

The West Wing Weekly
6.03: "Third-Day Story"

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And my name is Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Today we're talking about episode three from season six. It's called "Third-Day Story."

JOSH: It was written by our dear, dear friend Eli Attie. It was directed by our dear (one dear because he hasn't been on as often) friend Christopher Misiano, and it first aired on November 3rd 2004.

HRISHI: In this episode, the White House is in chaos without Leo, who suffered a heart attack at Camp David. But, before signing the Middle East Peace Accord, the president wants the staff to get the support of Congress and the United Nations. Josh and Toby are pulling in opposite directions without a Chief of Staff to direct them. C.J. does the best she can to maintain some order. And Donna returns to work, but she's in a wheelchair. And Charlie reveals that he could graduate from Georgetown, but he's putting it off.

JOSH: Because he's afraid of swimming.

[laughter]

HRISHI: Yeah. There is no swim test for Georgetown's graduation, by the way.

JOSH: There is a swim test for Cornell.

HRISHI: Really?

JOSH: Yes. Both my parents attended, and they're fine, fine swimmers as a result.

HRISHI: There are some notable things about this episode that I thought we could mention off the top. One, this is the first time that Melissa Fitzgerald is given a guest-starring credit.

JOSH: Oh, that's funny, I did notice it. [cross talk] I was wondering if I just hadn't noticed it before, but she's got that nice up-front credit.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah. Yeah.

JOSH: Way to go, Fitz.

HRISHI: Armin Mueller-Stahl is also given an up-front credit, but then I didn't see him in the episode, and I had to go back. And he's on the TV. We don't see him in person, so to speak, [cross talk] in the episode.

JOSH: [cross talk] Right. Screen in a screen. Interesting.

HRISHI: Yeah, he got a special guest star credit for that.

JOSH: He's a Hollywood heavyweight.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm. Another thing in this episode that is different than others is we get the title across the picture of the White House as we're entering, We don't get our trademark black screen between the "previously on" and the start of the episode. We get the title "Third-Day Story" in the bottom as opposed to centered over black. I don't know why that is.

JOSH: Nor do I.

HRISHI: Maybe it's just them trying out new stylistic moves.

JOSH: Maybe they misplaced that black card.

[laughter]

JOSH: I don't know how it all works technically.

HRISHI: Yeah, somebody left it in the art department closet.

JOSH: Ahh, just throw it over the White House.

HRISHI: Well, what did you think of this episode?

JOSH: Ahh, I didn't love it. It was fun to watch. It has some great, I think, Eli dialogue and there's some funny stuff and lighter and it's sort of a little bit of a respite from some of the more dramatic or even soap operatic elements of the preceding two episodes, although there's still darkness here. But, I don't -- aspects of it struck me as silly. Not always in a good way.

HRISHI: Hmm. What struck you as silly?

JOSH: The C.J./Josh eating contest I think is silly. Although kind of funny, and I like when she walks by the Roosevelt room and has a second thought and comes in. And then she -- after taking his brownie away -- she comes back again and takes all the brownies. It's funny.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It made me laugh, but it all seems to -- the genesis of it seems to be -- Our friend is fighting for his life, and you're eating a donut?

[laughter]

JOSH: I just didn't really get the That's it. I'm challenging you to a week of not eating these! I don't know, it seemed, maybe it's quibble to refer to a minor comic subplot as inorganic. But it's not like -- I'm not aware of -- C.J. being a health food nut and Josh as being a chronically bad eater. It just kind of came, it felt like, "Hey, let's do a minor comic subplot," and it didn't really entirely work for me. Although I gave myself over to it and still laughed at them for it.

HRISHI: Yeah. I liked it. I found it very believable that Josh might have absolutely terrible eating habits and really all self-care habits might be sacrificed for the sake of his job and so, as

someone who will eat a donut if it's in front of me without thinking about it, maybe I just felt very seen by that subplot.

JOSH: I mean I think they all eat terribly. You've had salad jokes from Toby.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I think they all eat pretty badly. It just seems sort of out of thin air, this challenge. I don't know. Additional silly elements to me: Charlie dragging his heels on graduating even though it's sweet, and I like the moment.

[West Wing Episode 6:03 excerpt]

CHARLIE: When I started Georgetown, the President made me promise that when I got the degree, I'd leave this job.

DONNA: Why would he want you to do that?

CHARLIE: He doesn't want me holding his jacket for the rest of my life.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: But in real life, you know, Charlie wouldn't like, I'm just not going to ever graduate so I don't have to fulfill that promise I made to the Pres- In real life, he would just talk to him and say Hey, I still really want to work for you for a couple more years. It's just, if you really break it down, and maybe just this is yet another thing that shouldn't be looked at too closely. It's ridiculous to think that after working his butt off to get through college while fulfilling his duties to the President, he's like I'm not going to take that final swim test because I said... 'cause he doesn't want me to keep working for him once I graduate. It's just not...

HRISHI: He made him promise, Josh. He made him promise that once he graduated he would leave the position. I think that these two people, Charlie and the president, take something like that very seriously, you know. There is a promise. So even if it's only by a technicality that he's able to keep his promise, then...

JOSH: It's kind of stupid though. I mean they're adults. I think you'd say, "You know what Sir, I really still wanna see it through til the end of the..." I mean, you know. Or the president would be like "Hey man, aren't you supposed to graduate this year?"

HRISHI: He's got other things to think about.

JOSH: Yeah. I know that I'm quibbling, and I still like the moment. It is sweet. It's just I don't like things that kind of don't really hold up to a second look or where you kind of go Wait a minute.

HRISHI: I don't think that that's the case with that. We know people burn out of those jobs much faster than anybody on our show actually has, you know. There's no way that somebody who's going to be the body man for the president is going to last for six years and try to make it to eight, so if we're already at that point, then I'm like yeah, I'm in for it. I like it.

JOSH: I guess. But that's kind of a macro silliness, where you go well, then there's no show or it becomes a show where we have new stars every two seasons and it's not that show.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And it's not that show. But, I don't buy that the like, ok, well, if you accept anything you have to accept everything.

HRISHI: Well, I don't think this qualifies. I thought it was nice.

JOSH: Well, I thought it was nice too. It's just too incredible. Like you could still have the sentiment of how he still wants to stay in his job without having to think of like Wow, all the people who know Charlie and love Charlie must be like "Wow, why didn't you graduate? I mean, wow, hasn't it been like two years longer than you're supposed to graduate." "Well, I didn't want to take my swim test because the President of the United States." I don't know, just to me, I guess we might as well just step to the last greater macro silly moment of this episode is that's the question of C.J. being appointed Chief of Staff.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: My feeling is -- I'm no expert about this stuff -- but it seems sort of having a press secretary become Chief of Staff probably isn't the most credible thing.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: All together, it just probably, the set of skills... I mean, we've seen C.J. be super competent and smart and she cares and she knows the issues, but the idea of a press secretary stepping into the Chief of Staff role isn't the most believable thing.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Then it's compounded by the fact that the way that it's presented to us in this episode is...

[West Wing Episode 6:03 excerpt]

LEO: "Only one name."

[end excerpt]

JOSH: To me it felt like an acting award because it's Allison Janney. Like of course there's only one name. She's won four Emmys; everybody loves her; she's an amazing actor.

HRISHI: I think it's an interesting choice.

JOSH: Oh, it's definitely interesting.

HRISHI: To be like Oh, C.J.'s gonna do it. I think putting C.J. in that role is gonna make for an interesting dynamic, and I like it, but it does feel like Josh has been the Deputy Chief of Staff this whole time and has stood in for Leo lots of times. I mean even from the beginning of Mandy...

[West Wing Episode 1.02 excerpt]

JOSH: She answers to me and she answers to Toby.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That being said, they do a good job sort of buttressing the decision in the end of this episode with all the stuff that comes before this episode -- when you see Toby and Josh being completely uncoordinated. The whole thing felt unfair to Josh Lyman as character.

JOSH: Well, that's another one of -- I hate to keep using this same word -- slightly silly aspect to the episode. Why don't they just discuss how this is gonna work? You know Leo's bedridden. Even after things start to go initially awry when Toby and Josh have a clear miscommunication about the number of children (the cap that might be put on this child tax credit), they don't sit down and go "Ok, listen. We've gotta take five minutes and discuss how communications are going to work and if there is a hierarchy." They sort of kind of dance around the idea and just continually keep making mistakes and have these miscommunications. And Toby even, at one point, goes to President Bartlet and says, "Hey, have you thought about how we're gonna deal with this?" And the fact that they don't ever just hammer it out, instead keep having these substantive and comic mishaps...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...feels a little odd. And I agree with you. You know if Leo's gonna say "There's only one name," you'd think it would be Josh.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Josh or Toby seems like a more qualified candidate or, you know, according to what their specialties would be, not that they're more competent than C.J. but you'd think one of them. Temperamentally, I don't know if I see Toby working so well as Bartlet's Chief of Staff.

HRISHI: I think it's a question of temperament in the end that lets me buy in that it shouldn't be Josh, especially after everything that happened in season five. I think part of my reaction to that is, looking at seasons one through four. Josh Lyman, where yes it makes sense, you know he would be the natural successor for Leo. But, after everything that happened in season five, he, you know, shot himself in the foot on a few occasions, and I think he's revealed that he doesn't have the best temperament for the kind of high level diplomacy and even-handedness that the Chief of Staff job might need.

JOSH: Yeah, he also has a hubris...

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: ...that could be a quick downfall in the job.

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

JOSH: Due respect, you never thought we'd get a deal and we did. They're going to be scraping faces off Mount Rushmore. It's a news roadblock.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's so big and so out of control and so clearly a headed-for-a-fall type situation. And we've seen that in a serial fashion from Josh. So, I guess with that might also disqualify him, in addition to Toby, from being a great candidate [cross talk] for the job.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

JOSH: And I think the choice of C.J. is certainly interesting. It's a great, new, interesting, unexpected way for the show to go, but the credibility of it all bothers me a little bit. And also the fact that we go from this episode, finding that the president can't even wrap his head around appointing an Interim Chief of Staff for the next couple of days while they wait to see how Leo's health crisis pans out, and then he goes from just a whispered word from his Chief of Staff, Leo, to just choosing C.J. [cross talk] so quickly.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah. Yeah. Pete Rouse was Interim Chief of Staff to President Obama. He served for three months after Rahm Emanuel left and before William Daily took over. And, you know, an Interim Chief of Staff makes sense. One thing that I do like about the idea of Leo, he is the Chief of Staff, right? And so one of his responsibilities is to kind of recognize talent and see what people are capable of and put them in the right room at the right time. And I like the idea that he has seen in C.J. over the past six years, that she actually has the stuff to be Chief of Staff, even though she doesn't have maybe the most obvious resume for that job. He has some Leo vision that's allowed him to say, "It's gotta be her."

JOSH: I agree with you, and I think there's a little something missing then, instead of this whole thing occurring sort of tacitly without our hearing anything of substance or even the suggestion that there is a greater conversation between Leo and President Bartlet. It would have been interesting to hear. I feel if somebody as un-expert as I am finds that it's not credible for the Press Secretary to become Chief of Staff, it would have been worth a scene, a moment, the speech to hear a little bit of the substance of why Leo's got just the one name. I would like to have heard how he would articulate it, and I wouldn't have minded an acknowledgment that this may not be what you're expecting, and this might be an [cross talk] odd choice, and this has maybe never happened before but here's why.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes. No, I think you're right. I think about the way that Debbie Fiderer was chosen for her job, and we got a really great dramatization of why she was the right person. Despite all these surface attributes that made it seem like she would be a terrible choice -- coming into the White House high and how zany she was with her poker and alpaca farming and stuff -- but in the end we got to see evidence of why she would be the right replacement for such a huge role. And that was Mrs. Landingham. Here we're talking about Leo.

JOSH: That's a very, very good point, and I think you build, probably, a great entire episode where that was the A plot, this decision, rather than it sort of simmering in the background of the rest of this episode, and then it occurring sort of off screen [cross talk] if there were any, you know, real conversations about it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah. Yeah, maybe that's the foundational criticism that I have, is that I am for C.J. being the Chief of Staff -- I think it's an interesting decision -- but I feel like it was done hastily here.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: It could have had one more episode to stretch out that replacement where we did get to have those things expanded upon.

JOSH: Yeah, it could have been great. It could have been interesting. I chuckled to myself as I watched this episode and thought Oh, finally, Will gets a great scene in the Oval Office, head-to-head with President Bartlet. We don't see any of it, but I'm just thrilled to have been mentioned in such an important scene.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: But it could have been interesting, if that was sort of feeling him out whether Will might have been the right person for the job. It would have been interesting to see that conversation and maybe for us to surmise why Oh, he's not the great pick and maybe it could have happened with other people as well. It would have been interesting to see the process, and Bartlet's thought process, and why Leo's lobbying for C.J. And I would have liked to see that.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Missed opportunity, I think.

HRISHI: Yeah. Greg Brock, the reporter, he knows that there's something interesting about that conversation.

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

GREG: I'm hearing Will Bailey.

C.J.: Then you should have your hearing checked.

GREG: A one-on-one with the President yesterday, first time all year, knows the military, which Josh and Toby don't.

C.J.: First of all, it's Leo. Second, Josh and Toby know every inch of the government--military, industrial, animal, mineral.

GREG: Lots of folks can manage down, Will's proven he can manage up. A fully-fledged adult.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Thanks, Greg.

[laughter]

HRISHI: Let's breakdown some of the mishaps between Toby and Josh because there are a lot of them in this episode.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: In round one of sort of this cringing cycle, Toby says, "Look we're in the middle of an intersection without a traffic cop. If we want we can run things through me" and Josh immediately thinks it's about ego.

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

TOBY: I'm talking about a process.

JOSH: And if we want to sacrifice livestock in your name?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's a great line.

HRISHI: But it feels like it sets things off that there's going to be a little bit of a power showdown between Josh and Toby, and C.J. tries to clear the air. She says, "How about you be the Communications Director and you be the Deputy Chief of Staff." It's great, but again, it's one of many occasions where C.J. has the levelheaded decision and that's fine but it's just like so many points for C.J., so many points against Josh, all within one episode. It feels like it's just cramming to try and prove that it should be her instead of Josh.

JOSH: Right and of course reverse engineering from the end, that is what they're doing.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's just a little blatant.

HRISHI: Yup. Round two of this is, I think, is right after they meet. C.J. says in her duties as Press Secretary Plus -- you know without Leo there -- "Ok, we have to get statements endorsing the peace plan from every member of the UN Security Council." I thought this was a clever thing, you know, the reason why C.J. would be talking to the UN is because they're talking about getting statements. There's this public message part of it.

JOSH: P.R. aspect, sure.

HRISHI: Yeah, she's dealing with these UN member states, and she has the idea, and then Toby comes in and has the same idea.

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

TOBY: You might want to start gathering statements from Security Council Members. Build momentum toward that resolution. We can tell the President it was your idea.

C.J.: Thanks.

JOSH: Hey, why don't you work with State. Bumble together any public statements from members of the Security Council. I got your back on this.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And she doesn't bother correct them to say, "Yea, I got it guys, I already know this." She says, "Sure."

JOSH: Carol and C.J. exchange that look of like "Oh, these men."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Being one step behind and then wanting to take credit for being one step ahead.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah, and then round three is this child tax credit issue, capping the number of children for the \$300 tax cut. Josh and Toby are out there making opposite deals without communicating with each other, and I think this is what you're talking about. Like come on, would you really be having these conversations and not have any kind of plan here?

JOSH: Right, this is a first-couple-of-weeks-in-the-administration kind of mistake to be making.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Hey, let's sit down for five minutes.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Talk about where we are. Hey, if there is any development text me, [cross talk] call me, like let's really stay together on this.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. You know I might chalk it up to some idea that they have been working together so long that they assume some level of telepathy on the other person's part or like "You know that this is what we have to do. It should go without saying."

JOSH: Perhaps. So, yeah. Do know what the current child tax credit is?

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: I believe it's \$2,000 per child. Up from \$1,000. I think the Trump tax plan in 2017 brought it up from \$1,000 to \$2,000.

HRISHI: And is there a cap on the number of children?

JOSH: I won't get there, so I haven't really looked into it.

[laughter]

JOSH: I topped out at two, and that's all she wrote folks. Do you feel slighted that you get nothing for Watson?

[laughter]

HRISHI: No. Watson is not my child. People sometimes call me and call Lindsey his parent. "Oh you go to, you want to see your dad." It doesn't feel right to me. Someone asked me the other day, "Are you his owners or his parents?" and I was like "neither."

JOSH: But you don't expect the government to subsidize his care?

HRISHI: No, come on.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: On the IRS website, it says, "credit as much is worth as much as \$2,000 per child." It doesn't say there is a cap on it.

JOSH: As a parent, let me warn you -- kids over the course of their lifetime or after the course of their first seventeen years -- cost more than \$2,000 a year. This is -- I can see if you're trying to work an angle, forget it, you're not going to turn a profit on this scam.

HRISHI: Ok. So they have these screw ups.

JOSH: Screws up.

HRISHI: Screws up, and it's a little bit embarrassing, but it's private, and then they have one, a big one, that's very public, and really, in front of the worst person it could possibly be: Speaker Haffley. Toby comes in. Josh calls him on the phone, and they've got absolutely opposite messages.

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

TOBY: A \$400 tax credit.

[phone rings]

HAFFLEY: Yes? Uh, sure I'll put him on speaker phone. Hello?

JOSH: Mr. Speaker, the president's going postal over this tax credit. I practically had to peel him off the ceiling, and I may be able to talk him down, but you're gonna have to move on peacekeeping now.

TOBY: Josh?

JOSH: Toby?

TOBY: Hi.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's pretty sad.

JOSH: It's a funny moment, and I like how it's played, even if it's a tough buy. Again, I did like the moment.

HRISHI: Yeah. When Haffley's like, "Ok, put him through," turns on the speaker phone, and you just get to watch Richard Schiff's face...

[laughter]

HRISHI: ...as Josh starts speaking.

JOSH: Yeah. Steven Culp was funny in this scene.

HRISHI: Yeah. When I said that I think this episode felt a little unfair to Josh, one of the moments that especially felt out of character for me was when he said to the president, "You know, if you want someone working out of Leo's office, just shout if you need anything." He does it in a way that is sort of inelegant and in the moment it feels like a betrayal or something and the president reacts as if it is. And to me, Josh is the last person who would ever do that. We've established this about him. You know, he doesn't want to be the guy. He wants to be the guy the guy counts on.

JOSH: I agree, although I saw Josh the way you do, even in that moment and felt that it was a particularly sensitive raw nerve of President Bartlet that was seeing it otherwise. I didn't take it as an actual betrayal, I saw it through President Bartlet's eyes that he was a little bit salty about it.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: But I took Josh at face value, the way you would interpret him as just saying, You know, if you do need anything.

HRISHI: Right. It's not a power grab.

JOSH: Rather than trying to jump into a power vacuum.

HRISHI: Right. Ok. I think it could have played that way too, but for me, whatever, it ended up not, and I bristled at that. But then, you know, Toby takes a run at a similar kind of conversation, and he does it in a much more elegant way, I think.

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

TOBY: And I care about his surgery, but we're fumbling the tax bill. Our diplomatic strategy is a game of telephone, and these are the things we're spending time on.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, he makes a very good point. But there's also a dark and intense moment in that scene when President Bartlet is saying, "Look this was out of the blue. This was completely unexpected" and Toby says, "Was it, was it really?..."

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: ...and sort of betrays a more practical, sort of cold, analytical. You know, like the guy had alcohol and drug... You know, it's obviously something Toby had thought about.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And I thought that was an excellent and almost kind of chilling moment.

HRISHI: Yeah, I think there is that assumption that if the Vice President is the person who steps in for the President if something happens, that Josh would be the one to step in for Leo if something happens. As everyone talks about him and acts with him, he's almost like a co-President. Well, who steps in?

JOSH: And of course, once again, the synchronicity between real life and our podcast and the television show. President Trump currently mulling whom to appoint in John Kelly's stead. Presumably Sarah Huckabee Sanders.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah. We'll see. Maybe we can turn for a second to my favorite weird sidebar in this episode.

JOSH: Please.

HRISHI: The President of Turkmenistan.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Gets mentioned a few times.

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

JOSH: Don't even say the name.

C.J.: Why not?

JOSH: Their President's looney tunes. He created a holiday for his favorite melon.

C.J.: A holiday for a melon?

JOSH: He mandated that the Turkmen people gnaw on bones like dogs to strengthen their teeth. He's nuts.

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: What I love about this is that it's all true.

JOSH: What?

HRISHI: That it's all real.

JOSH: Is it really? [cross talk] That's fantastic. Those things made me laugh. It didn't occur to me even to Google and see. I thought it was, again, some sort of, maybe, casual racism.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes. They don't name check him in the episode, but Turkmenistan's first ever president was a guy named Saparmurat Niyazov, and here are some of the things that he brought about: One, he banned the use of lip-syncing at public concerts in 2005 because of the negative effect on the development of musical arts.

JOSH: Where does he stand on Tic Tok?

[laughter]

HRISHI: Yeah. That would probably be blocked [cross talk].

JOSH: [cross talk] Unapproved. That would be Blic Blocked.

[laughter]

HRISHI: Here are a couple of dog-related things that I really like. One, he banished dogs from the capital because of their unappealing odor.

[laughter]

HRISHI: But, the thing that Josh says about the people gnawing on bones like dogs to strengthen their teeth, that's true. He said, "I watched young dogs when I was young. They were given bones to gnaw on to strengthen their teeth. Those of you whose teeth have fallen out did not chew on bones."

JOSH: Wow.

HRISHI: And so, that was his advice -- was that the Turkmen people should chew on bones to strengthen their teeth.

JOSH: I cannot believe this is all real.

HRISHI: It's all real. I mean it just, it's really a thrill to read about this stuff. He outlawed opera and ballet and circuses for being un-Turkmen-like. In 2004, he said that men should no longer have long hair or beards. And then you know, just some of my favorite ones: he abolished the Turkmen word for "bread" and replaced it with "gurbansoltan," his mother's name.

JOSH: Hats off to this guy because if you can't have fun with being a monarch or a ruler, I mean then it's wasted on you. These are the kind of things I would do. I think that's awesome.

HRISHI: He renamed the month of April after his mom.

[laughter]

JOSH: His mom. Whose name was April.

[laughter]

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Call me overly PC, I call that country Turkpeoplestan.

HRISHI: Oh, yeah.

[laughter]

JOSH: No?

HRISHI: He liked to be known as Turkmenbashi, father of the Turkmen.

JOSH: Yeah, that's kind of sweet. Hats off to you, by the way, for looking this stuff up because -- I think -- there's a nanosecond where I thought "Can any of this even be remotely accurate?" And then I thought, I'm not gonna waste a Google search on that.

[laughter]

HRISHI: It's real. I mean the thing about the holiday for the melon is real. Melon Day.

JOSH: Melon Day.

HRISHI: Melon Day. Yeah, we missed it this year. We should celebrate next year, August 11 2019, is Melon Day. It is the festival devoted to the musk melon.

JOSH: I smell a t-shirt.

[laughter]

JOSH: Might be our final piece of merch.

[laughter]

HRISHI: Ah, Melon Day. Also it is the musk melon, so if you are smelling the t-shirt it might be a musk melon that you're actually smelling.

JOSH: Wow. Now I want to create a sitcom set in Turkmenistan under this guy's rule.

HRISHI: Yeah. Just hats off to Eli for this tidbit. It's fantastic. I love it. I mean if you ignore the sort of repressive, dictatorial rule part of Turkmenbashi.

JOSH: Yeah, and you should.

HRISHI: Yeah. Let me laugh.

JOSH: You're gonna have any fun, sure. Let's say we take a quick break and come back later.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: I thought that this whole episode also had a kind of funny strain of "Big Block of Cheese Day," in terms of the Congresspeople who come in to talk to Toby and Josh. You know it's pork instead of cheese.

[laughter]

HRISHI: But they're asking for crazy things in order... [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] Crazy things.

HRISHI: ...to give their support and it really does feel like these crackpots.

JOSH: Very much so.

HRISHI: Yeah, one of them wants to...

JOSH: ...institute a monarchy.

HRISHI: ...institute a monarchy. I'm sure Turkmenbashi would be all for it.

JOSH: Sure. And the other would like abolish the institution of marriage all together.

HRISHI: Yeah. I love the moment when they finally tell the President that this is what they're up against. Martin Sheen has this great nod after they describe the ways that they've screwed up.

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

TOBY: Would you prefer a bill to appoint an American monarch?

JOSH: Or a ban on the institution of marriage except in casinos and department stores?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Martin Sheen nods does this thing where he frowns and nods at the same time. I would encourage everyone to try frowning and nodding. It really has a lot to it. There's a lot of juice to that combination. It's a Robert De Niro kind of a...

[laughter]

JOSH: That's true.

HRISHI: And he does it there. He gives him a really big frown and nods, and he's like, Ok. It's just a great moment.

JOSH: But there are two characters that I feel are slightly shortchanged in this episode.

HRISHI: Ed and Larry.

JOSH: Well, that's in every episode. You can never have enough Ed and Larry, as far as I'm concerned. Margaret, I would have liked to see what Margaret was going through with Leo [cross talk].

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah. Mm-hmm.

JOSH: Bedridden. There are a couple quick shots of her, but we don't really get the kind of concern, on the level that you know Margaret would have for Leo.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I would have like to have seen a little bit about how this was all affecting her.

HRISHI: In a John Wells-ian kind of way, you want to see her not stopping for red lights, barreling down...

JOSH: That's exactly right.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I'd like to see her car flip on the way to the White House, right itself, and then screech into the parking lot. And Donna returns and she seems to be completely free of trauma, having gone through an incredibly huge event. What's the time element here? Do you know?

HRISHI: A few weeks.

JOSH: A few weeks.

HRISHI: Well, it's been since season five, so really, you know, many, many months.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: And she comes back and Josh wheels her, you know, towards her desk, not actually to her desk, and [cross talk] then just leaves her there.

JOSH: Right, that's funny.

JOSH: Oh, and here's a pen. Get to work.

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah, chivalry.

[laughter]

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: The pen thing reminded me of *Say Anything*.

[*Say Anything* excerpt]

LLOYD DOBLER: She gave me a pen. I gave her my heart, and she gave me a pen.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's exactly what Donna got, yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think it's Josh's, maybe, kind of, way of trying to give her his heart. Or something.

JOSH: John Cusack once blocked me on Twitter and now follows me.

HRISHI: Oh, he follows you now?

JOSH: An incredible journey we've taken. Yeah, I'm sure he just doesn't connect me to the person he once blocked.

[laughter]

HRISHI: Well, I'm glad to hear that because that did distress me when you two were having a one-way spat.

[laughter]

HRISHI: I'm a big fan of *Say Anything*.

JOSH: I'm a big fan of saying anything.

[laughter]

HRISHI: What people don't know is you went to his house, stood outside the window, blasting Peter Gabriel.

JOSH: That's how I got him to follow me.

HRISHI: That's how you got him back.

JOSH: It worked!

HRISHI: I wanted to highlight the moment when the president turns to Abbey and confesses that he thinks that he's the one who caused Leo's heart attack.

JOSH: "I fired him."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I like that she intuits that that's what's on his mind, although obviously she doesn't know that he has in fact fired him or asked for his resignation. She knows that what's plaguing, or what's on his mind, is the idea that he's brought him into this pressure cooker of a job that has contributed to his health problems.

HRISHI: Yeah, I think my favorite moment of everything going on with the president and Leo -- you know, as he's racked with guilt about all this stuff and he's trying to come to terms with what to do and wanting to replace Leo and not being able to make that call -- is that moment when Abbey says:

[West Wing Episode 6:03 excerpt]

ABBEY: You've got to keep him out of that job. He'll kill himself for you if you don't.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: And instead he decides he'll kill C.J. instead.

JOSH: That's right. She can take it.

HRISHI: I mean, the thing he actually asks is "Will you jump off of a cliff?"

JOSH: By the way, another major, I think, *West Wing/Scandal* crossover. We know that Shonda Rhimes is a big fan of *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: And we also know that Shawnda Rhymez is your hip-hop moniker.

JOSH: That's right. I almost forgot. My hip-hop identity. Shawnda Rhymez, with a z.

HRISHI: And Shawnda spelled Shawnda, not Shonda.

JOSH: Right. The finale of *Scandal* -- the seventh season final episode, the finale of the entire series is called "Over a Cliff," and that's a reference to this sort of gladiator credo of Olivia Pope for whom her cohorts and colleagues would go over a cliff. And that's a phrase that's often said: "over a cliff."

[Scandal Episode 1.04 excerpt]

ABBY: You are the gladiator. I would gladly follow you over a cliff.

[end excerpt]

[Scandal Episode 7.17 excerpt]

OLIVIA: By my side? Do you know where I'm heading?

HUCK: Over a cliff.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I wonder whether that, subconsciously, the spark came from this "over a cliff" idea in the Bartlet White House.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I suspect it did.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I was going to say early on -- you know we'd talked -- Will, at this point is the appendix of *The West Wing* body. Kind of a vestigial organ that yeah, I mean, if you want to go to the bother of cutting it out you could, but you could also just leave it. But even so, he has a moment early on, just as he's waving goodbye during the cold open, where his sum up of this revolutionary mid-east peace agreement they made is, "Peace in our time."

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Kind of a bummer that he's echoing Neville Chamberlain's famous quote upon the signing of the Munich Agreement. You know, the appeasement of Hitler's Nazi party. So that's

his take on the deal that they've just made. I mean it's just kind of more of the same from Will even in a causal moment.

[laughter]

HRISHI: I was wondering how you felt about that line.

JOSH: Yeah, I don't recall exactly, but it's more of the same.

[laughter]

JOSH: That's Will, I guess.

HRISHI: Speaking of removing appendixes...

JOSH: Mm-hmm, appendixes.

HRISHI: ...appendices, we see Leo under the knife in this episode.

JOSH: Very *ER*.

HRISHI: That's what I was...and between that and Donna in the hospital room, there's been a lot of *ER* in *The West Wing*.

JOSH: Mm-hmm.

HRISHI: I wonder if John Wells felt this need to bring in more hospital scenes because *ER* was still this ratings powerhouse, and maybe they felt like they needed to drip some of those juices onto *The West Wing* to bring it back.

JOSH: I figured it was just that, "We already bought the open chest cavity stuff, why not use it a second time?"

HRISHI: Sure.

JOSH: Amortize it over two series.

HRISHI: By the way, the C.J./Greg Brock dynamic is pretty fun.

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

GREG: Who's the new White House Chief of Staff?

C.J.: I'll tell you about him. His name's Leo McGarry. He comes out of Chicago. An unconventional choice, sure, but...

GREG: I thought we were off the '30s comedy?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It does make me miss Danny Concannon a little bit, but I'm glad there is someone there to have a platonic kind of sparring relationship with.

JOSH: Whenever I see him on screen (Sam Robards), I think...when I see the two of them on screen rather, I think there could be a little...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...could have been a little romance there.

HRISHI: I think so too.

JOSH: Unspoken, there's nothing really that suggests it other than something about the two actors and how they interact. I could see it.

HRISHI: They have chemistry.

JOSH: They do.

HRISHI: Yeah. I like their back and forth when Greg is speculating about the new White House Chief of Staff and then he says:

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

GREG: Well, jeepers, Brock, you care about Leo too, but there's a power vacuum here. And your editors don't take puff pieces, and you haven't owned a typewriter since the Coolidge Administration.

C.J.: I would never say jeepers.

GREG: Would too.

C.J.: Would not

GREG: Would too.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, you would.

HRISHI: I think she would, especially when later in this episode she says:

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

C.J.: Well heavens to Murgatroyd.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Do you know what cartoon character -- have we discussed this before? I just have deja vu all the time now.

HRISHI: I don't know that we have discussed this specifically, but I like that when you asked me that, you almost went into that character's voice.

JOSH: Yes, I was ready to do it. Snagglepuss. [In Snagglepuss voice] Heavens to Murgatroyd.

[*The Yogi Bear Show* excerpt]

Snagglepuss: Heavens to Murgatroyd.

[End excerpt]

JOSH: [In Snagglepuss voice] Heavens to Betsy, even.

HRISHI: Umm, can you just keep going and say, "Have we discussed this already?"

JOSH: [In Snagglepuss voice] Have we discussed this already?

[laughter]

HRISHI: Will's meeting with the President does lead C.J. to her brilliant revelation that she can create a coalition within the United Nations just out of the NATO powers. And it's a significant enough group of countries that she can really craft a statement out of that. "Hey we've got NATO behind us." That's what actually the President had called Will in for. Will says, "He wanted thoughts on NATO's role in peacekeeping," and I like that he did not continue on to say, "and that's because my Dad used to be..."

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: ...Supreme Commander Allied Forces.

JOSH: My guess is that he said that a lot as a kid, maybe in grade school.

HRISHI: Yeah. So he doesn't need to say now. He's a fully-fledged adult, as Greg described him.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: So he doesn't have to say it anymore. But it's just a nice little nod to those of us who know that he's got this long-term connection to NATO and so, of course, the president would want to have his advice when it comes to what they might do.

JOSH: Absolutely. He's absolutely crucial, off screen.

[laughter]

JOSH: He's Supreme Commander of off-screen advice giving.

[laughter]

HRISHI: And inadvertent revelation fueling.

JOSH: Also, yes.

HRISHI: John Spencer's performance, again, I thought was fantastic. Watching Leo just having difficulty swallowing from his throat being so dry after he comes out of the surgery [cross talk] is, it's painful to watch and it's really affecting when the president says, "I'm going to need that list of names" and he says, "Only one." The cracked parched quality to his voice is...

JOSH: ...nicely done.

HRISHI: ...nicely done. And then I actually made a sound. I think I went "Bah" when the president got teary and choked up when he said:

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Go spend some time with my outgoing Chief of Staff. 'cause then we've got work to do.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Martin Sheen brings some tears into his eyes and his voice gets a little thicker in those lines, and I thought that was nice work, as well.

JOSH: I agree. I was very taken with his hair in this episode for some reason.

HRISHI: Whose hair?

JOSH: President Bartlet's, Martin's. He's just got a real like, presidential wedge on his head.

[laughter]

HRISHI: Is that a compliment, to call someone's hair a wedge?

JOSH: I think wedge salad. It's just -- it's a beautiful thing to behold. It looks like it takes a lot of time.

HRISHI: Oh, ok. I don't know.

JOSH: I mean it only as a compliment.

HRISHI: I think you'll find this is a wedge issue.

JOSH: Perhaps so. I think there's a good tweet, something about this whole romaine lettuce recall, being a wedge issue.

HRISHI: Uh-huh.

JOSH: I'm trying it right now, your tweet.

[laughter]

HRISHI: I think it's not going to be a popular one, I think people are gonna...

JOSH: I think it's going to do well.

HRISHI: Later in this season, there are some questionable hair things happening. Bradley Whitford's hair gets real crazy this season.

JOSH: Oh does it?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I'm looking forward to that, and I will have a lot to say.

[laughter]

JOSH: Anything else on this episode of *The West Wing*?

HRISHI: I just want to talk about musk melon more.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Toby mentions to the president that there are 290 million people who come first before Leo, the population of the U.S. at the time. Now there are 325 million more. We've got 35 million more people than Toby described.

JOSH: That's a lot of tax credits.

HRISHI: Taxes credit.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: You're saying they're all children?

JOSH: Well, I think, they all started as...

HRISHI: Yeah, who can say?

JOSH: I can.

HRISHI: I haven't seen it myself.

JOSH: Wow, you need actual empirical evidence.

HRISHI: Yup. Alright, after all of the back and forth between Josh and Toby and what seemed to me, what I perceived, as this kind of power struggle between the two of them, there's this detente. You know, Toby says, "I wanted to run it off something, anything, a decision-making tree" and Josh, still bristling, still prickly, he says:

[West Wing Episode 6.03 excerpt]

JOSH: With you at the top?

TOBY: NO! With you at the top.

JOSH: Me?

TOBY: 'Til Leo get's back. I tried to tell the president to give you the job.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Turns out we didn't get there but that conversation in the corridor of the hospital, Toby was hoping to get the president to give the job to Josh, but Leo speaks and has just the one name, and that's how it goes.

JOSH: I like that that was Toby's approach. It makes sense.

HRISHI: I think so too. I like the way it sets things up. The idea that they both thought Josh would be the person who should fill in. And that both of them are rebuffed.

JOSH: Mm-hmm. That's it for another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*. Thanks for listening.

HRISHI: Thanks for listening this whole year. This is our last episode of 2018.

JOSH: Yeah, wow. Another year in the books.

HRISHI: Yeah. We'll be back on January 9th with episode 6:04 and special guest Allison Janney. She'll be joining us to talk about "Lift Off."

JOSH: That should be fun. Also I don't think we've shared this news, but as we approach the finish line of the entire podcast -- how sad is that -- we've decided to visit some people and some issues that may not be episode specific, and so we're going to create some bonus episodes.

HRISHI: That's right. Every month, the last week of each month, we're gonna to do a bonus episode. A non-episode-specific discussion to talk to some folks who we might have missed along the way. On the one hand, we know there's stuff that we still want to cover and on the other hand we're just sad about the idea that we only have forty episodes of *The West Wing* left to talk about.

JOSH: [singing] We've only just begun.

HRISHI: So look for that in 2019. We'll be doing all the rest of season six, plus most of season seven, but we'll also have these bonus episodes and a couple of big bonus episodes too, like our *Parks & Rec* and *Hamilton* specials. Thanks so much for sticking with us through another year. Thanks to the rest of our team: Zach McNees, Margaret Miller, and Nick Song for their indispensable help.

JOSH: That's right. We remain, as always, a proud member of Radiotopia. There's pretty exciting Radiotopia news, by the way. I am a big fan of many of the podcasts that are part of Radiotopia. One of them is "Ear Hustle," which is a look at prison life, and it's produced in San Quentin. And one of the co-hosts and producers of that show, Earlonne Woods, has had his sentence commuted by Jerry Brown, in part as a result of the podcast. So it's kind of astounding

news coming out of a very special podcast. And so I urge people to listen to “Ear Hustle” and to the other fabulous offerings at Radiotopia.

HRISHI: Yea. This is one of the things that make being part of this network special. “Ear Hustle” is the kind of podcast that would not have existed somewhere else maybe.

JOSH: I think you’re right.

HRISHI: The only way that Radiotopia found the show was by doing an open call for podcasts. They just threw open the doors and let anyone submit. Out of, I think, 1500 submissions, “Ear Hustle” was the one that won, and it is truly special. And this news just makes things even more exciting.

JOSH: We wish you all the best: prosperity, wealth -- and more important than that -- joy, happiness, and health in the coming Goyishe New Year.

HRISHI: We hope that your New Year’s resolution includes hanging out with us more.

JOSH: That’s right.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI and JOSH: What’s next?

[laughter]

HRISHI: Sorry, let’s try that again.

JOSH: That worked good.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

HRISHI: What’s next?

JOSH: What’s...next.

[laughter]

HRISHI: Josh!

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI and JOSH: What’s next?

[Outro Music]