

The West Wing Weekly
5.19: "Talking Points"
Guest: Richard Schiff

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to *The West Wing Weekly*, I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: and I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: and today we're talking about *Talking Points*. That's episode 19 from season 5.

JOSH: It was written by our dear friend Eli Attie, it was directed by our dear friend Richard Schiff. Richard Schiff!

HRISHI: Richard Schiff making his television directorial debut, I believe.

JOSH: Huzzah! And it originally aired on April 21st, 2004.

HRISHI: Joining us later in this episode, Richard Schiff.

JOSH: Hurrah!

HRISHI: Here's the official synopsis of this episode. On the eve of the president's controversial trade summit in Brussels, Josh is troubled when he learns that Bartlet will reverse his position about sacrificing American jobs to foreign lands. C.J. is frustrated with a new Federal Communications Commission ruling allowing multimedia companies increased ownership of TV stations. Meanwhile, the administration tries to downplay job loss statistics, and Donna tells Josh about her dissatisfaction with her limited role on his staff. In the midst of it all, Bartlet meets Kate Harper, the brash new deputy National Security Advisor. Which introduces us to Mary McCormack.

JOSH: Yay, at long last. Captain Kate "Bangs" Harper, as she was referred to at *Television Without Pity*.

HRISHI: Oh really?

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: [laughing] She's got some pretty rad bangs going on.

JOSH: Yes. When we get her on the show we'll have to ask her about said bangs.

HRISHI: This episode is a frustrating one for me, I think. Not because, in terms of the craft of the episode, but in terms of what actually happens with our characters.

JOSH: For me as well. I also, if I'm to be honest, had trouble following it the first time I watched it.

HRISHI: Hmm, at what point did you lose the thread?

JOSH: Ahh, 15 seconds into the cold open [laughter] I guess really a better way to frame it is that it stood up to a second viewing soon after very well.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: it was helpful. I mean it's just one of those things, again, it's what *The West Wing* does and, boom, right out from the downbeat, Will and Josh are talking, referring to things about which we don't know very much, so it's just a lot of playing catch up and the first time through I would pause and rewind to just try to make sure I was understanding what people were talking about.

HRISHI: Yeah! In this episode, like many episodes, but especially in this one, Will Bailey is a guy who shows up unannounced and uninvited and says some stuff that no one really asked about.

JOSH: Right. I was trying to think and then I figured, why should I think, when you can probably come up with it [laughing] what's the, you know, we have C.J. exposition, we have a telladonna, and I think Will, at this point, is crying out for some sort of snazzy, clever, 'I provide exposition' term [laughing] We can give it some time, or maybe somebody will give us an idea.

HRISHI: I'm sure the listeners have good suggestions. What I thought was he's like living, walking person sliding into your mentions on Twitter.

JOSH: [laughter] that's good. That's really good. I like it.

HRISHI: He's just like "@JoshLyman – hey there's some tractors".

JOSH: [laughing] that's really funny. That just makes me, riffing on that, you know the Josh Lyman brilliant slide that Brad did, I can't remember what episode, but it's been frequently GIF'd, where he just slides across the floor.

HRISHI: Uh huh.

JOSH: That would just be a great GIF to accompany giving somebody grief for sliding into your DM's [laughing] I think people should start using that.

HRISHI: Awesome. Do you remember filming it, this episode?

JOSH: I remember filming this episode to the extent that it sticks out in my mind that Richard directed, which I enjoyed, and I remember very clearly some sort of press being on set because Richard was directing and they were covering somehow, for some sort of article or story, and that Allison, Richard and I posed for a ridiculously fake picture of us discussing a script. It's one of those things that, two actors and a director have never done in the history of filmmaking [laughter] where he's holding the script and I'm looking at it very earnestly and Allison is also and we kind of that, "oh yeah, interesting point" expression on our faces [crosstalk] We will find it and put it up on the site. [laughing] That's what really sticks out in my mind. I don't know that I remember filming that particular scene with Brad.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] I've seen that image.

HRISHI: The thing that Will comes in to at Josh about is this protest in Brussels as a result of a trade agreement that he has just negotiated.

JOSH: Yes, protests are sprouting in Brussels.

HRISHI: [laughing] Oh Josh.

JOSH: That one's good for you. It may not be funny but it's good for you.

HRISHI: [laughing] That's like an uppercut on your way down from the first punch.

JOSH: [laughing] Right.

HRISHI: It slowly unfolds, that we discover, that Josh has been transposed from his negotiating role with Congress to suddenly now he's dealing with unions and private industry to try and hammer out this multinational trade agreement.

JOSH: Right. You were starting to say you were frustrated by the characters in this episode.

HRISHI: I was frustrated by this episode because I think, like, in real life you can see the divide within the administration on this issue of free trade. My favorite moment, I think, in this episode, to jump way out of chronological order, is the exchange between Will and Josh when they ask each other about how they came to be free trade advocates.

JOSH: I like that scene as well.

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

JOSH: How'd you become a free trader?

WILL: America has a quarter of the world's wealth and only 2% of the customers. You have to sell to others.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love seeing these two wrestling with the actual political and moral quandary of free trade, just for a moment, and also the idea of having to be an advocate for their boss's position, regardless of what they might think themselves.

JOSH: Yeah, see I thought that was kind of an intriguing aspect of the conversation is squaring up your own ideals with what your job description is and the person for whom you work.

HRISHI: Yeah. There's a lot of unexpected alliances in this episode and unexpected antagonism too and I think a lot of using people's positions and words against them. So throughout this episode we learn that it's Ryan Pierce's last day working in the White House and Josh is giving him a hard time, and they're having their sort of usual dynamic of "stop bugging me kid" but then the whole thing kind of twists at the end because Josh goes in for a meeting and it turns out, the meeting's with Ryan as the legislative director for the congressman that he's now been hired by.

JOSH: A great little turn, I liked that.

HRISHI: And it comes back to this idea, Josh remembers a little comment that Ryan asked,

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

RYAN: These Belgium farmers think it's going to cost them jobs?

JOSH: It probably will, cause it lets in cheaper produce.

RYAN: But Belgium's for it anyway?

JOSH: It may be bad for their farmers, but it's good for their economy.

RYAN: Then who's their economy for?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Later, in this final scene between the two of them, that question comes back to Josh and he realizes that, "you weren't asking that question for yourself" and that's when Ryan reveals that, yeah, he's working for this congressman and he's doing what Josh told him, which is,

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

RYAN: Take you boss's position: lock, stock and sound bite and you get what you came for.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: There was a great moment of irony for Josh to get hit with that, to get hit with all of that, but the fact of now having to treat Ryan as some kind of a peer in this meeting. They're going to be sitting together, and then also to realize: I kind of felt bad for Josh, he's gotten played left and right in this episode but a lot of it is due to his own making. This certainly was.

JOSH: Yeah, I do like exactly what you're saying. Very cleverly done by Eli in this little scene, sort of wrapping up the, sort of, quintessence of what the whole episode is about. I also thought there was a great line of dialogue in there.

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

RYAN: If you taught me anything, it's that my view doesn't matter anyway.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Which I thought was actually [crosstalk] actually kind of a little bit sad. It's a great line of dialogue, and actually Josh, you said, treats Ryan as we've become accustomed to, but it's almost even worse this episode. There's no humor or affection underneath, for instance, his, the way Josh treats Ryan's inviting him out to his party or do you want to say goodbye or whatever. Josh is very dismissive and it's really harsh.

HRISH: [crosstalk] So good.

HRISHI: That's true, yeah. Ryan's being playful, Josh is not at all there for it.

JOSH: Right. He's, yeah, having none of it.

HRISHI: It almost feels like he's "yes, it's your last day, now I can stop having to humor you".

JOSH: Yeah, and then when you refer to Josh having been played this episode, I thought originally that might be what you meant when you said the episode seemed a little unfair to the characters. I feel, the presentation of Josh in this episode is as, sort of, stunningly naïve, in a way that I would not have anticipated. I'm kind of wrestling with whether I buy it altogether.

HRISHI: I had the feeling that they had discussed all this stuff, just not with Josh. Like it was an example of the close hold that we've been introduced to in this season, where they didn't give Josh all the information and they sort of, they wound him up and sent him in there with one directive and put him in one mode and then he did the job that they wanted him to do, not realizing what the consequences of that, those actions were gonna be.

JOSH: Yes, I think that it is clearly the chronology and how it worked out and I find it a little bends, or defies credibility to me, just, we've seen, we know they work together, and worked together closely, for years, so the idea they're withholding this information from Josh because

he'd refuse to do it if he didn't...I don't know, it just seems to me, what they really would have had is a genuine conversation and then sent him in there to make the deal that, after all reflects the president's agenda not his, you know, everything that happens after, or as the dénouement of our entire episode, probably really would have taken place beforehand. I mean, first of all, we just know, and it's almost a cliché of *The West Wing* at this point, that if the characters have something that burningly conflicts with their own moral compass, they're going to go in there and have their moment with the president.

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

JOSH: And I am taking this to him, if I have to park a tractor on the south lawn to do it.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: So know that that's what everybody does, yeah I think they might have well have talked to Josh before we have him negotiate the trade deal because this moment is gonna happen later anyway.

HRISHI: But by the time that it does happen, it's basically too late. I mean, Leo and the president really, I thought, executed their plan correctly and Josh's feelings get hurt, but I don't think that there is, they could sort of bring it up with Josh and he could make all his objections and they could go round and round with him and then, ultimately, maybe he wouldn't perform as effectively as they want him to. Or they could not tell him and he could have his complaints afterwards, but at that point the deal's already negotiated and they can just sort of deal with his complaints.

JOSH: I guess so, I just wonder whether they really have to do such a subtle emotional end run round Josh, is he so fragile that they can't really have this out beforehand. I don't know if I accept that he's so fragile, and also it seems to me maybe a little bit naïve in the sense that, it never occurred to him that any of the repercussions, or that the repercussions of a trade deal like this might involve the loss of certain jobs in one sector. It's a fairly simplistic look at some basic components of free trade and globalization and it's not it really gets in to the nitty gritty and it's like Josh going "whoa, it never even occurred to me that anything like this could happen". The real quintessence of what's being discussed here is pretty simple and the kind of the I would think a sophisticated, beltway insider like Josh Lyman would probably have been a few steps ahead of before he went into the room for the first discussion.

HRISHI: He could anticipate what step two of globalization looks like.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: It's like here, we're negotiating step one and he's like, and then it ends. And roll credits.

JOSH: Exactly

HRISHI: I think the thing that frustrated me was what felt like inconsistencies in some of the positions some of the characters. There are a couple of examples of this: one – the idea that, I would think that in some ways of all the people you could get to kind of bend their own moral compass, can you bend a compass? Whatever. They have a flexible moral compass, it would be Josh, who we know wants to win.

JOSH: He's a pragmatic guy.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly.

JOSH: He wants to get stuff done.

HRISHI: And he often has to figure out this kind of actuarial calculation about what goes and what stays and, you know, something.

JOSH: A net good.

HRISHI: Yeah. It was the main source of conflict so often between him and Amy.

JOSH: True

HRISHI: So, yeah, I think that he would get it, and they could tell him everything that they needed to tell him, but then the people who are manipulating him are Leo and the president, and that's a little bit confusing too. I guess, we don't really that much about Leo's history as Secretary of Labor, but we do know that he was Secretary of Labor and so for him to kind of be a little callous, I think, about the CWA, the union.

JOSH: This is the Communication Workers of America.

HRISHI: Yeah, they're gonna lose, there's 17,000 jobs that are gonna get shipped over, and I understand the president is a Nobel Laureate when it comes to economics and I understand that they're both, sort of mainstream Democrats, but I was a little bit surprised by some of the stuff that they were saying. I was thinking about the moment in Nashua, when Josh first goes to see the governor at the time speaking. He was talking to the town hall and this dairy farmer gets up and he says, "Hey, you voted for this bill and that cost me money" and the president's like.

[West Wing Episode 2.01 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I voted against the bill because I didn't want make it harder for people to buy milk

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Doesn't that feel like it might go against what he's saying about the free trade bill here?

JOSH: Yeah, I guess so. We don't get any sort of, I guess, edification about the president's evolving thoughts on the issue.

HRISHI: But see, I'm not sure actually, I'm going to contradict myself even. The president also says,

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: There are children in those plutocracies who dig through trash heaps for food, who'd kill for a low-wage job.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Well that's actually; he's talking about kids in India at that point, right?

HRISHI: Yeah, yes.

JOSH: That was actually an element of the episode that I would have like to have been amplified. The idea that he's thinking for the greater good, even beyond the borders of the United States, that there's another element to the conversation and to globalization which is greater good and value to some of the countries with whom we're hammering out this deal. There's just a little bit of it, I'm glad that it was there and I would have liked a little bit more of that because that really does open up the conversation, just philosophically to another whole other plane.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean we have touched on it in the briefest of ways in *Somebody's Going to Emergency*, *Somebody's Going to Jail*, you know Toby says, when he's doing the theory of floating opposites and stuff, he says "and here's the one that's different".

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

TOBY: Free trade stops wars.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: and there's this idea of an international diplomatic mission that goes along with free trade. And I guess we've talked about it a little bit too, you know, about with the sewing soccer balls with their teeth and all the things Albie Duncan and C.J. discuss in *Game On*, and so it would be nice to talk about that part a little bit more in detail.

JOSH: Yeah, this hints at, I think, a better episode with higher ambition and a more sophisticated look at the issues that such a trade agreement would bring up. That was somewhere in this episode, it didn't quite break out and become what it might have been.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm. I wish the division between the pro free trade wing of the Bartlet administration and those who might not feel that same way, I wish there was a little bit more of debate about that. There is that scene between Josh and Will, when they talk a little bit about, about this, but this part feels very realistic because in '93 when NAFTA was passed, the Democrats got kind of ripped in half a little bit...

JOSH: Oh yeah.

HRISHI: Between people who were pro organized labour and then the pro NAFTA side of it. And it still feels like an issue that that party hasn't figured out. There are things about this episode that I loved in that specific regard like, that the fact that Haffley is totally on-board with the bill as is

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

HAFFLEY: Let's get right to my issues.

JOSH: Sure.

HAFFLEY: I have no issues.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Pro business Democrats and free market Republicans can come together.

JOSH: and Josh seems completely caught off guard by that as well.

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

JOSH: Josh is not at his best in this, he doesn't seem like a grizzled political veteran in this episode. He seems like a guy on his first day, who looks like he's just going, "Wait, what?".

HRISHI: It's true, there are, like, by the end of the episode I feel like Josh has learned a lot, but it's also sort of like a reset, where he's learned a lot and now he's at the place where we think he would already be. He took some knocks but he's coming away with these life lessons about, you know, the tough world and it's like, he should know some of this stuff already. But there are also lessons that he learns in this that I do like. I like even the fact that he didn't learn the first or second or third time, and those are the ones that are the more specific lessons maybe, like, the fact that he has completely underestimated Ryan Pierce at every single step of the way .

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: And what Lawrence O'Donnell told us, which is that Ryan Pierce is the younger Josh Lyman.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And he hates him for it. But he also continually underestimates the guy, and so he has to learn that lesson again. I think that's great that he still hasn't learned it.

JOSH: Right, I agree. I also think that it's well handled, the human face of what are just usually numbers knocked around. I liked the idea of the CWA guy coming and plunking down these two people and saying.

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

BILL (CWA): They're going stay right here till you tell them how you plan to honor it.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I thought that that was handled well and then I liked how that's the sort of macro, you know, President Bartlet is talking about numbers and 17,000 here but you get 30,000 more jobs there, but what about these two people that we now, you know, have names and faces for, that are sitting Josh's office, I like that. And then on the micro level, Josh seems to be kind of seeing Donna for the first time in a way, where she's just been kind of a job description to him, I mean never mind whatever is going on romantically and personally, you know, he takes the lesson, the hard knock lessons that he's getting on the trade deal and kind of absorbs it, processes it on a personal level and treats Donna better and hears her and maybe kind of sees her for the first time and what she's trying to say as regards her job.

HRISHI: Yeah. You know what one thing I love about this episode is that it brings up a lot. I mean I have pages and pages of notes about this episode, but I also had a hard time organizing them, because I couldn't quite feel like I know how to organize my thoughts about this episode, in general.

JOSH: Yeah, I feel the same way too, and politics is messy and so's this episode to a certain extent, and so's my reaction to it. I agree there's a lot of really good stuff going on there. There is no way to wrap up everything that's brought up in this. We haven't even touched on the second C.J. B-plot yet, there's no way to wrap this up in a perfect little bow and nor should it be in the course of a single episode of *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think there's really, some really beautiful things being mirrored in the different plots. The C.J. plot line does dovetail really nicely in with the free trade agreement.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And Donna's frustration with her own job really dovetails nicely with the free trade agreement.

JOSH: I agree.

HRISHI: And Ryan changing his position, all these things I think are wonderfully connected to one another. I wish the title were something different. I feel like that would help give me some sort of organizing principle around this. But to me I think everything about this episode is about power, and about a consolidation of power at the top and the lack of power below and there just being this sort of un-breachable divide between the two and I think, Donna is feeling stuck.

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

DONNA: I just want to grow in my job, do something meaningful, do more than earn a paycheck till I die.

JOSH: Why are you saying that?

DOMMA: I only have one career, and I want it to matter, or I might as well be a soda jerk. That's why I wanted...

JOSH: Let's go back to not talking for a while.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Josh really callously it seems, I think, and if I were her, I would think like "what the hell?" just cuts her off!

JOSH: I know! His initial response is rough!

HRISHI: It's really brutal, but I think at that moment he's not responding to Donna. She's suddenly standing in for the CWA worker who's also in his office still saying, "I don't want my career to be over".

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

STEVE (CWA): I don't want burial insurance. My career isn't over yet. I want to keep my job.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: and suddenly now Josh is like I can't escape this argument, being voiced from one person who's a stranger, and now my closest assistant .

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: My closest colleague, yeah.

JOSH: What next? The soda jerk worker's union? [laughing] Something like that. No, I think you're exactly right, he's getting it from all sides.

HRISHI: Yeah, meanwhile Donna gets to see Ryan move up, he's leapfrogged over Donna.

JOSH: Completely.

HRISHI: From being the intern under her to now he's meeting with Josh and he comes from power. He's a descendent of a president, the nephew of a senator so, I think that part is really frustrating and I feel terrible for Donna that she's getting stymied. And even the way Ryan spoke about her in earlier episodes, "Oh, I'm a big picture person, Donna's a detail person".

JOSH: Mm-hmm.

HRISHI: I think that these sort of elements of the plot coming through the person from the CWA and Donna, it made me want C.J. to invoke them when Leo asks, "Who is the little guy?" going into this other plot which is that C.J. is trying to get reporters to write about a change in the FCC rules that allow media companies to own more of the TV viewing audience, which means monopolies and consolidation of broadcasters.

JOSH: Right! And do we think that the Bartlet administration's take on this is that they're fine with it and that there also ok with C.J. just undermining [laughing] I mean, there's something odd about her behavior in this episode, her trying to foment some action and dissatisfaction among the journalists so that they'll write about this particular issue.

HRISHI: Well the FCC's an independent agency, right?

JOSH: Right, yes.

HRISHI: So really the White House isn't supposed to have any connection to the decisions that they make.

JOSH: But, yeah, I guess so, but she's going rogue on an issue that just seems to have stuck in her craw and she doesn't get an ok from anybody, like "do you mind if I use my power and position to just really whip this up?" [laughing].

HRISHI: And take some White House carpenters who might be on some other job and use them to take out the seats from the press briefing room.

JOSH: Yeah, it is in its way, a great scene and it's a great visual that this episode needs, which is a pretty talky and staid, it needs a great visual scene like that, with what she does, but when you actually really look at what she took upon herself, it does seem odd and perhaps a fireable offense [laughing] and my feeling as I watched it too is, as I said, it's almost one of the clichés of *West Wing* that you're gonna have a moment where a character like Josh Lyman is gonna say "well I'm gonna go in there and I'm going to talk to the president about this issue, I'm going

to have my say no matter what” and you couldn’t have it twice in an episode where C.J. also strides in to tell the president this issue’s got to be addressed somehow [laughing] so she’s “alright, we’ll do the carpenter thing”.

HRISHI: [laughing] The part that was funny to me, it’s towards the beginning of the episode, C.J. learns about this FCC compromise through helpful @WillBailey.

JOSH: That’s right.

HRISHI: Who shows up and says 39.37% is the new limit. They were trying to do 45, people got upset about it, and they knocked it down to 39.37 and C.J. reacts like 39.37% is just an incomprehensible figure.

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

C.J.: 39.37%?

WILL: This stuff can be very scientific.

C.J.: I’m going to need a slide rule in my briefing – 39.37%?

WILL: On the energy speech, if you get questions...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughing] Not in the context of like, how many viewers that might be [crosstalk] no, just like, numbers... [laughing].

JOSH: [crosstalk] No, in terms of numbers [laughing]

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

C.J.: And it’s now 39.37%, a number that ought to come with a decoder ring and a jar of Ovaltine.

TOBY: What do you want?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I know [crosstalk] and I’m like what? [laughing]

HRISHI: [crosstalk] I’m like, really? You understand 10,000 people C.J. and you can identify 3,937 of them? That’s, there it is! That’s, it’s a decimal fraction, you got it.

JOSH: Yeah, it’s just math illiteracy [laughter] in the end.

HRISHI: It's an oddly specific number but I wouldn't say it's confusing. She says "I'm gonna need a slide rule", it's just...[laughing].

JOSH: Which I think speaks to her math literacy [laughing].

HRISHI: I think the thing that's funny too about this whole plot, is that if the FCC had just rounded up to 40%, none of this would have happened.

JOSH: [laughing] You're absolutely right.

HRISHI: Cause it's the only thing...

JOSH: That's all the cover they needed.

HRISHI: Yeah, she figures it out because she adds up the thing...She says "39.37% is the exact number that MertMedia now owns, and therefore the FCC is doing this really shady thing. If they just said 40%, she would have been like..."

JOSH: Oh, that's fine.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I've got no problem with that.

HRISHI: I have a theory by the way, about that percentage.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: I think the subplot is in response to something that really happened in the Clinton administration which was the Telecommunications Act of 1996 which raised the limit of TV viewing audience percentage that one conglomerate could reach. In the Telecommunications Act, which was passed during the Clinton administration, the number used to be 25% and then it was raised to 35%. Nowadays, it actually 39%, but that was a big jump then. Anyway, while I was looking at the Telecommunications Act, one of the sub clauses or whatever of that legislation is a provision called the Over the Air Reception Devices Rule, which prohibited restrictions on things like antennas and satellite dishes that people might install on their homes. The idea was they wanted to give people more access to the news and to the airwaves, whatever. So, as long as the antennas and the satellites dishes were below a certain size, people were allowed to install them, and you couldn't tell them no, so if you were in gated community or something like that, you couldn't say "hey, no satellite dishes or something like that", that would have been illegal. So the maximum size of a satellite dish that fell under this was 1 meter in diameter, or 39.37 inches.

JOSH: Oh wow! What?!

HRISHI: Which I can't imagine that [crosstalk] that's a coincidence, right? That has to be...

JOSH: [crosstalk] That's crazy!

JOSH: I guess. That's insanity, it must be

HRISHI: If you're looking for a specific decimal fraction in the Telecommunications Act, there it is: 39.37.

JOSH: There it is.

HRISHI: Which is pretty good. You know else I like? JCN.

JOSH: I was going to say that. I noticed that, I found that online somewhere.

HRISHI: Yeah. The computer company that is shipping job overseas is Jace Computer Networks or JCN for short and will you tell us the code to JCN Josh?

JOSH: It is, the letters JCN are each one letter after the letters IBM.

HRISHI: Weh-weh, pretty good.

JOSH: The on board computer in *2001 (A Space Odyssey)* famously named HAL and that name was derived from [crosstalk] going one letter, one letter before each of the letters in IBM – H, A, L.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Hal Holbrook.

HRISHI: That's true, right. I mentioned Albie Duncan earlier.

JOSH: Halbie Duncan.

HRISHI: [laughing] Famously played by Hal Holbrook, whose real name IBM Holbrook.

JOSH: [laughing] Yes, worth it.

HRISHI: [laughing] Thank you. Thank you for your support.

JOSH: Oh sure.

HRISHI: So this media consolidation thing that C.J. is talking about is so painfully real, there is a lot of Trump ai-yi-yi built into this because, like I said, we are now at 39% and the company that owns a HUGH stake in, of the marketers Sinclair Media and there was this great mash up that was made, a super cut of all of these stations delivering the same exact message, a message

from the corporate folks at Sinclair, where all the hosts in all these different markets across affiliates with different networks: CBS affiliates, FOX affiliates, ABC, NBC, all of them are saying the exact same script that's sort of anti fake news thing that's right out of a Trump speech.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And it went everywhere and it came from Sinclair.

[Sinclair Broadcast group news script excerpt]

<https://theconcourse.deadspin.com/how-americas-largest-local-tv-owner-turned-its-news-anc-1824233490>

Single voice news host: The share of biased and... (news host keeps speaking as the second voices join in saying the same words)

Second news host: ...false new and... (news host keeps speaking as other voices join in saying the same words)

A large number of news hosts: ...has become all too common on social media. More alarming, some media outlets publish these same fake stories... stories that just aren't true, without checking facts first. Unfortunately, some members of the media use their platforms to push their own personal bias and agenda to control...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Well that sucked.

HRISHI: [laughing] It does suck.

JOSH: Just saying.

HRISHI: And that's what C.J. is predicting will happen if they keep going through with it and, again, the thing that bugs me is that Leo doesn't understand what the ramifications are.

JOSH: No, he doesn't get it at all.

HRISHI: He says,

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

LEO: Who's the little guy? I'm serious. Who is he? Do you know of any poor, struggling station owners? Some guy in hand-me-downs, tying antennas to a pick-up truck.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And the short sightedness of that is baffling to me because it feels obvious, if you're thinking about this thing, that if there's diversity of ownership then that allows for the chance of actual diversity of messages.

JOSH: Right. Indeed. Yeah, no, he's strangely myopic, and I'm surprised she doesn't make the point, she kind of lets it lie as if he's talking about ownership themselves, they're all rich and he's not talking about the viewers at all.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: He's not getting that it's the populace and the paucity of multiple viewpoints that they'd be exposed to.

HRISHI: Right. There's a, this is a finite resource: time on the air dedicated to the news, and there's a CNN article about the Sinclair promo, it said local journalists have bristled at these "must run packages" about subjects that aren't relevant to local audiences and they're dictated, like the terrorism alert desk is a segment for a security alerts. Its corporate headquarters dictated messaging and that means that those minutes don't get to be dictated or devoted to things that might be more relevant to the local people.

JOSH: Indeed. I thought there was an interesting aspect to the conversation between C.J. and Greg Brock in which she complains about the consolidation of TV stations, that one company can wield such oversized political influence with so many people, and then he argues back that the media landscape is completely changing and that.

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

GREG: Media monopolies are history. The internet's exploding, TV's every guy with a camcorder and digital uplink.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And it is actually pretty prescient, I mean I'm things were happening already then, but this is, I think, even pre You Tube, this episode and so although he does have a point, it was interesting for me to watch that scene twice, given even in the current landscape, digital and online landscape, a lot of these multiple broadcasters online sources of information are being abused, you know, like Facebook's...

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: ... You know, it was just interesting to me that he uses it as a hedge against her argument but in fact, now, some of these new massive open resources are being used and abused to present a single type of viewpoint to a mass audience.

HRISHI: That's true. Yeah. New media, just hadn't, mega conglomeration of new media hadn't happened or not, not so palpably as we know it now.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: All right, here's some numbers.

JOSH: Sure. Five.

HRISHI: [laughing] A good one.

JOSH: Thanks.

HRISHI: 46% of people still get their news from local news compared to 26% get it from network news and 28% from cable news. But all of those numbers, those are from 2017, that's from a Pew Survey all of those numbers in 2017 are down from 2016. In 2016, all those numbers were higher and the biggest drop came in local TV. In 2016 it was 46%. So in just one year it dropped 9%. So at the time the episode was being made, local news was a much bigger thing, and even though Greg Brock is sort of seeing the writing on the wall, at the time local news was a huge weight [crosstalk] yeah.

JOSH: [cross talk] a big deal.

JOSH: From what source do you think you get most of your news?

HRISHI: Online, for sure.

JOSH: Yeah, same with me. I get the *New York Times* delivered 5 days a week, I guess during the week days, and even that just sits there in it's little blue bag days because I've read the *New York Times* online.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: It's just amazing how times have changed .

HRISHI: What I love, I mean, I love that this is occurring in this same episode, they don't draw the lines together, which I think is fine because they don't really need to, basically what Greg Brock is saying, he's also invoking Schumpeter's Gale in that moment, he's saying don't worry about protecting this stuff so much because it's getting destroyed by new means of communication anyway.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Which I thought was a neat thing, you know, while talking about power and consolidation and stuff, they're also talking about destroying these institutions with new technology.

JOSH: Yeah, very good point. I had this... in the scene between Leo and Josh, when Leo says "who makes your suit", Josh checks in his pocket and says that the suit was made in Mexico, but I notice that it is a Hugo Boss suit and self respecting clothes horse knows that Hugo Boss's suits are made in Metzingen, Germany. So, just a little gaffe right there. Also worth mentioning that Hugo Boss was a member of the Nazi party and that all my *Scandal* suits were made by Hugo Boss. I guess Lyn likes Hugo Boss. They make lovely suits, but Hugo Boss was a member of the Nazi party and the Hugo Boss label provided uniforms for the SS and Wehrmacht. And I will put up a link, there's a really, really brilliant bit by Russell Brand who was accepting an award at some sort of awards show, co-sponsored by GQ and Hugo Boss, in which he just riffs on the Hugo Boss connection to Nazi Germany [laughing] at the event itself, on a dais, behind which is the brand name.

HRISHI: [laughing] that's great.

[Russell Brand's Oracle Award acceptance speech at GQ Men of the Year 2013 excerpt]

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N6DH0Jhglp4&t=2m45s>

Russell Brand: I am literally a comedian and it is my job to make jokes about things, you know, so Hugo Boss, like you know, it's fair enough, like might not have know, "We're selling a lot of these [expletive deleted]... they're flying off the shelves", "We had a lot of clients in the 30's and 40's, I can't remember all of them", Did you make a lot of elasticated crotches Hugo?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It is hilarious, and I'll put a link up to that.

HRISHI: Josh, I thought of you early on in this episode because the president says,

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I'm an economist, some would say half-decent. I don't need a primer on this.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I did write that down. Very disappointed. Again, I knew it; we've been through this before. Prime-r would be the British pronunciation of the word P R I M E R, as it applies to an introductory book, of course if you are talking about that first layer of material that goes on under paint, we in the United States call that a prime-r, but if it's a little intro, teaching book, we say primmer here in the United States, although, I guess, both are acceptable.

HRISHI: But not to you.

JOSH: Not to me, no.

HRISHI: How would you have pronounced E N S I G N?

JOSH: oh, En-sin.

HRISHI: Does everybody know that that's how that's pronounced?

JOSH: I don't know.

HRISHI: I think that's a word that I have not, that I have seen many times but maybe haven't heard out loud.

JOSH: I have many of those.

HRISHI: and then Nancy, while introducing Commander "Bangs"...

JOSH: ...Commander Kate "Bangs" Harper...

HRISHI: Commander Kate "Bangs" Harper, says,

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

NANCY: Top of her class at Annapolis. Once an ensign, always an ensign.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: And I said, or for me, never an ensign [crosstalk] cause I didn't know. I come from Long Island

JOSH: [crosstalk] You wanted the long "I". Fair enough

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah you do.

HRISHI: There's another part of this episode that I got delighted by in terms of the language.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Even Charlie gets in on the president, basically calling him a pedant/nerd. Josh and C.J. and Leo, they're trying to get the president to stick to a positive message about free trade

and not get lost in the weeds of policy and whatever. They're just like, free trade, we just want you to say we're creating better, higher paying jobs, and even Charlie jumps in and says,

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

CHARLIE: Due respect, sir, your answers on economic issues can be a bit...

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Polysyllabic?

C.J.: Academic.

LEO: I was going to go with incomprehensible.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Hey listen.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: All that aside, what I love about polysyllabic is that it's a word that describes itself.

JOSH: Oh, very good, yeah, indeed it is.

HRISHI: It's great [laughing] and I would like to please tweet at us with other examples of words that describe themselves.

JOSH: Oh nice.

HRISHI: As I was having that thought I thought of two that I think could apply: one is lugubrious. Lugubrious is a lugubrious word.

JOSH: it sounds like, this is what you're saying, it's onomatopoeic.

[West Wing Episode 3.19 excerpt]

NIKOLAI: I don't know what frumpy is, but onomatopoeically sounds right

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Polysyllabic is even, it's something else, it IS what it is.

HRISHI: It is what it is. Well lugubrious mean sad sounding.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And lugubrious is sad sounding.

JOSH: Oh, ok, no, you're right. It is what it is. Well done, very well done. What else you got?

HRISHI: How about kerfuffle?

JOSH: Kerfuffle.

HRISHI: It's a bit of a kerfuffle.

JOSH: Sure, I'll accept it. Very good [laughter] I want to play this game but I can't come up with anything off the top of my head.

HRISHI: Well tweet at us @WestWingWeekly Josh, and let us know what you think.

JOSH: I will, yeah.

HRISHI: Make sure to @WillBailey. I did think that they went one step too far when Carol says,

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

CAROL: Professor-in-Chief.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which I thought was cute, she calls the president professor-in-chief and the C.J. says "More like Professor Incoherent", which is clever but I think it is one strand of cleverness too far from the main trunk of the joke.

JOSH: I think you're right, didn't occur to me at the time but I'm going to give you a nod on it.

HRISHI: Yeah, ok.

JOSH: Yep. How about the Ben and C.J. of it all? We haven't even talked about it and I think there's a reason and I think it just doesn't really work.

HRISHI: It's really just sort of, it's one joke, it's one moment really, right? It's "Ben's here to see you"; "I don't have time for him, I can't be this kind of woman".

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: "You forgot your passport".

JOSH: Yeah, yeah, and we've really had that moment already when she's like, she does the big kiss and he's like, "wait, what are we talking about?" It's kind of a re-tread of that moment

HRISHI: Right, of her saying, you think I'm all about you and really I've got some other stuff and he comes back and shows that it's; he is not lovesick in the way that she thinks that he is.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: I thought that it was a cute gag, I liked the idea of "oh he's here to see you" and "ugh! I cannot, I don't have time for you"; "yeah, you left your passport, you can't get on the plane". That was great but it probably didn't need 3 beats in the episode.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: At the beginning of this episode, by the way, I had to go back to the first Will Bailey impression.

JOSH: Sure, sure.

HRISHI: I am now finally getting why people didn't like Will Bailey, why viewers had a negative opinion of him. He was trapped in the amber of season 4 in my mind for so long, in which I found him delightful.

JOSH: Thank you.

HRISHI: Prickly at times, but delightful, and so I was always, I just couldn't even imagine; people were like "oh Will Bailey, what an annoying character" and even as we got there, I'm like ok, he's switched to the vice president's staff as we discussed, in a move that I thought was perfectly reasonable and an interesting one, but now the way he's been used over and over again, and now it's almost kind of like...

JOSH: Just, why is he there?

HRISHI: Like I said, that one scene between Will and Josh is terrific.

JOSH: Yeah, no, I liked it.

HRISHI: But the first two scenes when he shows up and pops in to Josh and says, let me catch everyone up on what's going on, there's a protest, it's in Brussels, it's 200 tractors.

JOSH: No, absolutely.

HRISHI: And then I'm going to disappear.

JOSH: Somebody's gotta just go "hey, one man Greek chorus, get out of there".

HRISHI: Yes, exactly.

JOSH: We don't know need you, we'll carry the expositional weight of this episode without you.

HRISHI: And then comes into C.J.'s office, unannounced [laughing], just shows up and says "let me tell you about the FCC compromise". Which is not even the reason why he came into the office although I do like that Will knows everything that's going on. What are you doing? You're like the Microsoft paperclip.

JOSH: [laughs] Wow

HRISHI: "I see you're have a discussion about the FCC..."

JOSH: [laughing] That's funny. That's all I'm going to see now when I see myself [laughing] Curse you!

HRISHI: Have you ever wanted to see the Microsoft Office paperclip in a Hugo Boss suit?

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: This exchange with Will, there's this beautiful exchange about, about serving their boss, you know, Will says "Hoynes was pretty critical of free trade when you worked for him, wasn't he?" and Josh says "that was mostly politics" but then later, at the end of the exchange, Will lets him know that the vice president is going to distance himself from the free trade deal, just like Hoynes was. He says,

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

WILL: You did a great job. It's mostly politics.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's awesome. Some great writing.

JOSH: He's a good writer that Eli.

HRISHI: Yeah. Those tractors by the way, in the streets.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: Of Brussels, in 2003, I feel like this might be inspired in part by a protest in 2003 by the Irish Farmers Association, and the EU was adopting something called the Common Agriculture Policy, and it was distributing funds in a way that was unfair, seemed unfair to a lot of the farmers, and they actually drove 3000 tractors to Dublin.

JOSH: Wow.

HRISHI: From across Ireland, and this is the part that I love, only 300 went into Dublin city centre, the farmers agreed to keep most of the tractors outside of the city centre, so that they wouldn't disrupt traffic too badly.

JOSH: I was thinking that would have been a real pain in the ass during rush hour.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Well that was thoughtful of them.

HRISHI: It was, and then it turns out, this whole thing kind of came true because in 2015, there were actual farmers with their tractors in Brussels. There was a protest about food prices in the EU and that one got a little crazier because hay bales were set on fire ...[crosstalk] They tried to ram through police barricades...

JOSH: [crosstalk] Oh, oh dear

JOSH: I was hoping that you were just going to say that everybody who met in Ireland decided to make it a yearly thing and like, "let's go to Brussels this summer" [laughing] I just thought would've been cool, if they'd all stayed friends.

HRISHI: mm no, no. What did you think about Leo's line?

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

LEO: You campaign in poetry, you govern in prose.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Well, we've heard that before, no? Who said that?

HRISHI: Mario Cuomo said that

JOSH: Ah! I like it, it's pragmatic, it's practical, it's a very pretty way of saying you can't deliver on the things that you promise people when you try to get them to vote for you.

HRISHI: That's what I like, that's a beautiful turn of phrase, but the way Leo is using it, he's saying "yeah you promise one thing, and then when you show up, you tear that promise up and..."

JOSH: It's a florid way of saying "Ah [expletive deleted] 'em" [laughing].

HRISHI: [laughing] Exactly.

JOSH: Well, you know, wording matters.

HRISHI: Yeah, I was thinking in that scene, about Leo taking this position when Josh gets upset and says “oh what about this promise that was made?” and Leo says “you have to talk in abstractions and you were doing your job, and you did it well” and Josh says “look, you’re not the one who just screwed over all these people” and Leo says “neither are you, it’s the president’s agenda” and that was when I started to think about Leo and the Secretary of Labour position and his history and his closeness with Labour, and I thought, maybe Leo actually is anti free trade, but he also came to work for a boss...you could kind of see these three different people as a dynasty. Leo to Josh to Ryan Pierce, all kind of learning from the other one, that they’re views don’t matter, they have to serve their bosses position; and Leo is the one who’s done it really well and has completely internalized it as such so you don’t even know what his own thoughts on this are, and you see Ryan has done it really well but he’s conscious of what he’s doing.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And Josh is in the middle and he ought to be closer, that was one of the things I really like that about this episode. Later on in the episode, Josh and C.J. have this little moment and he kind of lets her in on what’s been going on with him and he says,

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

JOSH You spend your whole career trying to get in the room as if...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought, can’t you see that that’s what Donna has been trying to do.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: She’s like, I only have this one career. She’s using the same language and he just can’t hear her.

JOSH: Yeah. Well I think that’s perhaps by intent from Eli. It’s very good. It’s very well done.

HRISHI: But I also thought, one of the inconsistencies with the president was around this idea of making a promise and then not keeping it. I mean, he clearly feels bad about the fact that they made.

JOSH: Promises to the CWA.

HRISHI: Yeah, but in *Shut Down* we saw the lengths that the president was willing to go over a broken promise. He literally shut down the government because Haffley said one thing and then showed up and didn’t stick to his word, so it is about as rigid as you could possibly be, but here

in his own case he's allowing himself this flexibility that feels like he's playing things fast and loose a little bit.

JOSH: Yeah. Well, there you go, there's an object lesson in his promises and my promises.

HRISHI: Right. I would have loved if at some point if someone posed the question "why is an American worker's job worth more than an Indian worker's job?".

JOSH: I don't know, sir, but it is.

HRISHI: Yeah, and of course the first answer is, because the American pays taxes here, and the Indian person doesn't, but this whole idea of globalization is that we are all connected.

JOSH: Greater community.

HRISHI: Yeah. These invisible walls and pretend things just end at the borders. But, there's something really naïve, I think, about the president's free trade position, in terms of his other policies and his concern for the child in the garbage heap in India who can't get a low wage job. I mean, I think it's all fine and good to be for globalization in terms of how it might bring countries together and protect diplomatic relations, but the actual fact of it is that all that capital that gets created, stays consolidated with the tops of the corporations. I mean it is the same thing that is going on with the media companies. He isn't really changing the life of a child in India by enacting this free trade agreement, what he's really doing is increasing profits [crosstalk] Yeah, the JCN CEO gets to have a bigger project margin, but it's not like those profit margins then somehow get evenly distributed to all the workers everywhere. So when he's saying "we're destroying this way of life, the Schumpeter's creative destruction, is for the cause of progress, like as if "oh everybody will eventually be better in the long run" but actually in the long the run, that's not the case. The capitalist doesn't, you know we found out that the trickledown economics.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Cheap labor for the companies.

JOSH: Does not work.

HRISHI: It does not actually work, and it seems strange to me that someone with his political leanings and his economic education.

JOSH: Would be making that argument.

HRISHI: Yeah, unless you were also, simultaneously saying "plus on the other hand, on the other side we're doing all this stuff domestically to close all these loop holes and change the tax codes, so that all the capital that's created by these US companies investing in foreign places, ends up raising the baseline level for everyone and everybody gets prosper from it.

JOSH: Well I think that's the great conversation that this episode needed that it didn't get, and that is sort of just couched in lofty and more general terms, like it will ultimately help the economy overall.

HRISHI: Yeah. There are really nice things, I think that the episode is so packed we don't get a change to really linger on some of the stuff that could use more detail.

JOSH: Unpacking, yeah.

HRISHI: Unpacking, yeah, exactly. It's all packed and then we don't get to unpack it. Joining us now is the director of this episode Richard Schiff.

JOSH: Huzzah!

RICHARD: How you guys doing?

JOSH: Welcome back.

HRISHI: You're here in my house; it's a real honor, thank you for coming all the way out here.

RICHARD: The honor is mine; to sit in traffic for an hour and a half to get here was a pleasure.

HRISHI: [laughing] Well let's start at the beginning, actually. How did you end up directing this episode?

RICHARD: I think from the very beginning of our work together on *The West Wing*, I think Tommy Schlamme of course always noticed I was aware of everything on the set, and made many suggestions for other actors irrelevant of me, when I wasn't even in the scenes, and quite often I was asked by him, by Aaron, by John Wells "When are you going to direct? When are you going to direct?" and I started out as a director in the theatre, I had my own theatre company, and at one point came upon a revelation or an epiphany, which was: I don't really like it. And it was, more than anything, the sense of responsibility for everyone else's wellbeing and work.

JOSH: That's why I don't like being a parent.

RICHARD: Exactly, exactly the same issues. And so I was resistant to it for those reasons, but thought I should give it a shot, and this, I don't remember why this particular episode but I know they were looking for one where, thankfully, I was very light in the previous episode, so that I could have time to prep. I don't remember the specifics of why now, except that I knew we were going to be done soon [laughing] you know, what season, what was this, five or six?

HRISHI: Season 5.

RICHARD: So...

JOSH: Take the opportunity while you had it.

RICHARD: Yeah, take the opportunity, I guess, and I know I had the, present company excepted, the love and the respect of the cast.

JOSH: [laughing] come on. I was delighted to have you direct.

RICHARD: Were you really?

JOSH: Was I difficult?

RICHARD: No, not at all. I actually like the couple of scenes you were in. I just watched again, for the first time, since I saw the last edit. I didn't even watch it on TV when it was on.

JOSH: No kidding?

RICHARD: There's a lot that I was, shockingly, pleased with, because I remember being "This is frustrating, it's a frustrating thing to put it all together". I was, as smart as I think I am, or as other people think I am, once the responsibility rests on your shoulders, all of a sudden, instead of criticizing how they're shooting it, I have to decide how I'm going to shoot myself [laughing] and then criticize myself. And I have to say upfront, that without Andrew Bernstein I would have been lost. And Andrew Bernstein was first AD for a few years by then, and I knew him as a good guy who was always very nice, respectful, ran a great set, didn't get to know him that well but I just knew he was a good guy from my neck of the woods on the west side of Manhattan, and I worked with him and he would make suggestions for shots and I remember the opening sequence which was one shot, the teaser was one shot until Donna and Josh split at The Oval Office.

JOSH: It's a great Steadicam sequence.

RICHARD: It's great, isn't it?!

JOSH: Yeah.

RICHARD: And it was Andrew who helped me solve the problems. One particular one was, when we were inside and Josh, I think, maybe meets Ed and Larry and then the camera kind of spins around but there was this gap, and then Andrew fixed it by having a sound cart go into the Roosevelt Room, where they were going to hold the press conference, and that filled the gap of this other camera move, and I went "wow, that genius", that what he does, he fills in the gaps with background and would so on, and then he...

HRISHI: Oh so visually there was a gap?

RICHARD: Visually there was a gap I mean, yeah, because all these fancy camera moves and stuff, there not fancy but, you know, you're turning the camera around because they stop and you know you're going to be leading them or following them to the next part of that walk and talk, and you can't just turn the camera around, you gotta have a reason and the sound cart became the thing to follow so that we could get around.

HRISHI: Huh!

RICHARD: And just that simple solution and I went "ok, this guy is really cool" and then I got to know him and found out his father was blacklisted as a screenwriter in the 50's and that he was a film guy from the time he was a baby, and he knew what he was doing. And after this episode I went up Andrew, "do you want to direct?" and he said "yeah!" and I went to John Wells and said "you gotta give this guy a shot, he's gonna be great" and I remember they did and then they gave him another shot, and now he's one of the most well respected and accomplished directors in television and...

JOSH: Yeah

RICHARD: He hasn't given me a dime.

ALL: [laughter]

JOSH: He did direct me in an episode of Dulé's show *Psych*, in the *Let's Get Hairy* episode, so he got to direct me.

RICHARD: You got to do *Psych* and I never got to go up there.

JOSH: You paid it forward, but I ultimately got paid.

RICHARD: Yeah, there you go so I can get 10% from you [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] I can't pay it, I can't pay it forward because I can't direct. So, how about the transition from theatre directing to film directing?

RICHARD: Well that's thing, and here's where I had a great advantage, because the cast was very tight. I'm used to seeing how it works with bodies visually, and deciding how to ultimate block it and react to what the actors are doing, that's what I did in theatre. So the cast came in on a day off, which was a lot to ask considering we already had 80-hour weeks.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: And they all came in on our day off, I don't know if it was a Sunday or a Monday, and I got to rehearse like a play, the first whole sequence walk and talk and then the whole scene in The Oval Office. Which was great, and so when that was the first day of shooting, but I already

had the scene completely blocked like we had been rehearsing in a theatre, so the first day was quite remarkable in that I made the day.

HRISH: Right.

RICHARD: I didn't go over. Everyone was quite impressed. I don't know if they knew that I had a whole day of rehearsal.

ALL: [laughing]

JOSH: They didn't know about the union infractions involved.

RICHARD: Yeah, they didn't know about all of the rules violations that I implemented but, so that first day was great and it was downhill from in terms of making my day from there on in. But I was very grateful to the cast for coming in on a day off and gave me kind of a kick-start.

HRISHI: That's really nice.

JOSH: That's a great story.

HRISHI: So everyone must have been very supportive of you directing. This isn't something that would happen often right?

RICHARD: Well at that point, in year 5 they don't need it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: At all. They don't have any questions you know what I mean? It was really just for me and so...very grateful, very appreciative.

HRISH: The only person who is really a guest in this I think is really Mary McCormack shows up for the first time in this episode.

RICHARD: Yeah.

HRISHI: But everyone else in the episode is someone who you'd worked with before by that, by that point.

RICHARD: Is that true? I don't remember.

JOSH: Mm-hmm yeah.

RICHARD: Steven Culp, Steven Culp had been there before.

JOSH: That's right, recurring guy, yeah.

HRISHI: It was a perfect script in some ways for you to...

RICHARD: It was also all in The White House, which was nice, I didn't have to deal with locations, which I did the next I directed, which I maintain was a disaster, but this one was all inside The White House and I do remember creating a bookends, where it wasn't in the script and it...It's interesting how it creates chaos on the production team when you have an idea that isn't written down. So I don't remember where it used to start but I wanted the idea of Josh, Brad's character, coming in from a trip, having to deal with this crisis and this betrayal, of the promise to the CWA workers and the trade deal and all that, and then taking off again, I think to Brussels for the economic summit, right? And so I created the caravan in the beginning and then have them go out at the end and that was a massive 6 hours of meetings and "What are doing? What are you doing with the cars? Why do you need the cars?" and it didn't occur to me that it was an expense.

HRISHI: Right, yeah.

RICHARD: I mean I'm sure we shot them both on the same day, the beginning and the end, so that they weren't...but you don't think of, as an actor, and then you're directing and there were gaps in my understanding of how difficult some things were. There was one shot that I loved, and I just watched it again and I still love it, which was from the perspective of the TV when Josh was in the middle of this crisis. The scene with you, before you show up and have that little scene about free trade, and there's a...it starts with a shot from up above as Josh is looking up at the TV and then there's a shot from that perspective. That took monumental effort on my part to get that shot.

HRISHI: Why?

RICHARD: Because they said it was gonna take too long; and we don't need it; and it wasn't Tommy Schlamme's *West Wing*, you know, Tommy would have said "Go for it" I think, this was a different era, we were much more of a factory at this point, and...

HRISHI: A more budget conscious show?

RICHARD: Yeah, I mean they were now in the mode of let's make as much money as we can before we die. Which is, you know...

JOSH: I'm still in that mode.

RICHARD: Corporate America's mode and the Josh Malina mode of going through life and just grabbing whatever you can.

JOSH: Thanks [laughing].

HRISHI: [laughing]

RICHARD: Yeah, so, but, and I love that shot so I'm glad we, and as it turns out, it did take forever, because the perspective of the camera, those fluorescent lights, those row of fluorescent lights looks funny, and so you had to skew them differently, and you had to bring up each fluorescent to a degree so that from the ground it looks like an angle but from the top it looks even.

HRISHI: Right [giggles].

RICHARD: And that took forever! And I was like "Oh [expletive deleted], they were right". It was just taking forever.

ALL: [laughing]

JOSH: How did you go to the mat for that shot? Was it just arguing it with John Wells?

RICHARD: It was such a conceptual thing for me to have a shot of Josh kind of in this maze and looking down from above and him just feeling really small at that point.

JOSH: Sure.

RICHARD: That I thought it was just that important and I guess I'm just annoyingly insistent and stubborn about everything and it happened to pay off for that shot [laughing].

JOSH: That's what you want in a director.

RICHARD: To be annoying and stubborn?

JOSH: Ahh...well the second thing anyway [laughing].

RICHARD: Well, yeah.

JOSH: Stubborn is good and attention to detail and a passion and buying in so deeply that you fight for a specific shot.

RICHARD: Yeah, no, absolutely. You do want that. It was a very interesting dynamic, being a director, because on the set, and Josh could probably vouch for this, I had an enormous amount of power because I was an actor who cared about everything and had proven to people that it's not a selfish thing, it's not like "what about me?" It's really, I just cared about the success of every scene and the integrity of every actor, especially when they couldn't or were unable to protect themselves, so I stood up for people quite often and had gotten the respect. John Wells, I was told, used to tell new directors at the tone meetings "Just listen to Richard, just listen to him. You're not going to want to, but just listen to him". And so there was this power that I had that I wielded probably a little too much, especially with new directors, but in this case, it was fascinating because once I sat that the tone meeting table, I suddenly realized I had absolutely

no power as a director. I had all this power as an actor, but at as a director it was “No, you can’t do that. No, you can’t do that. No! You can’t do that and what do you want to do with this, you gotta tell us now”. And then on the second day when I started to go over in time, all of a sudden the suits show up. It was, what’s Tommy’s nephew’s name, who became the producer?

JOSH: Dylan.

RICHARD: He’s gone on to do some great things, but he was the guy that would come over and stand there, like a mafia lynchpin. If you were on the verge of using up too much time in this scene or in that scene and the two of them, I forgot the other guy, but they just stood there, like you know, they were packing you know...

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: That’s the job, stand and look at your watch every now and then...

RICHARD: And then, ever since then I look at other directors when the suits show up, and they just keep going and they focus and they know it’s normal but for me, all of a sudden I felt this incredible pressure and I didn’t enjoy that part of it. I kept looking at them going “What? What do you want? Speak! Don’t just stand there. What do you want?”

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: I think you’ve told us in the past there were times when you would get frustrated with new directors who would come on the show.

RICHARD: Yeah.

HRISHI: And I was wondering, were there things when it came time to do this episode, did you have a list in your mind of things that you had seen first time directors on the show do that you knew you weren’t going to do or things that you had in mind that you’re like, I’m going to do this differently.

RICHARD: Well the biggest thing was I was going to go through every take and find the most poignant moments and moments that often I am shocked at didn’t make the edit when I watch something that I’m in, it’s like “how could they not use that?” I had a conversation with Tommy once; Tommy might have mentioned it on one of the podcasts, which was this, they were thinking of casting my ex-wife and they were coming up with these very character-y type women.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: And I said I think Toby’s kind of sexy actually, did you see the moment between me and, I think I mentioned this in Ireland...

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: With Marlee Matlin and blah, blah, blah, and he goes “what moment?” And I go “it’s take four, I decided to switch it up” and he goes “take four? We’re done with you in take one. We have so much, you know, we have so many things to worry about, and you’re always great in take one” and it’s like “What?!!” and from that point on he told me to asterisk moments or takes to the script supervisor and he promised to look at everything that I asterisked. So I decided that I’m going to do that to an actor, I’m going to look at every possible moment that they may have had a surprise moment, something they didn’t expect, something...and of course found out in editing that there’s no chance! There’s no chance of looking at every take, you’ve got...

JOSH: There’s just no time?

RICHARD: There’s not time. You’ve gotta tell...the editor does a first pass, you look at the first pass and if you have something that you didn’t accomplish that you thought you had accomplished then you would go look at other takes. Or if I remembered some, one of the takes, or had made a note, I would go say “no, no, no try take four, let me just see take four” and then I’d see the thing that I knew was there.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: But I couldn’t go look at them all.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: For what I didn’t know was there.

HRISHI: Right, right, yeah.

RICHARD: And that was very disappointing.

HRISHI: Right, there might have been some beautiful performance in take eight but you just never...

RICHARD: Little moments. In looking at it today, which I did, there were some beautiful little moments and I’m really happy about. There’s one where the president sits down when Mary McCormack comes in the office.

HRISHI: Oh, I love this!

RICHARD: And he’s got this little like, I don’t know what to do with you.

HRISHI: Yes!

JOSH: Yes, yes! I wrote something down at that moment.

RICHARD: That's an example of something that he might have just done that I've obviously noticed it on the day, but had I not noticed it and then searched through the takes and then found that, that would have been gold, that would have been the gold I was looking for.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: C.J. when she, her and her boyfriend, and she's dismissed him and then he goes, well basically his action is I won't bother you anymore, and then she goes "Wait a second" and then she does this little wave of her arm.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: As she's coming around from her desk, about to ask him to stay for lunch and that's the gold.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: That's the kind of gold I love, when actors, their physicality is revelatory of what's happening.

HRISHI: That moment with the president and Kate Harper is so great. I think I had written down that it seemed almost like Peter Falk as Columbo-esq the way he just kind of gets scattered for a second.

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: He's read her CV and I just love that this is a thing that we've come back to in *The West Wing* and every time there's just a little bit of a new flavor to it, which is what is like for a new person to come into the team? And here, this is a new thing, which is that the president, he was the one that was a little bit flustered.

RICHARD: I remember going are NSA Deputy Director's really this cute and adorable?

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: Well our only past example is Christian Slater so, yes.

JOSH: So, yes.

RICHARD: Yes. Ok?

HRISHI: What was your dynamic like with Eli like on this episode?

RICHARD: Oh, it was great and again, completely polar opposite to the next experience as director. Eli was very open to notes that I had about the show in either tightening or delving in a little deeper on certain issues. His understanding of free trade is obviously 100 times more than mine will ever be and also with the conglomeration of media, and isn't fascinating by the way, how those two storylines have played out of the last 12 years? Eli was obviously working on this as the real person in the West Wing and understood these issues really well, and however it happened, I thought the episode was really well written with some beautiful lines, and I love the story about Canute the Viking king.

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: ...wanted his subjects to be aware of his limitations, so he led them down to the sea and he commanded that the tide roll out. It didn't

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: and then later when Josh and Donna are making up and Donna goes,

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

DONNA: They're still in your office.

JOSH: Yeah.

DONNA: What are they doing?

JOSH: Waiting by the sea.

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: And it was beautiful.

HRISHI: Yeah, so, the three actors who aren't normally in the episode come in there, the ones representing the CWA.

RICHARD: Yeah. Well I got to cast my friend Wayne Duvall who was the main guy, Parsons, and Wayne is an old and very dear friend of mine, who I just, when I read this thought, Wayne was not only perfect for this but, against type. He looks more like a teamster.

JOSH: Yeah, that's exactly right. I think a Jimmy Hoffa type.

RICHARD: Yeah.

HRISHI: Well I thought that was such a nice thing about the casting, because he talks about how people have evolved in their careers in order to try and keep up with the changing technology.

RICHARD: Right.

HRISHI: And so here is a person who maybe you wouldn't look at and see computer programmer but he's been doing what he's had to.

RICHARD: Right, exactly right.

JOSH: He looks like he's on the later iteration of the career.

RICHARD: Right. Could easily be one of those coal miners that was, took it upon themselves to retrain. Yeah, exactly right. He was a real...and I wanted the look, having directed Wayne for *Lefty* when I was in college.

JOSH: I did that play in college.

RICHARD: Did you really?

JOSH: Yeah.

RICHARD: Different colleges. My production was really good, I have to say.

JOSH: And mine was...ok.

RICHARD: So yeah, I wanted him to look like an AFL-CIO possible teamster and also the fact, I love the way Wayne delivers the line,

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

BILL (CWA): One thing about the communications workers – we know how to communicate.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Fantastic. You're right.

RICHARD: There was such an unveiled threat and such a feeling of betrayal and I just thought he was fantastic.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Did you have to bring him in to read for John or...?

RICHARD: Yeah, well there's something, yeah, he had to come in and read [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] Jump through the hoop, sure.

RICHARD: And Wayne is a very lovely guy, you know, who is very energetic and he overblew the audition a little bit, came in know he was angry and stuff and I remember the best direction I ever gave to anyone, cause I wanted him to get the part, and I gave him this direction which was, you can be as angry as you want to be, just don't let him know it and that kind of made it more of a thing that had been boiling, rather than something was played.

HRISHI: Exploding, yeah.

RICHARD: Yeah.

HRISHI: Can you tell me more about what your vision was for Brad's character in the episode? Like the book ending thing is really beautifully realized. I guess he really does, Josh and I spoke about this earlier, he doesn't have so much of the information both sort of in terms of actual information and in terms of moral information at the beginning, and then you see him sort of have that unravel by the end.

RICHARD: Yeah. It's interesting because it was; there was a lot of Toby themes going on, for Josh. And if I made a mistake it might have been that I was bringing a little bit too much of Toby's perspective to Josh. I don't know how Brad would think of that. I thought he was great in the episode, but it was, I focused on the betrayal. The fact that they made a promise and that he was undercut. So there's this great sense of betrayal, which of course, you know, is a Toby theme and so I kind of landed on that part of it and I don't know if I overkilled that a little bit. For instance, the scene with the president, I had them sitting at the desk kind of intimately and that might be more of a Toby/Bartlet relationship.

JOSH: Huh. That's interesting.

RICHARD: And I wondered about that again, when I saw it and very little otherwise. I think Brad would have come to same conclusions feeling betrayed and so on and the steps with which he figured it out or that it slapped him in the face.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: So first it's JCN the tech guy, then it's the Speaker of the House, and then it's Jesse Bradford's character.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: McKenna's "butt boy".

JOSH: Wow [laughs].

RICHARD: Well that's what the Clinton White House called Charlie Young, was "butt boy". I don't know if you guys knew that.

JOSH: I didn't know that.

RICHARD: It's a...well...yeah...never mind. Speaking of which, the way Leo, the way the incredible Josh Spencer played that progression, and if you go back and look at it, cause I watched it twice, and you see what he does in the oval, the way he talks Josh up in front of the president.

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

LEO: You should have seen him. Like a Bull Terrier crossed with a Rottweiler crossed with a Fuller Brush salesman.

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: and then later on when Brad has some issues in Leo's office about this kind of sabotage and Leo brushes it off and says: this is the way it is. It's a free market blah, blah, blah, or he says that to C.J..

JOSH: When the president wants a deal you're...

RICHARD: Yeah, you're the guy.

JOSH: It's your job to close it

RICHARD: It's your job, and Josh says I'm gonna take this to the president and we leave Leo going I hate when I have to do this to my guys. I hate when I have to send them in knowing that they're going to be pissed off when the find, after they win and they find out what, how shallow the win is, you know?

JOSH: See I question whether Leo would have done that, or had the, had the difficult conversation first, and then sent them in to close the deal.

RICHARD: Yeah well in reality Josh wouldn't have done it. Couldn't have done it as well

JOSH: You think on principle he wouldn't have negotiated the deal?

RICHARD: He certainly would have had a fight over it first and I'm not sure he would have been successful, because we see how he is once he realizes the failure of the big picture.

JOSH: So you think without his heart in it, he wouldn't have negotiated as well?

RICHARD: Yeah, no, I think that certainly what Leo and the president came to the conclusion of, that that was the case.

HRISHI: Giving him three quarters of the information would make for a more effective Josh.

RICHARD: Yeah.

HRISHI: In that, in the...

RICHARD: Yeah. It's a multiple betrayal. It's like: a) you don't trust me with the truth.

JOSH: Yeah, it's a big betrayal, I agree.

RICHARD: And maybe I was right to land on that as much as I did. And I worried about the last scene cause again they're sitting down in this intimate setting and I wonder if he wasn't, if Josh wasn't just "oh well, on to the next battle...".

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: ...a little bit more. So at the very least I noticed when he gets in the car and he's still feeling that betrayal, the he should've, I should've asked him to bring out some work and just go on to the next thing.

HRISH: Right, right. So even though he's in the feeling, he has to keep going.

RICHARD: Move on. It's called, there's an exercise in acting class called "life goes on". So even if you've lost a loved one or something, you still have to wash the dishes. You still have to go on to the next thing. You still have to...yeah.

HRISHI: One of my favorite ways in which Josh's arc manifests in this episode is the way he talks about farmers at the beginning.

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

JOSH: That they can't cling to a dying way of life, that free trade means that some of them may have to wear neckties, that they can't beat Pentium chips back into plough shares. Take you pick.

[end excerpt]

HRISH: And then by then end he's the one who says "stop mocking the farmers".

RICHARD: "They're just trying to make a living."

HRISH: Yeah “they’re trying to scratch out a living.” That it’s taken all these messengers and his own betrayal for him to come around to it, but he’s done a complete 180 on his attitude.

RICHARD: What I love about Eli’s take on this and the writing and what he as a White House staffer working for the vice-president and also for the Clinton White House and for Al Gore, is you get, you really feel what it’s like when they suddenly realize there’s flesh and blood or as they say in the episode, blood and muscle, that that’s what you’re dealing with.

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

C.J.: And I don’t know who the FCC who is looking out for, but I came to here to look for the little guy. How come only the big guy is trying to hire me?

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: When you can’t touch the people or help or defend the people that you got into this for in the first place, that slap in the face epiphany must be tough. And this was one of those.

JOSH: Well said!

HRISHI: Josh, what was your question?

JOSH: I was going to just point out another scene that I like very much from this episode and that I thought you directed beautifully and that’s a, there’s a little bit in the hall towards the end of the episode. C.J. and Josh meet up.

RICHARD: Yeah.

JOSH: And sort of question their role in things.

[West Wing Episode 5.19 excerpt]

JOSH: You spend your whole career trying to get in the room, as if you’re the one who can square every circle. And it turns out...

C.J.: A circle’s a circle.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: You have the camera actually circling them and sort of come to a stop as she says that line.

RICHARD: Yeah.

JOSH: it’s kind of beautiful. Very poetic.

RICHARD: And I noticed that. I noticed that. I went “wow, that’s nice”.

JOSH: It really is.

RICHARD: And I wonder if it was my idea cause I remember Brad and I often talking about how we hate those roundabout shots, you know it’s like, just keep the camera still, please. Stop making us dizzy.

JOSH: [laughs] Just settle down.

RICHARD: So I think it’s one of the reasons I made sure it was just one circle. But what I loved about the scene between the two of them is that it’s also great writing and beautifully acted, it’s two comrades who are going down in their battles.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: Two people fighting for the little guy, who are losing and there’s this very sweet little private “kiss” really, between two comrades who are alone.

HRISHI: Were there things that you learned that ended up affecting how you approached the show as an actor afterwards?

RICHARD: Yeah. Yeah I wasn’t nearly as mean to new directors as I was before. I kind of understood John Spencer, who we all adored beyond words, as a very impassioned actor and very, very demanding that everything be justified and it’s one of, I loved, I felt he was an ally on the set. And in that first scene we had blocked it on our day off and the camera came around from behind the president and in this one particular shot I wanted to see everybody, you don’t want to see one person blocked, and John was blocked. And I said “John, can you just step over like half a step?” and he goes “why would I do that?!” [laughs] it was like, I don’t...“why would I do that? I’ve no reason to step over!” He got really mad at me and I said “I just...so I can see you” [laughs] and he went “Oh, ok”. Well, what happens with directors is that they often try to give you motivation, instead of I just want to see you in the shot [laughs].

JOSH: [laughs]

RICHARD: Because we’ll figure out the motivation to move.

JOSH: You got a taste of working with Richard Schiff, that’s what you got.

RICHARD: Yeah, I don’t think it was that bad.

ALL: [laugh]

HRISHI: Thank you so much for talking to us about it.

RICHARD: No, it's my pleasure.

JOSH: We've done it. That's the end of another episode.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for listening and thanks to Richard Schiff for joining us. You can follow Richard on Twitter @Richard_Schiff, if you don't follow him already.

JOSH: You can follow us @[our names] (@JoshMalina and @HrishiHirway)

HRISHI: and you can follow the podcast @WestWingWeekly

JOSH: Do that. Why not?

HRISHI: Also, some exciting news. We have brand new merch.

JOSH: That is exciting.

HRISHI: Just in time for thanksgiving, we have a *Shibboleth* themed lapel pin that we're introducing.

JOSH: You can check it out at

HRISHI: www.thewestwingweekly.com/knife

JOSH: Knife! We're so badass.

HRISHI: [laughs] It's a lapel pin inspired by *Shibboleth*. It's plated in antique nickel and it is a knife and it says, "I'm proud of you" on the top of it. And if there's someone that you're proud of, this would be a good gift.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Do people give gifts for thanksgiving?

JOSH: They do now.

HRISHI: Other than President Bartlet?

JOSH: It's a tradition that just started.

HRISHI: That's right. So check that out. It's my favorite thing that we've ever made, actually, for the podcast, although I know it's very narrowly focused.

JOSH: It's pretty nifty.

HRISHI: It's really beautiful and honestly the photos of it we have online don't do it justice when you see it in person. It's really something.

JOSH: Oh and hey, another piece of exciting news. We are going live again. We are doing a live event here in Los Angeles.

HRISHI: That's right, we're going to be discussing the season six premiere with special guest Mary McCormack.

JOSH: That's gonna be fun.

HRISHI: Tickets are gonna go on sale on Wednesday October 24th, at 12pm Pacific, 3pm Eastern time and you can find the link to buy tickets www.thewestwingweekly.com/live.

JOSH: It's all ages, so bring your babies, but do the right thing – buy them a seat.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: No lap audience allowed.

HRISHI: Except me, on your lap.

JOSH: Oh great. Now you've blown our whole opening.

HRISHI: Come see the show at the Orpheum in downtown LA. It will be on November 16th. Doors will be at 7pm and we hope to see you there.

JOSH: You can purchase tickets by going to www.thewestwingweekly.com/live. Thanks to Margaret Miller, Nick Song, and Zack McNees for their contributions to this episode.

HRISHI: And thanks again to you for listening to this episode.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

RICHARD: What's next?

[Outro Music]