

The West Wing Weekly
5.01: "7A WF 83429"
Guests: Bradley Whitford and Ronald Klain

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: Live from Georgetown University, it's The West Wing Weekly. [Audience cheers] I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today we are talking about the season premiere of season 5. The episode is called 7A WF 83429.

JOSH: Delighted to be here at Georgetown in a building named after my second favorite Disney character, Gaston hall. [Audience laughing] I don't know there is an Elsa house. That would have been even better. I want to thank the woman who gave me this West Wing Weekly button, thank you, that you had made. I choose to view it as not intellectual property theft, [audience laughing] but as a tribute to the show.

HRISHI: Thanks so much to Hannah for becoming my friend at the correspondence dinner/ breakfast last year and making this whole thing possible [audience clapping]. Thanks, Hannah.

JOSH: Yay.

HRISHI: Ok! 7A WF 83429.

JOSH: Written by John Wells. Directed by Alex Graves. And it first aired on September 24 in the year 2003. We are post-Sorkin, people. [Audience boos] Oh, it's going to get real, very quickly.

HRISHI: Here's a little synopsis. The season five premiere picks up right where season four ended. It's been seven hours since Zoey Bartlet was kidnapped. Things are a little crazy because Acting-President Glen Allen Walken is acting like the President and it's making the senior staff nervous, even as they try and continue the business of the government. Meanwhile, the truth about Abdul Shareef's assassination finally comes out. The Bartlets' circle the wagons but are rendered powerless as they wait for the news. While the combined forces of Leo, Fitz, Nancy McNally, Special Agent Casper, and Acting-President Walken try to sort out the military and law enforcement strategies against Kumar and the five terrorist suspects still at large, respectively.

And to discuss this episode, we have a couple of very special guests, as you know...

JOSH: and Brad Whitford. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: Please welcome Ron Klain and Bradley Whitford.

[Audience cheers/claps]

JOSH: You'll hear it when it's released, but last episode that we recorded last night we made Ron choose a code name and he went with Papa Smurf. So if I refer to him that way, you'll understand why.

HRISHI: Ok, before we get into this episode, a question for both of you, Josh and Brad: I was wondering if you could go back to this moment in 2003, the summer between seasons four and five, and what was it like for you knowing that Aaron wasn't coming back to the show? Were you nervous about how this season was going to go? Maybe even specifically how this episode, first episode, was going to go?

BRADLEY: Yeah. It was very weird and disorienting. I remember very clearly sitting in the Roosevelt room when Tommy and Aaron called us in. I burst into tears. I remember thinking this is what it would be like if I was Branched Davidian, and David Koresh left. [Audience laughing]

JOSH: That is so romantic.

BRADLEY: Yea, no, it was really disorienting. You really didn't know. I mean, apart from the incredible, sort of personal connection you get with a making stories with people. And knowing they were going to be gone, there was a particular brilliance of Aaron finding his voice and being there when he found his voice. And it was scary. You didn't know if it would go on.

HRISHI: This episode was written by John Wells. How well did you know him and know his writing?

BRADLEY: I'll speak for Josh. [Audience laughing]

JOSH: I'm comfortable with that.

BRADLEY: I want to say a couple things about John. I think John is actually an uncelebrated hero of the entire enterprise of the West Wing because John understood and the humility to understand that you go in our business with talent and he saw a really unique talent in Aaron and in the partnership Aaron had with Tommy. And John took all his E.R. schwing, it was a tremendously successful financial show and he put a cone around us. And we, Aaron, and Tommy, and the cast, I never heard a network note, which is extraordinary. And he did an amazing thing, and then when this happened, I remember at the table read, John sat down and it was very weird to be at a table read of a script not written by Aaron, and I remember John said "I feel like Ethyl Merman's understudy."

JOSH: We'll explain that to you young people later. [Audience laughing]

BRADLEY: Yeah. Not fans of 1940's musicals in here. But John did a really menschy thing and he wasn't going to put any other writer out there and we knew we had to reinvent the making of the show.

JOSH: It's also worth noting that John Wells is an excellent writer and very creative guy, a great writer. I think he knew he was stepping into something that already had been imprinted by Aaron's style and the way Aaron wrote. And I think rewatching this episode, which I hadn't since it first aired, he did a very very good job continuing from where Aaron left off.

BRADLEY: Yea and it brings up all sorts of fundamental questions that you are playing out in public. I mean, I remember it was really hard being on a show that everyone was going "oh this isn't going to be the same anymore" and what do you do? Do you try and imitate a voice that was so unique or do you create things that way? What are you laughing at?

JOSH: You can't modify the word unique. [Audience laughing]

HRISHI: It was in the West Wing.

JOSH: If Aaron taught us anything, it's that. But I understand the greater point, and I accept it.

BRADLEY: Oh.

JOSH: I also think there was a bit of a dry run for things not being the way they were when Rob Lowe left and I came on the show. [Audience laughing] There was already a sense of "oh this isn't what it used to be."

BRADLEY: Yeah. Yea, the ice was broken. I mean it was heartbreaking because you could really tell that Malina was there to stay. [Audience laughing]

JOSH: I remember when Aaron and Tommy let us know they were in fact leaving and I do remember there were a lot of tears and there was a very "West Wing-y" taking of turns and going around the table saying a little something. And it was all very heartfelt, and more than one person opined that perhaps the show shouldn't even continue in their absence and then it got to me. I tried to work up tears and as usual it didn't quite come. [Laughing] I was holding for an insult, but if you aren't going to jump on it. I remember saying, and Aaron is a good friend of mine so I didn't want to offend him, especially after going after everyone else, I was like "I kind of just got here and I would like the show to continue" [laughing] "don't get me wrong, very sad, want to continue".

BRADLEY: Right. It was really moving.

JOSH: It was

HRISHI: Did you get the sense of what the relationship was like between John Wells and Aaron?

BRADLEY: A little bit.

JOSH: I think they had a really good working relationship for four seasons.

BRADLEY: Look. There is a thing about Aaron that is really unique in television. [Laughing] Ok. I did it again. We all know David Chase did The Sopranos, right? A lot of writers wrote on The Sopranos. With Aaron, it would be as if you were to come to me as an actor. He was kind of like an actor's ownership or ego, the more pejorative word, it would be as if you came to me and said "You know, you've been great. Josh is really great. And we are just going to do John Slattery do it next week." That would probably freak out an actor. And for Aaron, it was unimaginable, and it wasn't ego, it just the only way he knows how to work. And I think John, making a TV show is expensive and an unyielding beast, and there were certain management artists issues. But John understood this was a unique talent that needed to be served.

HRISHI: And so John Wells, before he started as the executive producers, one of the executive producers on the West Wing, as you mentioned, he was a show- runner on E.R.. Before that, he was a writer and show -runner on a show called China Beach, that won a ton of awards and Emmy's. But I wanted to go back to a thing you mentioned briefly, Brad, he didn't want to put any other writers out there with this episode. Could you expand on that idea.

BRADLEY: He knew that everyone was watching. You know that everyone is out there going "this isn't going to be as good." There is no way to win doing that. And John was like "I'll be out front" I don't know who wrote the second episode. But, by the way, John works in a completely different way from the way Aaron and Tommy works. John is all about a real sort of team mentality in the writers' room, where you are alternating writers. I eventually went through the process with him. There is a system where you bring in an outline, you get notes on the outlines, you bring in another outline, you get to write a draft, you get notes from everybody. It's a very very collaborative thing. And of course, my joke with Aaron is great show about democracy that you ran it like you were Kim Jong III. [audience laughs] That was not the way this worked. And someone like John, I think it's remarkably astute thing to go "oh, this is different from the way I, who have a lot of power and can force things, I will get the best result if I let this horse run." Which I think is an under-acknowledged contribution to the show.

JOSH: Aaron's leaving created an opportunity for you, eventually, to write a couple episodes.

BRADLEY: Yes.

JOSH: And to make me say horrible things. We will have you back when that time comes. We'll dig into it.

BRADLEY: Truly, my greatest achievement.

HRISHI: Some of the directors who had come in under Tommy Schlamme's, I guess, under the auspices of his supervision, stayed: Chris Misiano and Alex Graves. Alex Graves directed this episode. Did that help feel like a bridge from the Aaron years?

BRADLEY: Yeah. This is a catholic university, right? Uh, a Jesuit university?

JOSH: Oh this is going to be good.

BRADLEY: No, no, no. The relationship with the directors is very tricky for actors when you're under the gun. This show was a director killer. Everything about this show was hard. This is not a procedural, which creates all sorts of shooting problems. You never get into a rhythm. You know on Law and Order you are going to be in the courtroom this day, you know how to shoot those scenes. The emotional stuff in this was hard. The acting was hard. The verbiage was hard. So, it was hard to find someone. And very quickly, you wanted to have, you know, Chris and Alex, people who you knew, knew what was going on. I didn't say the dirty story. [Audience yells] No, no, no. Mike Nichols used to say directing is like sex, because you've never seen any, in general...

JOSH: I don't believe Mike Nichols has said this.

BRADLEY: In general, you've never seen or experienced anyone else performing your specific job. There was a sense of continuity and that was intentional, because we were a bunch of freaking out babies.

HRISHI: Did that help at all, in terms of this episode? Because so much of the plot involves the staff being freaked out by the change in leadership and really feeling disoriented. I mean, in a lot of ways, what we are seeing with a new person in a leadership role, is a mirror.

BRADLEY: Yeah. I remember thinking about this. You are always looking for ways to judo the atmospherics of productions into what is actually going on. There were many opportunities for that playing, it was wonderful playing a White House character because I had young kids. I was exhausted. I was over caffeinated. And I was like "ok good. I don't have to act that" which is very similar to being in the White House. And looking at this it was like "Yea, what are you people doing here." All those feelings of sort of oddness and alienation was there.

JOSH: I also think this episode like the two that preceded the final two episodes of season four, Aaron was writing in a sort of anomalous fashion. So that the transition was smoothed over in the scene that John Wells didn't have to create the perfect Sorkin episode. The whole White House is in tumult and there's chaos, and there's more personal story than usual. In a way, the first down beat of season five starts in equally anomalous fashion.

BRADLEY: Yea, Yeah. There was a parallel version of what was happening plot wise that was happening in the creation of the show that made it, I guess, easier.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think what you're saying, Josh, and I agree with too, a part of why the transition here, so I haven't seen this episode, I actually watched it for the very first time in preparation for this conversation.

JOSH: Here's where the rubber hits the road. This is where we discover that Hrishu is an Aaron Sorkin fan much more than a West Wing fan [audience is shocked and murmurs]. He is a West Wing fan. I consider him the ultimate WingNut. He's the ultimate Sorkin Nut. Right?

HRISHI: So the first time I watched this, I got as far as the teaser, I think. I got to the titles [Josh and audience laughing] and...

JOSH: What does that mean? You put the DVD in and then you left? "I got to the teaser"

HRISHI: No, it was on TV, I watched it. It felt too weird and it didn't seem right. I mean partly I was braced for it to feel different. I had some bias going into it, it wasn't going to be Aaron Sorkin and that was the real reason why I loved the show and so it wasn't going to be the same. And then, I think it's actually not really just about Aaron's writing. The direction here, especially at the beginning, Alex Graves starts off this episode, also, so different from any other West Wing episode. There is this grainy footage, there's this cacophonous montage of newsreels and overlapping voices and these whip pan transitions. Things we don't see on the show. And so I kind of ascribed that a little bit of that to Aaron leaving. And not, especially at the time, not really knowing how all the mechanics of tv making worked or this show specifically. It just didn't feel like the tv show I knew and loved. And people were talking and I checked out. So I think...

BRADLEY: Did you never watch any of the episodes?

HRISHI: Pretty much no.

RONALD: Wow.

JOSH: I know. It's dawning on you, as it's dawning on me, that the podcast is moving into a new era, where I'm the expert on the show. [Audience laughs] This can't be good for anyone. I've seen at least all the episodes once, or most of them.

HRISHI: I've been pretty worried about this moment since we started since we started the podcast.

BRADLEY: When was this revealed to you?

HRISHI: Josh knew the whole time.

JOSH: Yea, I'm just pretending I'm finding out now. [Audience laughing] Even a while back, Hrishu tried pitched me on maybe I should continue the podcast with another host. And I was like "Of course!" I was like "Dude!"

HRISHI: Well I thought that part of the dynamic is that Josh was on the show, and I'm somebody who watched this show many many many times. So when we get to the episodes that I haven't seen many many times to continue the dynamic we should do a switch as well. And I could still help produce and stuff, I just wouldn't be a host.

JOSH: I wouldn't have none of it.

HRISHI: So here we are.

JOSH: I think it's actually going to be interesting moving forward and discovering what you think of the later seasons. And I'm curious, just in a.., we are going to get into the micro, overall, this is a good episode of The West Wing. I think.

HRISHI: Well so, now having watched it, I was expecting it to be jarred. When I first saw it, I don't think I had or the season four DVDs weren't out yet. So I couldn't binge watch and go from season four right into season five the way that I could just in the last few days. Seeing how, as you said, anomalous the last few episodes for Aaron, and then going to this one, there are so plot heavy, the last couple episodes of season four, the last three really. And so it doesn't feel like The West Wing, a little bit.

BRADLEY: There is a camouflage of plot.

HRISHI: Exactly. And they're able to keep that camouflage going here. And so as I watched it, it doesn't really feel that different, especially at a macroscopic level. It didn't feel that different from the end of season four. And so in the end, I found myself sort of mirroring what some of the characters were saying. Like when all of the characters are remarking on Walken, looking at him and saying, "gosh, he seems Presidential" and feeling a little surprised and a little unsettling by it, that's kind of how I felt when watching this episode. I felt this does seem more akin to what I had just watched, these episodes that Aaron had written, than I expected it to be.

BRADLEY: I have to say I got into a thing that I just didn't watch large percentages of the episodes from before this. And then because of this, I watched the second to last one and this, and I have to say I was kind of surprised. I didn't know if it was the camouflage of the plot. One thing that I can tell you, that I don't think is gonna offend anybody, is that John Wells in retrospect felt like initially, and I don't know how long he felt it but, that there was an inevitable awkward transition going from what John said was an attempt to imitate Aaron to realizing we'll be much better if we find our own post-Aaron voice. And the show changed in ways that I think is more recognizable down the road.

HRISHI: Right

JOSH: Even if that's how he articulated the experience of taking over, I watched it, I felt like a detective, looking for exactly that. And I feel like this episode doesn't play like an Aaron Sorkin tribute band.

HRISHI: No, but I think because the last couple that Aaron Sorkin wrote didn't feel like Aaron Sorkin, either. The transition [cross talk] yea exactly.

JOSH: [Cross talk] had more wiggle room.

HRISHI: A couple things were and there that I felt didn't sit quite rights. There's a moment with C.J. and Carol

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

C.J.: How do I look?

CAROL: Like you slept in your clothes.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: And then the moment's over. And I feel like with Aaron, you know, I would have expected last line. C.J. usually gets the last word. She gets whether it's self-deprecating or some kind of sharp remark back to Carol. There some third layer to that, that never happens.

BRADLEY: I could tell you, I felt a weird thing I don't know how it works in a brain, and I think as an actor in an Aaron Sorkin show you end up with a weird little muscle, which after the second stroke I'll be in the nursing home spouting policy. [audience laughing] Cause it's up there somewhere. But I had real trouble memorizing.

HRISHI: your lines in the episode?

BRADLEY: No, during the transition as different writers would come in, and then the longer I've been able to act, I've realized that it's a pretty good indication if the thoughts are flowing for the character. The easier it goes in, generally, the better the writing is.

HRISHI: Interesting. There's another little thing, a couple times in this episode. They say their sending out a "BOLO" and that kind of specific jargon is certainly something that Aaron would use a lot. But there would always be some moment, some aside, even if it was quick, where someone would explain what that term meant. BOLO means "be on the look-out." And we never actually...

BRADLEY: Yea...right. I was like "why are we talking about southern ties?" [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: Exactly. So there were little things. But in general, I was surprised about how undistracted I was by it all.

RONALD: Except Roseanne's husband is President in this episode. And that seems highly problematic in many ways. [Audience and Josh laughs]

JOSH: It's good casting, John Goodman

HRISHI: Yeah. Let me play this one part that I love.

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

JOSH: He looks small, doesn't he?

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: It's hard to hear with all the montage, but it's Josh looking at the President at the Presidents conference behind John Goodman, and he says, "he looks small" and he really does.

JOSH: It's very well framed. The exact thought went through my mind before I heard Josh say the exact line that went through my mind. I thought Alex did a really good job, again it's a screen within a screen. But it's very well framed, where the hulking mass that is John Goodman is making little Martin Sheen look rather slight. I also wanted to throw out clip 3, in defense of John Wells writing also in the idiom of Aaron Sorkin, but I think very successfully, there's this little bit.

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

JOSH: They are just laying off because the President's daughter is probably tied up in the back of a gas station. We have no idea how this is playing.

WILL: He showed he's a leader; nobly embracing his own flawed humanity.

JOSH: Lincoln and Kennedy had children who died. They didn't take a sabbatical.

TOBY: Lincoln never got a ransom note from Jefferson Davis. He's putting country before family. I'd carpet bomb Mecca to get my kids back.

[End Excerpt]

JOSH: That's Toby. That's very Toby Ziegler and I think that's the kind of dialogue Aaron might put in his mouth.

HRISHI: Yeah. The "carpet bomb Mecca" reminded me of when he was fighting with Andy and he says...

[West Wing Episode 3:14 Excerpt]

TOBY: I don't remember having to explain to Italians that the problem wasn't with them but with Mussolini. Why does the U.S. have to take every Arab country out for an ice cream cone? They'll like us when we win!

[End Excerpt]

BRADLEY: I'm worried about you. What is this going to be like for you? Do you feel like you're betraying Aaron when you're watching this?

HRISHI: I don't know. Do you feel that way? Did you feel at all like you were betraying Aaron by continuing on with the show? [audience makes noises of Ooooooooh]

JOSH: Well played. [audience laughs]

BRADLEY: You gotta back off. [Audience laughing] Yeah..no...yea...no

HRISHI: The fact is that Tommy Schlamme left too.

BRADLEY: It was very very weird at first. I don't remember when I first communicated or saw Aaron after that, but I saw him a bunch. And it was he would say "how's it going?" and you would go "You know...you know...you know" [audience laughing] you wanted to be, I know for him, I think he said he tried to watch and felt like watching his wife sleep with someone else, or something like that.

JOSH: He claims to essentially to have never watched the show again.

BRADLEY: Right.

JOSH: I remember feeling like I still had a job. [Audience laughing]

BRADLEY: Yea, you remember that?

JOSH: Yea.... also feels like last month

HRISHI: One of the nice things that adds to chaos here, in addition to the chaos of what's happening outside of the White House with the FBI and the military trying to figure out what their going to do, is the internal chaos of the President's staff. They are still in their offices, and their still trying to perform their actions, but their doing it for someone they've never worked for. In fact, someone they've probably worked very hard against many times. And one point, Will says he is preparing remarks for President Walken. And I remember earlier when Will got the job he gets all of these reams of speeches from President Bartlet to learn his voice and you know, figure out whatever his speech patterns might be. And he doesn't have any kind of luxury here where he's going to do that. He's got a new boss temporarily.

BRADLEY: It's really disorienting. It's like you're doing a podcast about a show where you're not in love with the writer anymore [audience laughing].

JOSH: Oh man. Oh, Ron! I'm curious about Walken comes in and he's got staffers and he's got his own people. But there is a sort of a tension between the two staffs.

RONALD: Yeah. Obviously, what's interesting about The West Wing is that so much of it is based on true things that actually happened particularly in the Clinton administration and a little bit in the Bush administration. This episode presents something that we have never seen in American history which is the President stepping aside, and his political opponent, not the Vice President replacing him, there is no Vice President at this stage in the series. His political opponent, the Speaker of the House comes in. So, this is something we've never seen in American history, how would this happen? How a Democratic President step aside, Republican Speaker becomes President, he brings his people in and the President's staff are still there. Leo is trying to serve as both Chief-of-Staff to kind of the Presidency and one scene kind of says to Bartlet "I can't tell you something cause that's something the President told me." And I think the episode captures the confusion and the difficult issues of loyalty the staff face in this scenario. Even inside of totally friendly White House, with a President and Vice President who run together, who are a team, and so on and so forth, the staff shifts from one principal to the other, there's often these moments of disorientation. Eli Attie, who played such a large role in the show, started off writing speeches for Bill Clinton eventually became Al Gore's Chief Speech Writer, had to really understand the difference between working for these two men, so on and so forth. So what you see here is what you'd expect to see if all of a sudden this completely hostile political person comes into the White House and is running the place with staff that don't fit him and his staff and conflict. And I think it portrays this unknown really well.

HRISHI: Ron, in your own experience, you were a Senior Advisor to President Clinton and then you ended up becoming the Chief of Staff to Al Gore. Can you talk about that transition? Was that jarring for you when you made that switch?

RONALD: Yeah. I mean, it worked well on the way in and I worked perfectly well, until we got to 1999 when the Gore campaign was going along, not doing that well early on. There was some tension between the President and the Vice President, and there was a feeling that the Clinton people weren't loyal enough and I got fired. You know, so that's got a very unhappy ending, doesn't it now.

HRISHI: You got fired because you were seen as a leftover from the Clinton....

RONALD: I was a little too close Clinton, a little too close to Clinton's people. And so I kind of got pushed out. So we have now gone into a very sad part of my life.

JOSH: And you eventually coming back.

RONALD: And yes! Thank you, Josh! I appreciate that! Yes.

JOSH: There's another chapter.

RONALD: About a year later, the people who fired me got fired, and I got brought back and came back for the end. And we won the popular vote and we lost in Florida, and it got sad again. So it's like the season nine cliffhanger. So there you go.

HRISHI: But luckily no President who won the popular vote ever didn't become the President after that.

RONALD: Never happened. Never happened.

JOSH: Here's another question I had: watching the subplot develop in this episode of Walken announcing his intention to consider nominating a VP, how quickly could that possibly be done? Might Bartlet have put a VP in place so that rather than transfer the reins of power as it were to an adversary, he could have had his man or woman in charge?

RONALD: So we've only replaced the 25th amendment, which allows the vice President to be replaced, only was ratified to the Constitution in 1967. The first 180 years of our country, if the vice President died or quit, or the President died and the Vice President became President, we just had no Vice President at all. The first 180 years of our country, 38 years with no vice President. So you know, that tells something about that job, I suppose.

JOSH: And when Kennedy was assassinated and Johnson....

RONALD: And they decided after Kennedy was assassinated to try to change the Constitution, they added the 25th amendment in 1967. So we've only had two vice Presidents made under the 25th amendment: Gerald Ford when Spiro Agnew resigned in 1973 and Nelson Rockefeller when Ford became President in 1974. In both those times, it took months to finish the process of picking a Vice President. The Vice President has to be confirmed by both the Senate and the House. It took two months when Ford became Vice President and four months when Rockefeller became Vice President. This is not something that will happen very quickly.

HRISHI: I think that Ford Presidency, as you said, there is no precedent here for anything in history, but I thought the closest equivalent to what we could look at is the Ford Presidency. Because, that is someone who became President having never run on a Presidential ticket. And in terms of a sudden abrupt change, LBJ with an assassination is a little bit different, because they were on the ticket together. But here is Gerald Ford comes out from having ascended from being nominated and then in some ways accidentally became the President. And in his case, he had a staff before he became President and there was a period were two mingled. He kept President Nixon's chief of staff for six weeks.

RONALD: You know, every President and Vice President make these sort of contingency plans for how a transition would go if there were a longer transition. And indeed, as you say, Alexander Haig, who had been Nixon's chief of staff, remained. Ultimately, Ford made Dick Cheney his chief of staff. So fill in the blanks there.

HRISHI: And Donald Rumsfeld in between.

RONALD: And Donald Rumsfeld in between, yes. And I think there is a kind of hand over is what you see here. Again, with the added complexity that these people are from different political parties and there are a lot of anxieties. And throughout the episode, Josh is very nervous about the politics of this. What I love about this episode is it really captures that inevitable aspect of the White House. Even at a time of tragedy with Zoey being missing and potential missile strikes in the Middle East and all these things, Josh has to ask the question “What are the politics of this? What if the country falls in love with Roseanne’s husband as President? Where do we go from there?” And I think it’s such a great, powerful portrayal of what it’s like to be in the middle of something like that.

HRISHI: Here’s that clip...

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

JOSH: What if they like Walken better? What if he seems more Presidential? What if they want Walken to stay?

WILL: In a few days, President Bartlet turns the second letter over to Congress.

JOSH: What if it doesn’t take a few days? What if it takes a few weeks or a few months? What if she’s never found?

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: There is all this precedent for the intermingling of staffs in a moment of chaos like this. But one moment that just didn’t feel right to me was the idea that Will would prepare his remarks. Again, going back to Gerald Ford, when he gave the speech after becoming so quickly inaugurated, he still had his speech writer write that speech, which had this famous line:

[President Ford’s Inaugural Address: 1974]

PRESIDENT FORD: My fellow Americans, our long, national nightmare is over.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: You can’t imagine a Nixonian aide calling what had preceded it “national nightmare.” So you’d think that Walken would also want to have his people doing things.

RONALD: Yea and ultimately, in the episode, that’s kinda what happens. He goes in the Press room, no one’s seen, even C.J. hasn’t seen what he is about to say in the Press room. And we see literally every minute of this episode Walken kind of assumes more and more power as President, is pushing the Bartlet people away, is pushing Bartlet away himself. Ultimately, makes a horrendous decision that could really impact the Bartlet family and the whole thing. You see he is becoming more and more of the President every minute.

HRISHI: Let's talk about the decisions he has to make. The West Wing, in general, has given some really memorable titles, from time to time. "Post hoc ergo propter hoc" I mean there are so many. And I don't know if this is because of my love of Aaron's writing or something, but I do feel like...

JOSH: You're going to knock John Wells for the title?

HRISHI: No, I think it's great...This one is not memorable but I do think it actually serves the episode well. It's so hard, even when we were doing the intro to this episode, I had to keep looking at my notes to remember what the order of digits and numbers were. I think it works very well because the title here is just this anonymous set of figures and when the President articulates that I think it really helps underscore that feel of horror. He says:

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

BARTLET: They gave her a number, Leo. I saw it on CNN. My little girl is a case number now, five digits.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: And now this person who he loves, this three dimensional person, flesh and blood of his, is now reduced to this case file. And he is horror struck by that but it's also that kind of context everybody who is in the situation room is examining what they have to do. So I actually think it's a good choice for the title.

JOSH: I agree. I've watched this episode as a dad and it's pretty gut-wrenching.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RONALD: I do think the question Josh raises early in the episode, and that exchange that you played with Toby, whether or not Bartlet was right to step aside as President, given that other Presidents have endured tragedies and other Presidents had to make hard choices. Think about all the hard decisions Bartlet has made over the four seasons before this, and I think it's a really interesting question. Presidents are reluctant to turn over power, even briefly, so we've had the 25th amendment for a long time, President Reagan was the first person to invoke it even when he did, he refused to say he was invoking the 25th amendment and turning over power. He sent these ambiguous instructions. The two times that President Bush did, he turned over power to Dick Cheney for two hours each time, when he had a medical procedure and they tried to keep it quiet until after it was over. So the President turning his power over to someone else is a huge choice and it does feel like it's a little precipitously made, and it's no surprise that the staff is still struggling with that as they are seeing the consequences of that play out in this episode.

JOSH: When Reagan was shot, we had an Alexander Haig, crazy chaotic succession moment.

RONALD: Yeah. When Reagan was shot, just up the street not too far away from here, and brought to GW Hospital down the corner the other way...when Reagan was shot, he couldn't turn over power voluntarily because he was unconscious. So he couldn't invoke section three of the 25th amendment to give power to Vice President Bush because he was unconscious. So the choice really fell to Bush to take power under section four and declare that Reagan was incapable of governing and Bush didn't do it. He refused to invoke section four of the 25th amendment and for a while we really didn't have a President until Reagan sort of came back to consciousness and resumed whatever governing he did from his hospital bed.

JOSH: But somewhere in there, didn't Alexander Haig...

RONALD: Yes. Alexander Haig...the Secretary of State showed up in the White House briefing room, and Vice President Bush was actually in Texas at the time, when this happened and he said "Look, the Vice President is on a plane and so I'm in charge here." It was a famous thing that Alexander Haig said. It was wrong in every conceivable way. [audience laughing] right! One, he was not in charge in any way, shape or form. Two, under the Presidential Succession Act, if for some reason the President or the Vice President are both unavailable, as we see in this episode, the Speaker becomes President, not the Secretary of State. Secretary of State is number five of the line of succession. So...

JOSH: In THE WEST WING, this is where Will would have walked out and said, "Sir, actually, uh..." [Audience laughing]

RONALD: Yeah. I assure that in the real West Wing, someone definitely did.

JOSH: I would suspect so.

BRADLEY: I think Josh is worried that this is gonna be perceived as a wussy, responsible, Democratic, you know, do-the-right-thing, not-macho-enough move from the President to responsibly take himself out.

RONALD: Yeah. When you see this great exchange between Leo and the Democratic leadership, in the Roosevelt Room, where they all come in to say, "Hey, we're really sorry about Zoey, but you guys have branded the Democrats as weak on National defense, when there's a national crisis. Bartlet has stepped aside, and you have put the Republicans in charge, you're really gonna wreck us politically." And I think that captures that sense that Josh has that the political problems that Bartlet administration and all the Democrats in Congress agree with that and really take Leo to the woodshed.

HRISHI: There is a line that I am fascinated by in that exchange with the Democratic leadership, where one of them says...

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

DEMOCRATIC LEADER: You've single handedly ended the Imperial Presidency.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: And I've always thought of the "Imperial Presidency" as being a pejorative term but here they are taking Leo to task for it.

RONALD: Yes. But I think in general, you can see their anxiety that Bartlet looks weak. He looks weak. And if you're a member of the party, you don't want to see your President look weak. You might have your President look a little crazy, but you do not want to see your President look weak.

BRADLEY: Yeah. Its gonna be perceived as "I am too upset to do this now." Which is not a way you the President to seem.

RONALD: Toby raises a great point. At that moment, they don't know when they're going to find Zoey; alive or dead, or how long will Bartlet step aside: weeks? months? At what point in time does he lose control of this all together?

HRISHI: One of my favorite parts of this episode is seeing the sort of moral dilemma that Leo has to go through. As someone who known Zoey for so long, and clearly having a relationship that isn't so unlike father-daughter, and he's the one the Situation Room, who you can see argues for her humanity outside of the file number. I'll play a couple clips here.

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

LEO: If we bomb the camps, don't the kidnappers murder Zoey Bartlet?

WALKEN: Or it sends a message. Kill her or don't, the United States does not negotiate with terrorists.

[End Excerpt]

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

LEO: We bomb Qumar and they kill her.

WALKEN: They're going to kill her anyway. When do you want to go, Admiral?

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: Everyone else is all business and he is supposed to be the one who is more pragmatic. As we mentioned, he cuts off the President from knowing information he is not supposed to know. But he is torn in the situation room, trying to still see this person as worth saving versus these decisions. You know someone like Fitzwallace, who has to send people in uniform in harm's way all the time, and can't be blocked by those kinds of attachments.

JOSH: I like the tension, also, between McNally and Fitzwallace in this episode, and I think in the previous episode.

HRISHI: Yea!

JOSH: Where we are getting sort of a back and forth with a more hawkish take from Fitzwallace and less so from McNally.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's an interesting reversal, because there have been times when I thought Nancy has been the more hawkish one of the two. But here she is presented as the voice of caution. She says this...

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

NANCY: This is a long term ally in a highly volatile region.

PERCY: Bombing Tripoli stopped Libya.

NANCY: This is more likely strengthen the resolve of the terrorist than topple a moderately Islamic regime.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: But in back in "20 Hours in America", in the second part of it in season four, when talking about Qumar, they still sort of butted heads, she and Fitzwallace, but it was reverse. This is how she was there...

[West Wing Episode 4:01 Excerpt]

NANCY: Let's attack.

PERCY: Who?

NANCY: Qumar. Let's recommend to the President that we attack.

PERCY: Why?

NANCY: Because I've had it.

PERCY: I don't think the UN is going to let us do it for that reason.

NANCY: That's because you're a sissy. You want peace in the Middle East? Give me a pair of third generation ICBMs and a compass.

[End Excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah. Her thinking has developed. [Audience laughing] Good call.

HRISHI: Then there's a moment when a phone call comes to the residence, this is on a separate topic now, but there's a moment when a phone call comes to the residence, and the President and the First Lady are there, and the First Lady answers. I really liked this part as well. Where she gets up and answers the phone, and the President says people have been calling but what ends up happening is that the First lady ends up doing the consoling, instead being consoled. And it gives me an opportunity to shout out this article that I read a few years ago that I felt was really useful for me. It was in the LA Times and it was called "How Not to Say the Wrong Thing." It was written by a couple authors, one of whom had gone through cancer, and they came up with something called Ring Theory, and I really liked this. I'm just going to read a little bit from the article. Draw a ring. This is the center ring. In it, put the name of the person at the center of the current trauma. Now, draw a larger circle around the first one, and in that put the name next closest to the trauma. Repeat the process as many times as you need to. In each larger ring, put the next closest people. Parents and children before more distant relatives. Intimate friends in smaller rings and more distant friends in larger ones. When you're done, you have a kvetching order. Here are the rules. The person in the center can say anything she wants to anyone. She can kvetch, and complain, and whine, and moan, and curse the heavens, say life's unfair, and why me. That's the one pay-off for being in the center ring. And everyone else can say those things too, but only to the people in the larger rings. The rule is comfort in, dump out.

BRADLEY: Ah, that's good.

HRISHI: And anyone calling the First Lady has no read this article. [audience laughing]

JOSH: I think it's that exact moment, and I think we have the clip, that we start to get the first sense, I don't think we've known previously, explicitly, that the President has not shared with Abby about the Shareef assassination. And it's only that we get that added resonance in this episode that percolating underneath is a lack of having communicated with her is maybe a sense that his decision has lead, in a way, to what has happened to Zoey. And I think there's a very nice economy in the acting and the writing from John Wells, in this moment.

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

LEO: Danny Concannon is going to run the Shareef story.

BARTLET: What?

LEO: The Shareef story. Danny's running it. Asked if we wanted to comment.

BARTLET: No. No comment.

[End Excerpt]

JOSH: And during that long pause, he looks over his shoulder and sees Abby on the phone, and in the silence we get that first sense that this is a big issue. I like how it's handled and directed and how it's acted.

HRISHI: And ultimately, that's how it's interpreted. The First Lady really seems like she blames the Presidents decision to assassinate Shareef. She draws a direct link between the assassination and the kidnapping and she puts it squarely on the feet of the President which I think is both understandable and unfair.

JOSH: I agree. I absolutely do agree. And now he is in a situation that as President he made decisions that may or may not have affected him personally. And now he's removed himself from being about to make further decisions that might affect his personal situation.

R. I mean, this episode really gives you the sense of the loneliness of the Presidency. Even when Bartlet is not even acting as President, he gets lonelier, and it's odd, right? Because these people are all there to console him and comfort him. But you see as the episode goes on, he's more and more just sitting by himself and sitting alone sort of isolated from everyone. And I think on both the personal level and on the governmental level, so he has this divide with his wife over his actions cause and the appearance of the potential death of their daughter, then there's that scene where Leo comes in and he and Leo ruminate about all the things they wanted to do. All the plans they had for his Presidency that may have gone off the rails because of this incident. So you just see in Bartlet this sense that reminds me of that famous picture of Kennedy in the Oval Office looking out the window just standing there alone, just the isolation of power, the isolation of the kind of decisions Presidents have to make, and that really come through here. In this episode, Bartlet mat have just lost his daughter, lost his wife, and lost his Presidency. That's a pretty lonely place to be.

JOSH: I do like that when he decides to be alone, he goes and stands by that incredible picturesque window. [Audience laughing] that is so beautifully lit.

BRADLEY: That's Alex.

HRISHI: The one person who seems to have loyalty outside of the office of the President is Charlie. You can see that contrast between him and Leo, who has the allegiance to actual office instead. And it is contrasted by the throng of people that surround Walken. And there's that great scene when you finally have both staffs intermingled in the Oval Office. And we meet for the first time, Steve Atwood, who kind of seems like evil-Josh Lyman. [Audience laughing]

JOSH: To me, Josh Lyman is evil Josh Lyman. [audience laughing] So it's a perspective thing. Steve is played by Zeljko Ivanek.

BRADLEY: Yeah. He is a wonderful, wonderful actor.

JOSH: As a kid, my family was very hip so instead of playing Marco Polo in the pool, we played Zeljko Ivanek. *yell/s Zeljko....Ivanek* [Audience laughing]

BRADLEY: Really? Did you see Cloud 9 in New York?

JOSH: No. I first saw him in Neil Simon's Brighton Beach Memoirs as Stanley in 1983, I believe.

BRADLEY: Oh wow.

HRISHI: And I most recently saw him in three billboards outside of Missouri.

JOSH: Great character actor. One of those guys whose in a million things and always is great. Damages.

HRISHI: One of the other things that makes this scene unsettling is we also meet Walken's pug, Bess, who's a creepy dog. [Audience laughing]

JOSH: Ah. I love that dog.

HRISHI: That dog was annoying [Audience laughing]

JOSH: She is no Watson.

HRISHI: Who is?

JOSH: Well, Watson.

BRADLEY: It is a pretty aggressive choice in a middle of a crisis. I know Bo probably went into the Oval Office but probably not during the tense times.

RONALD: You know, Presidential pets usually have run of the place, I will say. But, acting Presidential pets, I'm not so sure about that. [Audience laughing] Like, he should have been there for a day or two before he brought the pug into the Oval Office, is kind of my view.

HRISHI: And I think this scene give the, I don't know if creepy is the right word, but certainly one of the strangest moments, especially for us as viewers, as you see if register a little bit on the faces of the people in the room, with the Bartlet people in the room at least, this moment when we hear Walken, who is Acting-President, turn to Leo and say...

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

WALKEN: I'm sorry, Leo. What's next?

[End Excerpt]

JOSH and BRADLEY: Ooooooooo

HRISHI: He takes the President Bartlets' line even. And that's when it starts to feel a little bit like this is going to far. This is not just ...

JOSH: Maybe that's John Well's way of going, "Okay." [Audience laughing] Here we go. This is my territory."

BRADLEY: Watching this, Tim Busfield is wonderful in this. Whenever I see Tim I am reminded that people always say, "How did you get to be in The West Wing?" and it's because I was in Revenge of the Nerds II: Nerds in Paradise with [audience laughing] you're welcome, with Doug Gibb.

JOSH: Good movie.

BRADLEY: Did you watch it?

JOSH: Of course.

BRADLEY: Good. [Audience laughing] That's where I met Tim. And then Tim went into A Few Good Men, and then Tim introduced me to Aaron.

HRISHI: Danny Concannon in this episode, maybe more so than other episodes, I don't think I've had this thought before but something about the way he's dressed, the sleeves rolled up and the pants he is wearing, and just his manner, the way he is acting with C.J., he reminds me of a flash forward version of another Sorkin character. He reminds me of Jim Gallagher, Jr. in The Newsroom, Jim Harper. You can only see how the two correspond, especially here. It almost feels like they are playing the same character, different ages.

BRADLEY: Did you watch all the episodes of that show? [Audience laughing]

JOSH: That's a good question. For those listeners at home, the answer is no.

HRISHI: Josh, good work on Will's bedhead hair in this episode.

JOSH: Thank you. I think the ultimate ignominy which is to have my hair criticized by Brad. [Audience laughing]

HRISHI: We also get the introduction, we finally meet the eldest Bartlet daughter, and she is played by Annabeth Gish.

JOSH: This is the first time?

HRISHI: This is the first time.

JOSH: Oh, I didn't even realize that.

HRISHI: And you've acted with her more recently in Scandal, right?

JOSH: Indeed, that is true. I like that entire scene that is the family, they are making lunch. There are undercurrents of incredible familial tension.

BRADLEY: What is the deal...I'm sorry did I jump in?

JOSH: No go ahead.

BRADLEY: What is the deal with that exterior? I don't recognize that.

HRISHI: When the daughters arrive?

BRADLEY: When they arrive at The West Wing, I don't recognize the set. It almost look like they stole a shot from the real West Wing, but it's the California sun. So they faked something.
[audience laughing]

HRISHI: I like in that scene, when the son-in-law shows up and is just useless.

JOSH: Doug.

HRISHI: Yeah, and he's just useless.

JOSH: And there's the little awkwardness too. He doesn't do a great job at consoling, there's something just in there when the President and Doug greet each other,

HRISHI: He's just awkward and a bit lump.

JOSH: And we will return to Doug in a few episodes.

BRADLEY: Yes we will [sings]

HRISHI: Oh yeah?

JOSH: You're gonna love it.

HRISHI: So far, I'm not a fan. But it felt realistic as a sometimes son-in-law who is sitting there awkwardly and uselessly.

JOSH: Yeah. And in a horrifying situation, what do you say? And there is nothing really to say, so that scene ends with an extended hug, between Ellie and President Bartlet.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's a very sweet picture. And it's long. The moment is given the time it needs. It's lovely.

HRISHI: It's nice continuity from when we first met Ellie and you know, this sort of awkward relationship, they have. The intimacy isn't always feel natural between the two of them, until the end of that episode, of Ellie. And to see them connecting here in a more natural way, and later when she comforts him.

JOSH: Nina Siemaszko.

HRISHI: Nina Siemaszko. Yeah. There are some things in this episode that I haven't figured out how I feel about them where there are these echoes from things in past episodes. And certainly Aaron Sorkin repeated himself all of the time, within THE WEST WING and callbacks to things that he had written for other episodes. But there are a few specific ones, like in this episodes they say "don't call it a recession." You get a line about...

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

LARRY: So if it's a bagel, the Fed thinks it will be a mild bagel.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: But Leo had said that as well. He have told Leo tell Margaret, "make sure not to call it a recession." And there are some other echoes like Andrew Macintosh, the IT guy, who came to fix the computer and he said "my father always said that if they're shooting at you, you know you're doing something right." And Walken here kind of has a version of that here...

[West Wing Episode 5:01 Excerpt]

WALKEN: If the Arabs are mad at us, we must be doing something right.

[End Excerpt]

HRISHI: And then Sam had asked Toby why write two speeches for election night, and he said "oh you wrote two speeches?" and he says, oh yea, you write one if he wins, and one if he doesn't, because you don't want to tempt the wrath of whatever, from high atop the thing, and then here, a more morbid scary version of it, is that Toby has to write two speeches, one if she is found alive and one if she isn't. And in some ways these feel like it places you back in this universe that has been established four seasons ago, and in some ways knowing that Aaron didn't write it, like the knowledge of the authorship changes how I interpret the lines.

JOSH: But for normal viewers...I think it probably worked. [Audience laughing]

BRADLEY: If Aaron does it, it's a call back but if John does it, it's a heist?

HRISHI: I'm not sure. Yeah. I don't know if it's effective and works...I don't know...did anyone else feel this way?

BRADLEY: No. Nobody else felt this. I can answer for the room. [Audience laughing]

JOSH and BRADLEY: laughing

HRISHI: The episode ends with a song by Lisa Gerrard who was in a band called The Dead Can Dance, and it's this really haunting song here called Sanvean I Am Your Shadow. [I Am Your Shadow playing] It's the song that plays over the last montage. It's a really interesting song because, like some of Lisa Gerrard's songs, it has vocals. But they aren't in any language. It's called a glossolalia, where it's just a made up language. So only she can sing this song, because only she knows the words, 'cause there are no real words. The singer from Sigur Ros does the same thing. And I thought both that it's a really beautiful choice for the actual scene that plays out but I also couldn't help but think about the show that for so long chugged along on it's verbosity and use of language and in this transitional episode, it ends on a song that has no words.

JOSH: He's good.

BRADLEY: Yeah. He's good. So are you saying that John was aware of that? [Audience laughing] Or are you saying it's an example of the atrocity he committed?

JOSH: What a troublemaker. But if it's aimed at you, I'm just going to step out of the way. [Audience laughing]

BRADLEY: No. I am sure that music was chosen by Alex. That's not a John choice, I don't think.

HRISHI: Well, I thought it worked really well.

BRADLEY: Thank God we have never really gone through, I just keep thinking about just as a dad, we, I even hate to say it out loud, a real ongoing child in jeopardy situation, which would be a horrible, horrible event.

RONALD: Obviously, this episode portrays or continues to portray from the previous season every parent's nightmare, and every President's nightmare. In some ways, the greatest possible security risk that the President's child is kidnapped in an effort to try an influence policy and it does give Bartlet this impossible decision, which he solves by stepping out of the Presidency. But I do think there's this interesting question about whether that was the right thing to do. Whether or not you can separate your incredibly strong emotional ties as a father from the duty to do this job that no one can possibly fill, and that Bartlet uniquely fills, and that's what overhangs this. You know, anyone that has read the book, the novel that came out a couple years ago called Lincoln in the Bardo, a great novel about Abraham Lincoln grieving the loss of his son and kind of what he went through as that process. You can kind of feel the pain that Bartlet feels here, and particularly with the sense that Zoey's death seems likely with this

decision that the Acting-President has made. And I think it's just torturous to watch in the end of this, when Josh and Donna kind of walk out of the old Executive Office Building and see the makeshift shrine that has been built there. People are bringing teddy bears, and candles, and flowers, and signs. And so the music has no words, Josh and Donna are oddly silent, but the signs have words, "We love you, Zoey" "We miss you, Zoey" and so forth. It's all very emotional and powerful. And it goes back to the decision that Walken makes to strike. It's really interesting to think about that, if it had led to Zoey's death, you know, the Bartlet staff are all freaked about the politics of Walken seeming Presidential, but the flip side is that if he had made a decision and the way that it had played out had led to the death of the President's daughter, that would have been a very hard decision to explain to the American people.

JOSH: And chillingly, he says, and I think we commented on this before, we realize that Walken has written her off in his mind, no matter what he decides.

RONALD: Yes. She is already dead, basically.

JOSH: He's good.

BRADLEY: He's good. [Audience laughing]

JOSH: By the way, you took some questions from the audience and you just answered one of them. [Audience laughing]

BRADLEY: Can I just say one thing, just about John Goodman, who has always been one of my favorite actors on the planet. It's just an interesting thing. He has just always been one of my favorite actors and it was incredible. I was thrilled that he was coming in to work on the show and it was astonishing. He's one of those, he is kind of like Jimmy Schmitz, in that he is contemptuous of his ability to act. Do you remember? Wasn't there a day that he broke his hand because he punched a wall and we had to stop. If he screwed up a line, he would go, "oh *grumbles*" you know.

JOSH: Yes, he was a force of nature.

BRADLEY: He was a force of nature, and I think we had to stop shooting because he got upset because he didn't think he was a good actor and punched a wall [audience laughing].

JOSH: Yea, and we were all like "Dude it's working"

BRADLEY: Right. I'm like Josh has never hit a wall. [Audience laughing] But I love John.

HRISHI: He is a great casting choice. He can sort of flip from genial to terrifying almost instantly.

JOSH: And he has a sort of charm to him, even as he is saying lines of dialogue about the Arabs, that are, you know, you would normally vilify this guy. And you do, but in your mind there is also this swagger and a confidence and this Presidential air to him in crisis, that you get.

RONALD: One, for the government nerds and any government students in the audience here, the weirdest thing about this episode is the shocking absence of lawyers. [Audience laughing] Sure I'm a lawyer, so I think that, but here you have this really unusual situation; Acting-President and his authority to order tax, but no one's giving anyone any legal advice about who has power and what power they have, and so on and so forth. And if you go back to something we talked about earlier, you know, you have the Acting-President almost stumbling into forcing himself out of office, because he threatens that he is going to nominate a Vice President. And if you look at these statutes and how these things work with nominating a Vice President and if he had actually been confirmed, that person would then become President because that person would be the real Vice President. So Walken would have worked his way out of office just to get someone he picked. And no one is giving anyone any legal advice in this episode at all. [Audience laughing]

JOSH: Walken needs his Will to walk in and say "Sir."

BRADLEY: Michael Cohen should be there. He'll fix it.

RONALD: Maybe he was getting legal advice. Maybe that's the problem here is that Michael Cohen is lurking in the shadows. [Audience laughing]

HRISHI: Since this has devolved [audience laughing] let's go to start some of the questions that were submitted to us.

JOSH: More questions of the audience? Ok. Here's a cute one. What character would Hrishika play if he had been cast on the show? That's from Lindsay. I love it.

HRISHI: I would play, I think, I don't know if it's conceited to say this because I like him so much, but I would play, I feel like I would be Charlie. Charlie, I feel like, is the guy who is always going to be an outsider a little bit but he is trying his best to help as much as possible.

JOSH: He is going to sit in that chair, like he does in the episode, and it doesn't matter that the President is telling him to go home, he is not going to help with the new President, he is the ultimate loyal guy.

HRISHI: I can relate to that. I like to think Charlie.

JOSH: That's what I mean, I like him.

BRADLEY: That's so sweet.

HRISHI: Thanks for that question. That's nice, a question for me. [audience laughing]

JOSH: How would David Rosen survive in a Bartlet White House? [Audience laughing] Interesting. I can answer this a few ways. One, I think if you watch Scandal, David needs

constant sex. And in seven seasons of *The West Wing*, no one ever had any. [Audience laughing] So I don't think he would do so well. But I do think that the Bartlet administration might bring out the best in him in a way that the various Grant administrations did not.

HRISHI: I feel like David Rosen is so lacking in a sense of humor in a way that the staff of... [audience laughing]

JOSH: You're no Charlie. [Audience laughing] You're no Charlie.

HRISHI: I'm going to say they would never stop hazing David Rosen.

JOSH: Yeah. That's probably true. If you could pick one episode of *The West Wing* to show to Donald Trump, which would you choose? Literally any one. [Audience laughing] Just for him to get the basic idea of how it works and the loftier goals of the Bartlet administration. [C/lapping]

RONALD: I would choose the last episode of season four, with the title 25th amendment. That would be my choice. [Audience laughing]

JOSH: I see. Sort of a suggestion.

RONALD: Yeah. A hint.

HRISHI: It's always there.

RONALD: It's always there. It's always there.

JOSH: *yells* INVOKE IT!

HRISHI: Well, that wraps things up for us. Thank you so much to all of you here for coming out and listening to us ramble.

BRADLEY: Are you going to be ok? Are you really going to be ok moving forward? [Audience laughing]

HRISHI: We'll see.

BRADLEY: I have to say, I'm sorry, but I have to say, I've not seen this, you know, I don't think I've ever seen it and I was still taken with it. I was scared to watch this.

HRISHI: As was I.

JOSH: Well to me, I wrote down in my notes: it's still *The West Wing*. I don't think it's a knock at Aaron, it's just a tribute to the universe that he created and the character that he imbued with their characteristics and their qualities. And to the skill of John Wells and to the staff that continued in something that had been so indelibly created by Aaron and by Tommy, and the

world has its own life and momentum. And I was delighted by watching this episode, feeling that it's still The West Wing.

BRADLEY: We were all freaked out as I remember our realization, at one point, was his vision was so strong in terms of how these people interacted and in terms of what the show was aiming for. And in terms of the sort of heightened moral atmosphere of the show. And I remember being able to feel like maybe you'll get there. Not like I was betraying Aaron, but that continuing, even if I knew it was so personal to him, and weird for him, was that actually it was sort of a tribute to what he had created, which was incredible.

RONALD: I know that for actors and dramatists that the change in writing and the structure of the show is really significant. But I'm lucky enough to teach here at Georgetown, and I can tell you that students, how long after the show ran, who weren't alive when the show was on, inspired by The West Wing, and inspired to public service by The West Wing. And the heart of that isn't just the word play and the things that Sorkin was so great at, but the idea that these characters, these men and women, were dedicated to public service, flawed and facing super hard decisions, but going there every day, trying to do their best and make the country a better place. That's the heart of it for us, the more casual fans and that heart still comes through powerfully. That's what I think makes this so inspiring to young people, long after it ran.

BRADLEY: I'm grateful that it's not a cynical show about politics because I think that's inaccurate. I mean, we are often in a cynical culture interpreted as fantasy. And, you know, I would always get defensive and go after The Sopranos and say a hitman in therapy, now that's a fantasy. But six people surrounding someone trying to do the work of politics which is, you know, how we actively create the future, happens all over the town. And we don't do well when we are completely cynical about it, as tempting as that can be.

JOSH: Well said.

HRISHI: We would like to thank our guests, Ronald Klain and Bradley Whitford. Thanks so much for joining us. [clapping]

JOSH: The West Wing Weekly is a proud member of Radiotopia, a cavalcade of delightful podcasts. If you want to listen to the others, you can find them at Radiotopia.fm

HRISHI: Thanks so much to Margaret Miller and Zach McNees who make this show. Zach is here tonight.

JOSH: Zach's in the house. [Clapping]

HRISHI: He came down.

BRADLEY: And thank you, Georgetown!

HRISHI: And thank you, Georgetown! [Clapping]

JOSH: Hopefully now you can help us with our sign off. That goes a little something like this:

HRISHI: Okay.

JOSH: Okay.

AUDIENCE: What's next?

HRISHI: Thank you!

[Outro Music]