

The West Wing Weekly
6.11: "Opposition Research"
Guest: Mayor Pete Buttigieg

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today we're talking about season 6, episode 11, it's called *Opposition Research*.

JOSH: It was written by Eli Attie, it was directed by Chris Misiano, and it first aired on January 12th, 2005. We're two weeks away from the month that shall not be mentioned.

HRISHI: The month of Voldemort.

JOSH: Right, exactly.

HRISHI: In this episode, Josh and Matt Santos travel to New Hampshire to set up shop and do some campaigning for the early days of the Santos candidacy. But they discover they have some fundamental disagreements about the strategy in New Hampshire and the story to be told, and maybe even the ultimate goal of the campaign. And coming up later, we're going to be joined by special guest Mayor Pete Buttigieg, who has been honing his own narrative and introducing himself as a candidate for the Presidency. He's got an exploratory committee and he's got some similarities to Matt Santos and he just spent some time in New Hampshire doing retail politics of his own.

JOSH: He's a candidate you could see Josh Lyman getting behind.

HRISHI: I think so, yes. And in fact, Bradley Whitford tweeted that he thought that he was the real thing.

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: This episode starts with a white title screen, as opposed to our familiar black title screen with white text.

JOSH: Mmm. Maybe it's a comment on New Hampshire.

HRISHI: I think it is. It's unlike most episodes and I think it's also a comment on the fact that this isn't like most *West Wing* episodes.

JOSH: Yes, that's one of the things I enjoyed about it. Not that I don't enjoy most *West Wing* episodes, but it's refreshing. It's refreshing to get out of town, as it were.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think this is our first step into a really new world. One thing that makes this so different is not just the location, but several of our series regulars, our main characters, aren't in this episode.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: There's no Abbey, there's no Leo, there's no C.J., there's no Charlie, and there's no Kate.

JOSH: And I missed none of them.

HRISHI: I mean, I think the story is pretty captivating and interesting and, it's nice, it feels a little bit like a flashback that we never saw. A flashback that has never happened.

JOSH: Ha.

HRISHI: This feels a little bit like the first *Star Wars* movie, you know, *A New Hope* and then *A Force Awakens* when they have new characters and, you know, it's a different moment in time in the universe. But a lot of the mechanics of the story are things that are familiar, things that we're kind of used to, and they're kind of shifting some of the pieces around to tell some of the same stories.

JOSH: That's right. And looking at this episode, I thought of what Paul Redford had to say to us last week about how under Aaron it was important that every character be served, story-wise, every episode, so that you really would not, I guess, have gotten an episode like this in the Sorkin years.

HRISHI: That's true, that's interesting. I just am now thinking about "The Long Goodbye." It was kind of like this in that it was sort of a bottle episode for Allison Janney, a C.J.-centric episode, but it doesn't really count as a bottle episode 'cause it's entirely on location, you know, somewhere far away. But that's also an episode that Aaron Sorkin didn't write, even though it was during his tenure, that was Jon Robin Baitz.

JOSH: Indeed. I found it refreshing. Maybe I've just been in Los Angeles for too long, but I just enjoyed even looking at snow and cold environs and people's breath. I was like, "Wow. Oh, look how exotic!"

HRISHI: That white screen really does set things up, especially when you have the driving wind as the first thing you hear. It's a cold frontal.

JOSH: Ah, Nice. Very nice. When you said driving wind, I thought you meant Brad in the car.

HRISHI: [laughs] In this episode we're in New Hampshire, of course, but it wasn't actually filmed in New Hampshire, it was filmed in Canada, outside Toronto. Do you remember going out there for any of these scenes?

JOSH: I don't think I went to Canada.

HRISHI: That makes sense.

JOSH: Mine are all interiors, and I believe they were shot on a soundstage.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I didn't get the field trip.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I thought it looked good, not that I have such a discerning eye on behalf of New Hampshire, but I thought it looked - it convinced me.

HRISHI: I've spent a fair amount of time in New Hampshire, being from Massachusetts and having gone to high school there and yeah, I bought it as New Hampshire too. This episode starts with Josh and Matt Santos just driving around in the car. I don't actually know how to, I just realized in the synopsis and just now I'm calling Jimmy Smits's character, "Matt Santos." Like I don't know exactly how to describe him. I don't feel like I'm on a first name basis with him.

JOSH: But he wants you to be.

HRISHI: Exactly. He wants me to be on a first name basis. He wants me to call him "Matt." Maybe we should, but you know Josh is insistent that he should be called "The Congressman."

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

JOSH: Congressman, we're having this conversation.

SANTOS: Call me Matt.

JOSH: [shouting] I don't want to call you Matt.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And of course, you know, as we've talked about many times, we call the president "The President" or "President Bartlet."

JOSH: Well, I don't.

HRISHI: You don't, and a lot of writers...

JOSH: President Congressman.

HRISHI: [laughing] That sounds right. Okay, there we go.

JOSH: The number of tweets that I get, apropos of nothing, that just put the word "president" in front of what I tweeted, I'm sure I soundly deserve, but it is a lot. And occasionally it still makes me laugh, even though I should have come to expect it by now.

HRISHI: Yeah. We've created...

JOSH: A President Monster.

HRISHI: [laughing] Exactly. Yup. A monster that's kind of cute and amusing still, but monstrous and presidential, nonetheless.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: You know, I actually spoke to a friend of mine who is working for a Presidential candidate right now. This thing about, you know, calling the candidate by the title or by their first name or what the deal is. She sent me a text about this. She's a big *West Wing* fan too. She said, "One of the things that's changed between

the Santos campaign and the current cycle is how candidates are referred to. 20 years ago it was 'Congressman Santos,' 'Senator Vinick,' 'Governor Clinton.' Everyone used the title to be taken more seriously and remind voters that they already had an important job and could be trusted to take on an even bigger one. But today it's different. Candidates want to be more approachable, on a first name basis with voters, so it may be 'Senator Sanders' or 'Congressman Castro' in Congress, but it's definitely 'Bernie' and 'Julián' on the campaign trail. It's more relatable and easier to fit on a campaign button."

JOSH: There you go. There's such a contrast between the way I grew up as a kid and the way my kids are growing up. I would never have referred to a friend's parents by their first names.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: In fact, there's this classic moment that my younger sister had when she somehow just referred to our next door neighbor by his first name, and he just brutally reminded her that he was Mr. Washington and she didn't...I mean it traumatized her to the point where she can summon it up now in her forties as a seminal moment of just withering, but now I can't imagine any of my children's friends calling me Mr. Malina, it would just sound so weird and I would certainly say, "Please, call me Josh," and it's just such a, I guess, cultural shift.

HRISHI: It's funny, I felt really weird when a few of my friends who I grew up with switched, they switched with my parents. They went from calling them Mr. and Mrs. Hirway to calling them Sumesh and Kanta. And I was like, "You have not...like, what do you think has changed?"

JOSH: Earned it?

HRISHI: Yeah. How have you earned that?

JOSH: With no intervening occurrence? Nobody invited it or asked them? Your parents didn't say, "Hey..."

HRISHI: I thought you meant like a period where they just referred to them by their middle names.

JOSH: Ha. A little of a... please at least do it in stages. What it really meant was they were not invited to start calling them by their first names?

HRISHI: You know, I think there might've been a moment when my dad said, you know, call me some Sumesh or something, and I kind of laughed it off, you know, after we had graduated college or something like that, maybe my dad had said that. I'd never expected any of my friends to take him up on that, but a few of my friends have, and it actually bothers me.

JOSH: Ah, and would you ever tell anyone?

HRISHI: No, I guess I'm just doing a really deep subtweet here. So, if you're listening, maybe you know who you are.

JOSH: [Laughs] Let us know if you're mortified.

HRISHI: I don't call your parents by their first name. I would never dream of calling them by their first names.

JOSH: Oh, I'm quite sure they would want you to call them Bob and Fran.

HRISHI: Mmm-mm.

JOSH: I mean those aren't their names, but for some reason they're good with Bob and Fran. It's just these characters they take on.

HRISHI: Strange. I mean your dad's given first name is actually Mr. Malina, which was confusing as a kid, but...

JOSH: That is confusing.

HRISHI: There was this thing from CPAC today where Donald Trump was talking and he's like, "Oh, people used to call me up and be like 'Donnie, Don,' and now they call me up and they, and they say, 'Mr. President.' And I say, 'Relax. Call me Donald.'" [Laughs]

JOSH: It's so casual. That's hilarious.

HRISHI: You don't have to go that formal, but you do have to go more formal than you were before. [Josh and Hrishu laugh]

JOSH: Right. For speaking of names, CPAC doesn't work for me. CPAC is, I feel like, what I take when I get bronchitis.

HRISHI: [laughing] So as I was saying, I don't know what to call Matthew Santos. Congressman Santos, Congressman Matthew Santos, President Congressman Matthew Santos, and this is a big subject of discussion in this episode. "Call me Matt.' 'I don't want to call you Matt!'"

JOSH: That was a pretty good Brad Whitford you just did.

HRISHI: So, what are we going to do? Can we just make a house rule here? How do we refer to him? Santos?

JOSH: Santos.

HRISHI: Okay, fine.

JOSH: Jinx.

HRISHI: You know we have a savvy listenership, but just in case, I thought maybe it'd be worth just defining the term "retail politics" for a second.

JOSH: Okay.

HRISHI: So, New Hampshire is retail politics, really this is the process of introducing yourself to people at a small scale with real human interaction, is actually a crucial test for presidential candidates because most of our interactions with these people are through mass media. I mean even the stuff, you know, if you're not in New

Hampshire or not in the very places where they're going to be, even then you're watching it through TV news. But it's still a setting where they're actually meeting people, shaking hands, taking questions and actually having to be a human being. And I think it's like a way to sort of get a sense of, "Does this person actually have a soul, are they real? Is there something three dimensional to them?" And I think the New Hampshire primary feels important, especially to people in New Hampshire, but I think really in general in the process, as just a proxy for everyone else to get to see them in that setting.

JOSH: Yeah, well, what's interesting, I think, is that even in this day and age of social media and 24-hour news cycle and all that, what happens on the ground in New Hampshire, in what should be a very low stakes setting because there's only a few delegates that are going to be chosen by this process, but its prominence as one of the early bellwethers makes that sort of retail politics explode and magnified because everything's being covered. And also, every person I guess whose hand is met by the candidates and who is impressed by something, then also has their presence out in the world. It's like the shampoo commercial, they told two friends and they told two friends and they told two friends, and so I like, that's one of the things I love about this episode is seeing that even in this day and age, and granted this is 14 years ago, that there's an importance even being emphasized by somebody as savvy as Josh Lyman about just meeting people and looking in their eyes and giving them a sense of who you are. And I liked the little button on this cold open that just has President Congressman Santos, just walking up to somebody and where are they at? They're at a garbage dump or a recycling...

HRISHI: Recycling center.

JOSH: And just introduce himself, you know, it sort of almost trails off.

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

SANTOS: Morning. Hi, I'm Matt Santos. I'm running for President...

[West Wing theme tune]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I love that little moment.

HRISHI: It's pretty cute that Santos and Josh are just driving around together at the beginning, you know, with no entourage.

JOSH: Yes, and I liked the period piece of it all. What with the paper map...

HRISHI: Oh, needing a map. Yeah.

JOSH: Right. But it's nice that you...you couldn't really write that scene anymore. There would have to be some explanation for why neither of them has a phone.

HRISHI: Or it would be the really clichéd reason that just always stretches credulity for me, which is, "I'm not getting any bars here."

JOSH: Ah, right.

HRISHI: And therefore the GPS doesn't work. You know, like, whenever suddenly you're being chased by a monster - President Monster - and you're trying to make a call in the horror movie, it's like, "Oh, I'm out of bars." Wherever you just happened to be.

JOSH: Right. Or you'd have to be like my wife, the lovely Melissa, who genuinely enjoys a paper map. She likes something she can hold and look at whenever we travel. She's always getting the real deal...and I say, "Really? We need to buy a map of London?" But she likes it, and I love that about her.

HRISHI: And they're beautiful to look at.

JOSH: That's true.

HRISHI: I still keep a copy of the *Thomas Guide* in my car.

JOSH: Oh, do you really? Wow, that is old school.

HRISHI: Yeah. I really like all the dialogue between Josh and Santos in the car in this scene. Santos says he just, he wishes they could campaign and somehow just take his name off of it, which is a great sweet kind of ego-less drive from a presidential candidate, but Joshua's response is great.

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

SANTOS: You know, I almost wish that we could have a campaign slogan without my name in it.

JOSH: Yeah. For President. That's catchy.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah. I love that too. It's just a funny little couplet between them, but it also sort of augers what's to come, which is that they have this sort of fundamental butting of heads about basic approach to the campaign.

HRISHI: Yeah. Eli was on fire I think in this episode. Some really great writing.

JOSH: It's an excellent script.

HRISHI: Yeah. There are some other weird things though, stylistic things in this episode. You know, there was the white cold frontal, and then there's also this moment as they finish up the drive and they get to the...they finally arrive at the campaign headquarters. There's this little music cue. The song "Someday Someway" is playing in the car...by Marshall Crenshaw.

[short excerpt of "Someday Someway" by Marshall Crenshaw]

HRISHI: It's just there for a second, but it's the kind of thing that we almost never encounter in *The West Wing*, which is just like, just a piece of music. In the end it functions as a thing that was in the car, you know, they stop the car and the song turns off. But for a few seconds there's just a song playing, like a pop song, and it's not motivated by, you know, they're at the White House and James Taylor is playing or they're at Rock the Vote and Aimee Mann is playing, you know, or they're at a bar

and it's playing over the loudspeaker or something and they're talking over it. It's just this little moment of some music.

JOSH: Are you now going to tell me, you asked, you reached out to Eli and asked him why he chose that.

HRISHI: I didn't, no, no.

JOSH: I'm disappointed in you. It's about what I expected from me, but I'm a little disappointed in you. I was just gonna say Eli is a real music guy, you know, appreciator of fine music and there must be, that must have been, I would guess his choice. I mean that could be a directorial choice, but...

HRISHI: Let's give it a shot. I'm going to text Eli right now and let's see.

JOSH: Pick up the Bat Phone.

HRISHI: I mean, really it could just be any song, which is part of the reason why it feels a little unusual for *The West Wing*. It's the kind of thing that is extremely common in TV, and especially in network TV and TV of this era, but just it struck me as a little bit surprising. Then when they arrive, Josh really lays out the mission.

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

JOSH: This trip is about introducing yourself, honing a narrative. That's it.

SANTOS: I'm here to hone.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That is Josh's mission. This is the heart of what it is that they're butting heads over. The whole time Santos wants to just talk about real policy. He wants to get to the heart of what he thinks needs to change in the country and Josh keeps telling him, "They have to get to know you first."

JOSH: Yeah, there's a certain, I will pre-admit to being a party pooper a little bit, but there's a...one slight criticism humming under the...most of this episode for me is that they didn't have this discussion before they came to New Hampshire. Because it's a continuing discussion, I mean, obviously it's, you know, not in the spirit of the thing to make a suggestion that would have obviated the need for the entire episode. But you know, when they were finally yelling at each other or raising their voices and really getting into it, you know, I just kept thinking, "This is a – or I guess it's on Josh – He should have had this conversation before New Hampshire. They shouldn't have hit the ground stumbling; they should have been prepared for what their approach was going to be to this very important primary."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And first primary

HRISHI: To their credit, Santos does say that, he says, you know, "Maybe that's what we should have talked about in Houston." It makes you think - how short of a conversation was it? Did it...was it really as long as what we saw in the episode? He

just comes in and says, "I want you to run for president." And he's like, "See you later!"

JOSH: Right. "Okay, I'll meet you in New Hampshire."

HRISHI: But you know, one thing I don't take issue with.

JOSH: What's that?

HRISHI: When Santos makes a toast to everyone, they're drinking Dunkin Donuts coffee, which is very New England.

JOSH: That said, am I wrong or is this another instance, it's been a long time since we discussed it, of very bad fake coffee drinking on television? I mean, I went back to look at it again, and one - I don't think he's even pouring coffee. You certainly, they cut before you would really actually see any liquid come out. The cups look like there's no weight to them, when they clink them together it sounds like the clinking of empty Styrofoam cups. I had to look a couple of times to see if there's any steam. I think there may be CGI steam or something. I dunno, I just...it made me go back to that website that I think we referenced once before, this video montage of bad fake television coffee drinking.

HRISHI: Yeah, and you'd like to nominate this?

JOSH: Yes. Indeed.

HRISHI: And announce its candidacy for a fake coffee drinking...Empty Cup awards. #EmptyCupAwards.

JOSH: That's funny.

HRISHI: Yeah. Just search EmptyCupAwards and you'll see some great examples.

JOSH: It's good stuff.

HRISHI: By the way, it was Eli's choice to put that song in.

JOSH: He has responded already - the Bat Phone works again.

HRISHI: He said it was his choice. "I love Marshall Crenshaw."

JOSH: That's about what I was anticipating. I mean, I didn't know whether it would turn out to have been his choice, but I'm not surprised, but I thought the reason behind it might be that he really likes him. Sometimes, I think that's a classic Occam's razor.

HRISHI: There's great insight into Josh's character, I think, in this episode, when you see him sort of push really hard on one side against Santos and the Santos aides, Ronna and Ned, you know, about the idea of, like, injecting this education speech into their time in New Hampshire. He talks about it with such passion and such conviction, even really like a kind of like cockiness and arrogance about it, just absolute assuredness. But then when we have them in a different setting, he talks to Toby and he presents the idea to him almost sheepishly.

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

JOSH: [on phone] What would you think about a big education speech?

TOBY: [on phone] In New Hampshire on his first trip?

JOSH: Yeah, it's just an idea we're kicking around.

TOBY: Stop kicking.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But he takes ownership of it a little bit.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: It really ends up belying that sense of confidence earlier, and then Toby gives the answer that he himself had given. I really loved that. There's something really endearing about that for me. It shows he feels like he needs to push so hard just to move an inch, even if it's something that he isn't necessarily 100% convinced of, just because it's so important to, like, move somewhere in the direction that he thinks they need to head.

JOSH: Yeah. I get that. Having said that, I was a little put off by Josh's original approach to the existing Santos team.

HRISHI: Oh yeah.

JOSH: He comes in, you know, like rolling thunder, just ...he says all sorts of things that don't strike me as the kind of guy who's trying to ingratiate himself and maybe get a little bit of a sense of the lay of the land. He comes in with a sort of "my way or the highway" kind of approach that isn't necessarily the most effective management style.

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

JOSH: What part of campaign manager do you not understand? Do you want me to draw you a flow chart?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah. That's a conversational dead end with somebody who works for you. That's "Shut up, I'm your boss."

HRISHI: Yeah, he does not treat Ronna and Ned...great. Speaking of Ronna and Ned, when we first met Ronna in the episode *Liftoff*, she's played by...

JOSH: Karis Campbell.

HRISHI: Karis Campbell, and her name was pronounced differently, right? It was pronounced Ronna. [Row-nah]

[West Wing Episode 6.06 excerpt]

SANTOS: Ronna [Row-nah], get Mr. Lyman a copy of the talking points.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes. It's odd because you gotta...one would think they'd come up with their name initially to pay it off down the line in the kind of comic exchange that we get between Donna and Ronna, but perhaps it was just a happy accident and they had not yet figured out the comic potential there.

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

Donna: Hi.

Ronna: Hi. Ronna.

Donna. Actually, it's Donna.

Ronna: Oh no, it's Ronna.

Donna: No really, it's Donna.

Ronna: I'm quite certain it's..

Josh: Ronna it's Donna. Donna it's Ronna.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I like the idea that like we should change the pronunciation just so we can have this little Abbott and Costello skit.

JOSH: Right, and I guess it would have been a much bigger deal to suddenly have Janel's character pronounced Doh-nah. They probably figured fewer people will notice if we change Row-nah's name to Ronna. I mean, I think they made the right call there. By the way, I have a pair of brown shoes that are on the floor next to me and so far, nine times I've thought it was one of my cats. I keep trying to get my shoes to jump up onto my lap.

HRISHI: I was really hoping you were going to tell me that, coincidentally, the shoes are also named Ronna and Donna.

JOSH: Well, they are now.

HRISHI: All right. How about Toby's reaction to Josh? You know, Josh asks him straight up, "You think this is kind of goofy."

JOSH: And he says "Uh, yeah."

HRISHI: Nobody's really taking this campaign seriously, it seems like, outside of Josh and maybe the Santos aides who came with him from his congressional office and I think even they are a little bit bewildered by the whole thing. Josh thinks that he's not the only one who's taking it seriously. He sees these reporters on the campaign trail, he's got...they've got the *New York Times* there and the *Washington Post* there.

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

JOSH: And this guy's nothing but potential. Why else would Brock and Morgan be covering our first trip?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You know when he's frustrated with Santos's own feelings on the campaign, but Josh doesn't actually see that that's not the reason why the reporters are there. He's so bought in to the narrative that he's created about this guy and like, it's really wonderful. You need to...I think you need to believe in a candidate that much in order to sacrifice the things that Josh has sacrificed, but part of that also means he's lost a little bit of perspective, and it turns out, as Greg Brock tells him, they don't see Santos as a serious contender. They think the story is...

JOSH: Josh himself.

HRISHI: Yeah, that Josh is doing something politically interesting and maybe even working on behalf of Hoynes, like doing this very roundabout maneuver to help Hoynes against Russell by introducing this third candidate that's going to somehow divide them or you know, just position Hoynes better later on.

JOSH: Yes, and we learn that Will, as well, suspects that may be what Josh is up to.

HRISHI: Yeah. Will was kind of amazing in this episode I think, he has some really, really sneaky power moves.

JOSH: Yeah, he plays some long ball.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: We got to see a shrewder Will.

HRISHI: Yes. When Josh goes to the Russell Campaign headquarters in New Hampshire, he goes into Will's office and Will sort of casually says, 'You don't mind if one of my deputies sits in?'

JOSH: Deputy Dona.

HRISHI: It's Deputy Doh-nah. And the first time I watched the scene I was so, you know, the dynamic of now Doh-nah and Jowsh, being in the same room for the first time since she quit, you know, they actually haven't appeared on screen together since she told him that she was leaving the position. And so they're seeing each other now for the first time and the whole time, you know, they're both so distracted. The first time I watched it I was just watching the two of them sort of take each other in and it was only on subsequent viewings that I kind of really got what Will was doing there. Like I thought he was just kind of, as Josh later accuses him, you know, trying to guilt him or just trying to do some kind of...

JOSH: Stunt.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. Throw him off his game. Do some kind of weird intimidation or something.

JOSH: Yeah. That's the way it reads at first.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It becomes slowly clear that he's got more of a game plan in mind and that Will suspects that Josh is going to wind up working for this campaign, and he wants to leave them in a situation where he can actually be hired.

HRISHI: That's true, yeah. I thought that the really smart thing about having Donna there is, you know, Will says he's there because he wants to propose a clean campaign. He says:

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

WILL: The truth is we're all friends. We're all good Democrats. None of us wants a bloodied nominee and I know you don't want to attack the President's record, also known as your record, also known as the Vice President's record.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Great speech.

HRISHI: It's so good. He's kind of both at once extending an olive branch and a threat at the same time and I think having Donna there is this concrete way to yoke their shared history together.

JOSH: Yeah. It's a reminder for sure.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's brilliant. I mean it's like Machiavellian, which I know is like a pejorative, I think it's great. It's really smart.

JOSH: Yeah, it's nice to see, it's nice for me. I'm sure at the time, and it's nice for me on re-watch or original watch to see Will, having been shunted off to the nether regions of the *West Wing* universe, to see him playing kind of an important piece now in the foreground of the plot. I mean he's obviously backing the wrong guy still, but it's nice to see him in the game again.

HRISHI: Yeah, and it also doesn't come out of left field there. It isn't like, "Oh, we needed something for Will to do, so here's a place we can put him in the storyline". It's actually...

JOSH: "No more Clippy," as he would say.

HRISHI: Right, exactly. He's no longer the Microsoft paperclip just popping in. But when he was, you know, and he...for so long he was just in this weird purgatory of being the whatever...whatever his position was, Liaison to the Vice President's office. I never really understood, because when we had Hoynes, we never had a corresponding staffer.

JOSH: A good point.

HRISHI: It was strange. But in any case, we're past that. Now he has this very real role that's paid off. Him going over to the Russell side of things has given him this great foothold in this part of the story.

JOSH: You said a couple of things that I thought were interesting. First Josh, having bought his own narrative and getting a little bit lost in it and losing perspective. I think what's one of the interesting things about his journey in this episode, which obviously focuses on Josh Lyman and Matt Santos, he's kinda got a foot in each world. He's the one trying to be pragmatic and practical with the candidate, suggesting that you shake some hands and talk about your school background a little bit and get people just to learn who you are and build up some positive name recognition. But you're also right, on the other hand, he's also kind of lost in this sort of fantasy narrative he has for the entire campaign. It's interesting, it seems kind of caught between the two and that he even discovers, and I think it's, and you alluded to it earlier, there's a moment where he learns that the Congressman himself maybe doesn't even think it's winnable.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

SANTOS: I'm not trying to make this a test case. C'mon! We're lucky if we have two months with this. I don't want to waste it shaking hands.

JOSH: Two months? I gave up everything for this, you're not even in it to win?

SANTOS: Maybe we have a different definition of winning, Josh. Maybe that's what we should have talked about in Houston.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And it's like, wow, there's some fundamental stuff. Which also made me...I didn't realize that it was going to turn out that the opposition research that Joey had given him was on Santos, but I was thinking earlier, I was like, I was trying to play Hrishu and look into the title and I kept thinking over the course of the episode that they haven't done enough opposition research into each other. These guys don't know each other yet and no wonder they're not clicking yet, they haven't really had the...they have communications issues. They haven't delved deep enough into the way the other one works and figured out a compromise or a way forward.

HRISHI: Yeah. What is Santos's ultimate goal? He does not seem to think that there's any chance he's gonna win. And this is sort of what I was referring to earlier, this is a very Bartlet-esque position. I'm sorry, Bartlet-President-esque position. I don't know if you remember this, but in *Manchester Part Two* the president says:

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I was never supposed to win. I got in it polling in the single digits. Hoynes had it locked up. I got in it to give some speeches and keep him honest.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I think Santos really believes in this education policy. This is his one issue. This is the reason why he's doing any of this. And suddenly you understand why he's ignoring all of Josh's advice because some of this stuff is like Politics 101.

You're like, honestly, you should know about this. And he's not a newcomer to politics, he's been a mayor, he's been a congressman. I mean, he's just...

JOSH: He's run six campaigns, I think he says.

HRISHI: Yeah, he should know this. But then when you think, okay, he thinks he's got a brief flicker of a moment to say some things and effect some change at a national scale, knowing now that he's no longer going to be a Congressman.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Then this is his chance, and this is what he's going to try and push up the hill.

JOSH: Right. And of course, being that guy makes him a candidate we can all root for.

HRISHI: Yeah. And it works. The strategy does work by the end of the episode, despite everyone, despite Josh and Toby saying, "You gotta swallow this," you know, "You can't do this right now." Hoynes challenges everybody for a debate on education. And Josh, who had been doing a good job as Campaign Manager, had said to reporters, "Where's everybody else's education policies? We're the only one putting one out there". And by the end, all the other candidates were introducing their education plans. So that really felt like, "Hey, we've been here before," a little bit, because that other thing that Ronna tells Josh when he gives her that horrible flowchart, he says he wants to rein in the policy process. She says:

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

RONNA: In the House, when we were dragging our feet on a policy he liked, he would just announce it without telling us.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And that's what he does here and he...he wins. I mean, what's really sweet about at the episode is by the end they both have kind of gotten their way.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Santos did get to move the discussion forward on education.

JOSH: Yeah. And he's walking into the Hawk's residence to meet and greet and talk.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think that the thing that is, I mean they both have this sort of revelation. It takes Josh getting to the end of his arc, you know, this realization that actually the policy stuff that Santos wants to talk about and the personal narrative that he wants him to deliver aren't these two separate ideas that have to be somehow negotiated between. That actually there's a very easy line to be drawn between those two dots. And once he makes that clear, I think they both feel better about it. And then he goes into Hawk's house and he gives that, that last speech that we hear.

JOSH: Right. Yeah, well said. Well that's what I mean, it's kind of a brilliant episode, and I said early in our discussion I had this little sort of niggling issue with it, which is like, why didn't they work all this stuff out beforehand? And the answer is: because then you wouldn't get a fantastic episode.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly.

JOSH: To see them work it out on the trail.

HRISHI: Yeah, and it's wonderful to see, you know, like just that little moment at the end, you know, Josh apologizes for the crack about Santos' brother. Santos has this brother who's going to be problematic, maybe, somewhere down the line. He says, "Your brother hasn't worked in five years," and Santos is actually supporting him financially. Why that exactly is opposition research is, you know, it's not like it's so bad. That's hardly like a real...

JOSH: It's not a huge skeleton in the closet.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. But Josh says, "If there's something worse, if you ever tried to put them on a government payroll, I need to know that." Santos tries to be above it and Josh is really trying to get him to recognize that he can't pretend that he's exceptional in that way. I liked that moment at the end after they have their sort of détente and Santos like, pats him on the back and he says:

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

SANTOS: Oh, when you get the rest of that research, we'll go over it together.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: There are a lot of great moments. I love the phone call with President Bartlet.

HRISHI: For some reason that's exactly...when you said, "There are a lot of great moments." I thought "Like the President calling his son-in-law a pinhead."

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Sorry about what happened with Doug. You ever have daughters, Josh, don't let them run off and marry pinheads.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes, that's awesome. By the way, starting with, and in a rare moment of genuine appreciation, great moment from Brad. I loved...and it's just a subtle little thing...where there's a staffer who basically says:

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

STAFFER: A call for you, a Mr. Potus on the line.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I was like, dude, you don't even watch *The West Wing*? I mean, literally the pilot you haven't seen? But Josh rushes to the phone and you can see in Josh's face that even seven years into an administration, it's still high stakes for the

president. You know, while, while he's waiting, there's just something subtle in his clenched jaw and you can tell he's waiting for the president on the phone, and I thought it was just a great subtle little piece of acting from Brad.

HRISHI: Yeah. That's great. Doug Westin is the worst though.

JOSH: He's pretty bad.

HRISHI: And that's fine. The thing that I really object to is Lizzie Westin seems wonderful. Smart. We know she's...

JOSH: She's sharp, yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah. Why, why is she with this pinhead?

JOSH: That's a good question.

HRISHI: And I don't know that I have sufficiently been convinced of a reason, you know, something in her character or in the back story to explain exactly why this brilliant lady is with this doofus.

[West Wing Episode 5.09 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: 3.2 billion men in the world. She picks him.

DEBBIE: I hear he had a great pitching arm.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: When he was 19, sure. She dumped a Rhodes scholar for this guy. Zoey left Charlie for the Frog. Ellie and the guitar player with the purple van. My children choose morons. Every one.

DEBBIE: They say daughters look for their fathers.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Annabeth Gish is good.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: She's terrific in the role, and I like Josh's pitch to her for there just to be a photo op. A single frame would help maybe break this into a real race. So they just give a little bit of credibility rather than just letting the New Hampshire primary just be a rubber stamp for the traditional candidate.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: The established candidates, I should say.

HRISHI: And the way this storyline plays out in the end is great too. You know, she is sharp and therefore she's not ever charmed by Josh. She does not buy his bull [expletive deleted] and...

JOSH: She calls him a jerk.

HRISHI: Yeah. And she's still not friends with him by the end, but she does hand him over a \$2,000 check. The maximum allowed.

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

JOSH: You're donate-...you're giving Matt Santos \$2,000?

LIZZIE: Yeah, sorry that's the federal limit.

JOSH: Liz, this goes on a publicly disclosed donor list. This is a Bartlet family contribution to Santos For President.

LIZZIE: Funny thing about the FEC, they really like it when you report this stuff.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So even though Doug wouldn't endorse Santos and was actually pretty crappy to him.

JOSH: Yeah, so we'll give him sort of a backdoor endorsement.

HRISHI: Yes, and a really significant one.

JOSH: I like the way that it also sort of reflected what her dad did. We get two generations of Bartlets kind of subtly saying like, you know, "Put this on me," you know, the president with an actual negative - he's saying he should hit me on how little I've done on education, and here are some numbers to back it up.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That's fantastic. And then Lizzie saying, you know, obviously you can let this get out that I've donated to your campaign.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's sort of similar approaches.

HRISHI: By the way...some more thoughts from Eli, this is interesting. He said that...

JOSH: Is this a breaking news story?

HRISHI: Yeah, I got a text from him.

JOSH: This just in.

HRISHI: I was just asking him about this episode and he said that at this point he was just starting out as a full-fledged writer and he was so grateful...he says, "I was so grateful to be doing this work that I didn't know I could have strong opinions about tone and things like that. This episode came across as slightly too heavy to me, as I recall, plus some gags and prop humor from the script were cut by the director because they were hard to execute. I started asserting myself a bit more after this one."

JOSH: Huh. Oh, that's pretty interesting.

HRISHI: It is.

JOSH: I wonder, you know when he talks about tone, we've discussed before that the director and maybe producers and writers, will discuss tone. They'll have tone

meetings and I think scene by scene go through a script and discuss. So I wonder if he had not asserted himself to the point of wanting to be in that room or hadn't been invited to be part of it.

HRISHI: Yeah, I like the tone in this episode. I don't think that it's too heavy. I think there's some great jokes in it.

JOSH: Definitely, there's some very funny parts.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I think the contrast between those moments and the heavier stuff is fantastic. Maybe he's a little too close to it. He also says that he hasn't watched it since it aired.

JOSH: I can't believe that - it's such a good episode, I'm surprised he hasn't revisited it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: You never know, if it's something that kind of stuck in your craw 15 years ago and if you re-watched it, he might not feel that way today.

HRISHI: There was a moment we saw in flashback between the president and Leo, you know, when they're at their most caustic in their relationship, you know, at the end of Season Five and the president says, "Oh, it should have been you," and it looks almost for a second like Leo believes him. Anyway, there's this moment between Josh and Matt Santos. Santos says:

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

SANTOS: Whose campaign is this Josh?

JOSH: I don't know. Who flew down to Houston and talked you into it?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought, damn.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: That is a, well, if anything, it seems ripe for a flashback later on in their story.

JOSH: That's true. That's funny. Yeah, things get...hot in that scene.

HRISHI: Yeah. Joey Lucas shows up and I love her presence as a, you know, familiar ally for Josh and someone who can also just give it to him straight. You know, like Joey Lucas with the polling and her understanding of how to read a poll and stuff like that. She's kind of an oracle in a way for the show, you know, like she's kind of like a way for them to cut through things to truth. So she does the opposition research, she tells him, you know, he really should have done this long before. They should have been on this process a while ago, and she also gives him this news that Santos is within the margin of error. I love that this exchange.

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

JOSH: I don't suppose you've seen any with Santos in the mix.

JOEY [KENNY]: Two private polls, he's within the margin of error.

JOSH: Of who?

JOEY [KENNY]: Of having any support at all.

JOSH: Oh.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah. "Oh." That's rough news.

HRISHI: Yeah. I was looking at some polling from New Hampshire right now and Bernie Sanders and Joe Biden are by far way out ahead in the polls and they are the most established candidates, you know. You've got the runner up for the nomination and former Vice President, these are two heavyweights and everyone is sort of trailing them by quite a bit. And I thought of our upcoming guest, Pete Buttigieg, who is in a similar position to Santos, he's within the margin of error. I mean, I think in some of these categories he's at 1%, and he's not the only one. I mean, there's so many people in the primary right now for the Democratic nomination and so many of them are newcomers, you know, it's a very real position to be in.

JOSH: Yeah, there's a moment early in this episode that I love when Josh Lyman rather defensively says, with regard to name recognition, I guess it's about – is he talking about Hoynes or about Russell? – but somebody throws the name recognition in his face. He says, "Yeah, it's a mile wide and an inch deep".

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I think there is a certain truth to that, that early on – and of course New Hampshire is about as early as you can get, it's the first Primary and it's after only the Iowa caucus, name recognition is huge – but I think it can prove to be an inch deep as the candidate start to assert themselves and people start to stake claim to actual positions that can fall away pretty quickly.

HRISHI: Yeah. You know, Eli said that he had some prop jokes that got cut out, but the best prop jokes are the cutout.

JOSH: [laughing] Nicely done. It is funny, and you know the worst thing about it is the pose, the Russell pose, like, "This guy right here."

HRISHI: The two thumbs up, the pose is ridiculous.

JOSH: It is ridiculous, but comically so. I ran into Gary Cole, by the way, yesterday.

HRISHI: No kidding.

JOSH: Why I didn't take a picture with him, I don't know. But we bonded and he said he'd be happy to do the show. It was at the Kennedy Elementary School in Compton as part of the *Read Across America* program, which brings actors and people in to read to kids. It was so much fun. I got to read to a table full of six- and seven-year-

olds. My kids being old, and not so cute anymore, I forgot how cute and ridiculous and interactive...

HRISHI: What did you read?

JOSH: I read *The Giving Tree*.

HRISHI: Shel Silverstein?

JOSH: Shel Silverstein.

HRISHI: Awesome.

JOSH: I read *Corduroy*.

HRISHI: I don't know *Corduroy*.

JOSH: By Don Freeman. It's very cute. And I read *Curious George Rides A Bike* by H.A. Rey.

HRISHI: That's really nice.

JOSH: I just... every picture, every page, all 10 kids would say something. It was the cutest thing ever. And they were so jazzed by having those stories read to them and they would notice something on the page, or one ask a question. It was very, very cute.

HRISHI: Yeah, that sounds great and good on you for doing that.

JOSH: Thank you.

HRISHI: Speaking of schools, there is a moment in this episode that struck me as a little bit funny. It's just a little bit when they're driving back to the motel and Santos is talking about his education plan, you know, and the sort of broad strokes he's talking about it, you know, to his staff. It sounds like he's almost drafting the speech as he's talking. And I was wondering if somebody was, you know, writing notes for what the speech will eventually become. But at one point he says "Unless we want to completely balkanize the education system..." The thing that seems strange to me is that really I think his education policy is in response to the fact that we *have* balkanized the education system. It's just a matter of fact that everybody knows that not only is a high school diploma different from state to state and city to city, but even neighborhood to neighborhood.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: They're completely different. So that was a funny little...

JOSH: Interesting point.

HRISHI: Yeah, I know it's just a little bit of dialogue that's part of the texture of the episode. Not so much like a major plot point, but I thought he would really, I mean...

JOSH: You bumped on that.

HRISHI: Yeah. Just at the, "unless" part seemed wrong.

JOSH: And speaking of both schools, and bumping on, somebody on Twitter reached out and I think she said, and I should have her name, but I don't, that she has introduced the term 'bumping on something' to her sixth graders, I think sixth graders. And they use it all the time. And I just...the idea of that delights me.

HRISHI: That's really cute. We're going to take a quick break and when we come back, we'll be joined by Mayor Pete Buttigieg.

[ad break]

JOSH: And now let's go to Hrishi's conversation with Pete Buttigieg.

HRISHI: I really enjoyed speaking with him. Regardless of what happens in 2020, there is an incredibly bright future for Mayor Buttigieg.

HRISHI: So before we get started, here's just a little bit about Mayor Pete. He's in this process that Santos is in, going around introducing himself and I think he's doing a great job, but here are some things about him just to set the stage.

JOSH: Pete Buttigieg is in his eighth and final year as mayor of South Bend, Indiana. He was first elected mayor in 2011 at the age of 29 years old. He was reelected in 2015 with a whopping 80% of the vote. He served as a lieutenant in the US Navy Reserve. He took an unpaid seven month leave during his mayoral term for a deployment to Afghanistan, and for his counter terrorism work he earned the Joint Service Commendation Medal. The Washington Post has called him, "The most interesting mayor you've never heard of," and President Obama named him as one of four Democrats who represented the future of the Democratic Party. Not too bad.

HRISHI: Yeah. Thank you so much for joining us.

PETE: Yes, I'm glad it worked out.

HRISHI: Are you a *West Wing* fan by any chance?

PETE: Yeah, I can't say I've seen every one, but certainly seen some quite a few times. I remember that being a kind of antidote to the way the world was turning or...that's the time I was headed to college.

HRISHI: We're talking about this episode, "Opposition Research", where candidates are in New Hampshire getting ready for Primary season there. Had you seen this one before?

PETE: I actually hadn't, so thanks for the invitation to do that. Definitely rings familiar with some of the things we face on the trail.

HRISHI: Yeah, that was what I was wondering about. What in this episode felt most true to life to you?

PETE: Well, definitely the humbling dimensions of retail politics, right? I mean, nobody cares how much you've been on TV. Nobody cares, kind of, what office you hold. In these early states you have early voters, they take their role very seriously. They get that they have a kind of privileged position in terms of being able to have a lot of influence on Presidential politics and so they ask you very serious questions,

but they also expect you to come to the coffee shop, come to the living room, and to me that's one of the very democratic things that we still have in our Presidential process, is this idea that you're supposed to have conversations with people in a very intimate setting in order for them to really be able to kick the tires on your campaign versus just go off of all of it based on what they can get over the air and see from a distance.

HRISHI: What about on the other side? Was there stuff in the TV show that made you feel like this is purely fiction?

PETE: It definitely hit on a lot of themes that are very real. The tension that happens between what you want to do and what you feel like the process is asking of you. The only thing I wasn't sure was realistic is that the candidate Santos would, as a former Mayor, have that much of a struggle with the retail environment because I think when you're Mayor...

HRISHI: Yes.

PETE: I think I caught a remark...he's a Congressman right?

HRISHI: Exactly.

PETE: And I think when you're a Mayor of a city of any size, you were actually very attuned to retail politics because you have to be. Like, you know, I go to the...so I go to *Target* or the grocery around here, people are going to come up to me and they're going to ask what I was doing about a pothole or a trash pick-up or whatever, and so you don't overlook the importance of that kind of ground-level, nitty-gritty stuff. No matter how much you care about policy and big picture ideas.

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

SANTOS: If I wanted coffee klatches and recycled cans, I would run for Congress again.

JOSH: We need to sell you first, then we'll get to the big issues.

SANTOS: Meaning not in New Hampshire.

JOSH: Meaning once people get to know who you are.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah, that part really seemed to be a stretch to me, too. You'd think the grip-and-grin, he knows the value of that.

PETE: Yeah. I mean, look, I was never a grip-and-grin and kind of guy. In fact, I have a whole chapter on this in my book, about how I had to kind of learn gradually the importance of some of the informal roles that you have as Mayor. I was a policy guy. I wanted to work on policy, but my evolution was partly learning to respect the symbolic dimensions of the job that I had, but learning to take them as seriously, you know, even a title that I didn't always feel comfortable wearing or never wanting to look too pompous or caught up in that, but learning to make sure I took the trappings

of the office as seriously as the people who came into the office because doing that was part of how I could honor them.

HRISHI: Do you feel any kind of tension, the way that Matt Santos does in this episode, where he wants to move past introducing himself and get right into his education policy? Do you feel like there are policies that you want to get deep into but you're slowed down because of a kind of schedule that candidates are supposed to follow at this point?

PETE: I don't know about that. If anything, I think things may have lurched in the other direction. So, you know, Democrats, we're generally policy people. We would like to go right into the policies. I actually think it's cost us quite a bit over the last probably 10, 20, or even 30 years. We have kind of laid out our policies and expected people to be able to, kind of, derive what our values must be by looking at the policies instead of talking first about ideas and about values. So, if you do it wrong, it sounds all vague and meaningless, but I actually think it's very important to talk about universal values. Things nobody can be against. I talk about freedom, democracy and security, but then go a layer deeper and talk about what they mean to me in a way that might be controversial. Why I think freedom entails reproductive freedom, and freedom from having to worry about your health care, and freedom to marry the person you love, and things that have actually been very vigorously debated. Democracy, you know, an issue that I think is front and center or at least deserves to be front and center in our politics right now because we're becoming, in my opinion, less and less democratic as a country. And security, where everybody wants security but we're having a little bit of trouble as a country, realizing that security in the 21st Century includes things like cyber security and it includes things like climate security. So, I'm trying to push on those, but a lot of the questions I get are, "What do you think about the latest policy that this Senator put forward, and their plan and their resolution. Your for it or against it? Yes or no. Go." And to me, like, first of all, maybe I don't know, and secondly maybe it's more important, especially for my side of the aisle, having really allowed conservatives to win a lot of battles over ideas and values, so that the policies just kind of followed from that. Even Democratic policies. Maybe we needed a little more time contesting the idea space before we get into the specific prescriptions that ought to come out of that.

HRISHI: That's interesting. I wanted to ask you about your timeline. I'm just going to go over some highlights here. You were elected Mayor in 2011 but before that you'd worked on John Kerry's Presidential campaign in 2004? Before even that, and what I think is a really wonderful *West Wing* moment, you wrote an essay on Bernie Sanders that won you an award at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library, someone who you might end up facing in the Primary season, and I love that. So, in 2011 you were elected Mayor. In 2014, you went to Afghanistan, you served there as a Navy intelligence officer. In 2015, you came out, and then you were reelected as mayor and at this point that you were already on a lot of people's radar. Frank Bruni wrote an op-ed in the *New York Times* saying, "the first gay President," speculating about you, and then you ran for DNC chair in 2017. I think for a lot of people the last couple of months have been their introduction to you, but I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the steps that led up to your exploratory committee. In the

world of *The West Wing*, Santos is a sort of thrust into this Primary season very suddenly because Josh Lyman shows up and says, "I think you should run for President." Were there people in your life who were advising you saying, "I think this is the time now," you know, "You should be running for President." Was it an aspiration that you'd had in the back of your head and didn't know when?

PETE: Well I really...I certainly would not have planned for most of my life, or even most of my career in politics on doing this as a Mayor in my thirties in 2020. I think anybody who runs for office, it crosses your mind at some point, you ask yourself, you know, what's the highest and broadest level that I could ever serve at? But it certainly didn't seem to me when I was putting together a run for Mayor in 2011 that we could be talking about running for President in 2020. But a lot of things didn't occur to me. It didn't occur to me that Donald Trump would become the President of the United States.

HRISHI: Fair enough.

PETE: It didn't occur to me that the center of gravity in American politics would come to be in many ways the industrial Midwest and in particular my own party's failure to connect with people in the industrial Midwest. And it didn't occur to me that a moment of generational change might come unexpectedly soon. You know, three out of the last four Presidents we've had, Presidents Trump, Bush and Clinton are all exactly the same age. They were born within a few weeks of each other in the summer of 1946. We don't think of it that way. They entered our consciousness where they were at different ages, but it shows you how there's been a certain, for the most part, very strong generational pattern that we're now probably at a watershed moment where that's about to change, or are we? That's one of the things that will be tested in the years ahead. So, in terms of my own process, I believe that thinking about any office really comes down to two steps. The first step is you build your theory of what the office calls for, what the community of people, whether it's the whole country or a city or a congressional district, or a state, what it needs and what that office most needs in that moment. And it can change dramatically from year to year. But you think about what it needs right now. And the second thing you think about is what you bring to the table. And so following that process, for example, as part of how I came to run for Mayor, there was a city that I was from that was down on itself, struggling to grow, and especially when it came to business and losing its young people. And I thought, as a businessperson who was young, who believed in the city, I could be the exact – with a background in economic development – I could be the exact right person for this moment. Following that same process has also led me to not run for office a number of times. More than once I was recruited to run for Congress by people who thought that I can be the right kind of person to turn my district blue, because that was pretty popular with Republicans and independents as well as Democrats. But I never looked at the district and looked at the Congress and looked at myself and said, "This is an obvious fit." So I never did.

HRISHI: Why's that? What was not the obvious fit there?

PETE: Well, one of the things that I had learned through experience as Mayor was the importance of executive leadership and that I had an aptitude for it, that actually part of how I could earn my paycheck was by doing the things that an executive does, which is passing and implementing policies. The implementing part being, you know, a little different than what a legislator does, but also capably running an organization and administration. In our case, the city workforce that's, you know, a thousand plus people in a \$300 million a year operation that's dealing with everything from wastewater to streetscapes to economic development and policing. And then third, calling people that are highest values, bringing people together. I learned how to do that kind of work in the way that turned out to really suit me to the Mayoral job in a way that I might not have been suited, at least at that stage in my life and at that moment in US history, and the path of my district, to being a member of the US House. I think it's really important to think about the fact that every office...we're talking about running for a very particular job with particular demands and calling for particular strengths. And again, the strengths that are most needed can also really change. Right? In the years after Watergate, the Presidency really needed somebody who's just an absolute picture of humility and honesty and it was part of why Americans needed Jimmy Carter. Then once Jimmy Carter was elected, in some ways what people needed was a little more of a sense of royalty, which they got with President Reagan. And so the demands of the office in the symbolic level as well as concretely, with what experiences and skills that it calls for...those can develop. And of course, we as human beings develop, too. And it's only when you see a match between those two things that it really makes sense to take those steps forward.

HRISHI: Do you think that there are just personality types that are better suited to legislative positions?

PETE: I don't know, it's certainly the case that it's different. So, for example, if you think of some of our most masterful and successful legislative leaders. Just brilliant figures when it came to managing a chamber of the Congress. Lyndon Johnson is a great example. LBJ's mastery of the Senate was unbelievable. Tip O'Neil in the House. Nancy Pelosi today, who I think is a very effective speaker. Picture a great speech that they gave, picture the lines you most associate with them. It's hard to do because giving great stirring oratory, even though that's very much something that a member of the Senate or the House might do to great effect, it turns out is not one of the central skills of being a leader in the Senate or the House. It has much more to do with things that happen behind the scenes, the gifts of a tactician. Somebody who understands how to assemble a coalition, how to beg, borrow, or steal the votes you need in order to get something done. Arguably radically a different skill set than what's required of a President.

HRISHI: Can I ask you again about some process stuff about your committee? This is an exploratory committee. What does that actually look like in terms of who is on the committee? And how did you choose those people?

PETE: So, one thing that it's important to understand from the process perspective is when you have a committee, a campaign committee or an exploratory committee, it's

not a set list of people sitting around a table, it's mostly a legal entity. So, creating the exploratory committee was what made it possible for us to begin testing the waters. It's also something that was particularly necessary for me because we had to raise the money to do all of the things, even those very initial steps. So, if you're personally wealthy, there's no limit on what you can do, for example, to run polls in a place like Iowa or New Hampshire, you just cut a check and you can just do it. But the moment you raise somebody else's money to do it, you're doing something that's very closely regulated as a campaign activity. And so as somebody who isn't personally wealthy, and also, you know, who hasn't been in the Senate for decades to have a very large federal PAC, we really need to create an entity, a legal vehicle that would make it possible to do some of these things: travel to early states, meet with voters, understand what we need to do financially, put together a strategy. And so a lot of this stuff is kind of under the hood process stuff, but it's very important for an emerging staff that wants to make sure that the moment you actually turn the light to green, have your big launch event, have an audience and a podium and declare that you're going straight to the White House, there's a ton of groundwork that needs to have been done before. And to do that groundwork, you need people. To have people you've got to pay them, and to do that you need a vehicle. That's where the exploratory committee comes in, and it really, that first, sometimes behind the scenes step that begins the process of running.

HRISHI: I didn't realize that that was a legal entity. That's really interesting. So, do you have someone now who has the title campaign manager?

PETE: More or less, yes. Titles are fluid, but I do have somebody who's running this effort, Mike Schmuhl is his name. He's been an advisor and led a number of my efforts. We have finance staff, press staff, political staff. You know, one of the things you learn quickly in any candidacy, or in any office is the extent to which the people around you make or break you. So as I speak, kind of as quickly as we can raise the money to pay them, we're assembling what's still a pretty lean team that is designed to be as capable, as diverse, as talented as possible to help us develop this and make it into a viable national effort.

HRISHI: Who's the person that you've known the longest?

PETE: That would probably be Mike who's leading it.

HRISHI: Would you compare your dynamic at all to the Josh Lyman/Matt Santos dynamic? Do you butt heads at all like those two?

[West Wing Episode 6.11 excerpt]

JOSH: You have to shelve the education plan. You have to swallow the Mayflower quote.

SANTOS: You want me to introduce myself to the electorate as a flip-flopper?

JOSH: As opposed to a piece of political toast? Yes, I do.

[end excerpt]

PETE: A little smoother than that, but it's certainly the case that, you know, part of the job of a campaign staff that you hire is to tell you the things whether you want to hear them or not, and often it's their job to let you know what's expected of you and then your job to decide how much you're willing to conform to that. It's often occurred to me that all the ways in which you conform in any profession, not just politics, but all the ways in which you conform to what's expected of you, the sum total of that becomes your professionalism, and in all the ways in which you decide not to conform, the sum total of that becomes your style.

HRISHI: That's really well put. I know that there was a ton of preparation that must've gone on over the past couple of years leading up to this point. Your book, *Shortest Way Home*, in some ways feels like a great precursor for your bid and all the other steps that might've come up. But I'm sure there are things you just can't prepare for. So, in light of that, what's one or two of the things that you've faced so far now that you've been doing the retail politics and traveling and talk shows and all that stuff that maybe caught you completely by surprise?

PETE: I don't know that there have been any total surprises, especially because I have a team that's done a very good job of, kind of anticipating issues and preparing me, whether it's tactically or just psychologically.

HRISHI: Yeah.

PETE: If anything, some things have gone better than we hoped. You know, we're going into Iowa and, you know, some of my team members were, I think, trying to kind of prepare my ego a little bit and they're saying, "Look, it's not unusual for these first stops in an early state that you might have more reporters than you have voters." And in the end that didn't happen, which is great, but if it did, I would've been ready, but in the end we had, we had good crowds. Better than I could've hoped. But I'm sure there will be days like that. There'll be days when you organize a big...and I was a campaign staff member, you know, you organize what you think is going to be a big event and you wind up with like three people wondering where the soda machine is and, and, you know, you just have to be ready for anything. The other thing I guess is surprising, anytime you step into the arena, you're surprised by the people who help you, and the people who don't. Sometimes somebody who's been a longtime friend and you get along well with them, but for whatever reasons on their side, they're not prepared to be very involved in this particular effort of yours. And then other times people you barely know, people you didn't even think liked you come out of the woodwork and just put everything they have on the table in order to help you get to your goal. And so those surprises, most of which are pleasant ones, are among those that I think every candidate learns to absorb as you get onto the trail.

HRISHI: If people want to help or they want to support, what should they do?

PETE: PeteForAmerica.com - that's the quickest place to go. It's pretty basic now, it's just a splash page, but if you can share your email address, that's how we can keep in touch with you. And we're also, of course, collecting contributions. The DNC said that if you want to get invited to the debate, you got to have at least 65,000

individual contributors. Now, the good news is this isn't about massive checks. This isn't the \$2,000 that, you know, a character gives to Josh Lyman.

HRISHI: Yeah.

PETE: Not that we'd be upset if somebody felt moved to do that, but five bucks goes toward me being able to show that we have that kind of grassroots support, and hopefully earning a podium on that debate stage down the line. And of course, to just stay tuned, keep an eye on us, on social media. I'm pretty easy to find on Twitter and Facebook, and you'll see as we continue hopefully to gather momentum and organize events and perhaps in an area close to you and also continue to put forward ideas. I really want this whole thing to be a conversation about where we're headed and I think we, you know, because this is an underdog project, I actually think we have extra latitude to be original, to be creative, to make it really be about ideas. And so, we're not afraid to try some things that are new and want to engage as many people as we can. Given that we've got a lean team and we're not a huge operation, it's a little bit challenging to do it, but it's really important to me, to find that we connect with as many people as we can and as many ways as we can.

HRISHI: And what if people want to do more, if they want to volunteer or something like that. Are there states particularly where you really could use some bodies and some support?

PETE: Yeah, there sure will be, you know. The four earliest states are Iowa, New Hampshire, South Carolina and Nevada. And so those states in particular for people who live there, or people willing to travel there and help us make friends, that's going to be a big deal. So, in addition to the grassroots fundraising appeal, we're looking for folks to help out there. Now again, we're still building up the organization that would give us the capacity to put those volunteers to work, but the sooner we can get a name either through an email at that site or somebody could write us in at info@peteforamerica.com and just roger up and say that you're ready when the time comes. That will be a big help to us as we start really building this thing out.

HRISHI: Pete, thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me. I wish you all the best.

PETE: Good, well, thanks a lot.

JOSH: You did it, you listened to another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*, and for that, we thank you.

HRISHI: Thanks so much to Mayor Pete Buttigieg for joining us. If you want to learn more about his campaign, go to PeteForAmerica.com. You can follow Mayor Pete on Twitter - [@PeteButtigieg](https://twitter.com/PeteButtigieg). You can follow us [@WestWingWeekly](https://twitter.com/WestWingWeekly). You can also check out his book *Shortest Way Home*, we'll have a link to that on the website.

JOSH: We thank, as always, Nick Song, Zach McNeas and Margaret Miller for their contributions to the show.

HRISHI: Thanks to Eli for his contributions to this show. Yes, Bat Phone Attie.

HRISHI: Thanks to all the staffers at *Pete For America* who helped arrange this and let me talk them into putting the Mayor on our podcast.

JOSH: Yeah, thanks so much. *The West Wing Weekly* remains, as ever, a proud member of Radiotopia, a collection of intellectually erotic podcasts about which you can find more information and the podcasts themselves at radiotopia.fm. You can follow us on all manner of social media, except for Tumblr.

HRISHI: It's just a matter of time, I guess.

JOSH: Yeah, we'll get there.

HRISHI: So, until next time.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

PETE: What's next?

[Outro Music]