

The West Wing Weekly  
5.20: "No Exit"  
Guests: Former Senator Tom Daschle, Wilson Cruz, & Eli Attie

[Intro Music]

JOSH: We're back, you're listening to The West Wing Weekly. I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway and today we're talking about "No Exit". It's season 5 episode 20.

JOSH: Let me throw some names at you. This episode was written by Carol Flint & Debora Cahn. The story was conceived by Carol Flint & Mark Goffman and the episode was directed by Julie Hébert. Julie being the second person with an accent ague in her name:

HRISHI: And what was the air date [french accent, pronounced "herr-day"]

JOSH: Oooh, nice, Brilliant! April 28th, 2004.

HRISHI: Here is a synopsis: After a black-tie dinner, the president and his staff are locked down in the White House when a foreign substance is detected inside, forcing an odd-coupling of people who are forced to occupy small rooms where they share personal reflections. And some turn confrontational when Toby accuses Will of backstabbing Bartlet.

JOSH: The odd-coupling... sorry, sounds like a great idea for a TV show...

HRISHI: [chuckles] As the inspection continues, the president, Fiderer, and Charlie submit to intense inspection; while in other corners C.J. has strong career advice for Donna, and Josh queries Security Advisor Kate on why his joke was deleted from the Chief's speech.

JOSH: Before we jump in, I want to say, we threw out in our last podcast episode a request to come up with what Will Bailey's expositional nickname would be.

HRISHI: Yeah, @WillBailey, The Microsoft Office Paperclip...

JOSH: Exactly. The consensus seems to be that it would be a "William Tell"

HRISHI: A William Tell [chuckles]

JOSH: Right? Not bad!

HRISHI: That's not bad, that's not bad.

JOSH: A variety of people suggested that including: Grace Dobbin, Tim Kirk, Ben Greenfield Darell Anthony, & Amazon Queen Kate. I'm sure there are others, thank you all. I think this is the clear winner.

HRISHI: Great, I might still refer to him as the Microsoft Office Paperclip though.

JOSH: Yeah, I like that too

HRISHI: But it's not as concise.

JOSH: There's a moment in this episode when President Bartlet says,

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: That's what I call 'Will power'*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I would like to add that voiceover to Will's making it rain in season 4

HRISHI: Oh, yeah! That *is* his Will power. Before we even start, I just want to mention that when we were first launching The West Wing Weekly, we did some press and did a few interviews and a couple people asked us what were our favorite West Wing episodes? What were we most looking forward to? And I remember on multiple occasions you said "No Exit". And you know, I hadn't seen the episode at the time but now I have and I clearly understand why this is one of your favorites.

JOSH: Yes, I had a great time. You know, great material, written for me... and in one feature of it in common with one of my other favorite episodes to shoot, "Arctic Radar" is that I got to work with Richard and go head-to-head with him... to take him on and I just love that sort of challenge and opportunity.

HRISHI: Yeah, this is maybe my favorite Will/Toby storyline since "Arctic Radar", I think... which is also one of my favorites. And it's really nice to see you really letting it rip. You know we get to see Richard do his thing often, but it's nice to see you really letting it all out. Those scenes are fantastic.

JOSH: Thanks, see it was good fun to shoot. And I also just think, character-wise, the two of them, it's been bubbling under the surface... this mutual resentment, anger, aggravation... and it's about time that it bubbled to the surface. I'm glad the writers and John Wells gave them the opportunity to go at it and get more of it out in the open. It's kind of a multi-scene couples therapy session.

HRISHI: [chuckles] Absolutely. As the synopsis mentioned, everyone is kind of sequestered into these different areas and it just quickly...here's where those different areas are. In Ring 1 we have the president, and Charlie, and Debbie versus Anthrax [Josh laughs]. In Ring 2 we have Leo versus Abbey. [cross talk] It's the drugs ring, maybe. In Ring 3, we have Will versus Toby, the speechwriting ring. In Ring 4, we have C.J. versus Donna, the boys ring/career advice ring/bechdel test failure ring. [cross talk]. And then in the final Ring, we have Josh Lyman and Kate Harper in the [singing] "Getting to Know You" Ring. The who knows what, what do they know and [cross talk].

JOSH: [cross talk] [chuckles] Mmm, good matchup. [cross talk] Ha! I knew that was coming! [cross talk] It's a five-ring circus, this episode.

HRISHI: That's right

JOSH: There are two other little things about the Toby/Will Ring. One, I love that after insulting Toby in a previous scene about his age, Toby is then whistling "Sunrise, Sunset" from Fiddler on the Roof Which I thought had double resonance to me. Toby says something about how he's sailing off into the sunset of his life... or something like that, but also the lyrics of the song, "Is this the little girl I carried/ Is this the little boy at play" is kind of... there is a little bit of a father/paternal thing with Will, and Will's kind of grown up and moved on. It's almost like Toby is mourning the loss of their more innocent, familial relationship. One last other thing, in one of these scenes, Richard is rather inelegantly balancing a plank of wood on his hand. I think I made a play that I should be doing that because I am -incredibly- good at that. I could balance it on my forehead, I could balance it on my nose, I could balance it on my foot. We decided the energy wasn't right for this scene, and it would be weird that I had "Cirque du Soleil-ian" ability to balance things. I was like, "Oh! But I'm really good!" And they were like, "Yeah, you're too good. It's gonna look ridiculous. [cross talk] Oh yeah, I'll try to do it more.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Special episode of the podcast.

HRISHI: I think that could make some great audio... I'd be saying "Wow folks, Josh is balancing this thing on his nose. I wish you could see this!" We have a wealth of guests for this episode. We have former Senator Tom Daschle, whose office was once targeted by an anthrax attack. First of all, the timing of this is crazy!

JOSH: I feel like we open a lot of our discussions with "How are we having this discussion on this day?" Sometimes it's to the day. Although the storyline in "No Exit" involves a possible "bacteriological" attack, we are talking to each other and discussing this episode on a day when multiple explosive devices have been discovered - having been sent to a variety of democrats and liberals, including George Soros, Barak Obama, Hillary Clinton, Eric Holder [cross talk] CNN itself, and Maxine Waters, yeah, and I heard on the radio that CNN had a drill similar to what we see in "No Exit" today and that most of the people involved, the way you do, figured it was just a drill.

HRISHI: [cross talk] and even CNN.

HRISHI: Well this is very real, unfortunately, and we're going to hear from Senator Daschle about the very real experience that he had back in the weeks following September 11th. We also are going to catch up with Wilson Cruz, [cross talk] who played Jack Sosa; who we first met in "Access" and makes a brief appearance in this episode and it'll give us a chance to talk to him. And before that, joining us now is Eli Attie.

JOSH: [cross talk] Right on.

JOSH: The recently married Eli Attie.

ELI: Why thank you!

JOSH: Siman Tov & Mazel Tov & Mazel Tov & Siman Tov

ELI: I see everything through rose colored glasses now.

HRISHI: Eli, you are not a credited writer on this episode, but you did work on this episode.

ELI: That's right. This is an episode that was a little bit unusual for *The West Wing* because, very often, in broadcast TV when you're doing 22, 24 episodes a year; you reach a point, sort of in the high teens when everyone is burned out from the year and a little bit behind the curve, so it was actually Carol Flint's idea to make up for lost time by taking an episode with discrete story lines. I can't remember who had the idea of a kind of lockdown of the White House. I knew we'd done that once before on the show in "Isaac and Ishmael" but to just have interesting pairings of characters in rooms and then we sort of just divided up those storylines. It was actually the Toby & Will storyline was my storyline with Peter Noah.

HRISHI: What was the concept that you pitched?

ELI: Well, I was looking over the episode today a little bit and just looking over the script actually. I was just remember that I had worked for President Clinton, and then I went to work for President Gore and in my early months really, maybe the first year working for the Vice-President, we were really just trying to function as part of the Clinton White House. As Gore began to start to run for president on his own in earnest, he had to separate himself more. He had to make bolder moves and position himself as his own man and do things that, even by virtue of the fact that they indicated his own independence started to upset people in the White House who were my friends. It came from that place. Where a bunch of months later would Will be in his relationship with Toby as somebody who now didn't have to take orders from him and might even do things in defiance of him. For myself, as a White House speech writer, these comedy roasts were incredibly complicated and political and actually a huge time drain. I think it may have been George W. Bush, believe it or not after September 11th, who went to one of these - I don't think it was the Correspondents' Dinner speech, but just gave a serious speech

and didn't bother to tell jokes. I remember at the time thinking, 'That's really lame, he's not that funny so he probably needed to do that.' But there's something powerful about that move, essentially saying, 'I'm a constitutional office and I'm not hosting the "Tonight Show."' So I think those ideas came together in my mind a little bit.

HRISHI: I was wondering what seemed one maybe liberty you may have taken. Does the Vice President actually speak at the Correspondents' Dinner normally?

ELI: No, he doesn't. Actually, I was looking over, and I sent this to you guys if it's of interest to you or any of your loyal listeners; a rough, preliminary write-up of when I first proposed the story and it was the Gridiron dinner - which is something - Al Gore spoke at the Gridiron. I don't really remember why it changed. It may be the thinking was people weren't as familiar with those other dinners...

JOSH: Do we have permission to link to your "beat sheet?"

ELI: Absolutely.

JOSH: Wonderful. Will you explain to the listeners what a beat sheet is and I'm curious, would you always create this kind of thing to track a single plot line through a script?

ELI: A beat sheet, when you're sorta in the simmering kitchen of episodic television, you refer to scenes and beats. Like a story might have, you know, it might have three beats, which are three discrete plot events. So I guess a beat is slightly different than a scene which is to say you might split a beat in two, or you might have a scene that's just a placeholder scene like two people walking into a room but I think the heart of the original was Bob Russell had given this serious speech, Toby didn't like it, but it ended with - in typical *West Wing* fashion - heartfelt confessions from each to the other that they sort of respected each other. It ended in a good place. And Toby wished the president had given that speech and this is a storyline, I think, about mortality in the political sense. And what's hard for Toby, I think, in the series and in this storyline is that he's working for a lame duck, his time is coming to an end. The new generation is coming up, and I think it's hard to let go but in the cool light of dawn he has to admit he admires what Will is doing.

HRISHI: If only podcasts had been a thing back then he would have been looking forward to a very big podcasting career.

ELI: This is true. This is very true. That would have been our big flash-forward from Season 7.

JOSH: I think it times out about right. I think probably Toby is hosting a podcast. [laughter]

ELI: I think, it's either that or he's got a merchandise line.

JOSH: Well, I like how you have Will essentially say, 'Alright, there's someone better out there, go do it, go find him.' You know, he really calls Toby on his own inaction.

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*WILL: I'll comb the countryside.*

*TOBY: We went to Holcombville, New Hampshire to find one, yeah, comb the countryside!*

*WILL: You go. If it's so important, you go.*

[end excerpt]

ELI: It's a very interesting thing in real politics, I've thought about this a lot, that when you take the great strategists, the David Axelrods, the James Carvilles, the people who we know who got there at Ground Zero and launched presidencies, they never have two presidents. They only ever have one. I don't know why that is, maybe you're in sync with the zeitgeist just for one fleeting moment, if you're lucky. I mean it's so implausible and so impossible to do that anyway. And there's not really much Toby can say to that. He probably senses that he doesn't have another in him.

JOSH: Maybe it also speaks to the pendulum-like nature of politics, and if you were right on the zeitgeist there's usually going to be a swing back to some extent in the next cycle.

ELI: It's probably one of those things, it's not unlike writing a movie or creating a tv show that just happens to hit a moment in the culture. By the way, you're both so great in this episode, and I always really enjoyed the Toby/Will scenes up to this point. It's a great combination because there's this kind of energy and exuberance to Will that is sort of the anti-Toby energy. You're always kind of up to some degree and he's always down to some degree. There's a real clash but a lot of love there, too.

JOSH: Yeah, we've come a long way since "Arctic Radar."

ELI: Oh, yes. For sure.

JOSH: And this is one of my favorites...Arctic Radar is too...I always loved working with Richard, in part because even beyond the characters, our own energies and our own approaches to acting are so antithetical to each other that I always enjoyed working with him and also an opportunity to go toe to toe with Toby/Richard was a delight. I had a really good time shooting this episode and I loved the material that you wrote for me.

ELI: Maybe we've talked about this at some point on the podcast, but *The West Wing* set was actually a fairly social place. I've worked on TV shows where the set is closed to visitors and where it's considered a serious environment where people can't kind of wander in and out. *The*

*West Wing* was anything but that and in my time there I was always inviting friends from politics, senators would come visit, different writers would wander down. You guys were always so fun and so social and wanted to meet guests and chat with guests...but not Richard. And the reason is that he liked to stay in his head and stay in the moment and stay in the emotion of the scene. And I think he had the misfortune, and he's such a wonderful actor, of being in an environment where no one else felt that way. I can't remember specifically this episode but you'd sort of bring people down and Josh, you would come and socialize behind the cameras with whoever was there and Brad would and Allison would and very often Richard would go around the corner and kind of hide in another room of the set.

JOSH: That's true.

ELI: I wonder what that was like for you, with such a different approach and such a different energy being in the room with him. Did you ever feel like you were playing tennis and he was playing badminton?

JOSH: No. I think whenever I would work with Richard I would respect *his* technique and *his* process, because mine as you point out is a little more loosey-goosey so I had no problem with staying in it or not chatting Richard up in between scenes and in between takes even. I didn't need him to chat with me as part of my process, so I considered it an away game for me and we'd play in his stadium.

ELI: It sort of works for a storyline like this too because part of what you're acting without I imagine is someone who's trying to not give you much - which is the character.

JOSH: Yeah, that's absolutely right. Before we let you go I have one other question, this episode is a "bottle" episode, was it meant to be less expensive to produce?

ELI: You know, it wasn't meant to be less expensive to produce which is something we should have thought about occasionally on *The West Wing* and never really did, much to the detriment of Warner Bros. Studios, but it really was an episode meant to be written quickly. And you know something? I think shot in less than whatever we were shooting at that point, which was eight-and-a-half or nine days, because the storylines were so discrete, you could just knock out everybody's scenes in a day. But I know that in the writer's room it was Carol's concept to sort of make up for some delays or we hadn't gotten something in on time and we were just a little bit crunched because you could have four, five, writers, however many of us there were, all writing at the same time and in two-three days you'd have a draft of a script, where normally it would take at least a week, maybe two. And it was super fun and one minor piece of trivia about this is when I was working on the TV show *House*, I remember we were having a meeting there and somebody said, "What are unconventional episodes we could do this season?" Might have been Season 6 of that show or something. And I thought of this episode and I said, "What about a lockdown of the hospital, and just pair off characters that are sort of unlikely?" And we did that episode, it was basically a newborn had gone missing in the hospital and it was Hugh Laurie's directorial debut on the show.

HRISHI: Very cool.

JOSH: Makes sense.

HRISHI: Eli, thank you so much.

ELI: Of course. A great pleasure.

[Transition Music]

HRISHI: So, let's start with the cold open. We begin, and everybody is very pleased with the president's speech at the Correspondents Dinner, as we are returning from the dinner, the president and Debbie and everyone is just, "What a delight. He killed."

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And, I wasn't sure if this was going to be another case oft mentioned where people are celebrating a little too early. You know, he's done the thing and he goes on and it seems fine.

JOSH: Hmm. You killed but will you be killed?

[laughter]

HRISHI: I think that the other shoe does drop though, as we find out later in the Will vs. Toby ring, the victory for Toby ultimately ends up being hollow. Also in the first moments of the cold open, you can tell that the show is setting something up. We don't know what it is but there are these stylistic moves that seem different. Both in terms of the camera and the sound. There's this focus on these little moments and exchanges; the president gets a cigarette, and Debbie has a box of mints, and there's this peculiarity to the way those moments are shot and we don't know why they're getting this kind of focus at first.

JOSH: Yeah. I liked the feel, I wrote the same thing. Several odd little close-ups seem to auger that something's about to go awry and I don't even know why...closeup on a cigarette pack, closeup on the head off of a flower arrangement. Something clever. This is why I could never direct, because I can't even articulate why these little closeups make me uneasy as a viewer in just the right way, but they did.

HRISHI: Yeah. I mean one of the things that we benefit from is the fact that the show has a very clearly defined visual style. And so these little things depart from that and it is a subliminal - or not so subliminal - signal to us that something's going on. And it just makes everything seem suspicious.

JOSH: Yeah and heightened.



HRISHI: And then finally, Debbie's sneezes and the sensor goes off and we find out that maybe there's been this biological attack and then suddenly, nothing seems innocuous.

JOSH: That one little cut - and I watched it a couple of times - seemed a little odd to me because right off of her sneeze it's almost like you see a line on a readout go "wreehehe", is it meant to be that direct cause and effect? It played almost as comical to me, that one little moment.

HRISHI: I think, of course we find out later that it is actually a live drill but in the moment, I was like, "Oh, is there something that she had breathed in?" So in the moment where she sneezes all of the pathogen gets expelled in the air and the atmospheric detector catches it off of it coming out of her mouth.

JOSH: Then they cut to her little bottle of Afrin and it's labeled, "Anthrax."

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: As if she put that in her nose and then sneezed it out.

HRISHI: Which ring would you like to start our discussion? We've already talked a little bit to Eli and to Richard, should we go to the Will/Toby ring first?

JOSH: Why not. Let's get it out of the way. The first thing I wrote as Toby grabs Will and kind of brings and kind of makes him go into Will's old office with him, was "Never go with Toby to a second location."

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: That's on Will.

HRISHI: You never know what's going to happen. Well, you do know there is going to be some complaining.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Here's one thing that caught my ear:

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*WILL: You're upset cause the VP didn't use any of your jokes.*

*TOBY: I'm upset because he didn't use any of anybody's jokes! Cause he gave a humorless sermon at a humorous roast.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's like Toby is speaking in couplets, singing similar notes. I wonder if it was something that got caught by any other folks. And they just let it go and said, "Who will notice? Maybe one guy at most!"

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: Well, I am that guy, I don't mean to boast. But if you make a speechwriter speak like Dr. Seuss wrote, then expect to hear about it from at least one podcast host.

JOSH: Boom! Nicely done.

HRISHI: I was surprised by the internal rhyme. But as far as the actual content this whole dynamic is so fascinating and rich. And I love in the early section of this when Toby says,

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*TOBY: From now on, any joint POTUS/VPOTUS appearance, I clear his speech.*

*WILL: First of all, no.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, I love to see that is where Will is at now with him. "You're not my boss in any way." I don't answer to you and...it's a great line.

HRISHI: The delivery of it is both so beautifully Will and also this is just like the joy of having you as friend now, there are so many layers to it...

JOSH: You can see the threads of my own personality?

HRISHI: Oh I loved it. I loved it. I was like, could they have written this actor a better line? I don't think so.

JOSH: That's very funny. Re-watching this, for the first time in many years, although a small bit of it is on my reel, I thought to myself, that is such a Josh thing to say. And I think it's probably because I've borrowed it for years since then. I think I've just sort of processed it and absorbed it from that moment on.

HRISHI: It is great. The sarcasm, the indignation, and the straight up just "[expletive deleted] you" of it.

JOSH: Exactly.

HRISHI: It's just great. Will ends up scoring all of the points, which is I think is also something new, we aren't used to this. You know in "Arctic Radar" there's a great kind of, if we're going to bring sports into it, it's more like a tennis match and there's a great volley back and forth, but here it just feels like point after point goes to Will.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree, so much so that by the end you feel I think a certain pity for Toby. Like "oh, so he's gonna win it like that." [laughs]

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Forget about the Will knockout. Toby's going to win on points at the end.

HRISHI: Pity points. [laughs]

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Like this line

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*WILL: According to you, he's the only one tonight that didn't look like a buffoon and he's the only one that wasn't taking your advice. So add one to the other and tell me what you get.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Toby is really just working on the fumes of his rage and pride more than than any actual great points.

JOSH: Right. It's going to take him a few scenes but he'll get to the gooey center by the end.

HRISHI: Yeah. But then after the Secret Service guy tackles Toby, Will's whole demeanor kind of changes. He knows now that he's won the argument *and* he got to see Toby get taken down, literally.

JOSH: Right. Just bonus points.

HRISHI: [laughs] And so now he's having fun, like Toby's sulking but he can offer him a soda, he can be helpful...

JOSH: Exactly. And I took those all as extra little jabs. Because Toby's not going to want to take any help, anything you mention is now something that he cannot use, or do...

HRISHI: And yet on paper, Will is being the good guy.

JOSH: Right. Exactly. And I love and I suspect that is a Richard invention, that little moment where he just bangs his head against the wall and it actually hurts and he played it beautifully and I'm sure he came up with that schtick.

HRISHI: That's great. And eventually the real meat of this comes out, I think, the accusation that Toby is jealous of Will. I think Toby at first can't even fathom it, but Will says

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*WILL: You had one win in your career. One. And you're looking sunset in the face and I'm just starting out and that's eating you apart like some sort of psychological melanoma.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And, it's true - Toby has lost almost every election except for this one that put him in this office and Will is coming off of a victory where he got a dead Democrat to win in a Republican-controlled Orange County.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: It's a pretty good track record. And for whatever challenges Russell might give him, he's the incumbent vice president, and he's alive. So he's definitely starting from a better place than he was on the last one and he won that one.

JOSH. Yeah. That's right. I like that also there are also some moments of pettiness to Will's always having to be right in these scenes too.

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*TOBY: Like he's squirting seltzer bottles while Pompei's in flames!*

*WILL: Volcanic ash.*

*TOBY: What?*

*WILL: Rome burned. Pompeii was blinded in volcanic ash.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I just wrote down, "Dick."

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: And also, very similar to me. [Hrishi laughs] That is the kind of thing I would say.

HRISHI: Toby will take all of his pity points, Will will take all his petty points.

JOSH: Nice.

HRISHI: One thing that *doesn't* happen in this episode, for once in Season Five, the title of the episode is not said. And in fact it's not said in a nice way. But it's another moment where Will gets to win a petty point.

JOSH: He knows which playwright wrote "No Exit."

HRISHI: That's right. And he knows which line of dialogue from that play Toby is thinking of when he says

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*TOBY: It's like something out of Becket.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I am so grateful that the words "no exit" don't come out of anybody's mouth in that scene or any other.

JOSH: They showed great restraint at last.

HRISHI: It is a terrific set of scenes and definitely, for me, the highlight of this episode. I mean, I think, in the other rings there are great things too.

JOSH: Yeah, I really liked this episode. And re-watching it reconfirmed my enjoyment of it.

HRISHI: Let's go to another ring which I particularly loved which is the C.J. vs. Donna ring.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: It's brutal I think because we've never seen these two at odds. We've heard Donna just recently in "Access" talk about how much she admires C.J. and it's painful because at multiple points in the exchange, Donna asks C.J. to level with her. And when C.J. does, Donna doesn't want to hear it.

JOSH: Yeah, I think it's a very well written and well acted friendship fight piece. Nobody knows how to push each other's buttons like dear friends, and they do, and they alternately push each other away and pull closer and it's a good dynamic. There's a lot of good juicy stuff happening.

HRISHI: Yeah. I find it incredibly believable and all of Donna's moves and deflections and denials all seem so real and consistent.

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*DONNA: He's gone out of his way to give me every opportunity he can. He has.*

*C.J.: Okay.*

*DONNA: Hasn't he?*

*C.J.: Absolutely.*

*DONNA: C.J.?*

*C.J.: If he was giving you every opportunity you would have grown out of this job three years ago. Can't blame him, he's never going to find anybody else as capable as you, I wouldn't let you go either.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then she says you can't blame Josh and this is for me the real bite of it, she says

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*C.J. I don't blame Josh, it takes two of you. You choose to stay.*

HRISHI: And we've seen that, when Donna was offered a job at a start-up

[West Wing Episode 3.13 excerpt]

*CASEY REED: You don't understand. I'm talking about full-time. Issues Director for CapitalScoop.com.*

*DONNA: Is this your operating budget?*

*CASEY REED: It's your starting salary.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And she didn't take it. And yeah. We've seen that she's been asking for more. She hasn't always been getting it or when she has been getting it she gets these little bread crumbs and yet she's never said, "You know what, enough is enough, I can get a job somewhere else."

JOSH: I wanted to hear C.J. say, "I think you should read this," and then see her quietly slip a copy of "CoDependent No More" to Donna.

HRISHI: I mean, look, Ryan Pierce figured it out.

JOSH: Right?

HRISHI: He was able to leverage his experience and get a better job right away. And then Donna goes back again to C.J. and asks, "What should I be doing instead of this?" and C.J. says, "Anything. Go to lectures and symposiums and look for opportunities..."

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*C.J.: Anything that doesn't have to do with Josh Lyman.*

*DONNA: Wow. Okay. Let's not do this.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And...yeah, she does not want to face the reality of her situation, at least as sketched out by C.J. but I think it's accurate. Josh is holding her back.

HRISHI: Yeah, I don't really know what Donna is asking for or expecting to get when she says, "What is it that I need to do?"

JOSH: I think she is saying on some level, "Tell me what I want to hear and not what I need to hear."

HRISHI: Yeah. And the thing that really kills me is the way this ring closes out. You know they are given the "all clear" and C.J. just stops and says

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*C.J.: Donna?*

*DONNA: Yeah?*

*C.J.: Goodnight.*

*DONNA: Goodnight.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Donna's "goodnight" in response just crushes me. The coldness of it, just...brutal.

JOSH: Do you feel happy when Josh's final yell at Donna goes unanswered and he goes out to look for her and there's just air?

HRISHI: I do feel happy about that. I feel happy for Donna. It is sad, it goes back to that thing we talked about earlier in the season where I felt like this season, the first four seasons were about how this family stays together and this season feels like stories about a divorce and there's something just sad about that but I think at the same time this is really well done.

JOSH: To me it's akin to Donna's version of the chief at the end of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, throwing his sink through the window and getting out of there.

HRISHI: Are you saying she has metaphorically smothered Josh Lyman with a pillow?

JOSH: I am. Spoiler alert: I am. That's exactly what I'm saying.

HRISHI: Or maybe it's just her love for Josh that she is killing.

JOSH: That's right. Or maybe I'm just thinking about what I would like to do.

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

[Ad break]

HRISHI: Before our introduction to the C.J./Donna scene, we get a little bit of - speaking of petty points - we get a little exchange and the return of Wilson Cruz.

JOSH: Yes, we love our Wilson Cruz.

HRISHI: We got a chance to talk to him, and let's ask him about his experience on *The West Wing* which sadly was just limited to these two episodes. Joining us now is Wilson Cruz, who played Jack Sosa, C.J.'s assistant press secretary in this episode and in episode 5.18, the documentary episode, "Access."

JOSH: You may have first seen Wilson in *My So Called Life* where he played Ricky, or most recently on *Star Trek: Discovery* or the Netflix hit show, *13 Reasons Why*.

HRISHI: Wilson, thanks so much for joining us.

WILSON: Hey thanks for having me. Thanks for asking.

JOSH: The fans demanded it.

WILSON: [laughs] Well, that's nice.



HRISHI: Yeah you actually responded to the episode “Access,” you tweeted some really interesting information about that episode that we had no idea, we had to find out from you directly what that experience was like. Before we talk about this episode, let’s talk about that one and how you ended up on *The West Wing*.

WILSON: Yeah, I mean I was a huge *West Wing* fan from the beginning, and it brought together everything that interests me, right? Like great acting and great politics and it came at a time when we all needed it. I was way too young apparently to play any part for a while, we kept submitting me for stuff, and they were like, “too young,” or “looks too young.” Maybe. And then finally there was this episode and it was an odd audition, because first of all, we all knew the story of *The West Wing* and how you have to say everything word-for-word so when I walked into the audition, they were asking us to improvise. I was like, oh okay, this is interesting.

HRISH: Huh.

WILSON: And the best example of that is we were sitting around waiting for a big lighting setup that was going to take a while, and Alex Graves who directed the episode comes out of the blue and was like “So we have some time, I have an idea, we’re just gonna ask you to come into this office and I’m going to ask you some questions on camera.” And you see everybody kind of freak out.

JOSH: My blood would have run cold.

WILSON: [laughs] But luckily, like I said in that tweet, I had kind of created a backstory for this guy because there was no information about who he was. So I created a backstory for sort of how I got there to begin with. And luckily, when I got in there to do the on camera interview, he asked the right question [laughs]. So I had some answers. And I remember it was like five or ten minutes, they used a lot of it to be honest with you, and I just remember seeing Alex’s face at the end of that and him going, “Where did all of that come from?” And I was like, well, it came from my homework.

HRISHI: Where did that backstory come from? I mean, you had it at the ready and it turned out to be really useful but how did you come up with Jack’s backstory?

WILSON: I think I decided that he was pretty scrappy, and that he had a real ambitious streak to him, but also that he was a bit of an activist. I liked the idea of him being combative with C.J. I watched the show a lot so I felt like she is the kind of person who would appreciate some scrappiness on her staff, because she’s kind of scrappy.

[*West Wing* Episode 5.18 excerpt]

*JACK: I wrote for the paper, the student paper there, and I was writing articles basically criticizing the administration, really, about their issues on gay issues and racial issues and I, on*

*a lark, kind of wrote this letter to C.J., asking if she would see me because I wasn't really getting a response from them and I thought I would give it a shot.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I like that you came up with an origin story that not only reflected well on Jack but reflected well on your boss and her having hired you. It's kind of brilliant.

WILSON: Yeah, well thank you, I'll take it.

HRISHI: It's very *West Wing*.

JOSH: Yes, it is.

WILSON: Yeah! Well, I think it helped that I was a big fan of the show in that I knew the tone of it and I was confident in the story I was building for myself. And I also liked the idea that C.J. and Jack, she appreciated his ambitiousness, right, and so she saw herself moving to another job and eventually she did. I was also setting myself up, really, as an actor, going, "Well if she ever moves on from being Press Secretary, I could place myself in a good position to replace her in some way."

HRISHI: So, what happened for this second episode? How did you find out that they wanted you back and this must have been a different experience without the documentary setup.

WILSON: Right. You know, they called and were like, "Hey is Wilson available" and I was at the time and I liked that they wrote this kind of - for lack of a better term - bitchy scene.

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*JACK: Press detail for the CODEL. Have a fabulous time. Faxes need to clear a 90 minute timeframe before briefings. Try to keep track of your time zone. And don't drink the water.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Did it have a different feeling this time because it was not an improvised situation? Did it feel more like what you'd been expecting the first time?

WILSON: Yes, I think the script supervisor, if I remember correctly, came up to me and says, "There's a 'the' there" and I was like, "Noted." [laughter]

JOSH: That sounds like the *West Wing* I know. [laughter]

WILSON: I was hoping for more walking and talking, you know?

HRISHI: Yeah but you got a fishing pole which most people don't get.

WILSON: True!

HRISHI: There's not a lot of prop humor in *The West Wing*.

WILSON: I don't think I've ever used a fishing pole again in my entire life. I think that's the only time I've ever touched one.

HRISHI: So even though you didn't come back onto *The West Wing*, did you end up working with anybody from the show again later on?

WILSON: No. But you know I became friendly with..

JOSH: Rob Lowe?

WILSON: No.

JOSH: Just kidding.

HRISHI: Josh Malina?

WILSON: Oh but here's a good piece of trivia. I wore Rob Lowe's suits.

JOSH: Wow!

WILSON: Yeah. Which is funny for me because I thought, you know...

JOSH: Dude, you're in good shape.

WILSON: Rob Lowe's body had been in this suit.

JOSH: I once wore one of Rob Lowe's suits around one of my legs.

[laughter]

WILSON: I actually met him, and you know, lack of things to say when you meet somebody, it was coming out of a bathroom, I was going into it, and I was like, "Hey!" So dumb. "You're Rob Lowe." And he was like, "Yeah, how are you?" "I wore your suits on *The West Wing*!" "Interesting."

[laughter]

WILSON: Looking back at it that's probably how I would have responded too. But anyway, I did become friendly with Brian Poth, we actually met on there and we've remained Facebook friends through that experience.

JOSH: He was one of C.J.'s other aides?

HRISHI: Yes, he was the brownish hair one, not the black hair-ish one who wore the tie. And Allison Janney actually, whenever I see her out and about, always remembers for some reason my name.

JOSH: You had fun working with her?

WILSON: I loved, I loved, loved working with her. I mean, it was an ideal situation. And she was really generous.

HRISHI: It makes me feel like that's probably what it would have been like to have been an assistant to C.J. as well.

WILSON: Yeah. Yeah, it was very much that and she kind of treated us that way on set and it was really lovely. She was fantastic.

HRISHI: Wilson, what's the next thing that people can see you in?

WILSON: Well *Star Trek: Discovery* premieres Season 2 on January 17th, and you can find that on CBS All Access in the States, and then on Netflix internationally, and then I'm also producing a six-part documentary about the history of LGBT images on television so it's been a big project that I've been a part of for the past three years or so it's going to take awhile before it's all done but I'm excited about people seeing that.

HRISHI: Awesome.

JOSH: That's great.

HRISHI: If people want to stay in touch with you about that and get updates they can follow you on Twitter, right?

WILSON: Yep. wcruz73 on Twitter, also wcruz73 on Instagram, and my name on Facebook.

HRISHI: Awesome. Thank you so much for talking to us

WILSON: Thank you. I really appreciate it and I really, really enjoy the show. I listen to it despite the fact that I was on the show but it helps re-live those lovely *West Wing* moments.

HRISHI: No kidding, that's so cool.

JOSH: That's awesome.

WILSON: Thank you for having me, I really appreciate it.

[Transition Music]

HRISHI: Let's move on to yet another ring. How about Josh Lyman and Kate Harper?

JOSH: Sure. Kate is a G for grabbing that water.

HRISHI: I think she proves that she's a G in basically all regards.

JOSH: Except I didn't like that the very end, she kind of told him about the situation with the submarine, and Panama. I was like, c'mon! I don't think she owed that to Josh, to sort of...it just lowered her kind of badass tight lips characterization that she actually gave him a little nugget there at the end.

HRISHI: In my interpretation of it, what I thought was that between the note, where she said you have to kill this line of the speech, and when she tells him, something had happened where that information was now no longer embargoed. Like, I thought it actually might have happened during the time that they were there, you know while she was on her laptop, she got some piece of information that she was like "Okay, now it's safe to tell him."

JOSH: Yeah, fair enough, fair enough. I just would have liked it better had we learned that as an audience, but she had left it with him as "it wasn't funny."

HRISHI: Yeah, you just wanted him to stay in agony.

JOSH: That's a great moment, they're good together and his reaction to "this wasn't funny" was funny.

HRISHI: It's great. It's nice to see Josh just almost get broken by the idea that there is someone that knows more than he does about so many things.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: He's just used to being the guy who finds stuff out and knows stuff and so he can't find out about what's going on with Panama, he can't find out what's going on with where she was even stationed where she was in a lockdown before, she doesn't tell him...he's like, "I've got codeword..." He tries to show off.

JOSH: I love that he tries to flaunt his codeword clearance, she's having none of it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*JOSH: I could look you up. I have codeword clearance.*

*KATE: Not this code you don't.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's great. Just a little touch of how did you know the ventilation was shut off? She was like, it's hot.

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: That won her a lot of points with me.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: I am excited to meet Mary McCormack in a few weeks when we have our live show, our Season 6 premiere live show.

JOSH: That will tape on November 16th.

HRISHI: In Los Angeles.

JOSH: Which yes, I'm sorry, is Shabbos. If you start walking now, you'll get there in time.

HRISHI: [laughs] Right. Buy the ticket in advance

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: And all you are doing is having a comfortable seat.

JOSH: Yes. Or buy the ticket and then you'll notice at Ticketmaster for an extra \$17 we will send a Gentile to your house to carry you on his back to the venue.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: It's under a convenience fee-slash-Shabbos going.

HRISHI: Okay let's move on to other rings.

JOSH: What ring?

HRISHI: Leo versus Abbey?

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: This one was sort of about Xanax but it was also sort of about their individual marriages to the president.

JOSH: To the same man. Yeah, this one cuts pretty deep too, I think.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean we start off Leo finds out that Abbey is volunteering, she's doing the graveyard shift.

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*ABBEY: We try not to call it that in front of the patients.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: She's doing a midnight to eight am shift at a clinic and Leo didn't know even though the president does obviously and then she says, "He never tells me anything either." And I think again this is a little bit of a shocker for Leo, like with Josh, to suddenly be out of the loop on something. We've seen this season that the dynamic between the president and the First Lady has changed and really what she has decided to do, the type of power she has decided to assert for herself has changed too, and she's maybe not offering herself up as a more easily controlled, more manageable type of asset on the roster. And then it gets compounded later when Leo sees her taking a pill, which sounds like it's an anti-anxiety pill.

JOSH: She has little sort of soliloquy about the physical effects of the kind of daily stress that they live under.

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*ABBEY: Relieving those conditions is the one responsible course of action I can take. I am sorry it is not a course of action that's available to you.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: As an addict, or which it's implied. I liked that whole interchange, it's like you say, I think she's finally, she's deciding, she's always been a formidable presence and her own woman and professional but I think there's some things ever since the Zoey kidnapping, I think she's been working toward this moment where she's living her life for herself and taking care of Number One in a way that suggests some disharmony at home.

HRISHI: Yeah. I really appreciate that they've given the kidnapping this very long shadow we still see. We still feel the effects of it in these ways even if it's not so explicitly called out here. It's not like, "Oh, we wrapped up that subplot, everything has sprung back to normal."

JOSH: Yeah, you're absolutely right. On lesser shows, of which there are many, often characters will go through something extreme and there's just a complete emotional reset, as if that trauma had never happened. It's good that its presence is still felt in the episodes later.

HRISHI: Yeah. So the final ring of conflict is in this medical examination sector, with the president and Debbie and Charlie, the ones who perhaps have already been directly exposed to Anthrax or some other agent, we don't know what it is. As we mentioned at the beginning of this episode, we spoke to former Senator Tom Daschle about his experience when his office was targeted with Anthrax. And he told us all about it.

Senator, thanks so much for joining us.

SENATOR DASCHLE: Glad to do it, nice to meet you both.

HRISHI: Senator, we are talking this week about an episode of *The West Wing* in which there's a biological attack that comes through the mail and we wanted to talk with you to find out what that's really like.

SENATOR DASCHLE: Well, it's very scary, frankly. It happened to me 17 years ago. 28 people were affected in my office, five people had died in the weeks just prior that, in similar instances. So, there's a lot of confusion, a lot of uncertainty, a lot of panic, a lot of fear, a lot of trepidation, not really knowing. I think we know more know than we did back then, but we had a Ricin attack just a couple of weeks ago in the Pentagon.

HRISHI: Could you walk us through what actually happened? Do you remember where you were that day and how you found out, just sort of walk us through the events that occurred?

SENATOR DASCHLE: What happened of course happened on the 16th of October which was a month and five days after 9/11. 9/11 was a very traumatic experience, I was the majority leader of the U.S. Senate at the time and because the whole episode around 9/11 was so tension-filled and so problematic I ultimately developed a serious migraine headache. And I went to the N.I.H. that morning, the morning of the 16th of October, and got an M.R.I. and waited for the results and found out there was nothing wrong and it was just a lot of tension, probably related to 9/11. Came back to my office for work and relieved there was nothing serious medically wrong, but I had no sooner gotten to my office in the Capitol when my chief of staff broke into the office and said, "We've got a serious problem. 28 people on our staff were just exposed to what we think was Anthrax." A young intern that morning had opened an envelope and it had exploded into the room, aerosolized Anthrax all through the room, quickly getting into the HVAC system, spreading through the whole building. And of course the 28 people were sequestered in that



room, they couldn't leave, the Capitol Police came, they came into the room, just to investigate, they were then exposed to the Anthrax. I went over and I was exposed...the more we realized the serious circumstances we were in, we immediately began calling emergency personnel. We contacted the CDC and the NIH, they rushed emergency personnel, I got a briefing somewhere that night around two in the morning just trying to better understand what we ought to be doing. We really didn't even know then, what were the right things to do? We were then told we could go home, change clothes, and we were asked to bring out clothes back in a garbage bag the next morning which we did, and because the Hart Building by then was shut down, because the Anthrax spores had gotten through the HVAC system all through the Hart Building, we brought out bag of clothes into the Capitol building and there they were collected finally, I assumed, destroyed. But we really still were living in the dark, fortunately we had a young expert, medical expert at the time, working at NIH, his name was Doctor Greg Martin. He finally made the decision, in fact overruling other people in government, and vociferously argued with them, that we all ought to be prescribed Cipro, a drug that you're probably familiar with. We didn't know how long, but they had tried Cipro on monkeys and realized that Cipro had a positive effect but they just used their own calculations, "Well if a monkey weighs this much, an individual weighs this much, let's just assume we ought to double or triple the dosage just to accommodate the weight difference." So we were all assigned, I think it was 100 days, it may have been longer for those who were directly exposed, and that's how my Anthrax experience started.

JOSH: So this kind of scenario was something that hadn't been anticipated or prepared for.

SENATOR DASCHLE: Not at all. We had no clue what to do. Ultimately, everybody in the Hart Building were evacuated, they shut down the Hart Building completely, it was shut down for I think it was around 100-120 days. They actually stripped out just about everything inside the building and completely reconstructed it from the inside out. That took a long time, I think four or five months before it was completed.

HRISHI: Did your security protocols have to change drastically after that?

SENATOR DASCHLE: They did. Kind of a funny story. One night I came home and there was five or six emergency cars around my home. And there was all kinds of sniffing dogs. And there was a box on my doorstep and on top of the box it had "Jerk of the Week." And I had to explain to them that I had just recently subscribed to a South Dakota meat jerky plan [laughter], that sent me my first installment of meat jerky. But given the fact that it said "Jerk of the Week" they were concerned, the dogs loved it, but nevertheless...but yes, my security went from 12 hours to 24 hours. The whole way we look at mail, and process mail now, was totally changed. All mail that you send to the Capitol, if you are going to send a letter to your congressman, it is now opened off campus in these very secure areas where people in what look like moon suits that open up the mail and then make sure that it's not contaminated and then send it on to the members of Congress. Within the building has changed, they now have protection mechanisms in place, but we still have a long way to go.

HRISHI: You bring up, even with the “Jerk of the Week” package, you bring up a good point which is people can still mail you things even when it’s not sent to your office. In this episode, in fact we find out at the end that the scenario is that a letter was sent to the president’s body man, to his home address, that he brought into the West Wing, and opened it there and put it in the recycling bin and that’s what set off the sensors. So even with all those safeguards, seems like the possibility for contamination is still really high. Or do you feel like we’ve got it under control now with the things we’ve learned since 2001?

SENATOR DASCHLE: Not at all. I just made a comment today at a public meeting that we held here at the Blue Ribbon Study Panel on biodefense that I thought on a scale of one-to-ten we were probably at a four. We’ve made progress but we have a long, long way to go. I think mail going to Capitol Hill is probably quite safe now, that’s close to a ten perhaps, but as you correctly point out, there’s so many other ways.

JOSH: What do we need to do to get from a four to closer to a ten?

SENATOR DASCHLE: Well first of all we have to make it a much higher priority than it is. We lament frequently around here that we have a lot of supporters, but we have few champions. We don’t really have a lot of people that have made this a policy that deserves the kind of attention, support, and resources that is required. You know we spend the equivalent of about one-half of one aircraft carrier on biodefense. And yet it has the potential, when you look at all the deaths created over the last hundred years, we’ve lost more people in circumstances involving either natural or intentional causes, than all the wars put together. So we really don’t have the right prioritization.

JOSH: And I imagine to some extent it’s a public education issue.

SENATOR DASCHLE: It is, no question. We have a lot of work to do in educating the public and another thing we haven’t really talked about is how much misinformation can sometimes occur, whether it’s intentional or unintentional, and that lack of good information is another major challenge.

HRISHI: Senator, what did you think of this episode of *The West Wing*?

SENATOR DASCHLE: Well, to the point we just discussed, in terms of educating, one thing about *West Wing* that did so well, is really brought some of these issues into the living rooms of families all over the world, really, especially the United States and made those issues real to a lot of people that otherwise may not have given a lot of thought and I think you elevate, *The West Wing* elevated, the whole challenge that we face with regard to biodefense. And did, I think, a real service to the country in doing so.

HRISHI: Did watching it feel like an accurate portrayal of what it’s like to be locked down in a situation like that?

SENATOR DASCHLE: It did. I must say, I wasn't locked down like the story unfolds but my staff were for long period of time, they were locked in that room. And so that part of it was very real. And, even though you may be able to leave, the uncertainty which *West Wing* captured so well in that episode, the uncertainty around circumstances - how safe were they? How much in danger were they? What life-threatening circumstances were they facing? And the only thing I would say, I would take issue a little bit with the fact that nobody was told what was really happening. And I think that's a mistake. I think we have a responsibility to be as transparent under the circumstances as possible. That didn't happen in the episode and I think that might have been a mistake. Not necessarily from a story point of view but certainly from a strategic or tactical point of view.

HRISHI: Did you have to run drill after drill after the Anthrax attack, to get ready for a possible "next one?"

SENATOR DASCHLE: Yes, we actually have...they still do that today. Drills have become part of life on Capitol Hill.

HRISHI: It feels a little bit like the lack of transparency in *The West Wing* episode is because people had gotten so blasé about the drills, that they needed to inject some element of uncertainty, you know, in terms of the people participating to make sure that they really did everything that they needed to. Did it get to a point where you had done so many drills where people were just sort of like so annoyed by the disruption of their schedule and the work they had to do that they stopped taking the drills as seriously as maybe they needed to?

SENATOR DASCHLE: Well, I think that is a danger. I frankly think that people are so sensitized to the security challenges we face on Capitol Hill. I mean you've got to go through metal detectors just to get in the room, and there have been Ricin attacks, there have been strange packages that were very suspect that generated a great deal of anxiety. I would say the anxiety level may have subsided somewhat on Capitol Hill, but it's still there.

JOSH: And for the average citizen, for those listening who are going to be concerned, rightfully so, by what you have to say, about a lack of preparation, what can the average citizen do to pressure our legislators or to help?

SENATOR DASCHLE: Well, I think it's important for the average citizen first of all to know how real these threats really are. I think much to our credit in some respects, we don't spend a lot of time worrying about things that aren't immediate. And that's probably good for our psyche. But I think we've got to understand this isn't some hypothetical threat. This will happen again. So we have to first be aware and as people aware, you know this isn't just a federal issue. This isn't something that we need only be concerned about in Washington. This is a local issue, too. Local first responders are really going to be the first people on scene and we've got to make sure that our mayors and our governors and our legislators at the state level all take this seriously. That we have plans for dealing with the proactive and reactive requirements in circumstances like this.

HRISHI: Senator, I want to ask you a more personal question. You mentioned the migraines that you suffered in the wake of the stress and aftermath of 9/11. How did people carry on and live through their day-to-day life balancing sort of the sensitivity to the possibilities out there, and also still having a way to live that isn't wracked by stress and fear to an extent where their mental health or their physical health is negatively impacted?

SENATOR DASCHLE: Well that's a great question and I don't think there's any one silver bullet or some simple answer to that complicated question but how do you live with the threat of bioterror so real, I think we can take lessons from other threats that we've had to experience. The nuclear threat. What you have to assume is that we're doing everything we can to prevent it. That we've done everything we can proactively using diplomatic and other means to bring down that threat level as much as possible. Having whatever means necessary to respond when or if it occurred and certainly having the capacity: medically, physically, and in public policy to deal with the aftermath of an exchange, God forbid it would ever happen. I think we have to have that same mentality with regard to biodefense. What are we doing proactively to do everything possible to make sure that it never happens. But then secondly, we have to be reactive. Having medical countermeasures ready and having multi-year funding to accommodate the capacity for medical countermeasures is really important.

HRISHI: Well we know that you're a member of the Blue Ribbon Study Panel on Biodefense and what we're going to include on our website is a link to the recommendations that you made as part of that group.

SENATOR DASCHLE: Thank you.

HRISHI: So hopefully we can start educating ourselves.

SENATOR DASCHLE: Thank you, that would be terrific. That would be a big help.

HRISHI: Senator, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with Josh and me and our audience.

JOSH: Thank you so much for joining us.

SENATOR DASCHLE: Appreciate it. Good to meet you both.

[Transition Music]

JOSH: At the beginning of this ring, is a very, I find, humorous moment, worthy almost of a Zucker Brothers-type Airplane!-type movie in which at the beginning of this impromptu examination the doctor, who's very "all business" and "let's get this going" he takes President Bartlet's jacket and then hands it to a nurse or a tech with great intention as if she should rush that to the lab and then she takes it and puts it on the back of the president's chair.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: I have to keep watching that like, is that only funny to me? He doesn't say it, but it seems like what he should be saying is "Nurse, get that right to the thing." "Okay," and she picks it up and puts it on the back of the chair.

HRISHI: That's great, I definitely didn't get that.

JOSH: Go back and look at that.

HRISHI: For me, the most interesting part of the Charlie-President-Debbie stuff is what comes at the end, when Debbie's looking up what the possible effects might have been. She's at a computer and she's looking over and she's looking up Tularemia which is what they'd said was the agent and she says,

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*DEBBIE: It's colorless, odorless, could be stored in a sealed envelope but it's sensitive to ultraviolet light. It is contagious. Some nut could have mailed it to Charlie.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: She now knows what the deal is but she's just plagued by the possibility of what could have happened. And the president says you'll drive yourself crazy with this.

JOSH: I like that we go out on her on her phone too.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Of all the unlikely people to close out this episode on, it's Debbie and her personal life and how this moment has affected her and then just a little glimpse into her personal life.

HRISHI: It's true. I mean it is unfathomable, I think for me, and that's why I asked the senator this question, how do you take this information in and then just keep on moving? You have to be able to compartmentalize that in a way that sometimes feels impossible.

JOSH: And another in a series of my asking you to clarify aspects of an episode for me, we are left to understand that this was a real, a genuine, crisis, and potential attack that Ron Butterfield and the president are trying to sell to Charlie and Fiderer as a drill and to everyone as a planned drill, they want everyone else to think it's just a false alarm, but in fact, there was a contagion of some sort detected, right?

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: And then we later see...no? Am I wrong?

HRISHI: I think there are three possible scenarios, right? One is that there is an actual attack. One is that there was a live drill. And the other is that there was a false alarm. And so what actually happened was a live drill but they want to tell everybody that it was a false alarm because a live drill actually is a meaningful tool for them to learn how to defend against themselves, but they don't want to tell anybody that it was a live drill because they don't want to advertise or broadcast the fact that they might have learned something or gotten better at detecting these kind of...

JOSH: I thought that there was...see that's not how I saw the ending. I thought they'd take Charlie and Fiderer into their confidence and say we're going to try to sell this as a false alarm, you guys can know that it was a live drill, but then they leave the room and they're like, they didn't seem to question that, led me to believe that in fact something real was going on.

HRISHI: I agree with you that was unclear. What I am giving is what my interpretation of it is...

JOSH: Ah, I see.

HRISHI: It is definitely an interpretation. I think it's really, the line from Ron that says, "They didn't question it" is the thing that throws it into confusion. Otherwise I feel like yeah, it was a live drill which is a higher level of secrecy.

JOSH: Oh well to me there's a second piece of evidence that suggests this is not a live drill but a real drill which is to me that there's a scene early on where Butterfield and President Bartlet are having a conversation sotto voce about what's going on and it doesn't seem to be for anyone else's benefit although Charlie's in the room and they're talking about it as if it's real. I do not why they would have had that conversation if this were in fact a live drill.

HRISHI: So at the end of the thing, Butterfield says

[West Wing Episode 5.20 excerpt]

*RON: Tularemia will get through again.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Meaning I think that this actually...somebody had tried to attack with Tularemia. I don't know...now I'm questioning my interpretation of it. For consistency's sake, I'm going to stick with it, I think it was a live drill and they don't want to tell people because they don't want to let people...if people want to keep attacking them with Tularemia, fine. It's not going to work. And they don't want to let people know that they've figured it out.

JOSH: Alright.

HRISHI: Alright, now I'm questioning my interpretation of it. Let's text Eli and find out.

JOSH: Let's use the Eli Bat Phone.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: He's always right next to it.

HRISHI: He's always so good. Okay, hold on. "Hey Eli. Josh and I are confused about something in "No Exit." POTUS tells Charlie and Debbie that it was a live drill, meaning no one was told it was a drill, but that they should tell others in fact it was a false alarm. But then Butterfield says to POTUS privately they didn't question it as if maybe the truth is that it wasn't a live drill, meaning...maybe there really was an attack? And there are two layers of deception happening??? Could you let us know if you know the answer?" Sent.

JOSH: Normally now we would stop recording and wait for a response but knowing Eli, I think we can just stay on the air and...

HRISHI: [laughs] Here's Eli!

JOSH: Oh! There it is. Okay. That was quick. Here's his reply. Eli wrote, "That's exactly right. In the end it turned out that it wasn't exactly a drill, though it was a highly manageable situation, just a guy who was trying to get a hold of a dangerous bacteria, Tularemia, which my brother was doing research on at the time. It was sort of a grace note as I recall, not a grave scandal like a crisis (thanks Eli) but something's potentially serious for which every precaution was taken because that's how we do things, kind of like the AF1 issue in "Angel Maintenance" in Season Four."

Okay. Not entirely clear still but at least I was right. I was onto something where it wasn't just a drill.

HRISHI: Right. I end this episode slightly confused.

JOSH: Fair enough. As I start most episodes.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: It's only fair. I bet people will get into it on the site. The site being, [thewestwingweekly.com](http://thewestwingweekly.com).

HRISHI: Please leave us a comment there even if you aren't confused. Just tell us how much you like Josh.

JOSH: Yeah, that doesn't happen a lot on the site, by the way.

HRISHI: Thanks so much to our guests, Wilson Cruz, Eli Attie, and former senator Tom Daschle for joining us on this jam-packed episode.

JOSH: Yeah, it was a good one, I think.

HRISHI: You can find all of them on Twitter, we'll have links to their handles on our website and in the episode description wherever you downloaded this podcast. And until next time, thanks so much to Zach McNees and Margaret Miller and Nick Song for helping us make this episode. Also this is our last episode before the midterm elections. I feel like this probably goes without saying to our West Wing-loving audience, but please go vote.

JOSH: I like voting, too.

HRISHI: [laughs] What I love is you do it all with your heart in it, fully.

JOSH: Yes, as I do all things. Go vote, there's a free sticker in it.

HRISHI: That's true! People will do stuff for a free sticker.

JOSH: Yep.

HRISHI: The West Wing Weekly is a proud member of Radiotopia, from PRX.

JOSH: Radiotopia, of course, is a collection of the world's best podcasts found all in one place, radiotopia.fm.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

WILSON/ELI/SEN DASCHLE: What's next?

[Outro Music]