

The West Wing Weekly
4.16: "The California 47th"

[Intro Music]

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

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Today we're talking about "The California 47th". It's episode 16 of season 4.

JOSH: The teleplay is by Aaron Sorkin, the story by Lauren Schmidt and Paula Yoo. It was directed by Vincent Misiano, and it first aired in the year 2003 on the nineteenth day of Solmonath, which of course is the second month according to the Anglo Saxon Heathen calendar, as described by the Venerable Bede in his 8th Century classic, *De temporum ratione*. By the way, my own mom's birthday is the 19th of Solmonath.

HRISHI: [laughing] Happy Birthday.

JOSH: Happy Birthday Fran. Schizo-fran-ic.

HRISHI: We're synced up with the series right now, because today we're recording this in February; Toby mentions that the weather is 74 degrees in California, and it is 72 degrees as we speak.

JOSH: Oh nice. That is the daily weather report on local news. It's sunny and 72.

HRISHI: Mmm hmm. Here's a little synopsis. This episode really takes place in three different locations, although we only see two of them on screen. Equatorial Kundu, Washington D.C., and Orange County.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: As from the Situation Room, Leo and the president monitor the situation in Bitanga, and in Orange County, the president travels with his retinue to go help out Sam - hopefully help out Sam - on his campaign trail.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: This is really, again, another two-parter. It isn't called out so specifically in the titles, but the California 47th and the next episode, Red Haven's on Fire, really are a matched set.

JOSH: Yeah, for sure. By the way, before we even get into this episode, there is something, just the 'Previously On' sent me off into a thoughtful spin, when we get a reply of President Bartlet's quote...

[West Wing Episode 4.15 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Mothers are standing in front of tanks.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: ... resonated with me because I just recently saw, you know, the famous tank man, who stood in front of that row of tanks, I think the morning after the massacre in Tiananmen Square in 1989.

HRISHI: Mmm hmm.

JOSH: That's such an iconic image and photograph and just recently by chance I happened to see somebody posting the uncropped picture, which in a way, I think, is more impressive. It's an incredibly long... I think in the famous image we're seeing a cropped image where he, an unknown man, stands in front of what looks like four tanks, but in the uncropped version, there's an incredible, it looks like a mile long row of tanks and you see also how small he is in this greater, larger picture, and I was really struck by that, and that quote by the president made me think of him. And so I did a little reading; there are theories as to who this man was, and what may have happened to him, but there's not a lot of hard information, but I thought that was a great phrase: "mothers standing in front of tanks." That is a trenchant image.

HRISHI: Mmm hmm. Another thing that you don't get from that cropped, iconic photo of the man is what you get in the video. The thing that I really love, especially too is after he sets up his roadblock the tank turns to try and go around, and he moves in front of it again.

JOSH: Talk about courage, moral courage.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: We'll link to some information; I guess there's a theory that it was a man named Wang Weilin, but I think that's been hard to confirm and it's been equally difficult to confirm what may have happened to this solitary hero. Anyway, onto the episode itself.

HRISHI: We start off in the Situation Room, and the first thing I noticed is that the screens in the Situation Room need some serious anti-aliasing. If you look at the type on the screen it's incredibly low-fi, jagged, low-resolution text.

JOSH: Interesting. Well maybe that's because we don't, as viewers of *The West Wing* have the kind of clearance one would need to read that information.

HRISHI: [laughing] So it automatically jagged-ifies for us.

JOSH: Right, yeah.

HRISHI: Security measure.

JOSH: Interesting.

HRISHI: Mmm. But there's a tiny bit of dramatic tension as they wait for the results, but we're still on the teaser, so by the time they wrap it up and they take the airport, I was already starting to feel a little bit of dread, that they have gotten a victory so early in the episode. I felt like it came too easily to them, and so that meant, invariably something would have to go wrong later on.

JOSH: Interesting. Yeah, that does seem dramatically how it would work, like while they're having their little hubristic round of applause for themselves, this can't end well.

HRISHI: Right. I mean it's one of the problems with reading a book where you know the last page is, and you're in the middle of the book, and you're like, 'well, this is not the ending.' Or even watching a procedural TV show where the detectives have solved the mystery and you think, 'well there's still eighteen minutes left, so I think maybe there's more to it.'

JOSH: I have that with watching poker tournaments - televised poker tournaments - when I know it's going to be wrapped up, say, a minute sixty, and there's three and half minutes left and one person has the other outchipped six-to-one: 'OK, this guy's going to win.' It just sort of... the fact that I know when this broadcast is going to end, generally spoils the excitement of the finish of a poker tournament in the last ten minutes or so.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Although things can turn around in a volatile fashion.

HRISHI: It's one of the nice things about something like a podcast where there is no, there's no fixed broadcast clock. If you aren't looking at the, whatever, elapsed time and remaining time, and you just put it on and you're listening, you know, you don't know where the story's going to end. Maybe it's a short one.

JOSH: That's what's so sexy and electric about *The West Wing Weekly*: 'Oh, oh shit, these guys could do anything at any time.'

HRISHI: Thanks so much for joining us. We hope you'll join us next time [laughing]

JOSH: Yeah, thanks to Margaret Miller and Zach McNees.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Oh, and Blue Apron. Pasta!

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Do we even tangentially get into this administration's suggestion that in place of the SNAP program, they should do some sort of Blue Apron delivery of meals to people who are food insecure. Does that make your mind explode? That we've got people name-checking Blue Apron as an alternative to SNAP?

HRISHI: It made me think that once again *The West Wing's* content really is evergreen, and once again we ended up in a situation where the thing that we were talking about while discussing an episode from fifteen years ago ended coming up in the news two weeks later.

JOSH: Mmm hmm.

HRISHI: Right after our discussion with President Leibman, the president of MAZON.

JOSH: Exactly, we will link, three days ago there was an article: 'How president's food stamp cuts would impact military families.'

HRISHI: Right. Does he not listen to the podcast? Does no one on his staff listen to the podcast?

JOSH: The answer is no: no one on his staff listens to the podcast. It's interesting, almost counterintuitively, one of the fascinating and valuable elements about this TV series, which inspires us to believe that government can affect positive change, one of its hallmarks is how evergreen it is, even sixteen years later, because so little change actually happens. Hopefully it's not enough to crush out our belief that change can happen even if it's glacial, even if progress tends to be slow. But one of the reasons that these issues are still so relevant is because so little change actually happens, so we fight the same fights, and the same battles remain, decade after decade. It's inspiring and it also leads one to despair.

HRISHI: And depressing.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: After we get out of the Situation Room with Leo and the president, they turn to Sam's campaign, and Leo says:

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

LEO: They're making it about values.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: The right to privacy is a value.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I liked this bit of continuity. The president says 'the right to privacy is a value', and I thought, this is kind of a callback to way back in Season 1, "The Short List", when Sam, when talking about the potential of Peyton Cabot Harrison III, said the right to privacy was going to be a big issue with their nomination. He said, he has that little monologue, where he says:

[West Wing Episode 1.09 excerpt]

SAM: It's about the next twenty years. 20s and 30s, it was the role of government; 50s and 60s it was civil rights; the next two decades are going to be privacy. I'm talking about the

internet. I'm talking about cell phones. I'm talking about health records and who's gay and who's not. And moreover, in a country born on the will to be free, what could be more fundamental than this?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: As ever, nice pickup, Hrishi.

HRISHI: I love that they still pin Sam's issues to his past speeches.

JOSH: Mmm hmm. That is good continuity of character.

HRISHI: Yeah. They've been doing well with that, I feel like.

JOSH: Yeah. By the way, in the Sit Room itself, I like one little interchange. Leo at a certain point turns to President Bartlet and says 'Why don't you take it easy?' I just wrote down 'relationship goals.' The chief of staff who can say that to his president without setting him off. I'm always fascinated by the dynamic between Leo and Bartlet. It's just, they really are...although he calls him 'sir' and there's deference and it's clear who's the president, there also just is an ease of dynamic between them where Leo can say, 'hey, take it easy.' That could be considered insubordination. He could have couched that in more temperate terms, but he didn't need to.

HRISHI: Yeah. It is funny, this recurring theme of the president getting punchy in the Situation Room. I like it as a sign of his discomfort. In the past we've talked about it when they were going to assassinate Shareef, he seemed to be making a joke out of it, and Leo says 'I need you to dig in', and the president is like...

JOSH: 'Focus.'

HRISHI: ...'I'm focused.' But I think still in issues of the military he's uncomfortable and he expresses his discomfort with these little jokes.

JOSH: Yeah, you're absolutely right. He does the same here. He does a whole routine, while he's essentially on hold, waiting for, I can't remember what rank he is, but that military commander, to give them, what is clearly going to be, a very, very important update. I'm sure you don't put the president on hold for much less. But, you're right, it's a cue for President Bartlet to launch into a couple of minutes of one-liners.

HRISHI: Yeah. He can't suffer the silence.

JOSH: Right, I think you're absolutely right. It's a way of cutting the tension.

HRISHI: I also loved this exchange, when Leo says, 'There's no reason you can't relax a little in California.' And the president says, 'Aren't there quite a few reasons?' and Leo says, 'Yes.'

JOSH: [laughing] But what does that refer to? I mean we're pretty chill in California. It's not his, it's not the perfect milieu for a President Bartlet I guess.

HRISHI: Oh no, I think he means, because of the situation in Bitanga...

JOSH: Oh specifically...

HRISHI: ...yeah, the tax plan.

JOSH: Oh, I thought it was a crack on California.

HRISHI: Oh! [laughing]

JOSH: I guess I'm maybe a little defensive about my adopted home state.

HRISHI: Mmm hmm.

JOSH: Never mind. Sometimes I'm really just obtuse.

HRISHI: [laughing] Me too. I wonder if there's a term for that, that kind of literary, or Sorkinian device, where somebody says something, someone asks a question, and then the person who's... Phrase A is said, and then the second person asks a question about phrase A, and then the person immediately denies phrase A.

JOSH: It's usually some sort of compound German word that would explain exactly that. Speaking of which, let me just throw out, there's a great guy, writer and editor-type, named Ben Schott, whose work I love, and he puts out these books of miscellany, these great fact-filled, wry compendia, and he has a book called Schottenfreude: German Words for the Human Condition, and it's just a celebration of the fact that the Germans seem to come up with long compound words for every possible observable phenomenon.

HRISHI: This is amazing. Tell me how to spell that word.

JOSH: Well his name is Ben Schott, so it's Schottenfreude - S-C-H-O-T-T-E-N... yeah.

HRISHI: Oh, I see. Well that's amazing because I was going to bring this up later but we get the first instance of it here. So, as we finish this conversation in the hallway, the president and Leo walk into the office and they see Debbie, and the president says, 'Miss Hamantaschen.'

JOSH: Yes. Yes!

HRISHI: And then later, he calls her 'Mrs. Hottentot.'

JOSH: Hottentot! I love that! Her name is Fiderer! But the two gibberish words that Bartlet comes up with, both for some reason start with an H! He's not even, he's two steps away!

HRISHI: So Josh, would you do me a favor? Would you open up your browser and go to thewestwingweekly.com/debbie?

JOSH: What? You've created something new?

HRISHI: Uh-huh. You remember the Headmaster Bartlet Secretary Name Generator?

JOSH: Yes. Oh this is awesome.

HRISHI: I have created a Debbie Fiderer nickname generator.

JOSH: Mrs. Harquebus! [laughing] Mrs. Hecatomb! Oh my god... Ms. Hominoid. This is hilarious. And shoutout, not only to Hrish, but to Squarespace, which makes it rather easy to create delightful pages like this. Oh, that is hilarious. People are going to enjoy this! Miss Hollandaise!

HRISHI: I took these two.. [laughing] I took the two nicknames that he gave her, Miss Hamantaschen and Mrs. Hottentot, or he says 'Hamantaschen.'

JOSH: Do you know what hamantaschen is?

HRISHI: I do now.

JOSH: Ah.

HRISHI: He says 'humentaschen' but is it actually 'hamantaschen'?

JOSH: Well, it's based on the villain of the Purim story, whose name is Haman, or 'Ham-man' in Hebrew, so it's 'hamantaschen' basically. I guess 'taschen' are ears, right?

HRISHI: I thought hamantaschen was a dessert?

JOSH: It is. Haman, who, in rather grizzly fashion, along with his ten sons, is hanged, as part of this holiday story we tell in the Jewish tradition. Part of the celebration of the holiday is giving money and food to the poor and giving also little gifts of treats: mishloach manot - you give each other treats and pastries, and some of them are hamantaschen, which is usually filled with either chocolate or some sort of fruit jam, and it's a triangular-shaped pastry that is supposed to resemble Haman's ears. Hamantaschen.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Yeah. It's a little bit making what is a lovely holiday sound like a grizzly pastry-fest, but there you have it. Hamantaschen.

HRISHI: Right. Well, in both of these, I tried to extrapolate, again, like with the last generator - I tried to extrapolate what the rules were, and then create based on those rules. So he uses two different prefixes, he says Mrs. Hottentot, and then he uses Miss, for Hamantaschen. So one of the variables is the prefix for her name.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: And then, the two different names we get, both start with H, as you pointed out. One is three syllables, and the other is four syllables. They both start with a stressed syllable, and unstressed syllable, and then a stressed syllable.

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: And when it's four syllables, there's another unstressed syllable.

JOSH: Wait, you were able to program this all in?

HRISHI: [laughing] Well, I mean, I picked the words trying to follow this formula.

JOSH: Well I'm enjoying it on my end already. I'm sure it's going to get a lot of hits. Do we have a counter in there? It'd be fun to throw in a counter.

HRISHI: Actually yeah there is, SquareSpace has stats...

JOSH: Of course it does. Love SquareSpace. I also saw somewhere on the boards, which I do still read although I think I respond less frequently than I used to, I'm still reading everybody's comments, and somebody threw out 'why not add a search function to the website?'

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: That was a great suggestion, and of course SquareSpace making it easy for you to do this kind of thing, we will add a search function.

HRISHI: I had a lot of fun doing this, but I embarrassed myself at a moment while reading the dictionary. I started laughing at the dictionary.

JOSH: I noticed you saying that in a tweet, so I'm curious to know. I hit the dictionary once for this episode too; we'll get to that later, but tell me.

HRISHI: I believe it was [laughing] when I found the entry for 'hugger-mugger'

JOSH: Hugger-mugger! [laughing] Isn't Hugger-Mugger one of the Jellicle cats? Perhaps not.

HRISHI: I didn't understand the word you said before 'cats'.

JOSH: This is all about musicals, never mind.

HRISHI: Ok. Anyway, thewestwingweekly.com/debbie

JOSH: That's D-E-B-B-I-E.

HRISHI: That's right. I hope you enjoy it as much as I did making it.

JOSH: So the other linguistic, actually let's do the couple of linguistic things I have. One is Will Bailey's contention:

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

WILL: I made Rice Krispies treats

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yes!

JOSH: That makes me crazy and I just remember very much lobbying Aaron, lobbying him hard to allow me to say 'Rice Krispie treats' and he basically said, "Well what is the main ingredient in these treats?" and I said, "Rice Krispies." He said, "Ah! There you go, hence they are *Rice Krispies* treats." I said, "Well let's say you take M&Ms, that's the name of that candy, M&Ms, and you make cookies out of them. Have you made M&Ms cookies? You'd say no, I made M&M cookies."

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: But I lost the argument.

HRISHI: You did lose the argument, and for what it's worth, officially Aaron is actually right.

JOSH: I did notice, by googling it, to my disappointment.

HRISHI: Yeah, if you go to ricekrispies.com and you look up the recipe, they list it as 'The Original Rice Krispies Treats' recipe.

JOSH: That said, for a change, I think you're being the prescriptivist, and I'm being whatever the other thing is.

HRISHI: I would never say Rice Krispies treats!

JOSH: Well then, I don't think they get to decide, I think common usage has decided that they are Rice Krispie treats. I will very rarely make this argument.

HRISHI: Mmm hmm.

JOSH: Because I am normally a prescriptivist... gah! It hurts my ear to hear Rice Krispies treats.

HRISHI: Yeah, language is ever-evolving.

JOSH: Which is what I hate about it usually!

HRISHI: [laughing] What I like is there are some YouTube videos on how to make Rice Krispies treats... I mean, God, see now I'm confused. There are YouTube videos on how to make Rice Krispie treats, and in the title, for example, The Joy of Baking video, the title is 'Rice Krispies Treats Recipe Demonstration'. But if you listen to the actual beginning of the video, they're referred to as Rice Krispie treats.

JOSH: Huh. See, there you go.

HRISHI: And this happens on a couple of videos where 'Rice Krispies' is in the title but then the person actually speaking says 'Rice Krispie treats'.

JOSH: Are you eating a blueberries muffin?

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: No! It's a blueberry muffin! A descriptivist by the way - I think I'm being a descriptivist for a change as opposed to a prescriptivist.

HRISHI: And I am a Rice Krisp-pivist. Dammit, I can't...

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: [laughing] I am a Rice Krisp-vitist... I can't say it! Rice-Krisptivist. And I am a Rice-Krisptivist.

JOSH: There you go, well done! [laughing]

HRISHI: Thank you. [laughing]

JOSH: Good.

HRISHI: OK.

JOSH: You had another language thing, and then I have one more language thing.

HRISHI: I do have another language thing. As we move on in the episode to the press briefing room, C.J. is telling them about their upcoming to California, and someone asks about the reception they'll get in Orange County, and C.J. says:

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

C.J.: Don't be fooled, they love us in Orange County, they're crazy-go-nuts for the president...'

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I really love the term 'crazy-go-nuts', but most of my affection for 'crazy-go-nuts' comes from, I don't know if you're familiar with *Homestar Runner*?

JOSH: No! What's that?

HRISHI: It was a flash website cartoon thing from the early 2000s.

JOSH: I'm intrigued, go on.

HRISHI: It's just one of the best things ever to be on the internet, and one of the characters is named Strong Bad and he started a college called Crazy Go Nuts University.

[*Homestar Runner* episode excerpt]

Strong Bad: Here at Crazy Go Nuts University you can get the experience you need to be almost half as awesome as I am!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I love it!

HRISHI: CGNU, and I like to think that, at least in some ways, inspired our university sweatshirt - the TWWW university sweatshirt. But anyway I was just thinking, yeah, all these people are all enrolled at Crazy Go Nuts University.

JOSH: C.J.'s so charming and winning in the press briefing room.

HRISHI: She is. This episode is really funny and sharp. I think there is this parody idea of Aaron's writing, or *The West Wing* in general, where they have the walk and talk, and everyone's walking really fast, and they're talking really fast, but there's something sanctimonious and just pretentious and very silly about it. And certainly the talking fast is accurate; they're really on fire this episode. I felt like all of you, I'll include you into it, are speaking really quickly in this episode. But it's also really not this ponderous, pretentious thing, it's really funny. Especially in this episode, I think, and one of the moments I was thinking about where this is especially true is, well, C.J. in the briefing room, but then this exchange between Toby and C.J. later:

[*West Wing* Episode 4.16 excerpt]

TOBY: Give it up with the dress, would ya?

C.J.: It was a suit and they hit me with an avocado.

TOBY: It could've been worse.

C.J.: How?

TOBY: They could've hit me.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] It's a good line.

HRISHI: I really like this episode.

JOSH: I do too. Yeah, I agree. I think Aaron gets less credit than he deserves for self-awareness. There are times and scenes and maybe whole episodes where he could be open to parody, or to charges of self-seriousness if you don't get pulled along with it. He also will deflate his own steps in those directions too, with great frequency. It's one of the things we will discuss later too, even with the whole Will and the Laurens, Will and the interns, which we'll get into more. But he's even aware, there's much to potentially criticize there, but there's also hints in the writing that he's aware of that. But we'll get back to that; the one other language thing that I want to mention was, when President Bartlet has shown up to help Sam at that first campaign stop, at which Bartlet is going to speak and he's off in the wings as Sam is ready to introduce him, and he raises his voice, and he's speaking rudely, and he refers to somebody as being 'poncey' -

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

Sam: And someone you can honestly...

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Leo, tell those poncey little hairdressers, I'm gonna shove a load...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And that hit my ear and I thought that's homophobic isn't it? That's a surprising word for me to hear from President Bartlet, and I wanted to check and the OED, that is the Oxford English Dictionary has 'poncey' defined a 'derogatory term for an effeminate man.' I was surprised to hear that come out of President Bartlet's mouth. It's supposed to be a comic moment, I think, where Sam's in front of a crowd, extolling the president, and the kind of man, the moral, upstanding man that he is, and then we hear him bashing somebody, raising his voice, from off-stage, but he actually employs a homophobic slur. I did also find in my googling that recently, a couple of years ago, in Britain, there was a Labour MP who criticized David Cameron for his use of the word, and I think that was because he felt it to be a homophobic slur.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Shall we get into Will and the interns?

HRISHI: Sure.

JOSH: It's rough giving a bunch of workers - and workers who are, power-dynamic wise, below you in stature - numbers because one can't remember their names.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: First of all, there's only two names to remember. There's Cassie, and there's Lauren for four people.

HRISHI: Right, right.

JOSH: If you can remember which one is Cassie, then all the other are Laurens. I mean, this is really not a difficult... I think you could probably learn four different people's names, with a brain like Will Bailey, the kind of brain that Will Bailey seems to possess, but there's only two names! [laughing]

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: You've got a 75% chance of addressing a Lauren, if you just figure out who's Cassie, you're good.

HRISHI: So Lindsey, my wife, in her old job...

JOSH: I call her 37.

HRISHI: Well, I was so happy to get to this episode and watch it with her, because I was like 'Here it is!' At one point there were five people in her office and three of them were named Lauren -

JOSH: Truly?

HRISHI: - And I thought maybe you need to get jerseys for everyone.

JOSH: Yeah, that's a bit insulting.

HRISHI: There was Lindsey, Mary-Alice, Lauren, Lauren and Lauren. But they went the extra mile and referred to them as Lauren S, Lauren W, and Lauren K.

JOSH: Well that's very *Bachelor* of them.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah, it's true.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: I love how much you love *The Bachelor*. It cracks me up. I haven't seen it.

JOSH: So you're not watching *The Bachelor Winter Games*? I was an hour into the first episode of *Bachelor Winter Games* before I realized I wasn't watching the Olympics.

HRISHI: Wait, what's *The Bachelor Winter Games*?

JOSH: That is, I guess, ABC's answer to the Olympics, and it is past participants of a variety of *Bachelor* and *Bachelor* spin-offs from around the world coming together to compete in winter sports, and love, in Vermont. It's crazy, coco, what is it?

HRISHI: It's crazy-go-nuts.

JOSH: It's crazy-go-nuts, and it's fine viewing. And it is not as entertaining as the actual Olympics, which I've been thoroughly enjoying.

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

[ad break]

JOSH: I was going to say in the intern scenes, any criticism of condescension or patriarchy, or any of that, ought to be aimed at Will, and not Aaron, because the way Aaron has written it, he's aware that this kind of behavior is...

HRISHI: Will's being a dick.

JOSH: Yeah, exactly. And Cassie's the one who points it out. Cassie even plays him by originally saying that she went to the London School of Ballet or something like that. She's got his number, so that means that Aaron's got his number.

HRISHI: Yep. Speaking of patriarchy and condescension, how about Josh and Donna?

JOSH: Yes! Remind me what happens in this particular episode. People do not like our take on Josh and Donna. Or I should say many. Our message boards are a place for people who love Josh and Donna, and I wouldn't even say I don't, I do love Josh and Donna, it's just there are times where it's a little much for me. So it's almost like there's a support group going on on our website, for 'can we just talk about how much we love Josh and Donna here without Hrishi and Josh?'

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I'm glad it's a safe haven.

HRISHI: OK. Operation Safe Haven.

JOSH: Exactly.

HRISHI: I really am tickled by Donna's comment:

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

DONNA: I have a level?

JOSH: You do. It's not a lot to speak of, but y'know, no shoes no shirt - I'm sorry but you draw a line.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's great. And I especially like Donna when she actually meets with Ivan Perez, when she's listening to him, and he says:

[West Wing episode 4.16 excerpt]

PEREZ: Well my point was, we have no way of determining whether twelve hours in the sun picking grapes is worth less or more than nine to five in an office.

DONNA: True. True. But, let me ask you this, Ivan.

PEREZ: Yes.

DONNA: What do you think of Richard Setter?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It was just supreme, wonderful, bullshitting.

JOSH: Janel's funny in that scene. And she also essentially, as soon... Ok, he knows who Setter is, she gets up and leaves. She just cuts short the whole thing.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly.

JOSH: I got what I've been told to get.

HRISHI: Yeah. She's efficient. She's not wasting time or brain power.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: One thing that is weird though, is that later, then, this guy, we find out that somebody refers to him as, one of the aides, one of Holcomb's aides, calls him Izzy Perez, and I didn't know that, similar to your Yoncle revelation, I didn't know that Ivan could be nicknamed Izzy. Is your daughter's full name Ivan Malina?

JOSH: Indeed! Yeah, no, she's an Isabel.

HRISHI: That makes sense.

JOSH: Yeah, I would think Izzy would be Isaac, or Yitzhak.

HRISHI: Or Isaiah?

JOSH: Or Isaiah, very good.

HRISHI: Or Is-his-name really Ivan?

JOSH: [laughing] That's his full name!

HRISHI: Is-his-name really Ivan and they call him Ivan for short - or Izzy. Izzy a Communist? Perez.

JOSH: Very good.

HRISHI: Now that we're on Scott Holcomb.

JOSH: Yes. As played, I think, smarmily well, by Matthew Glave.

HRISHI: Scott Holcomb was first introduced to us, by name, in Swiss Diplomacy, back in episode nine of season four, when Will says he's leaving the campaign, and he tells Sam:

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

WILL: Scott Holcomb and Betsy - these guys are the best. We just went from 435 house races to one. You get the All-Star team.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So that was our introduction to him and so now we actually meet him, Scott being this Democratic operative, brought in, presumably to help Sam. I really liked this moment early on, where Sam is on the phone with Will, when they're discussing how to get the writing staff to like them. Will has a comment about the itinerary, and he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

WILL: Why did you cancel the Teamsters?

SAM: Scott thought we should be at the Manufacturing Association breakfast.

WILL: I don't think that was very smart.

SAM: Hey Scott, Will says he doesn't think you're very smart.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: This is a move that I know very well, it's something that I do with my family and Lindsey, where I'll pretend Lindsey has said something disparaging about my mom or my dad, and make fake fights - stuff like that.

JOSH: Sure, yeah.

HRISHI: It's a silly thing, but it's only funny when the love between the people who are not speaking to each other directly is well known.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And Sam, I think, assumes that that's the case - he's clearly in that mode, and I think neither Will nor Scott are on the same page.

JOSH: That's funny, that had not occurred to me.

HRISHI: Later in the episode, we definitely find out that all these operatives around Sam are a bunch of jerks, but it's taken Sam, sweet Sam, a while to realize it.

JOSH: He's Chris Traeger-like.

HRISHI: Yeah. He thinks that everybody's buddies, and they're all on the same team. I love it when he introduces Donna to them.

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

DONNA: Hi.

SAM: Hey! Everyone, this is one of my best friends, this is Donna Moss.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes, it's very sweet. Do you notice, by the way, that Scott and the other guy who's going to get later insta-fired by Sam, they don't really acknowledge Donna at all.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: There's no hey, ho, hi, here's my name, shaking of hands. There's no smile, they're just dead behind the eyes. They've got cow eyes. These are not warm people.

HRISHI: They've got poo brain is what I would call those eyes. If you ever watch the episode "The Eyes" of *Adventure Time*. *Adventure Time* being, in a lot of ways, a spiritual descendant of *Homestar Runner*. A lot of the reasons why I love *Homestar Runner*, those are present in *Adventure Time*. Anyway, there's an episode called "The Eyes".

JOSH: *Adventure Time* is one of those things that you and I have discussed explicitly, but it's also one of the shows, that, every time I see anything referring to it, I always think, 'I would love that.'

HRISHI: Ah, you really would.

JOSH: But that for some reason that I have never got around to watching.

HRISHI: You would.

JOSH: I know I would.

HRISHI: If you want to just jump in at 'The Eyes,' you know the episodes are twelve minutes long.

JOSH: Ok, I can find that time in my busy schedule.

HRISHI: And then together we can use the term poo brain.

JOSH: Great. And also we'll be able to figure out whether or not it will hold up to an episode by episode podcast a year and a half from now.

HRISHI: [laughing] Oh my gosh. The mythology of that show is deep and complex.

JOSH: I've gotta watch that.

HRISHI: Yeah, Scott's agenda is hard to decipher a little bit, because...

JOSH: Yeah, I'm also confused by it. Go ahead.

HRISHI: Yeah. He's hired by the DCCC, so he's a Democratic party operative, so you would think that, in some ways it feels like he's advising against Sam's best interests, so you'd think, OK, maybe it's for the good of the party?

JOSH: Yeah, but it seems to me to be the diametrically opposite thing where he's trying to push Sam to the right, so maybe he can get enough votes to win.

HRISHI: Yeah, but at the same time, the things that he's actually doing are neither good for Sam, nor the Democratic party, because if he's a real party operative, maybe he might advise Sam to do something - everybody says 'you're gonna get creamed,' and he's acting like it's kind of unwinnable by making these strategic choices that seem weird to everybody else, who you'd think would know better. You'd think Will knows not to cancel the Teamsters. For example the tax plan is not just the president's plan. As we know from our real world mire of tax plans, to put together a tax plan, it has to involve many, many, many parties, and so to come out against the tax plan, you know, it's being scored by the OMB, all this stuff. To come out against it would really be - it's either going to hurt Sam, or it's going to hurt the Democratic party, and I can't figure it out. Scott doesn't seem like he's loyal to Sam, and he doesn't seem like he's loyal to the Democratic party. What is his agenda?

JOSH: Yeah, I found it very confusing as well. And it's suggested that he has his own personal agenda that he's serving, with his advice.

HRISHI: Which I guess maybe makes the most sense, but I don't know what that agenda is, or how he's able actually to achieve it. If he's a Democratic party operative, President Bartlet is the leader of the party, and so you'd think he might feed Sam some stuff, where you could say 'this isn't as good for Sam but he's following the party line and adding his voice to a chorus that ultimately will end in defeat, but at a national level is beneficial.

JOSH: Sure. He's got the president himself standing next to him in the wings, and Sam's on stage saying "I'll be the first to vote aye" or something like that about the president's tax bill,

and Scott's saying, audibly, "He did not just say that." So you'd think if he was looking for his own preservation and/or what's best for the party, that wouldn't be his reaction as he stands next to the president himself.

HRISHI: The kind of person who I would imagine advising Sam to be his own person, to step away from the president, to have opinions that are contrary to the president's policies, would be somebody who is actually someone who's more closely aligned to Sam. Someone who's an independent voice. Not someone who comes from the DCCC. Not how Will describes him, not one of the all stars of the party. I would imagine it would be more some maverick person on his team.

JOSH: Yeah, for hire, on this particular campaign.

HRISHI: Yeah, or a close friend who says "I know what your true colors are, even if they are against the greater principles of the party, you need to say these things," or something like that. But it's neither of those. Ok, enough Scott. He's a jerk. Actually, I do have another question about the general political climate in our show. I had thought that the economy...

JOSH: Yes! I bumped on that too.

HRISHI: ...was doing really well.

JOSH: Right. I thought it was humming along. And all of a sudden, we get a newscast that tells us:

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

NEWSREADER: ...certain debate will be coming tomorrow morning when GOP leaders plan to roll out their ambitious \$800 billion tax cut plan, their prescription for an ailing economy.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But just a few episodes ago, the president, in "Arctic Radar", he said about his first term, to his cabinet, he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.10 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: You created over 9 million new jobs and the highest home ownership rate on record.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: In Two Cathedrals, he says to God, "3.8 million new jobs? What, that wasn't good enough?" And so, somewhere between Season 2 and Season 4 they added 5.2 million new jobs, which seems pretty good. I looked it up, and it's not as good as the Clinton era, but y'know.

JOSH: It's not an ailing economy, that's not the picture that's been painted.

HRISHI: Yeah, ailing economy - ailing is not the word I'd use, so it feels like it came out of the blue a little bit. *Diablo Ex Machina*.

JOSH: Well done. Little things in the episode that I thought were handled particularly well by Vincent Misiano, and cast; I like how there's a moment between Leo and Will outside of the Sit Room, where Will is trying to get a little bit more information about what's happening in Kundu.

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

WILL: With regard to whatever is happening right now, I feel a little responsible.

LEO: You are.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I like the dialogue, and how it was played, but I also like the way it was staged, because they are right at the entrance of the Sit Room, and I think right before they have this little exchange, Leo puts his hand on the *Get Smart* hand print reader, and then they have that little exchange, and Leo goes into the Sit Room, where of course, Will, would not be allowed to enter.

HRISHI: Right. There really is a holy line of demarcation.

JOSH: The holy line of demarcation, and yet, by being around the president, and saying something and as we've discussed previously, saying something that he almost blurted out in response to a rhetorical question that the president said, he's now, even in the smallest way, involved in what happens behind that door.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I just thought it was very well blocked and shot, to remind us of the level you're playing at when you're, even if you're outside that door, but you speak regularly to the people who are welcome inside. It's a very high level, and you have to choose your words carefully, and be prepared for some consequences. And I also like the act break, where we have Fitz and Leo in the Sit Room, having a conversation and making the realization:

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

LEO: He's trying to finish the job before the deadline.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: This very grizzly realization, and I like how that's handled well, and how we've seen that they've marked a spot for an eventual mass grave and then there's some photographs that Fitz is handling, and we don't see the front of them, we don't see the full shot, but you

can see through the back of the photograph that there seems to be piles of bodies and I just thought it was handled in a powerful and subtle way.

HRISHI: I thought it was a cool idea to have the administration and the military here have to go up against an enemy who doesn't play by the same rules. They issued an ultimatum, and clearly they had some expectations, and they were seeing further down the board...Leo anticipates the bluff they're trying to call, they say 'oh, as soon as they see US soldiers dead, that'll be the end of it,' and Leo says:

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

LEO: You've gotta find a way of getting word to Nzele that in 23 hours, he's going to lose that bet.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But despite that, there are moves that President Nzele has...

JOSH: Yeah, he is willing to essentially genocide as extortion.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: As an extortion tool.

HRISHI: I think they don't really count on that kind of playbook, because it's so far outside of the realm of moral decency, even though they know that this person is genocidal, and so in some ways they should have anticipated that their sense of what the landscape looks like, is not going to be shared.

JOSH: Mmm hmm.

HRISHI: On a much lighter level, going from the art of war, to the art of war of love.

JOSH: Mmm. Are we getting onto Jean Paul?

HRISHI: Yeah. There was one thing, I was thinking about, I think Zoey makes kind of a show of kissing Jean Paul in front of Charlie.

JOSH: Yeah, I absolutely agree.

HRISHI: And I realized, she's been kind of insensitive in previous episodes, and we've talked about it, poor Charlie, she's sort of flaunting him, but I realized it is - she's actually flaunting the romance in front of Charlie, and maybe this should have been obvious to me earlier, but here it really comes out. I feel like she's not unaware of the effect it has on Charlie, I think that actually she's making a show in order to hurt Charlie, belying the fact that she's actually still hurt by his breaking up with her.

JOSH: I don't even remember - we know that he broke up with her? I thought we decided that we were just made aware that they seem to have fallen apart. I thought there wasn't such a fine point put on it, plot-wise.

HRISHI: Hmm. You might be right. In my mind -I don't know if I have evidence to back this up - in my mind, after the assassination attempt, Charlie grows distant from Zoey and stops calling her, or stops returning her calls, and I think, wracked with guilt, and feelings about her potential personal safety, just sort of grows distant and then whether he's the one who breaks up with her, or she ends up because he's not available. I feel like it was because of him, and she would have liked to have stayed with him.

JOSH: Hmm. Yeah, perhaps so. I guess I didn't really have a...

HRISHI: I might be completely making that up.

JOSH: I think you might be.

HRISHI: I might have a little fanfic backstory in my head.

JOSH: Fair enough. But either way, I think you're right, there's either a small torch still being carried, or just a cruel streak in Zoey, because she is absolutely just trying to rub his face in it a little bit. That said, maybe Charlie shouldn't be playing pool with Jean Paul, like dude - just pass on that.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: By the way, I think two small new strikes against Jean Paul, in terms of my sense of him: One, maybe I haven't noticed in previous episodes, does he always wear that choker? That super-tight neck choker?

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I thought that was a great little touch by Lynn Paolo to make him that much less palatable. God, that choker! I just want to rip it off his neck. And then I don't like that he seems to use an open-handed bridge for every shot in pool.

HRISHI: Oh!

JOSH: I always learned that you cover it with your finger, on easy shots you can use an open-handed bridge, but cover the bridge. Certainly Fast Eddie Felson would not approve of Jean-Paul's grip on the cue stick there.

HRISHI: Maybe that's a bias based on which side of the Atlantic you're on.

JOSH: Perhaps so.

HRISHI: I like Toby's little moment of brown-nosing.

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

TOBY: I don't like that French kid very much.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I mean nobody seems to really like him except for Zoey, and in this episode, I'm starting to think I don't think Zoey actually likes him that much. I think she's just using him. I mean I think it's maybe a bit cruel what she's doing, but I don't think she's being motivated by a desire to act cruelly. I think she's doing it for Charlie's sake. I mean, otherwise it just seems mean.

JOSH: There are a lot of lines that I wrote down that are worthy of note in this episode. Apropos of nothing, I loved, on Air Force One:

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

ANDY: Uh-uh. I saw him first girls.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Oh my god, that whole exchange is so great.

JOSH: It's pretty fantastic. Toby's concern... "Have you been on the plane this whole time?"

HRISHI: "No, I jumped in over the Great Lakes." [laughing]

JOSH: That's a very funny run. And then I love Bird York's delivery of "I saw him first girls."

HRISHI: I think about that line all the time. Well I think about it every time I put my foot in my mouth, in my own relationship. I think, if I were Lindsey, at this point I would turn around, look around the room, and say, "No, no, no..."

JOSH: "I saw him first girls."

HRISHI: Exactly. For any people who are listening right now who has a partner who's pregnant, see how it goes when you call them a minivan.

JOSH: Yeah, give that a try and get back to us.

HRISHI: And then report back, yeah.

JOSH: There's a moment, at what you would call the galley on the plane, on Air Force One, where Josh and C.J. are chatting, and C.J. grabs a soda, and then opens it. I feel bad for her, because it's clearly the flattest can of soda ever. Listen to the sound effect, it just goes 'click', and there's no 'pfff'. There's no sense that this carbonated beverage is indeed carbonated. I also noticed some interesting, I couldn't even quite tell - often branded

products will be made to be, if not unrecognizable, at least less so, through a process called greeking.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: They'll greek out the brand; she's clearly drinking a Pepsi, or it's a Diet Pepsi - it's a Pepsi product but you can't quite read it, and I can't tell if it's been greeked, or it's the way she's holding it, but then later also when Jean Paul and Charlie are playing pool, Dulé's holding a beer, and you can tell, take a look at it, he's clearly, with intent...

HRISHI: ...got his hand...

JOSH: ...holding his hand around the brand, and you're seeing the back of the bottle. If you want your product to be seen visibly, you'd better pay us. And also, you don't want to create a situation where some brand objects to the way you've used their product.

HRISHI: Right. I always like looking for those little bits of show craft.

JOSH: Yes. I also enjoyed:

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Sing it Larry!

ED: Ed.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: It's very quick, and subtly done. I like the delivery from Peter.

HRISHI: It must have been frustrating watching this episode, in real time, after having just watched a two-parter, and get to the end of it, and be like 'I have to wait another week again?'

JOSH: Right. 'It's another two-parter, and this one they're just slipping in on us, they're not even telling us. They're not even announcing two-parter.' It's an under-the-radar two-parter.

HRISHI: We got to the end of this episode, and we're nowhere really. We have no resolution...all of the balls are still in the air.

JOSH: The denizens of Orange County don't come off very well. Or certain of them, in this episode.

HRISHI: No. "And this is the one who was with the daughter."

JOSH: Right. Phew...

HRISHI: Putting him in the Hawaiian shirt as he's walking through the hotel. Well here's the thing - they're in a hotel - maybe this couple is not from Orange County, they are staying in the hotel, so they might be tourists from who knows where.

JOSH: Perhaps not. By the way, notice that my friend, Ron Ostrow, who plays a reporter at the hotel there, he's wearing a very similar shirt. I'm not sure why; it's that one reporter, played by Ron, who might be friends with the racist couple.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: And then they shop at the same place.

HRISHI: That's my one defense for residents of Orange County.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: These people might be tourists.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Andi is just on fire the whole episode.

JOSH: Yeah. It's a great episode for her.

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

MAN: Whatever you say.

ANDY: Damn right whatever I say.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: She could have just let him walk by, but I like the consistency.

JOSH: Well we know she's been spoiling for a fight, on a bigger stage anyway, but she'll take it person by person.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: Bring it buddy.

HRISHI: She'll fight the undercard fight and the headline fight.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: That's a boxing metaphor. That's unusual for me. You were supposed to say that, and you were supposed to be quoting C.J. - "a gun metaphor, that's unusual for you sir."

JOSH: You've got to know by now, that I'll always let you down, if you're leading me towards some sort of *West Wing* reference, it'll go right over my head. Sorry about that.

HRISHI: That's Ok.

JOSH: I did write this down. Sam, at one point, says, "I've got salsa on my shirt." And I wrote down, "I've got blisters on me fingers." I don't know why. It reminds me - I think Ringo, at the end of "Helter Skelter", I think it's Ringo.

["Helter Skelter" song excerpt]

RINGO: I've got blisters on my fingers!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I don't know why, but somehow Sam saying, "I've got salsa on my shirt" reminded me of it.

HRISHI: Did you see this insanely explosive interview that Quincy Jones gave to Vulture?

JOSH: I read it, yes. I read it...I mean it's very entertaining, but I also felt bad for some of the people involved. I saw some of the things that Rain Pryor wrote, and she was not happy about the things that he had said about her father.

HRISHI: Well, and he's not so nice to Ringo.

JOSH: No, no, he basically says that all The Beatles were terrible musicians, which I think...

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I'm certainly no expert, but I strongly disagree with what he had to say.

HRISHI: Here's the exchange; the interview from Vulture asks, "What were your first impressions of The Beatles?" and Quincy Jones says, "That they were the worst musicians in the world, they were no-playing motherf*****s. Paul was the worst bass player I had ever heard, and Ringo, don't even talk about it. I remember once we were in the studio with George Martin, and Ringo had taken three hours for a four-bar thing he was trying to fix on the song. He couldn't get it. We said 'mate, why don't you take some lager and lime, some shepherd's pie?'" First of all, he's just dropping in all the British... "Take a half hour and relax a little bit.' So he did and we called Ronnie Verell, a jazz drummer. Ronnie came in, fifteen minutes and tore it up. Ringo comes back and says, 'George, can you play it back for me one more time, so George did, and Ringo says, 'That didn't sound so bad,' and I said 'yeah, motherf*****', because it ain't you!'"

JOSH: [laughing] Wow.

HRISHI: "Great guy though."

JOSH: Give the guy a break!

HRISHI: And then he ends it with “Great guy though.” [laughing]

JOSH: “Great guy though.” Give him a break. He had blisters on his fingers!

HRISHI: [laughing] Exactly!

JOSH: Oh yeah, he just, no holds barred.

HRISHI: Amazing. He should have a podcast.

JOSH: Yeah, perhaps so. Towards the end, I started to really just enjoy this episode as another one of those great little windows into the unrelenting nature of what it is to be the president of the United States, and the sense of trying to multitask while he’s there trying to help Sam, and figure out when to release their tax plan, and he’s got these huge life-and-death-stakes events unfolding around the world, and I just thought, it’s just that fertile area where *The West Wing* really digs in and does some of its best stuff. I’m excited to watch the next episode.

HRISHI: Yeah, they’ve really got all three major areas happening at once, major topics. One is military, one is governing, with the tax plan, and then one is politics, with Sam’s campaign, and how the three have to be coordinated at all times, trying to figure out how to mix the public face of what they’re doing with the tax plan, vs. how it might hurt Sam, while still wrestling with military intervention. It’s a great episode for tying all those things together.

JOSH: Right, and as a dramatist, Aaron and company, or as dramatists, Aaron and everyone else involved, have to deal with how to weave those stories together in a way that feels cohesive and keeps us along for the ride, and they do so very well in this episode.

HRISHI: Alright.

JOSH: OK.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for listening to this episode, things are going to slow down for us. We’re going to be taking some time off very soon.

JOSH: As we age.

HRISHI: That too. But as we get ready for our live episodes coming up in April, we’re going to be taking some time off from the podcast to prepare and to get everything synced up. So just a head’s up on that.

JOSH: That’s right. Thanks as always to Zach McNeese and Margaret Miller, without whom this podcast would not be the same.

HRISHI: *The West Wing Weekly* is part of Radiotopia, a curated collection of extraordinary cutting edge podcasts, made possible by listeners like you. Learn more at radiotopia.fm.

JOSH: Thanks to our sponsors and to those of you that patronize them. When you patronize our sponsors you help out the podcast. In the meantime, between now and the next episode, you can listen to Hrish's *Song Exploder* podcast, and you can see me on *Scandal*, on Thursday nights on ABC.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: What's next?

[Outro Music]