

The West Wing Weekly
5.05: "Constituency of One"
Guest: Jennifer Palmieri

[Intro Music]

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

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. And today we're talking about episode five of season five. It's called "Constituency of One."

JOSH: The teleplay is by *West Wing Weekly* hall of famer Eli Attie. The story is by Eli and Michael Oates Palmer, and the direction is by Laura Innes-- terrific actor from *ER* and an old John Wells crony.

HRISHI: And a multi-time director of *The West Wing*.

JOSH: That's right. And this episode first aired on October 29th, 2003.

HRISHI: Prior to this, Laura Innes also directed "Let Bartlet Be Bartlet" and "Shibboleth."

JOSH: Classics! Two classics!

HRISHI: She's got some classics under her belt.

JOSH: Very impressive. I was delighted as this episode began to discover my first full-frontal.

HRISHI: Have you ever done full frontal before?

JOSH: [chuckling] I've done brief nudity.

HRISHI: [chuckling] That's where you're naked except for the briefs that you're wearing.

JOSH: No. That's where I'm fully naked.

HRISHI: Oh.

JOSH: Yeah. That's my problem. I don't need to talk about it here.

HRISHI: This episode has a great Will storyline - giving you some juicy material to work with, because Will is caught in a dilemma of his own-- whether to stick with the team, and work under Toby under conditions that have gotten quite a bit worse from when he first started.

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

WILL: As it is I'm going to have nightmares about color-coded six day weeks with no accomplishments.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Or to go to Vice President Bob Russell's team instead. The reasons why the circumstances aren't so good with Toby anymore is because Toby is trying to create this message calendar, and he's pushing it kind of dictatorially. More skillfully, Amy Gardner is finding her place in the first lady's office, but the way that she operates doesn't jive so well with the West Wing staff, and especially with President Bartlet. And Josh is celebrating his birthday while also fighting with a conservative democratic senator who's played by Tom Skerritt, who's holding up military promotions because of funding the he wants directed towards his home state of Idaho.

JOSH: Yes. We can see that the ability to book major guest stars has not diminished with the passing of the Sorkin/Schlamme administration. Tom Skerritt, that's a big booking.

HRISHI: A big get, yeah.

Coming up later in this episode we'll be joined by a special guest, Jennifer Palmieri, who was Hillary Clinton's Director of Communications on her presidential campaign, and before that she was Director of Communications in the White House for President Obama.

JOSH: Also a good get.

HRISHI: Exactly. Nice to see that season five hasn't hindered *our* ability to book guests.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Where do you want to start?

JOSH: With the nasal stylings of Josh Malina, saying

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

WILL: Come on Toby!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [Laughter]

JOSH: Well, actually, here's a little reminiscence I have that must have been just prior to this episode. I do remember John Wells asking to meet with me, and I went up to his office, and I sat down, and he said, "Ok, so here's the plan I have to keep you on the show." And I said, "Well I don't need to hear any more- that sounds great."

HRISHI: [Laughter]

JOSH: And he basically, what he shared with me in that meeting was the direction in which he planned to take Will. Basically he said, "I think we've done seeing the White House, and how things work, through the new guy's eyes. I think Aaron did that brilliantly, and I think he did it fully, and we're not going to use you for that anymore." And then he kind of talked to me about the request from Bingo Bob to work for him that Will would receive, and that he told me that, in fact, Will would take this job. And I thought it was actually very nice of John to even bother giving me a heads up. I'm not normally used to that; I don't expect that as an actor. "Here's where we plan to take you." I think he felt like maybe I wouldn't love that direction, so he wanted

to explain to me this is the way to keep Will on the show and relevant. And I don't think I had much to say other than, "Hey, thanks for the heads up! Sounds great!" And, you know, this is the beginning--I keep reminding myself that you don't know any of this storyline. This to me is the beginning of the reason behind my Twitter bio's being, "Hi! I ruined *The West Wing!*"

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: In other words, I lost a lot of good will from *West Wing* fans and hardcore Wingnuts when Will made this decision, and when Will started to go in a different direction.

HRISHI: Yeah, you lost Good Will; they got Bad Will.

JOSH: There you go. Bad Will Hunting. You know, I still get people, and it's kind of sweet, but also a little bit sad, who are writing to me saying, "Oh, Dude! You're not horrible! You didn't ruin *The West Wing!*" Someone tweeted something like, "I want to just beat the [expletive deleted] out of whoever made Josh Malina feel this way." And I want to go, "Oh no, no. Understand. I think I'm great." This is just kind of a tongue-in-cheek nod to those who disagree, or to those who turned sour on Will. But anyway, I've been enjoying watching this storyline as well as the others, and the different direction that John Wells and company take our heroes, because at the time I didn't dwell on it much because I don't think that enhances one's acting, to obsess about your storyline or, "Do I wish you were doing something else?" Your job is "Here's the script. Act it."

HRISHI: Mhmm.

JOSH: Make that real and live that, and fulfill that. So I never really gave it two seconds of thought. I've never really cared deeply about Will's decision. That's just kind of the actor I am. It doesn't matter what I cared, or what I thought, or whether I thought it was a good idea, because if I had said, "Hey! I really don't think you should do that John." he would have explained, "No, I'm just letting you know what we're going to do. I'm not asking for your input. You're not a writer on the show, you're an actor." So to me it's not even worth discussing. You just take in that knowledge, and you go on, and you do your job. Not everybody feels that way, and we'll get to that later in the series. But I enjoyed watching this episode, because I totally get why Will made his decision.

HRISHI: Right, well that was one thing I wanted to ask you about. I know the disinterested stance you take when it comes to what's going to happen with the character, as an actor, because you've articulated that really well, and it makes sense to me. Watching the show now, though, where you are not actively on the show, and we're just sort of discussing the plot and the characters, and you get to engage with it a little bit more, do you end up feeling the kind of feelings--do you relate to the people who say, "Oh, I was really disappointed when this happened with this character...?"

JOSH: Well, talking about this, specifically about Will's storyline, you know I intentionally never gave it much thought for couple reasons. One, as I said, because I didn't-- it's not going to improve my performance to go through some sort of mental gymnastics about whether or not I like the storyline.

HRISHI: Right, right.

JOSH: It's just, this *is* my storyline. This is what I say. Go say it. But, I have always, now

watching simply as a viewer, as a critical viewer, and a co-host of a podcast about it, I've been anticipating, and I was curious how I would feel about this storyline, and while I feel I totally get why hardcore Sorkinites would be disappointed in Will and/or the people who made him do this, I watch it and I totally get it. There's an interesting turn being taken in this and some of the previous episodes, towards, I think, a more politically realistic situation in the White House where we've got--you know, in Aaron's world he's so prizes, and almost fetishizes loyalty, and collegiality, and teamwork, that I agree Will would never make this decision under Sorkin's pen, but I think it's done in a way here that is completely credible, doesn't makes me hate the character. I absolutely understand what's going on with Will. I think that Russell lays out the rationale for Will's taking the job very well. He basically says, "Look you got a dead guy elected. Figuratively I'm dead, politically I'm the vice president and people's perception of me is as almost a nonentity."

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

RUSSELL: But you can run out the clock on a Bartlet presidency that, politically speaking, is over. You can finish something that you never started in the first place. You can run around those little hallways until Toby turns out the lights. Or you can shape the next presidency from the ground up.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And meanwhile, you know, Eli gives us a situation where Will is offered this job on a day when he's essentially color coding calendars.

HRISHI: Right. I agree with you. I think it makes complete sense, and I think it's the right option for him. I guess I'm waiting a little bit for the other shoe to drop on some of these things. While I haven't seen 99% of the episodes in seasons five, six, and seven, I do have a sort of general lay of the land of what happens. But my sense of the world at this point is kind of like when you open up Google Maps on your phone, but your phone's still waiting for a connection, so you don't have the details, you just have the general outline of the mass of land where you're at. You see some blue and some green and you know the what the general shape is, but the streets haven't yet been filled in. So now I'm getting to the part where I'm seeing some of the details, and as I learn about it I don't know if I'm just disagreeing with what the conventional wisdom is, or it's just that I haven't experienced it yet, but I had this sense that there was this real betrayal on the part of Will--and also that Bingo Bob is just this terrible character--and so far, I mean, and we're only this far, but so far I haven't found either of those things to be true. Like you said, I think that his decision is--I completely buy it, and I think it makes sense. I think it's an interesting one for the show to have a character essentially go into the Vice President's office, which has mostly been unexplored territory. That's another part of the map that hasn't yet resolved, and so I'm excited about the idea of getting to see that perspective and how they connect to the West Wing itself. But also I continue to dig Bob Russell.

JOSH: That's another great point with which I completely agree. So far, what we are seeing of him belies what we have been told.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And, you know, our heroes' perception of him. Will and Toby, you know, put up on the prompter--they actually tore the guy apart.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: They think this guy is absolute trash, like just completely worthy of disdain and mockery...

[West Wing Episode 5.02 excerpt]

WILL: [typing] This lab dog of mining interests is as dull as he is unremarkable...

TOBY: ...as lackluster...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: What we've actually seen of Bob Russell is a pretty shrewd, self-aware--

HRISHI: Ingenious.

JOSH: charming, self-deprecating, genial guy who probably has a lot more potential than people give him credit for. And I think, again, it's almost like it turns on its ear that hardcore fans of *The West Wing* sometimes, I think, won't even see something if it's in contrast to what our heroes are telling us.

HRISHI: Hmm.

JOSH: I think we're so, I think they're so, these characters, you know, Toby and C.J. and Josh are so beloved that we tend to trust what they tell us over what we might observe on our own.

HRISHI: I'm reserving judgment. There could be an episode that's going to come up where I'm going to change my mind, or you know, by the time tomorrow ends, maybe I will say, "Yeah. You know what, Bob Russell, that wasn't a great character, and man, this was a bad idea for Will to do this. But as of this moment, as of 5.05, this is fun actually just watching the show in real-time."

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: And talking about it for the first time. Right now I think that I support Will's decision. I think it's a good one. I think it's a cool decision for the plot. And yeah, I dig Bob Russell. By the way, we had speculated a little bit about the Bingo Bob nickname, you know--

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: The way Debbie Fiderer says...

[West Wing Episode 5.03 excerpt]

DEBBIE: [whispering] Bingo Bob.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I was wondering if that was going to be explained. We've gotten some feedback from listeners letting me know that no, that isn't ever explained where the nickname comes from, but

we got an email from one of our listeners, Greg, and this was fascinating. He said, "I couldn't tell you if he's necessarily the inspiration for the name Bingo Bob, but Bob Russell wasn't the first Bingo Bob. I first heard the name in reference to my former congressman and my step-father Bob Traxler of Michigan. And he sent a link to a Chicago Tribune article from 1988. The headline is "Bingo Bob: Incumbents Look Out for Number One," talking about Bob Traxler. We'll put a link up to the article on the website. But I'm curious to find out if Bob Traxler, and his nickname Bingo Bob, was the inspiration for Bob Russell's name.

JOSH: We'll have to ask Eli.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Well we know, we communicated with Eli, even if we're not talking, speaking with him on mic this episode, we did a little email back and forth, and I think Will generally and specifically in this episode tends to be a little of a stand-in for Eli, especially when Eli is writing the script. And Eli has expressed to us that there were times where he felt a little hemmed in, a little bit constricted, in terms of what his responsibilities were, and a desire to do more. So I think some of Will's chafing at the bit is a reflection of what Eli sometimes felt.

HRISHI: Hm. That is one thing that I was thinking about, too. I was thinking about the specter of the constituency of one, that no matter what decision our characters are making, they're thinking of the person that they are responsible to. In the "previously on" it ends with the president saying to Josh, you know, reading Josh, and saying,

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: You're not willing to toss it overboard to win; you're willing to toss it overboard to avoid disappointing Leo.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I was thinking about this idea of a constituency of one, and how all the decisions and everything, like, you really have to sort of feed upwards to the top. The person at the top of the food chain. And we know from Aaron that there was a very pyramid-shaped structure to his writers' room. It's different from the way most writers' rooms are run where he wanted everyone to feed ideas and then he would digest those ideas and then write the teleplay for the episodes. So really, as a writer in that situation, you really have this consti-- you're really just trying to please Aaron, and give him something to work with. And so it felt very much like a show within the show kind of meta-moment, even though it's not about writing, or you know, other ways the show can sometimes be self-reflexive.

JOSH: Yeah, absolutely. And Eli shared with us, the first time he heard the phrase was when he was working on a speech with Vice President Al Gore, and Gore slipped in a line that explicitly praised President Clinton. And then kind of with a wink to Eli explained that that was for the constituency of one.

HRISHI: There's a great line in this.

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

JOSH: We've gotta stop feeding the hand that bites us Leo.

[excerpt end]

JOSH: Oh yeah, very good. That's in reference to Carrick.

HRISHI: That's in reference to Carrick, yeah. Carrick is a good name because it combines both the carrot and the stick.

Josh: Ooh-hoo. Nice.

HRISHI: My mind wandered there because I was thinking about how you always have to feed the hand that feeds you, essentially. You have to give things to the boss in order to keep them going. You know, it's much like our relationship.

JOSH: [Laughs] Yeah. I'm always giving you stuff.

HRISHI: Exactly, yeah. And you know the punishment if you don't. [laughing]

JOSH: I do.

HRISHI: You get the Carrick.

JOSH: [Laughter]

HRISHI: Oh Carrick! That would be a great--imagine if someone could breed a giant carrot that you could hit people with.

JOSH: Wow.

HRISHI: Let's go to the beginning of the episode. You're full-frontal moment--

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: And then the ensuing scene in Toby's office. Toby says,

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

TOBY: This is your life the next three months.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which feels like a jail term or something, you know.

JOSH: Drudgery

HRISHI: Yeah. There are a lot of little clever bits of dialogue, and I like that, you know, they're talking about the economy, they're talking about job creation. Will gets paged, and Toby says, "Oh, they're probably calling you about one of the nine million jobs that were created." And they really are!

JOSH: Mhmm.

HRISHI: They actually are! They're calling him about a new job.

JOSH: Mhmm. Extremely clever. That thought went through my mind, too. I love Eli's writing in this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I think the storylines are great, the plots are wonderful, and there's a lot of great dialogue. I love when Will says,

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

WILL: I need to see my bed. In fact, I've been thinking of carrying a picture of it in my wallet."

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah. I thought that was great. I thought, "That is funny."

JOSH: [Laughs] Yeah. I mean, Eli talks about the weight of having to write, as he puts it, "In the shadow of Aaron," But I think he acquits himself really beautifully in this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah. I agree. It is more of a TIFOL episode than an LOL episode, but I feel like that's what's appropriate. I find this moment that we're in in the show kind of stressful, and kind of a slog. Did I already say this last episode?

JOSH: Well, I think we both touched on it in the last episode. It's worth mentioning again though. Again, this is not, this is not the happy, shiny people that we're used to seeing in this White House. And in that sense, I also think it's jarring for some viewers when our pals don't get along. They're not so pally. There's a lot of fighting. There's a lot of tension both explicit and implicit. And people not happy with their jobs, or their sense of agency within them, and so everything is just slightly off.

HRISHI: Yeah. I like the callback to Leo and the president's conversation about the missile defense shield. In the drop-in the president and Leo, you know, kind of had this back and forth about the missile defense shield, and there's some joking at Leo's expense about how the thing doesn't work and why the president won't fund it. And here these are two different voices sort of arguing about a similar kind of thing with Josh and Tom Skerritt-Carrick. But ultimately, the outcome is reversed here, you know. I think it's so nice to take an argument that we're familiar with, and maybe it feels like, "Oh, maybe we're just doing a rehashing." You know, but then by the end it's flipped on its head.

JOSH: Completely.

HRISHI: Eli wrote to us a little bit about that as well. He said, "The most important part of the storyline is that the liberal point of view turned out to be wrong. This was an idea that suggested to Eli by John Podhoretz, conservative columnist who was also consultant to the show in season five.

JOSH: Also an editor of *Commentary Magazine* and he writes for the *New York Post*.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And he's a Twitter friend!

HRISHI: And this idea that missile defense, the point of missile defense isn't to work--

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

CARRICK: The launcher is a deterrent. The launcher says we're serious about perfecting missile defense so rogue governments don't go build missile programs.

JOSH: You can't be serious.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That ends up, of course, being the climax of the storyline that sends us off into the end of the episode, blindsiding Josh. And I always love it when *The West Wing* shows that our characters are wrong.

JOSH: Yeah, I think the finale, if you will, to this episode which is Josh's comeuppance, for I guess, intense hubris, is wonderfully well done. And it's a real gut punch. And it would have been enough had Carrick decided to switch parties, you would get it's a seven year promise unfulfilled, but the extra little twist of his making a very salient point about this missile system that we have come over the course of the episode to think is a complete waste of money, but to actually make the point that it's not just the jobs that it would create for Idaho, but there's actually some value to the system whether or not it works is great writing, and a great moment, and a superb twist.

HRISHI: Yeah. To quote an episode of *Barry*, which I saw recently and really loved, at one point Henry Winkler says to Bill Hader,

[Barry Episode 1.07 excerpt]

GENE [HENRY WINKLER]: You came charging out there, huh, equal parts loud and wrong.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And that's basically what Josh does in this.

JOSH: Indeed. I also like the entire subplot about this puff piece about Josh Lyman that's in the paper is fantastic. I also like and how it's written that in equal measures he seems titillated and delighted by it as well as troubled by it and has to sort of publicly poo poo it. It's a nice layered performance, and I like how Eli wrote it too because he clearly gets off on it.

HRISHI: Yeah!

JOSH: Um, but It also causes trouble for him he also, over the course of the episode I think, starts to believe his own press, which is, you know, mistake number one to avoid.

HRISHI: I wrote, "chuffed and chafed."

JOSH: Very well put. Did you actually freeze frame and read the article?

HRISHI: No, I did not. The 101st...?

JOSH: Yes, the 101st senator. And the--I hate to call anybody out, but I think the props department should have put in a little bit more time. They should have anticipated--

HRISHI: Knowing that we would eventually pause it, and...

JOSH: --Knowing that, yeah, but even back in the day, you know. Even in the day of DVDs that you could pause and read. And this is the sum total of the article.

HRISHI: [Chuckles] Okay.

JOSH: [Reading] "The 101st senator may become a very powerful man in congress. The speaker has offered the former congressman an office on the house side of the capitol, and the constitution gives him a tie-breaking vote in the senate, which will be evenly divided for the first time in more than a century." And then that paragraph is repeated over and over and over for the course of the article.

HRISHI: Yup.

JOSH [snickering] No mention even of Josh Lyman, other than, I guess, maybe it's in the headline or a picture.

HRISHI: It's barely, barely more than Lorem Ipsum.

JOSH: Yeah. We caught them phoning it in.

HRISHI: Do you know Lorem Ipsum?

JOSH: I think she was, um, number 27.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Am I wrong?

HRISHI: Uhm, Lorem Ipsum, it's like placeholder text.

JOSH: Mm.

HRISHI: And when you're doing layout and graphic design you need it often, when you don't know what the copy's going to be yet, but you just need words to move around and accommodate. Anyway, go to lipsum.com and learn more about Lorem Ipsum. L-I-P-S-U-M.

JOSH: Fantastic.

HRISHI: Um, and then, you know, generate some text and write a *Washington Post* article with it.

JOSH: [Laughter]

HRISHI: We've talk about how Josh's character was based on Rahm Emanuel in the past, but this is, we get a very explicit callout to that inspiration with the dead fish story, which is a thing that actually happened, where Rahm Emanuel sent someone a dead fish.

JOSH: Yeah. It also reminded me of putting a fish in Allison Janney's trailer, which, this episode may well have inspired me to do so.

HRISHI: Did you do *that*? I don't think I, I don't think you've told us that! You put a dead fish in--

JOSH: I think so. I think at different times I have put a fish and an onion to slowly molder in Allison's trailer.

HRISHI: Oh, my gosh. Like, where would you hide it?

JOSH: The little shelves that you never, uh, they're way up high. And though she can see pretty way up high--

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: --she didn't catch the fish and the onion until it made its presence known.

HRISHI: Wow. You know what's another funny moment in this episode that I loved is when-- I tried to tell this joke after watching this, or you know, relate the scene you know and sometimes you can do it and sometimes you can't. This one really needed Allison Janney to be funny.

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

TOBY: Who's Ben?

C.J.: A guy I lived with for six months.

TOBY: I didn't know you lived with a guy named Ben.

C.J.: There's a lot you don't know about me.

TOBY: Like what?

C.J.: Well, that's about it really.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughter]

HRISHI: I can't, I can't say, "Well, that's about it really" in a way that'll be as funny as Allison Janney.

JOSH: Well, you're setting the bar too high. I'm sure you can say it funny though. I thought it was a lovely piece of acting, the entire reminiscence about Ben, and her time with him.

HRISHI: Oh, the bad romantic comedy reminiscence?

JOSH: Yeah, exactly. It's just a brief little speech, but she invests it with a credibility. It's the kind of thing that often sort of feels like an actor doing a little mini-monologue, but I believed it. I believe C.J. was remembering this guy that she had lived with. I liked it. I thought it was a great piece of acting.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think it's shocking. I mean, I appreciated Toby's shock that C.J., it turns out, had a side piece, and we didn't even know! You know, I think we have come to believe that these characters have no lives outside of their work and it's nice to be told that actually there are some secrets that are left off of the edges of the screen.

JOSH: Yeah. I also like when Ryan takes this shot at C.J.

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

C.J.: There aren't enough phone books in the District of Columbia for you to stand on.

RYAN: How about suburban Maryland?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [Laughter]

JOSH: I think that's a very cute little scene.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That's a great line. It's a fantastically cutting line, and it's a tribute to Ryan and his genetic confidence that it doesn't even really particularly put him off.

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: He just kind of smirks at it. He gets it.

HRISHI: Yeah. "How about suburban Maryland?" He's getting ready to go toe to toe, which is I guess the only level--he can't see her eye to eye so he's gotta go toe to toe.

JOSH: [Laughter] Well said. Yeah. This is also the--I understand that nobody is fond of Ryan--but this is the worst internship ever, where's he's not even given a chair.

HRISHI: [Laughter]

JOSH: I watched this episode. It's like the third episode the poor guy is just hanging in doorways, and leaning against desks. And I thought "Give the guy a chair!" or at least, throw him a Bamba Pouf.

HRISHI: I just thought maybe his internship was in the department of lurking.

JOSH: That's essentially what he does.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: He's a lurker.

HRISHI: He does it well. I mean, if you were going to be a lurker, if you were to lurk, you wouldn't want to sit down, you'd want to just be leaning against things and trying to appear inconspicuous.

JOSH: This is a good point. But the way, this is just a little, I'm just throwing a bone to the charmed circle of people that seem to enjoy when I say "Bamba Pouf."

HRISHI: [Laughter]

JOSH: It's a small group, but they're vocal. I see you. They've been reaching to me on Twitter and on the message boards. People now just like to tweet to me the words "Bamba Pouf."

HRISHI: I haven't seen that!

JOSH: Oh, yeah.

HRISHI: See? More secrets! I didn't know you lived with a guy named Bamba Pouf!

JOSH: [chuckles] So all you people, go to article.com and see the real deal.

HRISHI: I think that you are excellent in this episode by the way, and I really like the way Laura Innes directed it. I liked the little bits of Will's passive aggression. The way it comes out, and the way that the camera will get him in there just, you know, with a look, or you know Leo's reinforcement of the messaging calendar. He says, "just a positive message. Opportunity and security one day at a time," and this little snotty aside from Will, "Except Fridays," talking about, you know, Will wasn't around in season one, so he didn't know about, he didn't learn about "take out the trash day" when everyone else did.

JOSH: Well, thanks for the compliment. This was a nice opportunity for me. Eli wrote me some great material, and it's funny. This is the beginning of the end of whatever love affair Will may have had with *The West Wing* audience, but I think he starts to become more human and more interesting in this episode.

HRISHI: I think so too! I think Will maybe tries to take a shot at flirting in this too, when he goes to the Vice President's office, and an aide says,

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

AIDE: Are you Will Bailey?

WILL: I could be. [Beat] I mean yes.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Immediately abandons ship!

JOSH: Yeah. He retracts immediately. You're right. That is an attempted flirt aborted very quickly. There's a funny piece of direction there. There's a big reveal when one of the aides to the Vice President walks by and she's carrying a painting or something just as the scene begins.

HRISHI: Mhmm.

JOSH: And lowers the painting but you kind of expect it to be like, "Oh, my god! They got Meryl Streep!" But there's no reveal. It's just, "Oh. There's a person holding a painting." But there's something about the way it was filmed that made me think there was going to be a significant reveal.

HRISHI: Ah. That's great. Um. And then you were disappointed?

JOSH: Yeah, I was a little disappointed. It was like, "Oh, it's just a person holding a painting." I knew that.

HRISHI: But did you see what the painting was?

JOSH: I don't recall.

HRISHI: It was a painting of Meryl Streep.

JOSH: Oh! See that makes a lot more sense.

HRISHI: [laughter] That's probably where your expectations came from!

JOSH: Mhmm.

HRISHI: But I do think it does serve some bit of plot device, right? Because it's what leads to the flirting, right? First you, Will sees the aide carrying the painting, and then she lowers the painting, and it is revealed that she is a pretty woman.

JOSH: Yes, indeed.

HRISHI: And I think Will's taken aback a little bit, and that's why he gives us the "I could be."

JOSH: True.

HRISHI: It would have been a good get though, if that role had been played by Meryl Streep.

JOSH: Yeah. Maybe it was! Maybe it was Meryl Streep, uncredited, in prosthetics.

HRISHI: [sputtering]

JOSH: Unlikely.

HRISHI: That aide was played by Erin Hayes.

JOSH: Oh! My god! Whaaaaaaaaaat?

HRISHI: Erin Hayes, who is fantastic in *Children's Hospital*, a show that you've been on.

JOSH: Indeed! And worked with her. I know her. She's a terrific person. And I'm also a huge fan of hers. She is hilarious.

HRISHI: She's great. She's also in a couple episodes of *Parks and Rec*.

JOSH: My god. How did I even...? Wow. Maybe we should have her on to discuss the big reveal. Now there is a big reveal!

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: I win! I said at the beginning-- it took fifteen years, but there's the big reveal!

HRISHI: You should certainly at least tweet at her, does she remember being in a scene with you.

JOSH: I'll tweet a picture of her holding the picture.

HRISHI: Yeah. She's great.

JOSH: Yes, she is.

HRISHI: Yeah. She plays Lola Spratt in *Children's Hospital*. That's what I know her from the in the most, but she's been in so many things. And it's too bad that Will didn't go for it, because maybe she would have stuck around.

JOSH: That's right. Just a little piece of physicality I loved: Donna had those documents for Josh to sign, and they have dialogue that's going on as she sort of puts the pen in his hand, he sort of signs, and he moves to go away, she just grabs his hand, puts his hand back in, because there's a second document he has to sign.

HRISHI: Yeah. Yeah.

JOSH: It's just fantastic physical dexterity between Janel and Brad that I like very much.

HRISHI: Yeah. I also really liked that in the script, Donna notices, and it is never made explicit, that Josh is coming to work after having slept over at Amy's house.

JOSH: When she comments on his suit.

HRISHI: Yeah. She says,

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

DONNA: Like your suit though.

JOSH: Thanks.

DONNA: Liked it when you wore it yesterday, too.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Also the fact that he's not wearing a tie. There's a little bit of ruffled walk of shame that only Donna notices. And it speaks to their relationship, and her keen sense of her boss. So you have that in the background behind everything that's going on between Josh and Amy. You know, he's coming from her place this morning, but then when they get to the office, you know, they're not just hiding their relationship from their peers, but their relationship is adversarial, and is professional, and they have to put that stuff aside. I just love that there's never a moment where it's like, "Well, you spent the night at my house..." it never, we never get more than that, and I think that's wonderful non-writing.

JOSH: Mhmm. Nuanced. See, I was just stuck on that as the 101st senator he would presumably break a tie but he's not even wearing one.

HRISHI: [snorts]

JOSH: Yeah. Mhmm.

HRISHI: Abbey Bartlet, by the way, very good at breaking ties. With scissors.

JOSH: True. They mentioned in this episode that Bartlet's job approval is down to 49%, and they are concerned about it. Um, as of yesterday, I found an article in *The Washington Examiner* mentioning that Trump's approval rating were at 43%, and it was considered an uptick and respectable.

HRISHI: Yes. They have been down as low as 36%.

JOSH: Mhmm.

HRISHI: I think it's also nice just to go back to the Will, Toby, Vice Presidential love triangle in this episode. Toby ends up putting Will and the Vice President on the same side in one line by pointing out that in his view they are on the same side: Their job is to serve the president. He says,

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

TOBY: Give him his assignment. I don't care if he likes it! You work for the president, so does he!"

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And so he kind of unwittingly even further aligns the two of them.

JOSH: Yeah, he also makes the argument for leaving.

HRISHI: Right, exactly. Like, we already know Will's unhappy, but then Toby really says like, "Here, it's the two of you!" and I thought that was also nice and just a great foundation for everything else that was yet to come.

JOSH: I always loved going toe to toe with Richard as Toby, and I like how the storyline starts to carry these two characters into greater conflict. It was always great fun to play.

HRISHI: And especially since just recently, Toby is on his jag about the messaging calendar because he believes in Will. He had said previously that Will is working out nicely, and as a result, "I'm going to give him the bulk of the speechwriting, and I can do this other stuff trying to get us back on track." But in doing so, he's pushing away the person who he is now trying to rely on.

JOSH: Yeah. I like also that without that being made too explicit, we see that Toby, to some extent, perhaps, has been grooming Will to take over, so that Toby can do the other thing that he wants to do: become the big picture message guy.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And in his conversation with Leo, he kind of pitches Will take over for him, so that he can go on to his greater ambition. And Leo makes it clear it's not gonna happen, that Will's taken the job, and that the president has okayed it.

HRISHI: Yeah. That's a devastating one-two punch.

JOSH: Mhmm. I think part of the reason that some people began to get disappointed in Will is that he was set up in battle with Toby. It's very hard to win a popularity contest against Toby! [laughter] I mean, he's so loved, and so lovable that, yeah, Will's going to take a hit going head to head with Toby.

HRISHI: I was thinking about how the spirit of season five so far, or these last three episodes, three, four, and five, the sort of in-fighting, the tension, the sort of sense of despondency, if that's not true dramatic that some of the staff are feeling, it makes me feel how far away we are from the era of Sam Seaborn.

JOSH: Mm.

HRISHI: You can't even imagine, I think, how Sam would fit into this mood. Whatever the miasma that's hanging over everyone here, it's like the opposite of the chipper quality that I found so charming so often.

JOSH: Yeah, that's true. It speaks to me to a boldness on the part of John Wells to take the show in a new direction and not to attempt to be the Aaron Sorkin cover band--

HRISHI: Mhmm.

JOSH: --that they might have tried to be. We've talked about Will and Toby wanting different or greater responsibilities than they currently hold in their positions, and I think a little bit that's what's happening with C.J. as well, even though it doesn't seem to be explicitly bristling about her job, but she keeps getting into these situations where she wants to have some effect on policy.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And generally coming from a moral position, or a position of ethics, and her job is really

to go out and put forth the team line. And so, I think in a way, she's also not happy with what her job is. You know, because I keep thinking I'm on the side of the people who are with Leo, you know, "I told you to go out there and say this. You went off message, and you're not supposed to go there. That's not your job."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I always agree with him, but I also see what's behind it, and I think she's tired of being the press secretary. I think really what she wants is a say in policy and affairs that really isn't part of her agenda as a press secretary.

HRISHI: Right. I feel like Will actually wasn't one of the people who I was thinking of as in danger of quitting his job, but I, you know, as we just talked about in the last episode, C.J. is really feeling it, and I feel like the strain has been written and acted really well, and then this episode just takes it even further. We were talking about the way Aaron, you know, wouldn't have allowed a sort of scenario like this to exist. I was thinking about how often *The West Wing* feels like a show-- you were talking about loyalty, and I was thinking about how we've talked about the family dynamic of this show. You know, part of the reason why in this show so few of the characters have outside romance or outside life is because it's all about pulling them together. And I always loved how in seasons 1-4 there was this kind of extended metaphor of your workplace family being your real family. And so far I feel like, season five, the biggest transition is that now, the metaphor is this is a show about divorce, and that is so fundamentally different from what we've seen, that idea of like these are the things that bind us, you know. The scene between Josh and Sam when they're lighting the fire and he says,

[West Wing Episode 2.11 excerpt]

JOSH: You know what we could use?

SAM: Newspaper?

JOSH: See? This is what I'm talking about. This is teamwork.

SAM: It really is!

[excerpt end]

HRISHI: I think the diametrically opposed version of that, where we're now witnessing these people who we thought we so bonded, there are these fissures and cracks, and here it's actually splitting apart.

JOSH: Mhmm.

HRISHI: And I think that's pretty cool. Like that's a cool show. I wanna watch that. It doesn't have to be *Scandal* or *House of Cards* to reflect some of the darker parts of politics. It can still be realistic.

JOSH: Yeah. It can just be a good old-fashioned discomfort food.

HRISHI: Yeah! Exactly. Let's take a quick break, and when we come back, we're going to speak

with Jennifer Palmieri about what it was really like to be in Toby's position, and dealing with some of the darker, discomfoting parts of being in the White House and on the campaign trail.

[Ad Break]

HRISHI: Joining us now is Jennifer Palmieri, she is the author of the *New York Times* number one best-selling book *Dear Madam President*. She was the Director of Communications for Hillary Clinton's 2016 presidential campaign, and before that she was Communications Director for President Barack Obama. She was Press Secretary before that for John Edwards' presidential campaign, and also for the democratic party in 2002. And she joins us now to talk about episode five of season five of *The West Wing*. Thank you so much for joining us.

JENNIFER: I'm really happy to be with you all.

JOSH: I think it's worth noting that the subtitle to *Dear Madam President* is, "An open letter to the women who will run the world." I'm currently reading the book on my Kindle. I'm definitely going to send a copy to my daughter, and if I can convince my son to read a book, I will send a copy to him as well.

JENNIFER: [Laughter] Start with sending it, right? That's the first step.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: You know, when I had first emailed you, we had talked about focusing on Toby's storyline in this episode.

JENNIFER: Right.

HRISHI: As Communications Director in the Obama White House I thought it would be particularly relevant. I hadn't actually watched the episode yet at the time when I reached out to you. Having seen it now, I feel like there's a lot we could talk about with Amy's storyline, too.

JOSH: Oh! And C.J.'s I think actually!

HRISHI: And C.J.'s, yeah.

JENNIFER: And C.J.'s, yeah. The fact is, the White House is composed of a number of people who have the constituency of one, which can make you feel adrift, which I think made people felt in that episode.

HRISHI: Hm. Let me start with a little bit of background. Are you a fan of *The West Wing*?

JENNIFER: I'm a fan of *The West Wing*, although I have to say I had to stop watching it during the Bush administration, because you know, you all started when I worked for President Clinton, and came to the White House and checked it out, and I think even before the show aired, came to visit. And we had some trepidation about what this was all gonna be, and then fell in love with it. And then it was a little painful to me after a while to watch it during the Bush administration, but I was glad to know that you all were still there. Because it felt to me like there was still some semblance of--because it started during our White House--some semblance of us still out there.

JOSH: And did you ever return to the series, or that was it? You were done in season two?

JENNIFER: No, I did return to the series late. You know, like six and seven probably.

HRISHI: So had you seen this episode before?

JENNIFER: I had not seen this episode before. And it made me anxious! And I felt the agita of just being adrift, and particularly in second terms, which can be so precarious, right? Anything can come along and really rock you, because you have...I think there's this view that the President of the United States has all this sort of control, right?

HRISHI: Mhmm.

JENNIFER: Presidents have a lot of power. They have very little control. And as a Communications Director you have even, you know, less control. And you're subject to the whim of any, you know, any one person on the planet can take an action in a day that really upsets whatever it was the White House thought the day was going to be about. And second term presidencies are particularly vulnerable to that, because you don't have the built-in tension around, you know, is the president going to be re-elected? And that's when things can really go astray.

JOSH: So a second term presidency doesn't take off any pressure and allow you to focus on the message of what you are trying to accomplish, rather than trying to get reelected?

JENNIFER: I mean, not really. Even when you're not running for reelection, the pressure is off for you to have to be re-elected, but I think it's never as freeing as a president thinks it's going to be, having watched both President Clinton and President Obama go through it. Because it's replaced by the dwindling currency that you have, and the very little time that you have to get things done, and your lack of leverage. So it's trading one set of problems for another.

HRISHI: I think there's an interesting thing that's shown in this episode. It certainly implied with some characters and was explicitly stated with others, the idea the pressure might be off for the president because, for the president, it's going to be their last job, but for the people working for the president, they still have political futures they have to consider. With Will's potential to move over to Bob Russell's team, and you know, what Amy is going through considering what her role is, what her capacity is, and what she might be able to affect in the future if she goes somewhere else--did that ring true for you, too?

JENNIFER: Yeah, no, it really did. As a [indecipherable] I thought it did a great job with that, because up through the re-elect there are these people that you work for as, you know, relatively junior staff that are held in such high regard, and everyone wants to be them, and everybody wants their job, and you can't imagine a moment where in the Clinton White House or the Obama White House it's not going to be the coolest thing ever, to be that person, and have that job. And then, you know, it starts. It starts pretty soon after the re-elect ends. You can feel it sort of slipping away, not the pace slowing down necessarily in the White House, but feeling the drudgery aspect of it, which any job can feel like, because it's so grueling. You know, that quotient starts to rise, you know, and some of the aura that otherwise you find so fulfilling slips away, and you see people lose power, and they almost have a different sensibility about them when you watch it happen. But I thought it did a great job of that, particularly when Toby is talking to Will like, "This is the NBA," and Will's, like, not so sure. Like maybe this is the NBA old-timers game versus the rookies.

HRISHI: You said it sparked your agita. Was there one moment in this episode that felt the most, you know, painfully true?

JENNIFER: When poor Toby was screaming about calendars!

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

TOBY: You think I like being in a PR dogfight with congress writing banner copy for photo ops?!

[end excerpt]

JENNIFER: You know, it's just like, "How pathetic is that?" Here you are, the West Wing, it's the center of the universe, and it's the most powerful place in the world, and the only thing that you, as Communications Director and your colleagues have to fight back against all of the forces in the world that are coming at you is a flimsy piece of paper that's got a calendar on it!

HRISHI: [Laughter]

JENNIFER: And you can't even stick to it. And it's such a weak tool. The calendar only works when there's built-in drama. Right? Like every story needs drama. It's true in television, it's true in politics and dealing with the press. The worst times, I always felt, weren't those times of crisis, it was like the days of episode five where you're just adrift. It's the worst feeling ever, and you feel so incompetent because like, "How can I be the White House Communications Director, and be so adrift, and not be able to guide, or like, make anything happen?" You seem like you have the whole world at your fingertips, but without something to push against, whether it was an opponent or a crisis or a big problem, it's hard to do.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: In this episode and in the previous few episodes, Toby's kind of bridling as White House Communications Director under the tension between wanting to be a big idea guy and getting bogged down in these kind of quotidian details of getting the message out. Is that something you can identify with having done the job?

JENNIFER: [Laughing] Yes! Because when it is the President of the United States that you're dealing with there's no detail that is too small that it doesn't warrant your attention. Right, as Communications Director, because anything can blow up, right? So, you know, if a flag is positioned the wrong way it's your responsibility, it's your fault, and it's going to ruin whatever you had planned. There's just no escaping the small details. There's no way to do these jobs in a way that--I just don't believe it's true. So, I identify with Toby's frustrations, and I knew he would never solve them, he's never going to get out from under the all-consuming pressure of the calendar. And I've had so many White Houses say, like, "We're going to have a meeting, and we're going to talk big strategy, and we're not going to be consumed by the calendar. Nobody bring calendars! Nobody bring a schedule. Do not default to the schedule." And within fifteen minutes, you are, everyone is defaulting to the schedule, because that is the only thing you have of the president's time, you know, it's the only currency you have, and it does drive everything, and it will make you crazy.

HRISHI: One of the things Toby's dealing with outside of the lameness of the messaging calendar--

JENNIFER: [Laughter]

HRISHI: --and the pressure to try and get his job done, is this specter of the idea that Will might leave his position as deputy, and his response is just to tell him he can't do it. "No, you can't take that job. That's not an option."

JENNIFER: Right.

HRISHI: Were you ever faced with that, where you had a deputy defect for another position, or for another campaign, or something like that?

JENNIFER: Yeah, you know, I did. Well, I did, I mean, I defected. So, I was not really a willing defector, but I left the Obama White House as Communications Director to go be Hillary's Communications Director.

HRISHI: Hm. Was that seen as a defection?

JENNIFER: Weeeeeeeell, I think if you ask Denis McDonough in the first few minutes, he was the Chief of Staff at the time, the conversation, it was seen as a defection, but it's not. Eventually I think everybody agreed it was the right, you know, including President Obama, agreed it was the right thing for me to do, because it's not something I necessarily wanted to do, but during President Clinton's time, and at other times during Obama, you could see it in somebody's face that they're getting ready to tell you, "I'm gonna leave," and it hurts because there's institutional knowledge that's so important, and it hurts because you also know at a personal level it means it's not as appealing to be there as it once was, and that's painful to realize, too.

JOSH: When you leave, is it a sharp break? Do you remain accessible to the people with whom you worked previously, or once you've moved on is that not kosher?

HRISHI: Right, I mean as you said, institutional knowledge is so valuable.

JENNIFER: I never felt that force field of them--they still felt like family, they still felt like though they would not call me to ask me for advice, but I would check in with them because they were the only people who could truly understand what I was going through. Right? And they were the only people, like you just get judged so much on campaigns, on presidential campaigns you get second-guessed, and it's just part of the job. You know, there are entire cable news shows, three of them, dedicated to judging you. And I felt that they were, and they totally were, the only people who didn't give us a hard time or mock us or, they were the ones who understood how hard it is.

HRISHI: One of the chapters in your book is "Move forward, draw fire," and I was wondering if you would tell us about the origin of that phrase.

JENNIFER: Yeah.

HRISHI: You described that in the book, but if you could tell us about that, because I feel like it also feels applicable to this show and what Amy goes through.

JENNIFER: Yeah. So "move forward, draw fire" is a joke that the secret service agents on

Hillary's detail used to tell each other, not when they were dealing with serious situations, but when they were dealing with some sort of bureaucratic business back with DC--they would say, "Well, I guess we've got only one thing left to do. Move forward, draw fire." And they would look at me and laugh, because they knew that's what our life was, too. And one day I was having a particularly bad day, and one of the agents came to me and said, "You know, some days you don't even move forward, you just draw fire." And it was like, "Yup!" There was a lot of that. You don't have to move forward to draw fire, but I think it's particularly true for women, and that's what that chapter is about. And I would find that a lot in the White House, and one might think that the staff's inclination is "Wow, here I am. I'm at the center of the most powerful place on the planet. I'm gonna be super aggressive, and always stick my neck out, and try to get as much done about what I think is right." But I find that's not how people behave usually in the White House, because you're so overwhelmed by the risk involved. And if you make a mistake, if you opened up your mouth, and you give the wrong advice, the President of the United States is going to act on that. There's big consequences. And what is remarkable about what Amy did was she took really big action, and it really wasn't clear to me whether it was sanctioned by her boss, the First Lady, and how much of it truly was her own agenda, but it was certainly what she thought was right. The episode did capture well, the power of the First Lady's office, too right, which was to act independently. It's not--Mrs. Obama's office didn't do that, but they would sure be able to get away with it if they'd wanted to. You know? You just have that kind of power. Same thing when Hillary Clinton was first Lady.

HRISHI: So you never encountered that, where the First Lady's agenda butted up against your own?

JENNIFER: Uh, in the Clinton White House, absolutely! Bunch of times! [Laughter]

HRISHI: Oh.

JOSH: Do tell.

JENNIFER: I mean there were so many I can't recall a particular one! But the thing that's so appealing about working in a First Lady's office is you actually do have more control there. Right? Because you're not responsible for managing whatever's happening on the World Stage, you don't have a lot of the ceremonial obligations, and then you don't have the big world obligations of being responsible for whatever disaster. So it does give you--and Mrs. Obama's team was particularly good at this--you know, Hillary's team, Hillary and her team, you know like the entire Clinton White House was a disaster for the first eighteen months because--we used to laugh very hard at the notion of a second term during the first term of the Clinton White House, and Hillary's team was the same was, but after they figured out how you use that platform, it's extraordinarily powerful, and a lot of times I would find they just run circles around you, Hillary's team and Mrs. Obama's team, because they had the time, and the bandwidth, and the wherewithal to be very focused on whatever it is that they wanted to do. Their priority would win out over what we were trying to do just because they had their act together more than we did, because they had the ability to do it, right? Amy didn't have to deal with all that Josh has to deal with in a day, or all that Toby or Will have to deal with in a day. You know, you don't have to deal with all the little details, right? She could just go and make phone calls to appropriate sub-committee chairs and get something done.

HRISHI: We didn't mention in your introduction that you were Deputy Press Secretary under President Bill Clinton.

JENNIFER: Yes.

JOSH: And National Press Secretary for the DNC earlier.

JENNIFER: Yeah.

JOSH: I'm curious, you're having worked as a Press Secretary, what your take is on C.J. in this episode. We've seen her for a few episodes becoming increasingly vocal behind the scenes about White House policy with which she disagrees, and decisions that this administration has taken. And then, in this episode, we see what is presented as a gaffe in front of the cameras, and in front of the microphones, where she allows her own kind of personal opinion to supercede the message and the line she'd been given from the Chief of Staff. Is that a credible storyline?

JENNIFER: Yes, it is. It's a very credible storyline. I don't recall, you know it's sort of dated, too right? It's like more than ten years ago now. But I don't recall press secretaries that I worked with being that indignant about the injustice necessarily of what was being done, but certainly about whether or not you could survive it, right? The strategy-- but the other thing that C.J.-- that was like, seemed to be really important in her own mind that is true for both Obama and Clinton, is understanding--which I don't see in this White House--is understanding you're not just spinning for the politician you work for, you are speaking for the United States' government. You're speaking for the United States of America. And then the third thing that I saw there was also, you know, she's seeing the end of the administration, too, right? And you feel, which I sensed with both my colleagues with both Obama and Clinton, it's like it's all really hard to get anything done here. I really want to make sure we're doing it the right way.

HRISHI: I feel like the issues that she's dealing with are ones that have come up before in the series, but her response is different here. She just seems exhausted. Like, she can't have the same responses she had before because she just doesn't have it in her. By the end of the episode I was just sure she's going to quit in the next episode.

JENNIFER: I've seen that with people, and it manifests itself in different ways. When Leon was the Chief of Staff, and we had so many people get beat up in confirmation processes, and lose out in them. And at the beginning of the second term, right before he left, Alexis Herman, who was a colleague of ours from the White House that we all loved very much was up for Secretary of Labor, and people started to come at her pretty hard on the Hill, and other times I could see a scenario where the White House staff decides, you know, maybe [unintelligible], or maybe Alexis herself might decide, you know, "This is going to be really painful. We're going to have to pay a big price for it. Maybe it's not worth it," and everybody was like, "Hell no!" Particularly Leon was like, "No! We are fighting for Alexis!" And we did, and she got confirmed, and she was a great Secretary of Labor. And so I would see, as you get closer to the end, people being more concerned about how they're doing things, and how people are being treated.

HRISHI: Do you feel like after everything that you've been through, you know, the exhaustion that you felt is detailed palpably in your book.

JENNIFER: [Laughter] Yeah.

HRISHI: Do you feel like you could do this again?

JENNIFER: Uh, yes. I could do this again. [Laughter]

HRISHI: Awesome.

JENNIFER: I love it so, and it's so important, and it makes a huge difference. I don't come out of any of these experiences more cynical. I come out of them less cynical, and even though in the living though last election where we battled so much, including Russian interference, it makes me want to push all the harder. I know very much what's at stake, and I know what this country-- what all the good of this country--is capable of launching. And whether I'm part of it or just watching it, I can't want for it to get underway.

JOSH: And you do feel having worked the Hillary Clinton 2016 campaign that you have taken certain hits that will allow a future woman running for president to run on her own terms, in a way that maybe Hillary couldn't?

JENNIFER: Yeah, there's-- I didn't appreciate at the beginning of the campaign how important models are for the person running, and the public, right? So the fact that we had never seen a woman do this before, I really think that was a much bigger hindrance than I thought, and what I realize we had done to her is we had made her a female facsimile of the qualities we look for in a male president because there was no other way for us to think about the president. And I think that's why people thought she was inauthentic. I think that's why you hear people say things like, "There's something about her I just don't like." T-S-A-H-I-J-D-L There's something about her I just don't like. She just doesn't quite make sense to us.

HRISHI: Right.

JENNIFER: So I think that the next woman, she's gonna have-- there's a trail there.

HRISHI: I'm also wondering, having worked in the positions that you have in both the Clinton administration and President Obama's administration, has the explosion of social media fundamentally changed those kinds of communication jobs?

JENNIFER: Not fundamentally, because at the core of it is human nature. There's an issue. There's not a good answer to it. You're trying to find the best answer to it. The press are going to attack you on whatever solution you come down on, and it's never going to be enough. The pace has changed, and then there are new tools that give you an ability to share with the country what's actually happening and who the president actually is. Right? So you have your own platforms, and that's exciting and interesting to me. So you had thirty minutes a day where people sit down and watch the news, and you sort of carefully curate the images that they see of the president, and what they hear the president say. It's not like that anymore. So what I would try to do, particularly with President Obama, is understand people are going to see him in tons of different situations and hear from him a lot, and also see him represented by the press in many different ways, and you just try and understand who he is at his core. And if you do your job right, you can at least communicate to the people by how he handles a situation, the person he is, and what's important to him. And when you have so little that you do control I think that's the best that you can do to actually communicate about the president.

HRISHI: Jen, thank you so much for talking to us. I really am so heartened by the response that you would be willing to consider doing the job again, because I feel like that's what I liked so much about your book. It is, at times, such a bleak portrait, I think, of the country, but there's still--

JENNIFER: [Laughter]

HRISHI: --because of how clear-eyed it seems about all the reasons why things went the way they went, and it's remarkable to me that within that you're still able to craft a message of hope in the book. And so I really appreciate that you seem to live that as well.

JENNIFER: Oh yeah, for sure. It's how I get up every day. It's like, what's the alternative? I still think we're ultimately on a trajectory where, you know, I get inspired by the young people. And I get inspired by how many people I see running for office, new people, women, and it's hard to not have faith that ultimately the country can come out of this stronger.

JOSH: On that Sorkin-esque note, thank you so much for joining us. That was a fantastic interview.

JENNIFER: Thank you.

HRISHI: Yeah. Thank you so much. If people wanna hear more from you they can follow you on Twitter. You're @jmpalmieri. You might get some of our listeners talking to you after this comes out.

JENNIFER: Yeah. That'd be great.

HRISHI: And people should go out and get your book *Dear Madam President*, number one New York Times bestseller.

JENNIFER: Thank you.

HRISHI: Well that's it for this episode.

JOSH: Thanks for listening! *The West Wing Weekly* is, as always, a proud member of Radiotopia, which is a collection of superfine podcasts. To find out more information about them, or to listen to them, you can go to Radiotopia.fm.

HRISHI: And just a few thanks from us. First off, thanks to Zach McNeas and

[West Wing Episode excerpt]

LEO: Margaret!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: --Miller, who, as always, helped us make this episode. But also big thanks to Eli Attie for giving us behind-the-scenes insights, and once again, just being a great friend to this show. And also thanks, of course, to our guest Jennifer Palmieri.

JOSH: You can follow Hrish and me, and Jennifer, on Twitter. We have an Instagram account, we've got a Facebook page. Hrish's got another great podcast called *Song Exploder*.

HRISHI: We're taking next week off, but we'll be back the week after that to talk about "Disaster Relief." Until then, ok.

JOSH: Ok.

JENNIFER: What's next?

[Outro Music]