it's one of the strengths of the episode, is that it isn't made super clear exactly what's going on emotionally. It seems to be a swirl of things. The cancer bit that I guess he feels good about having written when the president is sort of pitching his vision for including the section, Sam's the only one who really seems to be on board, so that's been left out. I guess that's a blow to Sam. And I guess having a reporter follow him around altogether is not ideal from his point of view and then, of course, it's a woman with whom he has a very serious romantic history and a botched engagement. So, that whole swirl of emotions seems not to be sitting too well with Sam.

HRISHI: Yeah. He's saddened about having to cut the cure for cancer, but by the end of the episode he's actually there with the president saying, "You know we can't do this." And despite many people having told the president, "We can't do this," I think it takes Sam, who was on the same page with him, to actually bring him down. Like he dreams with the president together.

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: *This is good.*

SAM: *You know we can't do it.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Yeah.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And the president only at that point lets in the reality that he's like, "Yeah, I know." But it's funny despite everybody else, everybody else had sorta been saying no to it all along, he only really listens when someone kinda came along with him for a little while.

JOSH: Yeah. You know what I found interesting? In all the scenes during which that subplot plays out, I kept thinking, "Is there no middle ground?" I get the reluctance to point to the fence, and say, "We're going to beat this thing and we're going to do it within 10 years." But ultimately they excise the entire topic and it seems to me there is a middle ground, where they could have talked about a recommitment to cancer research, and the new indications that there is hope and that maybe, without putting a number on it, maybe there is hope in the future to reduce terminal cancers to chronic cancers. I just kept thinking, "How come nobody's pitching something in between?" And when I went back, and I watched the cold open again, the little bit of the State of the Union that we get includes President Bartlet saying:

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: ...there is no limit to what we can achieve. There is no limit to what we will achieve.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I thought, "Hey, this might be a good spot for it."

HRISHI: Right. It's funny because the reasons why they can't, that Sam and the president then list, you know, they say, "Oh, the ONB has to score it, we need to line up experts," but the whole time the precedents that they're citing are ones where they didn't have something similar. There wasn't that same kind of accountability when they said, "Ok, we're gonna go to the moon."

JOSH: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: [cross talk] And nobody had any idea how they were gonna do it. Does he have to be specific? There's so many things -- he also says that he will find and eradicate every single enemy of the United States and every enemy of freedom.

JOSH: Exactly what I was about to say -- no matter what cave you're in, whatever, wherever you're hiding. He doesn't put a number on what that's going to cost, or how that's going to happen. And I think you're onto a very good point, which is that the State of the Union is one of those rare speeches, I think, where you can sort of broad stroke it, and get a little flowery and aspirational and poetic, without necessarily having to bottom-line it as distinctly as you generally do in a kind of policy speech.

HRISHI: Right. Which brings us to the real world for a second, because in 2016, President Obama actually did announce that they were going to cure cancer in 10 years at the State of the Union.

JOSH: Yeah, why not? My feeling is anything you wanna point to and say, "This will happen years after I'm done with my second term," that's kinda brilliant.

HRISHI: And if it's something where the hope is that it will inspire people in public and private

industry, to reinvigorate that energy, I don't know what the problem is, in terms of the intention. And to learn more about this we called up Children's Hospital Los Angeles and spoke to Dr. Leo Mascarenhas.

HRISHI: Dr. Mascarenhas, what's your official title?

DR. MASCARENHAS: I'm the Deputy Director of the Children's Center for Cancer and Blood Diseases, and the Section Head of Oncology. I'm also the Director of the Clinical Trials program.

HRISHI: Last year in the State of the Union address, President Obama said:

[State of the Union 2016 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT OBAMA: Last year, Vice President Biden said that the with a new moon shot, America can cure cancer. Last month, he worked with this Congress to give scientists at the National Institute of Health the strongest resources that they've had in over a decade. Let's make America the country that cures cancer once and for all, whatdya say, Joe?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: In this episode of *The West Wing* that we're discussing, the president there also talks about wanting to achieve a cure for cancer within 10 years, same time frame that President Obama gave. And I wanted to know, what do you think? Are we anywhere close to a cure for cancer?

DR. MASCARENHAS: Well, that's the vision and the hope, and there are new avenues to attack cancer which are being explored, and many of them in the past were just a pipe dream and have actually become a reality. With some cancers, for example, you know, we're close. I mean, not even 40 or 50 years ago for example, a child with leukemia had less than a 10% chance of living and it was almost considered a fatal illness. Today we can cure almost 90% of them and with some subsets, cure over 99% of them. So I think there's been remarkable progress. The recent buzzword which everybody is really talking about is immunotherapy, and this is really harnessing the body's immune system to actually attack cancer and basically kill it and cure it. A classic example is our President Jimmy Carter, who received one of these drugs, and he had metastatic melanoma and is in remission at this time, and this disease in the past was considered incurable. However, not all cancers are responding the same way and we need to answer that, and I think the cancer moon shot identified an area of intensified research to kind of understand why some cancers can be cured and some cannot, and how can we address the reasons why those cancers are not responding.

HRISHI: There's often language around curing cancer, as if it's a single disease.

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*BARTLET: I think in the State of the Union that I can announce that I'm directing our researchers to have the cure of cancer in 10 years. Call everyone in.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But it's really not, right? There are thousands of different kinds of cancer with the different causes and genetic markers.

DR. MASCARENHAS: It's absolutely different diseases, and even what we think -- we thought was a single disease before, like a single category, there are so many various subtypes with different genetic abnormalities and backgrounds and they respond in different ways. And so our hope is the new era will bring in what we call precision oncology, that is, the right drug for the right cancer for the right patient. And if all those things align, then you can cure cancer.

HRISHI: There's a mention in this episode which was a signal transduction inhibitor. Is that still relevant in the work that you're talking about?

DR. MASCARENHAS: It is relevant, but again it depends on the situation. There's a disease called chronic myelogenous leukemia, which in the past was a pretty deadly disease. And the only hope for cure was a bone marrow transplant, and that's where this drug Ibrutinib that was on the cover of *Time Magazine* a few years ago -- not a few, it's over a decade ago now -- called Gleevec, came in and changed the face of the disease.

HRISHI: And wasn't Gleevec a signal transduction inhibitor-based drug?

DR. MASCARENHAS: Yeah, it's a tyrosine kinase inhibitor.

HRISHI: Really at this point you could just make up syllables and we'd believe you.

DR. MASCARENHAS: Ok. But for example, immunotherapy, you know, like the drug which worked for President Jimmy Carter is not a tyrosine kinase, it's not an induction. But what it does is that the drug actually takes away a signal on the cancer cell or on the immune system which prevent them from recognizing each other. And by taking away that signal the immune cell recognizes the cancer cell as abnormal and attacks it and does away with it.

HRISHI: Do you think it is valuable, is it worthwhile, to try and put a timeline on finding a cure?

JOSH: Right, does that help or hurt cancer researchers?

DR. MASCARENHAS: I think it really helps cancer researchers, and I think the reason is that if you actually have a strict timeline, you actually have an action plan, and you can synergize and get all interested parties and here, particularly the government behind this, you have the big private sector. It's akin to President Kennedy, many years ago, basically saying, you know, we're gonna put a man on the moon and we did it, if he didn't do it, it wouldn't have happened.

JOSH: That parallel of getting to the moon is drawn in this *West Wing* episode.

DR. MASCARENHAS: Oh, really? Oh, I didn't even know that!

JOSH: Are you a fan of *The West Wing*?

DR. MASCARENHAS: You know, I would love to watch it, but unfortunately I am so stretched that I almost never watch any television.

JOSH: In fairness, you are doing more important things.

DR. MASCARENHAS: Is it available on Netflix?

JOSH: Indeed it is.

DR. MASCARENHAS: I think I can get into it. I mean, for sure. I mean, the topics which I've heard being discussed is all areas which are in my interest.

JOSH: I feel a little bit though, Hrishi and I are working towards impeding progress on cancer

research by convincing you watch more television. I was gonna ask though, can you speak to the current state of cancer research funding: is it adequate, does it vary greatly from specific disease to disease?

DR. MASCARENHAS: It does. I mean, and you know, I can speak from the pediatric perspective, because I'm a pediatric oncologist, we were very, very pleased when Vice President Biden, you know, identified pediatric cancer as one of the focus areas, and the cancer moon shot initiative. And we still have to see where the dollars will come in for, but I think they'll find a way to get there.

HRISHI: Dr. Leo Mascarenhas, thank you so much.

DR. MASCARENHAS: Thanks so much, Hrishu.

[end phone interview]

JOSH: You know, the whole subplot about the possibility of the cure for cancer and then the response, whenever someone poses the question: "How do you do that?" "That we don't know," made me think of a family story. My dad has a cousin, as I think almost every family does, who is kind of a get-rich-quick scheme guy, always coming up with ideas.

HRISHI: Mhm. I think I might be that guy in my family.

JOSH: Is that right?

HRISHI: Might be.

JOSH: Well let me know if you need an angel investor.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: I have \$300. So, this cousin of my dad's, decades ago, calls my dad up: "Bobby, I got it, I got the big one! Imagine this: you go to your house, you open a can of paint, you paint a single coat in a room..."

HRISHI: I already see where it's going!

JOSH: "...and you never have to repaint that room again! What do you think of that?' My dad says, "It sounds fantastic, how do we do this, who's got the...?" And he says, "Oh no, no, that's the...we gotta get someone to come up with that." Ok!

HRISHI: That's great. It also reminds me of the gnomes from South Park, which is a well-known meme on the Internet. But if you don't know it...

JOSH: [cross talk] Well-gnome?

HRISHI: Yep, it is well-gnome. But if you don't gnome it, it basically breaks down to three...they have three phases:

[South Park Episode 2.17 excerpt]

*GNOME: Phase one, collect underpants. Phase two...*

[end excerpt]



HRISHI: "Question mark."

[South Park Episode 2.17 excerpt]

*GNOME: Phase three, profit!*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh, I like that!

HRISHI: So, here we could break down, President Gnome Bartlet says, "Phase one, announce cure for cancer. Phase two, question mark. Phase three, cancer's cured!"

JOSH: There ya go. There it is.

HRISHI: I wanna ask you about a couple of other things.

JOSH: Please do.

HRISHI: In the scene when we have the oncologists who are Abbey's friends...

JOSH: First of all, let me ask you, in this scene Abbey gets up and takes a phone call during the grapefruit course? This is a huge faux pas as a hostess, I believe.

HRISHI: Maybe she thought the president's really hosting this.

JOSH: Huh. There ya go.

HRISHI: He seems very engaged by the way he's not looking at anyone and not talking to anyone.

JOSH: Yeah. And the way he says

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Abbey just went to take a phone call...*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Just kinda like, don't talk to me, she should be back soon. Yeah, it made me laugh, he's grouchy.

HRISHI: It's a pretty brilliant excuse, the phone call, to not have to pay Stockard Channing for an episode.

JOSH: Very good point. You're exactly correct. She was getting a phone call from the producers saying, "Hey, you're not gonna be in this episode."

HRISHI: [cross talk] "You're not gonna be in this episode."

JOSH: "We don't have the money, sorry."

HRISHI: Yep. I do like the portrayal of the oncologists sort of talking around, over, and at the president, but never actually with him. He's just meat in the room.

JOSH: Indeed. I kept thinking, "Do they not realize that they could be pitching this guy?" it's funny, the shape of the scene, there's a guy standing there saying, "It'll take this and this to cure cancer," in front of the guy who could possibly set them on that course, but then it takes the president to say, "No, wait a minute, now you got me. I'm hooked, I'm interested, sit your asses down." It's funny, the tenor of the scene is not exactly what I would have expected.

HRISHI: Yeah, I like how dismissive they kind of are of him, I thought that kind of indicated how long they've been friends with Abbey, that they've known him as kind of a somewhat disengaged guy, who they maybe even look down at a little bit?

JOSH: Right, perhaps, "Oh, he's not gonna understand this so we'll just talk around him."

HRISHI: Exactly. And even though he's the president and they're hosting this dinner in the White House, they still have the same attitude. I liked that. It's one of the rare moments along with somebody like Albie Duncan, where the president isn't being treated like a sovereign figure. But in that scene there's, I'm gonna borrow a phrase from Donna from this episode, one of the oncologists says, "This, they did?" which uses a sentence structure with which I am not familiar, except in stereotypes of old Jewish Americans.

JOSH: I was...I'm glad you got there on your own. That is how we speak.

HRISHI: It was really funny. It just jumped out.

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*Oncologist: This, they did?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Did that catch your ear?

JOSH: I don't think it did, as an older Jew, it was just finally a line of dialogue I understand.

HRISHI: What about this, did this catch you?

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*SAM: In Los Feliz, California.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: As a former resident of Los Feliz, California, a neighborhood in Los Angeles, I thought, "Well, that's not really a place."

JOSH: Oh, I was thinking the only reason he's pronouncing it correctly is because he's from LA.

HRISHI: Right, as opposed to "Loss Fuh-leez."

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah, correct.

HRISHI: Or "Los Fuh-leez," or anything else. We say, "Los Feel-ez."

JOSH: Mhm.

HRISHI: I think he says "Loss Feel-ez."

JOSH: Oh, maybe he does.

HRISHI: But in any case, it would be like saying, you know, we've got people in...I don't know, you don't really refer to the neighborhood, comma, the state, right? Neighborhood, comma, state? Los Feliz is not a city, is what I'm saying.

JOSH: Right, that's a very good point, and no, I didn't catch it.

HRISHI: And it's a funny one given that the show's made in Los Angeles, where they clearly

know the neighborhoods of Los Angeles. But then I thought, "Ok well maybe, you know, people say Hollywood, California," maybe.

JOSH: Yeah, that's true. The Hollywood sign is a lie.

HRISHI: That's true. Well, if you're thinking that that's a city landmark. It's not even what it originally said, it said Hollywoodland.

JOSH: Good point.

HRISHI: It was a sign for...

JOSH: [cross talk] Real estate?

HRISHI: Real estate, yeah. Do you know the game Portal?

JOSH: Oh, the computer game.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Yes, the moody computer game.

HRISHI: Yes, I can tell you know it well by the way you're referring to it as a computer game.

JOSH: Doesn't that just show how old and uncool I am? Isn't it like a game you play on your computer, or I just have the computer, the PC version?

HRISHI: I think you can play it on a variety of consoles.

JOSH: I'm playing miniature golf though, as we speak.

[sound of golf ball landing in a hole]

HRISHI: Oh, good!

JOSH: And, as I predicted, quite a few people either admitting that they thought the same thing and now laughing at themselves, but in addition, quite a few people making an argument that in fact the president and Toby did play mini golf.

HRISHI: Which is silly. As someone who thought that that was what really happened, as soon as you pointed out it was a joke...

JOSH: But you know what? You'll see, go look at the website, lot of people arguing on your behalf.

HRISHI: I disavow those people.

JOSH: Oh, by the way, back to the Shureborn-Seaborn of it all, during one of the I think three iterations of that joke, I think Sam tells Toby that C.J. asked him whether that was the reason they didn't ultimately get married and, Toby says:

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*TOBY: That's funny.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Exactly, he tiffols!

JOSH: Without breaking a smile, he tiffed! I wrote down: “Toby tiffols!” And that led me to the concomitant revelation that I’m Toby without the heart of gold, and you’re all the other characters on *The West Wing*. We don’t even have to take a quiz, I know exactly who we are.

HRISHI: I’m Peyton Cabot Harrison III.

JOSH: [laughs] Hey we didn’t mention Lisa Shureborn played by Traylor Howard, well known for long runs on *Two Guys, a Girl, and a Pizza Place* and *Monk*? Just thought I’d throw that out there.

HRISHI: All right. I like all the Lisa stuff as a device to learn more about Sam. There’s even little things like...well, first of all, Lisa herself, this is a callback to “In the Shadow of Two Gunmen,” and it’s nice that this is a long payoff. In the season two opener, in a flashback, when Josh goes to visit Sam:

[West Wing Episode 2.01 excerpt]

*JOSH: You know why I’m here?*

*SAM: You want me to quit my job and come work for Hoynes.*

*JOSH: He’s gonna win, Sam.*

*SAM: So what do you need me for?*

*JOSH: A better campaign. Come do some speechwriting.*

*SAM: Lisa and I are getting married in September.*

*JOSH: Ah.*

*SAM: Yeah.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Josh has kind of a look of surprise and he says, “Ah.” And Sam’s happy, and he’s like, “Yeah.” And so that’s his reason for not doing it. And then of course we know, Lisa doesn’t come up again, but we know that Josh comes back and he does convince Sam, and Sam is a little bit pulled by it, even just by the idea, he’s like, “Hoynes isn’t the real thing.”

JOSH: Yeah, that’s fascinating. Of course, I did not make that connection. But now that you throw it out there, it’s so unlike Aaron to play long ball that way just because of what we’ve learned about his writing process.

HRISHI: But when he does...

JOSH: But when he does, yeah, or he hooked that little thing in there knowing he’d use it somehow later, it makes me wonder whether, maybe I’ll even write to him, because that really fascinates me. It seems like that little tidbit was thrown out to payoff in an episode like this, but I wonder whether he had that specific a game plan, or whether it was more...this is a little pepper, this is a little spice to Sam’s character, that he was going to get married and didn’t, and I’ll explore it one way or another somewhere down the road.

HRISHI: I think it’s also, just in terms of the simple narrative part of it, it puts an obstacle in Sam’s path.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: He doesn't like his job, he wants to leave it, Josh comes and says, "Come with me." And Sam can't say yes for some reason -- what's the reason? He's gonna start a family here with this woman. But even the way that Josh kind of reacts to it in the flashback, like he's not just paying off the plot of Sam had a fiancée, later when Josh actually interacts with Lisa in this episode, that feels like a payoff of that moment where he just says, "Ah." He doesn't say, "Hey man, that's great, fantastic! Congratulations," anything like that. He just says, "Ah" when he learns that Sam is engaged, and then when he does meet her they don't get along, and I love that that carries through from that initial mention of her.

JOSH: Yeah, we also didn't know in the second season opener that Josh had never kissed a woman up to that point, so that might also color his reaction to Sam's getting married.

HRISHI: Mhm. He says to her:

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*JOSH: Lisa.*

*LISA: Josh.*

*JOSH: Still trying to get waved into Generation X?*

*LISA: Still a pompous jackass?*

*JOSH: Oh, you betcha, see ya later.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I kind of get the feeling that, so those are like...not really jokes.

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: There's real venom to both of those, and Josh gets to say, "Oh, you betcha," because he won. Like, in the fight for Sam between Lisa and Josh, Josh won.

JOSH: He has Sam, that's true. Well, his criticism of her in that quick little moment seems to be similar to Sam's. I mean, Sam has a couple comments I guess are the sort of insult equivalent, something about Moombas?

HRISHI: Yes, Moomba.

JOSH: That seems to be the take on Lisa, is that...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

JOSH: [cross talk] She's not substantive enough for these guys. And we'll get a little bit more, a little deeper background on that in the final scene between Lisa and Sam. But yeah, she's there really to sort of open up our understanding of Sam, and she doesn't have too much as a character in this single episode.

HRISHI: Right, but Sam's really awful to her. He's quite mean. And it feels like a product of his discomfort, and it felt bad listening to him insult her over and over again. But then I love that in the end it turns out that he's gotten it wrong, because it starts off with him saying:

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*TOBY: So why didn't you get married?*

*SAM: She didn't like me very much.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: We take it at face value, or I did at least, I believed him. I'm like, "Ok, yeah." She's cast as a villain, really, in that moment for me. Like, "Oh, who couldn't like Sam? What kind of awful...? Obviously she was a terrible fiancée." But then when it comes down to it, when they do have that confrontation at the end she totally turns it around on him.

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*SAM: I was never cool enough for you.*

*LISA: You're full of crap, and you think too little of me. And I didn't leave you, you left me, and you did it to do this.*

[end excerpt]

Josh: Yeah. That's funny though, at the time even when he says, "She didn't like me very much," I didn't take it the way you did.

HRISHI: Oh.

JOSH: I figured he probably gave her a reason not to like him. It's funny, it's again it's a distinction between you and me and how we watch the show. I figured, yeah, he's probably a workaholic, he's probably somewhere in that zone. I mean, not that I was like, "She's right and he's wrong," but I kind of figured the ultimate dissolution of their relationship lays somewhere in the all work no play nature of our heroes. And I wrote down, ultimately in that final scene with Sam and Lisa, "Sam's a needy baby."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: [cross talk] We have these moments, and they're actually fantastic, again I think it's one of the strengths of the show, all of the sudden we get these incredibly vulnerable moments. As with Josh and Amy, and a little peek into the sort of sad romantic realm of Josh's life, we get a little peek into...Sam's like a little boy, suddenly saying, "I wasn't cool enough," and the kind of somewhat immature take on what was a serious relationship for him. We're so used to seeing them in their element that it's fascinating to me and powerful when Aaron puts them in a new context, which usually is the personal rather than the professional, and suddenly these sort of super efficient masters of the White House look like needy little boys.

HRISHI: Yeah. And it's crazy to me how nice Lisa is actually to him, even in the face of him being a jerk throughout this whole episode to her, both in terms of the insults about her being like this shallow, vapid party girl. Even at the end, she speaks to him with admiration.

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*LISA: And you're wondering if I'm gonna think you've been doing anything at all.*

*SAM: Often it's not clear to me whether or not I have.*

*LISA: You have.*

*SAM: How would you know?*

*LISA: I don't know.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which is essentially, like, your mom...

JOSH: [cross talk] "I'm really trying to humor you, but I ran out of steam!"

HRISHI: Yeah, or it's like, "Thanks Mom, thanks for the encouragement." "You're doing a great job!" "Mom, do you have any idea what I do?" "No, but I'm sure you're great at it."

JOSH: "I'm sure you're very good at it, and I'm sure there's something."

HRISHI: I think we're at the point of total dissemblance that we should take a break.

JOSH: Yeah, perhaps so.

[ad break]

HRISHI: There are two stray observations I had about Sam. One, this is not stray, I actually really love this this, this is not stray at all. We get the return of offscreen Mr. Helper, who I guess only appears when we have State of the Union episodes. I don't know if you remember in "Bartlet's Third State of the Union" how much I loved the guy offscreen, who was like, "Sam Seaborn, everybody!"

JOSH: Yes, right.

HRISHI: He's in this episode as well!

JOSH: He gets his room announcement again.

HRISHI: As he walks in:

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*Offscreen Mr. Helper: Sam Seaborn!*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's hilarious.

HRISHI: I love that guy.

JOSH: He's good, he gets a lot of work. He's one of those people you probably wouldn't recognize him but he's made a steady living throughout decades of television.

HRISHI: Aww, and I just really want him to be part of my entourage, like to be my advance team, so any time I walk into a room there's somebody there to yell, "Hrishikesh Hirway, everybody!" and then everybody can turn around and clap.

JOSH: I'd be willing to do that for you.

HRISHI: Excellent. And then the other thing that I noticed, which, this is a pointless thing to notice is...

JOSH: Hey, that's my department.

HRISHI: This is now what our podcast prompts me to do. Ok, so at the very end of the episode when Sam deletes the text of the State of the Union, the draft that he had written where the President was going to announce eliminating cancer, he highlights everything and hits delete. Before he hits delete the Word document that he's writing has a title: "N underscore science dot

doc.” And then as soon as he hits delete, the title changes on the document to “Curing underscore cancer dot doc.”

JOSH: What the what?

HRISHI: And I tried watching it a few time to see like, did they switch a thing where it's just...they just replaced it? I mean there's no reason to, it just deletes text that you can see to blank page. And I'm also not sure if, I don't know why the title of the document would change, but you see it change onscreen.

JOSH: Wow, I gotta go back and look at that, it's a mistake of some sort.

HRISHI: Or is it like a way that Microsoft Word used to operate back in the Stone Age of 2002 that I just don't remember? That it like, it was auto-creating a title based on the text? I don't know.

JOSH: More likely I think they probably just forgot to input that title that they wanted on the original screen, because usually they have it idiot proof, so if there's any kind of using a computer on screen the actor just like hits any button and the screen will turn to the next thing we need to see.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: So my guess is it's just an inconsistency of the people who put in the data.

HRISHI: That's what I was trying to see, is if maybe it was like, it went from one screen shot to another screen shot, like an identical screenshot, only they named the blank document something else.

JOSH: I think that's exactly what it was.

HRISHI: But then I was trying to remember, I was like, “Oh yeah, I think that Microsoft Word at some point did used to like, suggest a title based on the first couple words in the document, or something like that,” like maybe auto-save or something, but I don't know how it would go from...

JOSH: [corss talk] After deleting, I don't know why it would have that feature.

HRISHI: [cross talk] How it would change to “curing underscore cancer.” It was just a very silly thing to notice, but something I noticed.

JOSH: I'm dragging you down to my level; I'm delighted.

HRISHI: Ok, and now this is a bigger thing that I wanted to talk about, which is the dispute, the central conflict between Sam and Lisa. In some ways, it's kind of playing out in a miniature form, the same kind of dynamic that existed between your character on *Sports Night*, Jeremy, and Natalie. The idea of, “I don't know where the cool party is.” Sam says, “I don't know where the cool restaurant is and I don't know where the Tommy Hilfiger party is,” and it's kinda accusing her of being a little, like you said, lacking substance for wanting to go to those things. It's kind of the same thing that happens in “Dana Get Your Gun,” I think it's season two, episode 13 of *Sports Night*. You kind of get the longer, extended version of it, you get to see it play out between Jeremy and Natalie, but it feels similar to me.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: What do you think?



JOSH: I don't remember *Sports Night*.

HRISHI: That's not what I was expecting.

JOSH: I have general positive feelings towards it, but I can't get down in the mud with you. I don't really remember that. I don't know.

HRISHI: Really? You don't remember when Jeremy and Natalie break up?

JOSH: No, I remember that she won't let him break up.

HRISHI: Well, that's later, that's cute. This is like really like a dark episode, again, because there's just some real meanness, legitimate meanness, that happens between the two characters.

[Sports Night Episode 2.13 excerpt]

*JEREMY: ...great, Natalie. We're going to be in a room surrounded by people for whom "cool" means discontent, all of them trying to be cool, which isn't easy while trying to crane your neck around to see if you can spot Skeet Ulrich.*

*NATALIE: Jeremy.*

*JEREMY: And believe me there'll be half a dozen people there named Skeet.*

*NATALIE: If you don't want to go, you don't have to go.*

*JEREMY: I'll go.*

*NATALIE: You don't have to go.*

*JEREMY: I'm happy to go.*

*NATALIE: You're not happy to go.*

*JEREMY: I'm not happy to go, but I'll go anyway.*

*NATALIE: Why?*

*JEREMY: Because I'm tired of having this fight with you.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I don't really remember that.

HRISHI: You're very good in the episode, you should check it out sometime.

JOSH: I was gonna say that -- I don't really remember, but I suspect I was good.

HRISHI: You were.

JOSH: Thanks, Hrish.

HRISHI: Your suspicions are correct.

JOSH: Thank you. I did notice, however, that the closed captioning person spelled Hilfiger with two G's.

HRISHI: Mm so when Sam says, "I don't know where the Tommy Hilfiger party is," the subtitle is saying, "I don't know where the Tommy Hilfiger spellcheck is."

JOSH: Correct.

HRISHI: I thought that was funny because at one point, we talked about the idea of Sam looking like he was gonna be in a Tommy Hilfiger ad.

JOSH: That's true.

HRISHI: When he was off to his Christmas trip, and at that time it seemed like he did know where the Tommy Hilfiger party was.

JOSH: Yeah, you're right. Can somebody please make a GIF of Brad Whitford's...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh, God.

JOSH: [cross talk] Insane victory dance?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh, God.

JOSH: [cross talk] His reaction to the polling numbers. What the hell is he doing?

HRISHI: I wrote, "I can't look. I looked away. What move is that? I can't look."

JOSH: That's very Beckett of you. "I can't go on. I must go on. I go on."

HRISHI: Exactly!

JOSH: "I can't look. I must look. I look."

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

JOSH: I watched it over and over in a silent wonderment that Brad has worked as much as he has since that moment.

HRISHI: Yeah. We'll make that gif, I've taught Izzy how to make West Wing GIFs, so she will.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yay. I will request it specifically.

HRISHI: What did you think about the grammar within Sam's text, the stuff that he had written for the president about curing cancer? He wrote, "New science, new technology, is making the difference."

JOSH: Well, I didn't bump on that but I see what you're saying. So if you take it as those two things are making the difference, you would be incorrect. But couldn't you re-interpret that as new silence...?

HRISHI: [cross talk] In a positive...

JOSH: Maybe. Whatever that word means. Yeah, exactly. I know what you're saying. Yeah that....

HRISHI: Yeah, I guess you could. But to me, it sounded a little bit weird. And I was like, "Hm, I bet Josh is going to have issues with this."

JOSH: No, I was hung up on the fact that Lisa Shureborne-Seaborn, unlike Vice President Hoynes, does not know to use a possessive with a gerund form because she says...

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*LISA: You really are uncomfortable with me being here right? You're not just, you know, being you?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And she's a writer. Supposedly professionally, for a living.

HRISHI: Well, she hasn't prepared, so maybe she hadn't prepared her research on using the possessive with the gerund.

JOSH: Nor does she have a pad or a writing instrument.

HRISHI: I am so self-conscious about the possessive with the gerund thing now, because I feel like I go both ways.

JOSH: I'm go both ways. No. Mine go both ways. There's no joke -- I can't even make a joke in there. All of the mistakes that I point out, I am quite sure I make all the time.

HRISHI: Ok, good. The first time I watched the episode, I thought when Lisa asks, which one is Ed, which one is Larry, that Ed and Larry said...

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*ED, LARRY, AND SAM: Doesn't matter.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But on the second watch, I realized that all three, Ed, Larry and Sam all say, "It doesn't matter."

JOSH: That's funny. I loved that moment, I went back to watch, too. I had to figure out who said what. And, you're right, they all say it. With great humor and a smile on their faces, they just get it. They're Bert and Ernie and they're going to be -- the other thing that was actually making me laugh, but it was kind of answered in the episode, they don't look alike.

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: It's not like, how could we possibly tell these two apart? But later, it is noted...

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*JOSH: Do the two of you ever go anywhere separately?*

*ED: It's weird, isn't it?*

*JOSH: A little weird, yeah.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: So it's really just that. It's the fact that they are a twosome, it's almost if they really should just have one name.

HRISHI: Yeah. I actually didn't like that Sam also said, "It doesn't matter." I sort of felt like, it's only really up to Ed and Larry to be able to say it doesn't matter. That's a joke no one else gets to make.

JOSH: Yeah. It's a moment that takes Sam down a peg in my esteem, and Ed and Larry up a peg.

HRISHI: Oh, so you feel the same way? Yeah.

JOSH: Absolutely.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: He's being a dick and they're being super cool.

HRISHI: Exactly. Let's talk about Toby for a second.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: I like discovering that Toby has a superpower of knowing how many words are in things...

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*DONNA: How many words in the Gettysburg Address?*

*TOBY: Two hundred sixty-six.*

*DONNA: And the Ten Commandments?*

*TOBY: A hundred and seventy-three.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I know, I was like, "Really?"

HRISHI: I just want to be like, "Toby, how many words on the back of this Frosted Flakes box?"

JOSH: That would be funny. It's funny that you mention that, because my sister Toby has a kind of superpower with words, which is that if you give her any sentence or a series of sentences she can tell you the number of syllables very quickly.

HRISHI: [cross talk] What?

JOSH: I don't know how she does it. Yes. Yeah, it's almost akin to Toby Ziegler's ability to know the number of words in any given speech.

HRISHI: Where did that super power come from?

JOSH: I don't know, but I sense a three-minute interview in an upcoming podcast.

HRISHI: Yeah, where we'll just ask her a question and immediately follow it up with, "How many syllables was that?"

JOSH: Right. I was even willing to accept that perhaps he knows the number of words in the Gettysburg Address, but the Ten Commandments? I mean, ok, the Gettysburg Address might be a thing that speech writers know, or could be speechwriter nerd-dom, but the Ten Commandments? What a random... My first thought was 10, but then I was like, "No..."

HRISHI: Well, here's my issue with the knowing how many words are in the Ten Commandments: that wasn't written in English.

JOSH: Oh. Snap.

HRISHI: I mean, which translation are you using? As Toby is someone who is fond of texts interpretation, and as someone who regularly goes to temple, he knows all about, I would guess, he knows all about the mutability of translation, so what's he talking about?

JOSH: Well, we've seen him, he goes to a synagogue but doesn't know about the mutability of your cell phone.

HRISHI: Oh, man!

JOSH: I'm throwing down Hrishi-style.

HRISHI: Mic drop.

*[Sound effect of a mic drop]*

HRISHI: Wow. That was very good.

JOSH: I feel good about that.

HRISHI: Yeah. Back to my point. You know what I am saying. You get my point.

JOSH: I do, absolutely. Yes. That would not have occurred to me.

HRISHI: I mean, we've even had, as we've discovered, there are discrepancies in what the order of the commandments actually is...

JOSH: Oh, and he made the mistake...

HRISHI: And he made the mistake!

[West Wing Episode 1.01 excerpt]

*TOBY: Honor thy father is the third commandment!*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So now I don't trust him at all about the commandments, let alone how many words there are.

JOSH: That's a very valid point, indeed. He got the order of the commandments wrong. "I know how many words, but I don't know the order." I don't buy it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. But the Gettysburg Address, I would've gone with that.

JOSH: [cross talk] Right. Sure.

HRISHI: I also like that Toby can't be alone with his thoughts. You know, he's working on the speech, he's like, "Don't ask me about the speech." And Josh is humoring him as he's kind of struggling with it, and then he's going to go get some pie and he asks, he almost pleads with Josh, "Come with me," I think, because he doesn't wanna stew.

JOSH: He wants pie.

HRISHI: He doesn't wanna stew, he doesn't want to stew, ah God. Yeah. He doesn't wanna stew, he wants a pie. Ah, damn you.

JOSH: I'm just here to derail you with dad jokes.

HRISHI: It's really good.

JOSH: I'm just trying to give the haters something to latch on to for this episode.

HRISHI: I love it. I also like that Toby is Josh's, and has been, Josh's co-conspirator in his plans to court Amy. In the previous episode, he helps him strategize around -- unwillingly helps him strategize -- around trying to find some source of tension to bring to Amy around the State of the Union. And then he asks him:

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*TOBY: How'd it end up going last night?*

*JOSH: With Amy Gardner?*

*TOBY: Yeah.*

*JOSH: Very, very well.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes, I think it's funny actually. You're making me think of two things: one, the just overall questionability of going to Toby for romantic advice. But if anyone would, it would be Josh. And also, we haven't discussed the remarkably ill-advised stratagem of telling Amy that her boyfriend doesn't really care about her personally, but is simply using her to court the female vote.

HRISHI: Right.

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*JOSH: Women's groups started hedging, saying there aren't enough women in Congress. Tandy needs women. NOW hasn't endorsed him yet.*

*AMY: It's January.*

*JOSH: Yeah -- still, when did he start going out with you? A week after Lieberman announced...*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Wow. Bad.

HRISHI: Well, I will say Josh didn't go to Toby for romantic advice, he went to him for policy advice, to ask, "What's the thing I can use to start a fight with the Women's Leadership Coalition?"

JOSH: This is true.

HRISHI: And then, Toby, kind of unsolicited, says, "Hey, you know this thing is happening with her." I just love that Toby is in on the gossip, that he knows who is dating whom.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah, he says, "I know everything," right?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah, that's what Josh says later when Amy's like, "How did you know that?"

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah, you're right.

HRISHI: He's like, "Well, Toby told me." Who, I guess there would be a less *saue* answer in that moment. But yeah, Toby is feeding intel to Josh; it's so great. But then, yeah, it is incredibly tactless to drop that on Amy. But of course, I think it's also -- he's borne out! He gets proven correct in using it. It takes a couple of weeks. But I think...

JOSH: [cross talk] Well...

HRISHI: Well, you see that same moment play out in miniature between Toby and Josh, right?

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*TOBY: I don't think he's courting Amy Gardner, I think he's courting women.*

*JOSH: I don't think you're right.*

TOBY: *Why?*

JOSH: *'Cause that's ridiculous.*

TOBY: *Really?*

JOSH: *No, it's not ridiculous, of course you're right.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Like, at first he tosses it off because like, "There's no way!" And then he thinks about it and, "Of course, that makes absolute sense." 'Cause he thinks about the strategy of that kind of move and the context and stuff. I feel like, between the past and the present, when the timelines of this episode, Amy is coming to the same place and, you see at the end, when Josh says, "Go ahead, photo op," she goes with Congressman Tandy, but she stops and she gives Josh a look that is having an effect, as much as she's defending and saying, "Here are all of the reasons why he's not scared of Nan Lieberman." And she has all of her stats and facts about why Josh is wrong, but you can tell he has pierced...

JOSH: [cross talk] Absolutely.

HRISHI: [cross talk] A layer of doubt.

JOSH: Although, I think it's unclear to the viewer that he is necessarily correct. Yeah, he wants her to be with the photo op but there's also another way of reading that -- he wants her to be with him.

HRISHI: Oh, of course.

JOSH: Yeah, it's small of him to assume that this intelligent, attractive, funny, accomplished woman for sure could only be being used by this guy, because...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh yeah.

JOSH: [cross talk] She might be.

HRISHI: Yeah. Completely understand why it's incredibly insulting to her. It seems like a not-rare case of Josh not being both entirely correct and completely insulting.

JOSH: Yeah, he clearly might be onto something. That moment with the photo op seems to indicate that perhaps that he wants to use her as a prop for the press.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. I like that we don't know for sure.

JOSH: Right. Correct. That's what's so insidious about what he's done, that he's planted this seed of doubt in her right.

HRISHI: Right, and now everybody sees it. We see it, she sees it.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: What's interesting with the tension between Amy and Josh, there is suddenly really none between Joey and Josh. Not suddenly, I guess, the opposite of suddenly. But what used to be such a great kinda flirty dynamic, is really not there. They're really just buddies now.

JOSH: Yeah. I felt a little bit sad to see that tension deflated or dissipated. I liked the idea of them together, although I like Amy and Josh together, too.

HRISHI: Yeah, we also figured out that Joey was too good for Josh anyway.

JOSH: Yeah, that's true.

HRISHI: One thing I was thinking about with Sam: Sam's getting excited in this episode about curing cancer, felt like a continuation of something that we had started to see develop when he was talking about the book recently -- the book that the photographer was going to do, the tell all. When C.J. sort of calls him out on sweating the small stuff, because he can't do anything about the MS. The book was small stuff, and the book was sort of petty in and of itself, and his response to it was arguably maybe also petty -- in any case, the effort was towards something petty. Whereas, curing cancer, I think also feels like he gets to bring his powers to bear on something. He gets to leave this sense of impotency that he's had around the MS and everything. They get to actually really do something and really run on something. So this is a grand gesture that actually means something and can fire him up.

JOSH: Do you think they're any chance in a macro sense that Sorkin is toying with Rob Lowe by getting him all excited about a subplot, as if he's giving him something really meaty that's going to matter?

HRISHI: In terms of like a long arc, that this is going to be over several episodes?

JOSH: Right. So like Sam, Rob can get excited that he's being given more to do -- I'm really just trying to stir the pot. I withdraw the comment.

HRISHI: I think that you're right, at least not maybe in terms of like a multi-episode arc, but I did think they'd must've been some kind of -- you know, we've been saying Sam's had nothing to do this season and suddenly, he's had a couple of good Sam-focused episodes. And, I don't know if that's just the way the course of things play out, or if there was some sense of like, "All right, we really need to give Rob Lowe some real work here," and so in response to that Aaron was like, "Ok, here's a great Sam story."

JOSH: Perhaps so, yeah.

HRISHI: Ok, I'm texting you a link right now, Josh, a YouTube link. Mary-Louise Parker is really great at taking a line like "Don't talk to me," and giving it a little bit of flavor, every single time, in a way that changes it and adds to it. I love it. Later on, we'll see it in a later episode, this is something that stuck in my head that I sing along to much like the president's old map. The way she answers the phone, often coming up she says, "Hello?" And then someone will be like, "Hey, it's Josh," and she says, "Hello." And just the way she repeats that line with a little bit -- with slightly different intonation is great. And so, the way she's like...

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*JOSH: ...own good.*

*AMY: Don't talk to me.*

*JOSH: Look.*

*AMY: Don't talk to me.*

*JOSH: We'll change the...*

*AMY: You're talking to me.*



*JOSH: Perhaps...*

*AMY: Don't talk to me.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And because I just seen it, it reminded me of this incredible clip that I've seen of Jerry Seinfeld and Ke\$ha. Did you see this?

JOSH: No, I read about it. Of course.

HRISHI: Oh my God. You have to watch. I just texted it to you. You have to watch it...

JOSH: [cross talk] Can I watch it this moment?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right now. Yeah.

*[YouTube video excerpt featuring Jerry Seinfeld and Ke\$ha]*

*Jerry: ...'cause people are tired most of the time.*

*Ke\$ha: I'm Ke\$ha, I love you so much.*

*Jerry: Oh, thanks.*

*Ke\$ha: Can I give you a hug?*

*Jerry: No thanks.*

*Ke\$ha: Please?*

*Jerry: No thanks.*

*Ke\$ha: A little one.*

*Jerry: Yeah, no thanks.*

*Ke\$ha: [Whining]*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: If only life could be made up only of moments like that.

HRISHI: It's so good. The way he just -- one, the way that he switches from, "Oh, thanks," to "No thanks," is brilliant, like it rhymes.

JOSH: [cross talk] I see now where you're going with this. Fantastic.

HRISHI: And then, "no thanks."

JOSH: "No thanks, no thanks."

HRISHI: "No thanks, no thanks. Yeah, no thanks."

JOSH: Yeah, that's awesome. That's now reminding me of a classic scene in *The Wire*, I wanna say maybe season one...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh, between Bunk and.. yes.

JOSH: [cross talk] In which all they say is "[expletive deleted]." Right?

HRISHI: Yep. It's really great.

JOSH: Dominic West and Wendell Pierce. I should shout out the two actors in that amazing

scene. I guess maybe we can't link to it, but I recommend people take a look. I will find the info on that scene.

HRISHI: Somewhere in the deeper recesses of my brain, I knew their names but I still just was going to say Bunk and McNulty. One thing that annoyed me a little bit in this episode, it happened not once, but twice, was characters asking what the stakes were of the State of the Union Address.

JOSH: You're right.

HRISHI: Lisa asks in a moment that feels kind of very like, "This is important TV!" you know, as Sam's talking about when they're preparing for the State of the Union and he's like, "Well, first you've gotta do this, and then you gotta...and then you realize you're nowhere." And then there's some drums behind it and stuff and she's like, "How high are the stakes?" "How high can you count?"

JOSH: "What do these speakers go up to?"

HRISHI: Which is a little bit strange, like, "How high are the stakes?" "They're up to 1,000 stakes." "I can count higher than that!" "It's up to 1,000,000 stakes!"

JOSH: One million stakes! You're right, that's an odd moment.

HRISHI: But then, even more confusing, Charlie asks how high the stakes are, as if he hasn't been around for all of the other States of the Union.

JOSH: Right. I think they're trying to get us to realize how high the stakes are.

HRISHI: Yeah, he asks Joey, "How high are the stakes?" and she says:

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*JOEY (via KENNY): If he doesn't park the State of the Union, and I mean deep, it will be his last one.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And that I think is relevant information that like, yes, this is important because this is going to determine the future. But I just wish it has been posed somehow in a different way. I guess with Lisa, again it really shows how little research Lisa has done.

JOSH: I was going to say the same thing -- wow, you REALLY didn't prepare.

HRISHI: Yeah, and again, Charlie knows what the stakes are. He knows what's at hand. He knows what the trouble is.

JOSH: At least they avoid the phrase "Stakes of the Union."

HRISHI: Nope.

JOSH: Nope?

HRISHI: I award you no stakes.

JOSH: Fair enough. How low does it go?

HRISHI: How low can you count? Negative 35 stakes.

JOSH: By the way, it just occurred to me, I actually undersold my sister's superpower, I believe

what my sister Toby can do, in fact, is listen to a sentence or two and tell you how many letters are in it.

HRISHI: What?

JOSH: She does a weird kind of chisanbop thing with her fingers as you speak and then tells you how many letters in your utterance.

HRISHI: That's crazy that she can do that.

JOSH: Right? I assume she still has the gift. I'll have to check in with her.

HRISHI: That is a really remarkable and utterly useless superpower.

JOSH: Truly useless. Yes.

HRISHI: Which reminds me of *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog* and the character played by...

JOSH: [cross talk] Are you referring to a musical?

HRISHI: I am referring to a musical! It reminds me of the musical, *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*, in which Simon Helberg plays a character with a superpower to make things moist.

JOSH: That's very funny.

HRISHI: Oh, there's a moment that has been GIFed in this episode which is the president says...

[West Wing Episode 3.11 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Somebody get these guys some pie.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And watching it this time, I was thinking, "You know, Toby is really the only one who wanted pie. Sam has never mentioned wanting pie at all."

JOSH: You're not wrong. Look at Rob Lowe, he doesn't eat pie.

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: Not often.

HRISHI: He just wants a wife who will tell him he's doing a good job and really understand. Oh, here's another thing: when Sam is pacing around, feeling anxious about the lack of response in the early numbers from the speech, the reaction, and Joey's like, "It's just the first twenty minutes." He's like, "We did Internet commerce in the first twenty minutes!" And he can't believe that that didn't just bring them out of their seats.

JOSH: Right? Come on. That's funny.

HRISHI: Well Josh, thus ends another episode of The West Wing Weekly. Thank you for joining me.

JOSH: Thank you for being joined.

HRISHI: And thanks to you, listeners, for joining us as well. If you want to check out any of the past episodes of the West Wing Weekly, you can find them wherever you found this one -- on iTunes or on some other podcast app, or on our own website, [thewestwingweekly.com](http://thewestwingweekly.com).

JOSH: Thank you to those who continue to support the podcast by hitting the donate button, and thank you to those who have purchased the official West Wing lapel pin, which is available at [thewestwingweekly.com/pin](http://thewestwingweekly.com/pin).

HRISHI: I still get a thrill every single time we see someone post a picture of their lapel pin on Twitter, or on Facebook, or on Instagram. We're on all of those places. You can tag us in your photo of your "What's Next" West Wing Weekly lapel pin. Feel free to use #BartletsArmy to show how many of us there really are.

JOSH: I was delighted that just last night they re-ran my episode of *To Tell The Truth*, and the number of people who noticed that I was wearing the lapel pin during that appearance made me very happy. Additionally, I am getting the signal more and more often, and my very favorite delivery of it, is just the silent signal and then the walk away. I was on a flight recently, and a woman came up to me, gave me the signal, turned around and just departed the plane, disembarked.

HRISHI: Might have been a flight attendant just telling people to get off the plane.

JOSH: Oh, you know what, I think it was. The West Wing Weekly is a proud member of Radiotopia, a curated collection of fascinating podcasts on PRX. You can check those out at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm). They are made possible by the Knight Foundation.

HRISHI: Our thanks to Zach McNeese, Margaret Miller and Izzy Malina for their help in making The West Wing Weekly possible. And our thanks to Dr. Leo Mascarenhas who is a great guy and I'm so happy we got to have him on the podcast. Thanks to Dr. Leo Mascarenhas and to Children's Hospital of Los Angeles for helping make that happen.

JOSH: Here, here!

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

DR. MASCARENHAS: What's next?

[Outro Music]