

The West Wing Weekly  
6.21: "Things Fall Apart"  
Guest: Jennifer Palmieri

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Today we're talking about episode 21 from season 6, it's called "Things Fall Apart."

JOSH: This episode was written by Peter Noah and directed by Nelson McCormick. It first aired on March 30<sup>th</sup> 2005.

HRISHI: I don't believe we've heard the name Nelson McCormick before. Is that someone whose directed *The West Wing* before?

JOSH: No, I think not. This is his first of what will turn out to be two episodes of *The West Wing*. He also directed an episode called "Transition." Which we'll get to. Oh we'll get to it.

HRISHI: Joining us later on this episode Jennifer Palmieri, Communications Director for the Hillary Clinton campaign and formerly for the Obama White House.

JOSH: What do you think of this one?

HRISHI: I, I like the plot of this episode. I think it's interesting what happens with the convention and the nomination process, but the execution of it, I have issues with here and there. Really just a few moments here and there in the writing.

JOSH: I think we will find ourselves in accord as I wrote down 'Great bones, not enough meat'

HRISHI: Hey look at that. Yeah. That's a good way of putting it. And before we jump into our discussion, here's a synopsis from Warner Brothers. "The success of the impeccably organized Republican convention contrasts with the Democrats who look in disarray as the candidates continue to battle to be the Democratic Party Presidential nominee. Bartlet asks Leo to take control and organize the upcoming convention. Meanwhile the International space station develops a leak and is losing oxygen, jeopardizing the lives of the three astronauts aboard."

JOSH: Sounds good.

HRISHI: And it is, again, I mean, those are the bones, and those are good bones. The episode begins with footage of the Republican National Convention. We see Darren Gibson, again and I felt a little bit like, nice callback, and another part of me felt like, there's gotta be more Republicans than this. I think I just, I have such an animus for that guy, he's such a jerk. We know this is a person who was going to out Leo during the congressional hearing and has popped up here and there. He's a really annoying jerk. And I thought "ugh", they even give him a spot at the RNC? It just seemed like maybe too much, but at the same time I did appreciate that they brought him back.

JOSH: He's a thorn in the Democrats' side.

HRISHI: We also get the return of Ed O'Neil as Governor Baker.

JOSH: Huzzah.

HRISHI: And that's because we see the strategy being laid out by the Russell campaign. They're the front-runner by a tiny bit and they're trying to position themselves so that they can offer the vice presidency to Santos. Thus creating some party unity and giving them like a clear winner for who will be the nominee with Russell on top and Santos as Vice President. Feels like a really smart situation, practical situation but then they've also got this backup of Ed O'Neil. In case Santos says no, they've got Governor Baker from Pennsylvania which means they could actually eek out a win anyway.

JOSH: Right. It looks like a reasonable strategy from the Russell campaign. Neutralize the candidate whose nipping at their heels and also broaden Russell's appeal with Santos on the ticket, the Latino vote. There's mention from Leo, which I bumped on at first, the idea of, I think Leo, or somebody says adding Santos will also put California back in play. It's weird to think of California as a place that isn't firmly in the Democratic nominee's pocket.

HRISHI: Well, it's supposed to be kind of a surprising thing. It's because Vinick is both moderate and from California.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*RUSSELL: Vinick's a moderate, states will be in play the Democrats are used to counting on, we need to protect our flank.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, we also forget that, I guess California as such a deep, deep blue state is a, well it's a more recent development than I think I realized, that it's a question of changing demographics of California and that for a long time, I think for decades into the late 80's, California tended to vote Republican in the Presidential.

HRISHI: Really?

JOSH: Yeah. Here's a factlet, from 1952 to 1988 Republicans won every Presidential election except the landslide loss of Barry Goldwater in '64 in California.

HRISHI: Really?

JOSH: Yeah, more than 30 years.

HRISHI: Well things have definitely changed and in our world of *The West Wing* it reflects the current demographics.

JOSH: Calculus, yes.

HRISHI: So they need to figure something out. There are two strategies they have to work on at once. One is how to get to the nomination but also how to get to the nomination in a way that might also give them a chance to compete against Vinick.

JOSH: Yes. And then there's the calculus on the other side should they go with Baker, their number two choice, that puts Pennsylvania in play which tends to be a swing state.

HRISHI: Right. Pennsylvania at the moment, at least on the Democratic side, is in the Santos column. So there are really three agendas I guess. One is the Russell campaign, they want him to be the nominee. One is the Santos campaign, they want him to be the nominee. And the other is, sort of the larger Democratic Party agenda which is we want to get in here and set ourselves up to not look foolish and also come out you know, with the strongest chance of winning the General Election.

JOSH: Yes, and in a progression from President Bartlet's little Oval Office talk about lets keep this clean and positive in terms of campaigning, President Bartlet through Leo in this episode gets explicit about what they would like to have happen which is to have Santos accept that number two slot.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*LEO: You need to take the VP deal.*

*JOSH: We're considering it.*

*LEO: Not consider it. Take it. The party, the president needs you to accept.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah, the pressure is really high and it's not just coming from The White House, we see even, you know, Santos is getting calls himself from Senators. Everyone wants this to break in that way and ultimately, probably not surprisingly, he doesn't go for it.

JOSH: Yes, and this is one of my big disappointments of this episode. It's the failure to sort of drill deeper beyond what we kind of think is going to happen and beyond the sort of tantalizing plot points that have been raised. We ultimately get a sit down between Santos and Russell and then we leave the room before the substance of their conversation happens. And it's, I think it's an ill-conceived feint. It's almost as if it's building suspense so that Josh and Santos are in the elevator, we don't really know what he decided. They walked out, people's countenances were kind of inscrutable, but I think we know what he decided and I don't think there's enough value in the quote unquote surprise of the reveal that he turned Russell down to have denied us the scene between them. I would like to have seen what maybe Russell said that finally helped Matt Santos decide he didn't want to be number two to this guy. I think there could have been an interesting moment.

HRISHI: Yeah. It feels a little bit like an action movie where they finally come across the object they have been hunting for. It's in this building and there's a million bad guys defending it and the hero or heroes run in while the camera stays outside the building and then you just hear a bunch of noise and they run out with the object like 'we got it'.

JOSH: Yeah, I absolutely agree with you. And then it's compounded further I think in the interactions between Josh and Santos and then Josh and Leo where Josh ultimately tells Leo "I told him to go in there and look for a reason to say yes, and he didn't and I was wrong". But we never really get a deeper understanding of why Josh first thought yes and then admits later that

no was the correct answer. I thought it lacked a little bit of credibility in the beginning when Josh brings the offer to Santos and then just kind of lays it there. That's unlike Josh, you think would have laid it out right there, this is what I think we should do, now you sit with it, but we just don't get a deeper understanding of anyone's thinking really.

HRISHI: My favorite part about that first scene, it comes right before the credits, Josh comes in and says

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*JOSH: The Russell campaign, in return for us releasing our convention delegates is prepared to Name Matthew Santos as the Democratic Party nominee for Vice President of the United States.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then we come back from the credits and the first thing that Santos says is

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*SANTOS: Vice President.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought, the way he says it, I was like, like he's surprised, like maybe they were going to offer him president?

JOSH: [Laughs] Here's the deal. You become president.

HRISHI: [Laughs] In exchange for your delegates

JOSH: And I want your Netflix sign in

HRISHI: I just don't, I really don't understand that one little bit of performance.

JOSH: That's funny.

HRISHI: Vice President. My take on why we don't get Josh sort of furiously laying out the reasons why he should do it is I think, maybe this is the result of a character arc for him. You know, he has been pushing against Santos time and time again and I think he's learning that, to some extent, he can't influence him on certain big decisions, and also sometimes he's been wrong, like there have moments where he's pushed his opinion, Santos has gone another way entirely and been borne out to be the correct one. I like this for Josh, this sort of being a more hesitant take.

JOSH: Yeah I get that, I just still think a more interesting manifestation of his development as a campaign manager would have been like let's really dig into everything and then I'm going to leave you with it.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I get that it's your decision.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: But it makes him more effective in one sense that he's come to this realization that this guy Santos is his own man and his own candidate. But I still felt like, again like the meat wasn't there.

HRISHI: Yeah, you want him to break out the whiteboard.

JOSH: Yeah, there you go.

HRISHI: Yeah, by the way I recently finished *Crazy Ex-Girlfriend* I don't know if you finished it?

JOSH: Yes, actually I loved that show though I have not finished it.

HRISHI: If I can spoil one thing for you in it?

JOSH: Sure

HRISHI: It's not a real spoiler but there's a moment where a character Darryl explains to, Rachel's trying to make a hard decision and he says 'well I have this, I have this system of how I make decisions and maybe you might want to try it' and it's a system he calls "columns" and its, uh..here are three choices she's trying to decide between and they write on a whiteboard the three things and then underneath each they list the things that are good about them and she's just like, 'oh it really is just columns'

[Both laugh]

JOSH: That's very funny. By the way, you also know they did recently a *Crazy Ex Girlfriend* live at Radio City Music Hall and this great little clip of Lin doing a little salsa on stage with Gabrielle Ruiz and we're gonna link to that. It's pretty great.

HRISHI: Oh wow, that's exciting. So Josh, really, you know maybe some columns would have been in order.

JOSH: I think so. I use them when I order Chinese food.

HRISHI: I use them when I build Greek architecture.

JOSH: Hmm, that is sound.

HRISHI: They have a lot of uses. We also meet the Chair of the DNC in this episode and you might recognize who that is from the line when he says 'I'm the Chair of the DNC' to the president.

JOSH: Lest you forget.

HRISHI: Yeah, and I was trying to think I know that there are certain expository beats that you have to hit in order to tell your story but in my memory, now I gotta go back and listen to all our old episodes of our podcast, I feel like this is the kind of thing that gets handled a little more

elegantly in other episodes. Even just what we were talking about, like the introduction of Bruno Gianelli. Having Margaret ask Leo 'Whose Bruno Gianelli?' and he tells her and the thing that makes it nice is you've got Bruno on the other side of the door hearing them. You know, there's a dramatization of it that feels like it's getting the information but also it's doing, it's multi-tasking.

JOSH: Right, I agree. I'm the Vice President of clunk-a-lunk exposition.

HRISHI: Exactly. He might even be the President I think, actually.

JOSH: Probably so.

HRISHI: He was offered Vice President and he said

BOTH: *Vice President?*

HRISHI: I was just thinking.

JOSH: The President of Vice?

HRISHI: Yeah, well, and

JOSH: I was racing you for that.

HRISHI: No, you really got there yeah and the

JOSH: I'm the Vice President.

HRISHI: And the people who are the Vice Presidents of vice, that's where I thought it might get really confusing.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: So what's your title? 'Vice president', oh congratulations.

JOSH: You're the top guy, huh.

HRISHI: No, no, I'm one of the Vice Presidents. You have multiple Presidents of vice? OK.

JOSH: It's good. It's like an Abbott and Costello for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

HRISHI: Ok, so back to the ineffectual DNC Chair who gives us this really cringeworthy metaphor and the President has a similar reaction to it that I did when he says.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*DNC CHAIR: They're not listening to the nanny anymore.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: We may be in danger of overstepping the metaphor*

*DNC CHAIR: We need Daddy to step in*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, I know. It's funny you can go one of two ways as a writer. I could either write better dialogue or have another character criticize what the other guy's saying.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I'll go with number 2.

HRISHI: It was a piece of number 2.

JOSH: Boom.

HRISHI: After that eeky piece of dialogue, we go to C.J.'s office where the NASA administrator is telling her about the situation with the space station.

JOSH: There's a space shuttle in Gail's fishbowl.

HRISHI: Good catch.

JOSH: We've given short shrift to Gail's fish bowl for the last couple of seasons. I think there was a time when I thought we just wouldn't have enough to discuss in the podcast and like, every episode I'll mention the fishbowl. That has fallen by the wayside, but it did catch my eye.

HRISHI: That's funny, I think for me part of it is because these are episodes I haven't seen as many times, I've now seen this episode maybe three or four times in preparation for our re-cap but it still pales in the number of times I've seen other episodes, that I'm still absorbing some of the main points and I'm less able to let those sink into the background while I look at what actually is in the background.

JOSH: Does this particular episode stand up to three or four viewings? Cause I have to, I a little bit felt, once I watched it and I usually do watch multiple times. I just kept waiting for it to start.

HRISHI: Ha. It does feel a lot like set up for our finale.

JOSH: In fairness, that crossed my mind too. Like maybe they're teeing up some stuff that's going to pay off tangibly next episode.

HRISHI: Yeah, this episode and next episode aren't explicitly listed as part one and part two but they really are, I mean really these last few episodes are just moving in one

JOSH: Of a piece

HRISHI: So yeah, let's drop in Commander Harper's explanation of what's going on.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*KATE: Something's gone wrong on the International Space Station. It's losing oxygen.*

*CHARLIE: The Astronauts on board can't fix it?*

*KATE: Not so far. I've got a NASA Administrator who wants to see the president.*

*C.J.: The president's unavailable, bring him here.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Ok, so now he's here in C.J.'s office and this for me is my biggest issue. This is not a stylistic fluke or anything like that. At least I don't think you can attribute it to anything like that. This feels just like a major error or something in the way that it's handled. So the NASA Administrator is briefing C.J. on the situation and his name is Kelwick and he says okay, they need a rescue operation, but the space shuttles are grounded, they can't get a space shuttle up there and it's because of a review, and C.J. says well whatever, forget the review, let's get one going and rescue them. Kelwick says well, one, they can't there are repairs going on and then Kelwick says 'that's the civilian shuttle'

JOSH: Oops

HRISHI: And C.J. says sorry, and at no point does anyone address it. And then from there this becomes the crux of this plot. It turns out there is a shuttle, a non-civillian shuttle, a military shuttle that could be used to save these astronauts.

JOSH: Space force.

HRISHI: Space force indeed. But it's top secret. The whole problem is it's top secret. They can't let anybody see it, they can't let anybody know that they have this thing even though people assume that they do, whatever. There's all this secrecy and stuff, Kelwick just casually violates what must be all kinds of levels of security talking to C.J. about it. C.J. has no idea what he's talking about and in fact she spends many minutes in the episode trying to get confirmation that there even is, that he's even talking about what she thinks he's talking about.

JOSH: Like really, a slip of the tongue is what's gonna unravel this for them?

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean like how does this, I just, this part doesn't really make sense. Either he's there to talk about actual options that they have. I mean I guess the military shuttle wouldn't be under the purview of NASA, it would be a defense department thing and NASA's, right?

JOSH: Well I guess there's a little crossover. I think NASA's not technically part of the military right?

HRISHI: No, it's not part of the Department of Defense.

JOSH: Yeah, yeah, exactly.

HRISHI: This Space Force, as it would be part of the Air Force.

JOSH: I was going to say Nick Song, the delicious Nick Song. The bubbly and effervescent Nick Song uncovered some good research for us about the Boeing X37B which is apparently the closest thing to a space shuttle which the US military possesses. It began as a NASA project and then the program was transferred to the DoD in 2004, so while not technically part of the

military obviously there's crossover, there's development that can then lead to military projects out of NASA.

HRISHI: That's right, but then again we cut away from the rest of the scene and I would like to see C.J. say 'what are you talking about?'

JOSH: Yes, you think she's not letting the guy out of her room, out of her office until he's spilled the beans. Like you can't just walk out now I need to know what you're talking about.

HRISHI: Yeah, how about a follow up question? Kate Harper also surprisingly does not reach over and snap his neck super-spy style to prevent him from saying anything else. So C.J. later is in the Oval Office where apparently this is where she's ready to ask her follow up question. She says

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*C.J.: Sir, the NASA administrator alluded to a non-civilian shuttle*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: What she does not say is, 'and then after he alluded to it I didn't bother to ask any follow up questions.

JOSH: Yeah I thought I'd come straight to you

HRISHI: And then the President just makes a sort of Bartletly, you know literary, nerdy reference and that's it.

JOSH: Is this where he references Wernher von Braun?

HRISHI: Yes

JOSH: Whose name immediately always puts me in mind of the fantastic Tom Lehrer song

["Wernher von Braun" song excerpt]

*"Once the rockets are up, who cares where they come down?  
That's not my department" say Wernher von Braun*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's a pretty, pretty cutting song. Wernher von Braun who famously developed the rocket program of the Nazis and then close on the heels of the resolution of World War II was recruited by the United States to work for us.

HRISHI: Yes, they said look we've got a thing that starts with NA as well.

JOSH: Nice.

HRISHI: So C.J. gets blown off and we continue through this episode with this dilemma. Do they send a military shuttle up there? They don't want to use it because of national security concerns

and losing two American astronauts and a Russian astronaut, letting them die is an acceptable trade off for being able to keep the military shuttle secret.

JOSH: A fascinating dilemma. It's actually a great and intriguing, at least potentially, plot line.

HRISHI: It is. Yeah, it is in fact very reminiscent of *Avengers Infinity War*.

JOSH: Oh, is it?

HRISHI: In that movie, throughout the entire thing, characters are faced over and over and over again with the choice between sacrificing one member of their team or half the population in the universe and they can't make that sacrifice. And a lot of times the person who is up for the sacrifice says I'm willing to do this, it is an acceptable trade off to me. But then everybody says no, no, no, no, we're going to fight our way through it.

JOSH: Think of the franchise. I was going to say that my mind drifts to Truman's decision whether or not to drop the A Bomb but *Infinity War* is also good.

HRISHI: [Laughing] Like we all have our-

JOSH: Cultural touchstones.

HRISHI: Our important, important moments in history. Okay, sorry, it's a nice scene where Toby says.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*C.J.: Would he have been okay about sacrificing himself for national security?*

*TOBY: He would have insisted on it. Don't ask me what I would have insisted on.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Do you think they sunk their teeth in deeply enough to this moral question, this dilemma of the sacrifice of two Americans and one Russian in exchange for military security?

JOSH: No, I do not. I think again they raised the spectre of a very interesting plot without digging in enough. It was too surface for me.

HRISHI: Where else would you have liked to see it go?

JOSH: Well, I guess I don't even think in terms of what I would have done but there just weren't deep, substantive conversations. Also certain things were raised in mind, they're kind of concerned about the other two astronauts are going to take pictures of it and they're going to give up the biggest military loss of information ever, you know just made me think, can't you make sure they can't take pictures? Or like, give me your iPhone before you get in this thing, I'm going to frisk you and make sure you can't take pictures. You know, they're just ancillary issues that you would think a serious life and death discussion would have entailed. I just wanted to hear more about it, is there some way to broker a deal? So they can make use of the military shuttle a reality without it necessarily being an espionage disaster.

HRISHI: I think the scene that really encapsulates all of this is the one in the Oval Office between C.J., Kate and another thorn in our side, Hutchinson. Who I'm so over, I just can't believe this guy still gets to have a job.

JOSH: Is this in the Sit room?

HRISHI: No, this is in the Oval Office with the president where they're kind of running through it again after they've tried a space walk which was unsuccessful

JOSH: and cost them some oxygen.

HRISHI: Yes, and the president says we have a decision to make and Hutchinson says this, he makes his argument the security concerns outweigh the consequences and C.J. is trying to make a case for rescue via the military shuttle.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*C.J.: I can't help notice the absence of anyone from NASA to make the case for a rescue.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: I don't need anyone to make it. I need more time.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think there is an assumption there, of course the president is wrestling with the morality of this, but I think that actually assumes too much. I want to see the president in that moment. C.J. is trying to make that argument but I would like to hear the president think that through.

JOSH: I agree, I'm going to continue the analogy, if we've got a movie about Truman's decision whether or not to drop that first atomic bomb, I want to see him wrestling with it. I want to see every single thought that's going into it. I also think they could have sort of humanized the story a little bit. Maybe we don't have the budget to see the space walk but I would like to know who is up there. And they could have communicated with them. It would have been interesting to know what the astronauts themselves think. You know, there are a lot of interesting places this could have gone. I feel like they just settled for raising the spectre of a difficult decision without really the battle being joined in a more intellectually stimulating way.

HRISHI: What I missed in that moment was the version of the president and the version of *The West Wing* from "The State Dinner." Where at the end the president gets on the radio with the folks on the tender ship, the USS Hickory, you know, and the grief of losing those sailors weighs so heavily on him, any time, any kind of military loss, any death of any American personnel weighs on him so much and I didn't feel like it weighed on him here, there wasn't a lot of humanity in the way that he was making his decision and that seemed exceptionally uncharacteristic.

JOSH: Yeah, that's good, I think you've nailed it now, that's the perfect *West Wing* analogy to what's happening in this episode. This is not the Bartlet we've grown to know and love.

HRISHI: Yes. And again I don't think that we're supposed to believe that the president isn't concerned with the morality, I just think that, this line, C.J. saying 'I can't help but notice the absence of anyone from NASA to make the case for rescue' and the president saying 'I don't

need anyone to make it I need more time' feels a little bit like trying to write your way out of the fact that you aren't having the president weigh this decision.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree with you. This is the, you know this could have sent the old Bartlet into another . . .

HRISHI: Rant in Latin.

JOSH: Dialogue with God you know, exactly. Where's that guy? This is a pretty [expletive deleted] decision he has to make.

HRISHI: Incredibly [expletive deleted]

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Ultimately there's a bit of a cliffhanger in the episode because Annabeth reveals that Greg Brock from *The New York Times* has released a story about a classified military space shuttle that could be used to rescue the astronauts but hasn't and that means somebody who has this information leaked it.

JOSH: And now we've got a national optics situation which may very well influence the decision.

HRISHI: Yeah. Although since Toby's brother talked about it, since Kelwick from NASA talked about it, Annabeth has this feeling it could only have come from somebody big. But apparently there are a lot of people who know about it. Hutchinson knows about it, a lot of people know about it. But clearly people who work at NASA and work in the DoD know about it.

JOSH: And those that know about it aren't necessarily that great about keeping it under wraps.

HRISHI: Exactly. Okay, switching gears here.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: Do you have an appreciation for the line

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*JOSH: Remember, three feet on the floor at all times.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes, I wrote that down. I got a kick out of that. I assume it's a reference to the Hays Code. Oh, am I wrong?

HRISHI: I don't know what that is. What is the Hays Code?

JOSH: The Hays Code were the production codes that governed Motion Picture production in the, I don't know, maybe from the 30's on. This is a mandatory production code that included among other things the proviso that, during love scenes in movies either the woman or the, I don't know either partner, had to have one foot on the floor. Rather than saying they can't get in

bed, there was this really weird clunk-a-lunk rule that love scenes had to include one foot on the floor.

HRISHI: That's really funny.

JOSH: One other indication of it is ah, Rob and Laura Petrie on *The Dick Van Dyke show* slept in separate beds.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Even married couples had to sleep in separate beds.

HRISHI: I just thought that's how people slept back then.

JOSH: Well, perhaps it was.

HRISHI: Also, the world was in black and white back then.

JOSH: That's also true, yeah.

HRISHI: Josh says this just as Santos is about to go in to meet with Russell about the possible combination of their tickets. He's trying to make a joke, nobody thinks it's funny. But to me, I heard that and was immediately brought back to high school. At my high school at the time, dorms were divided only into boys and girls, and if you were a boy and had a girl visitor, you had to get explicit permission to have them in your room, it was only allowed between the hours of 7pm and 8pm. The door had to be open and you had to have three feet on the floor.

JOSH: Oh truly?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I don't know. One foot up gives you instant access. [both laugh] So I don't really get that rule.

HRISHI: So that moment in the episode came out and I was thinking about my bye-gone years in high school and sneaking around with girls. Which brings me to another moment in this episode that I take issue with which is the Zoey and Charlie scene in *The White House*. Because again, as someone who has some, not a lot but a little bit of experience sneaking around with girls, this was as poorly planned as you could ever imagine. Charlie, you're sneaking around, you're visiting your girlfriend, your secret girlfriend, no one is supposed to know about this. Here's some pieces of advice that I have for Charlie. As he kisses Zoey and casually walks out into the hallway of the residence. One, finish getting dressed in Zoey's room.

JOSH: I thought the same thing too, put that tie back on.

HRISHI: Put the tie on, yeah. He comes out all ruffled, really there's no question. He's holding his jacket, his shirts untucked.

JOSH: Rumpelstiltskin. Also, send her out first.

HRISHI: Have her take a look.

JOSH: The coast is clear.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Oh, my Dad's right here.

HRISHI: Yep. But, you know, un-rumple yourself. Have some plausible deniability, at least in your appearance.

JOSH: I completely agree.

HRISHI: And then he walks out in his half-dressed state and then takes a beat in the hallway. What are you doing, don't dilly-dally.

JOSH: Don't linger to spite the ball.

BOTH: Yeah

JOSH: He should have yelled.

BOTH: Yeah.

JOSH: That would have been funny. Waking Bartlet.

HRISHI: You get dressed, Zoey does a hallway check, once it's clear, you make a beeline for the exit. What is he thinking, you know, maybe he might have the excuse that, maybe he doesn't realize that sometimes the president gets up in the middle of the night. Oh wait, no, it was his job to wake up the president in the middle of the night for many years.

JOSH: Good point. That said, we find out subsequently that the Secret Service sees all and they talk.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*ABBEY: Zoey told me about the two of them not that she had to because there's the small matter of the Secret Service. The clandestine is a non-starter around here.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: The clandestine as she says. There's some odd pronunciations in this episode. We get a miss-pronunciation of prurient which put me in mind of February and I felt like Richard has his own February to deal with as he says prurient. I feel that someone should have caught that in the shooting stage. Clandestine is probably an acceptable alternative.

HRISHI: Um, interesting, I should have honed in on that, but I didn't hone in on it at all because, there you go. it's one of these moments where it's a little seed for the entire episode. The clandestine is a non-starter around here is a great little piece of dialogue for the entire space shuttle plot as well.

JOSH: Good point.

HRISHI: I mean if the First Lady is finding out about Zoey and Charlie from the Secret Service which really I think she should not be. Zoey's detail is really supposed to, the whole point that they've said is the Secret Service can't do their job effectively if they're reporting you know, this is what Jorja Fox [Agent Gina Toscano] says, you know that she can't tattle on Zoey and also expect Zoey to trust her in a way that lets her do her job.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: So that seems a bit weird. The only reason I can think of for Abbey saying the clandestine is a non-starter around here is to set up the idea that that applies to the space shuttle as well.

JOSH: It's a multi-leak episode.

HRISHI: It is.

JOSH: Maybe I shouldn't have said that.

HRISHI: You can't say multi-leak.

BOTH: [Laugh]

HRISHI: Speaking of people getting it on.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: I think that actually there are a few dynamics here. We've got Zoey and Charlie post coitally having gotten it on. We also get the Santoses

BOTH: Coitus interruptus

HRISHI: I am ashamed that we both said that at the same time, and also, of course we did.

JOSH: Of course.

HRISHI: Josh interrupts them, he prevents them from getting it on. And then I also love the moment between Donna and Josh which feels like finally, a continuation of their extremely long game of foreplay.

JOSH: Yes, you're right.

HRISHI: This little teasing bit of back and forth that I love because it feels like a Donna and Josh that we haven't had for a long time and it's also an evolution of their relationship. There's a level of equality to them finally, professionally. They're trading thoughts on Santos becoming the VP for Russell.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*DONNA: You want him to accept?*

*JOSH: You don't?*

*DONNA: I have concerns.*

*JOSH: He's not hitman enough.*

*DONNA: He's too much voltage at the bottom of the ticket.*

*JOSH: Overshadows the nominee.*

*DONNA: Gets people wishing the names were reversed.*

*JOSH: People willing to wait until next time. How did you get so smart about this?*

*DONNA: I had a good teacher.*

*JOSH: Thanks.*

*DONNA: I meant Will.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's cute. It's a cute little zinger.

HRISHI: It is cute. And what makes it the cutest and zingiest of all is, you don't really know if she's joking or not.

JOSH: Right, yeah, it's a good delivery.

HRISHI: It could go either way.

JOSH: Good line, well delivered.

HRISHI: It's coy and you know we get a little shot of Josh letting it hit him, you know and he realized he's been zung.

JOSH: Yeah and he doesn't, ah, I also liked his reaction shot because rather than just being amused by it like, I really know, it's more like oh, wait a minute.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It actually lands with a little pain.

HRISHI: Yeah, he hears the stinger in the zinger.

JOSH: Nice.

HRISHI: I think this also sets up the conversation between Russell and Santos. This idea of who is the teacher and who can learn from whom comes back in a much less cute way when Russell and Santos finally talk about their possible ticket. Santos goes in there and Josh has said when

you go in there find a way to say yes, which I thought is a really interesting instruction. Like I thought that was a really great understanding of what position Santos finds himself in.

JOSH: I agree absolutely. That's why I was sorry ultimately not to see him struggle to do so. I guess we are left to believe ultimately that he maybe attempted to do so but just couldn't find a way to say yes. But I would like to have seen it, I would like to have seen that struggle, I would like to see Jimmy Smits play that moment. And that there's nothing substantively that I saw. I think you're getting at that moment where Russell says

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*RUSSELL: I'm sure there's things that I could learn from you.*

*SANTOS: Well, uh, I know*

*RUSSELL: Chances are there are undoubtedly things you could learn from me.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I didn't find it offensive. I thought it was, you know, rather than being completely obsequious and just sort of kissing Santos' ass, he's saying there is something in this for both of us. So I'm going to give you a voice, respect you. I think there are things I can learn from you and then, he's also got enough self-esteem to say I think there's also something I can bring to this and that you can learn from me.

HRISHI: It is interesting. He is saying something that could be cool and setting things up for a partnership, but there is something stylistically, both in terms of his delivery and just a couple of specific verbal choices that I think don't let Santos in. He says I'm sure there's things that I can learn from you.

JOSH: Like, believe it or not. Is that what you're saying? There's a little bit of, you know, one wouldn't expect it but I'm sure there are [crosstalk] things I could learn from you.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] I'm sure there's things I could learn from you, yeah. And he says it with a little bit of.

JOSH: A tinge of that perhaps, yeah.

HRISHI: And then he says just as there are undoubtedly things you could learn from me. And it's funny because another read of those same lines could present them with equal weight. I'm sure there's things that I could learn from you, but he says it in a kind of casual, ah I don't know.

JOSH: I know what you're saying. I'm curious now then, having only watched it once, to go back and watch that scene again because I remember, I probably should have watched it, at least that scene again, because I do remember thinking, once I realized we weren't getting the full serving that I wanted of that conversation, was that what tipped him off. Was there something in the flavor of that delivery, or what he said, that that was the end?

HRISHI: I think it was. I think it was something about the delivery. I think there's a personality issue for Santos and that's really what's happening because in some ways it feels like it's pre-

scripted. Everybody knows what's going to happen, he's going in to have this conversation where he's going to be offered the Vice Presidency and Santos has this funny line of saying do you want to flip a coin, like as if maybe it isn't pre-determined what the conversation is going to be. And Russell kind of has a nervous chuckle about that. So even though the stage is set for it to go a certain way, Santos is not at all convinced of his own part. And it feels like a miss-read somehow, you know that Russell isn't actually completely obsequious. He ought to be, right, like he needs to be humble in this moment because he's asking Santos to humble himself by accepting a lesser position. So you've got it on paper, like you're going to be the boss, so why not take this moment to make this guy just feel like he's amazing, he's great.

JOSH: Maybe it's just cause I played Will Bailey and so I'm somehow, I lean towards Russell or giving him the benefit of the doubt. I thought his pitch was fairly good. I get what you're saying about there's something in the articulation of the "I can teach you and I can learn from you" that sort of gives him the upper hand in that power dynamic. But I felt he was fairly, that being full on obsequious wouldn't be credible. I mean, you know, ultimately this is a person who feels he should be president and Santos should be vice president.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And also, the other thing I did like about Russell's pitch was that it included, I think, a surprising candor about his tenure as Vice President. How he was not happy with the power dynamic there and I'm going to give you a voice in a way I wasn't given one.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I thought that was a sort of a refreshing approach that I wouldn't necessarily have expected him to take. Rather than say how great it's been or whatever, he's betraying some frustration on the position he was given as VP.

HRISHI: Yeah I liked that moment a lot. But ultimately I agree with you. I want to see that scene play out, especially having enjoyed the Vinick/Butler conversation so much. Where there's another sort of, it's not really a refusal because he cuts him off before he can make the offer but to see that moment where he tries to offer him the Vice Presidency and Butler says I'm going to stop you right there. I wanted to see the moment where Santos ultimately says. . .

JOSH: Right. That's it, we're robbed of that moment and not only are we as viewers robbed of the moment, but Matt Santos is robbed a little bit because we don't really know, we don't know what he had to say. That's an acting moment and a writing moment I want to experience. Why did he turn him down, how did he turn him down? Did he leave that room like not only am I not going to be your VP but I'm going to kick your ass? Is there a you know, that's when I decided to kick your ass moment? Like, what happened?

HRISHI: That's a great callback. I think, I do feel like "there are things you could undoubtedly learn from me is when I decided to kick your ass" is probably what we're meant to assume because that's the last thing we get and then he walks out. But again, just like with the president and the arguments for why they should save the astronauts, I would have liked it if they didn't just assume, you know, they kinda yadda, yadda, yadda'd it.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And then Russell says this yadda, yadda, yadda, he didn't accept. And then, immediately afterwards, I do love the moment in the elevator between Santos and Josh.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*SANTOS: Mad at me?*

*JOSH: No. Oddly.*

*SANTOS: Disappointed?*

*JOSH: Proud, I think.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's a great line and it's a great performance by Brad and again it's just, I like the continued evolution between these two characters and their relationship.

JOSH: I liked that scene too, although again I don't feel like I really know what his thought process was and I wish I did, but.

HRISHI: Of Santos' thought process?

JOSH: Oh yeah, or Josh's. I mean, I sort of get it and this is an audacious thing to do and what the hell and we're taking the risk but substantively I don't know what's changed you know, and then after this we get Josh's admission that, to Leo that he was pressing Santos to take it but he was wrong about that. You know, I'm still not sure exactly why.

HRISHI: Really? I feel like he articulates it here where he says.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*JOSH: I told him to say yes. I was wrong. He's twice the man Russell is on his best day. Ten times, and Russell doesn't have that many best days.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Josh just really believes in his candidate, he really doesn't believe in Russell and he just couldn't stomach it and so I feel like we did get Josh's point of view.

JOSH: I guess, except, we already knew Josh thought that. I guess, maybe unfairly, I'm looking for something a little bit more revelatory. Yes we know, we know that Josh thinks his guy is twice the guy that Russell is but there were some pragmatic aspects to considering, and indeed in Josh's view taking the VP slot on the ticket so I'm not sure what changed, it's just kind of, I guess it's a little bit wishy-washy for me. It's like, you know what, no, you really are better than him.

HRISHI: I can see the red pen of your teacher comments circling Josh's thesis statement and saying needs more supporting sentences.

JOSH: Well said.

HRISHI: There's a moment in that scene between Josh and Leo where he says

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*JOSH: Santos turned Russell down,*

*LEO: Okay. Okay, so now you get him to un-turn it down.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And that little moment reminded me of *Sexy Beast*.

[*Sexy Beast* excerpt]

*GAL: But I'm just going to have to turn this opportunity down*

*DON: No, you're just going to have to turn this opportunity yes.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Ha, that's great.

HRISHI: Back to the Charlie storyline for a second, how about this bombshell, when he tells the President.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*CHARLIE: I don't wanna sneak around The White House anymore.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: I'm not trying to break you two up.*

*CHARLIE: No, sir, I'm talking about actually seeing more of Zoey. More time with her, spent together, being together and such.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He's trying to, in a very awkward way, trying to tell the President this is a thing that's going on we would like it to be out in the open so it's not such a weird thing and the President misinterprets it.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Understandably because Charlie's being very cryptic about the whole thing. The President misinterprets it as thinking that Charlie wants to propose to Zoey and Charlie is, that is not what Charlie means.

JOSH: Is that clear that it's not?

HRISHI: It is not, it is not what he means and I think it's pretty far from his mind. But then when the President says it, it suddenly opens up this door. I'm sure it's something that Charlie has thought about from time to time.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: But probably thought about it in a way where he's brushed it off, like that's outside of the realm of possibility or you know, there's no way for us to even begin to have that conversation. But then when the president brings it up and says are you asking, you know.

JOSH: To make an honest woman out of her.

HRISHI: Ugh

JOSH: Yeesh.

HRISHI: Yeesh, but still, Charlie stops before he leaves and says sir, would I have your blessing? I mean, one, holy crap, Charlie and Zoey are back together.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: That's awesome.

JOSH: Are they ever!

HRISHI: And not only are they back together, there's suddenly this tiny pinpoint of hope that not only are they back together, maybe they will live happily ever after.

JOSH: Perhaps so.

HRISHI: So, in summary, Charlie, you have my blessing, but I will also say, that moustache does not have my blessing.

JOSH: [Laughs] I don't know.

HRISHI: You saw it this time.

JOSH: Maybe it's growing on me more and more better than it grows on him but I kinda like it.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Boom.

JOSH: I didn't love some of the dialogue. The initial Sit Room scene, the dialogue is a little precious when they're sort of dancing around sharing information or not. And the scene between President and Dr. Bartlet, the president says why have I been so ostentatiously kept out of the loop.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Dr. Bartlet, golly one wonders there's something about it that I don't quite buy it.

HRISHI: This is, again to me an example of writing to try and convince us that your characters are smart rather than just letting them be smart through the substance of what they say. It's sort of like drawing little flowers around all the words and it is, it feels unnecessary, it also feels like maybe it's making up for a lack of actual smartness.

JOSH: Yeah, and as a counterpoint to that I picked out just one line that I thought was just, couldn't have been more simple but yet I found it lovely, Toby's sum up of the situation with the shuttle.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*TOBY: The Senate reveals it.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Sometimes something simply put can land in a way that overwritten dialogue does not.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I noticed also a little moment again of Will Bailey's engaging again what I will hereafter refer to as cheap thrills.

HRISHI: Cheap thrills!

JOSH: Little mini phone flip in the Roosevelt Room when Josh comes in to talk to me.

HRISHI: Yep. It's a chance to quote Sia, I love cheap thrills.

JOSH: Nice. And then I think actually the final moment is worthy of discussion. After staying behind the scenes during a Republican Nominating Convention that fairly roasts President Bartlet in order to stain Russell's connection to him and Vinick comes out and has sort of a lovely, gracious kind of tribute to President Bartlet and the kind of Commander in Chief or President that he's been and then President Bartlet tells us that Vinick just gained 5 million democratic votes.

HRISHI: I'm sorry, you do like that?

JOSH: No, I didn't love it. First of all I don't love being told what the moment means, it's like in case you missed it.

HRISHI: Really? I actually appreciated that one because while it was happening I was like come on, you know like, I know we're supposed, I actually started to feel like, it felt unrealistic to me that Vinick would even say of anything positive in this context. I felt a little bit like, alright, we get it, he's noble, he's heroic, he's bigger than the party and everything. And I thought but yeah, but it's the Republican National Convention, why would he do this, this seems ridiculous. I felt like they were going too far and then, so then when the president says yeah that bastard just picked up 5 million Democratic votes I was like there you go, those are his political instincts.

JOSH: Well, yeah, I guess I agree and I disagree with you. I wanted to say to the screen, you know he just presided over from behind the scenes and it's not like a candidate doesn't have any say in what the tenor of the convention is going to be so, like it's a little bit on Vinick that there were however many days of Bartlet bashing and then he comes out and says that. But for some reason I guess I kind of liked living in that moment of is this real is this not. I guess rather than having it neatly wrapped in a bow and being told no, this is pure politics and this was why he did it and this is what he's going to get out of it. I don't know, maybe I'm changing my mind as I talk to you. I kind of liked living in that moment where I'm like, wait a minute-

HRISHI: Oh, really.

JOSH: Should I admire Vinick for this or is this calculating? I guess I thought it was more nuanced to sort of go wait, what's happening here. Am I supposed to dig this or am I supposed to not, the way I would think some of the electorate would.

HRISHI: I think, I don't know that I would have gotten there if they hadn't had that line I would have felt a little bit like I was being manipulated into liking this guy in using methods that felt unrealistic. I really thought that this was just a character development saying look at how sort of selfless this guy is that he's willing to take this moment where the spotlight is on him and actually turn the spotlight onto President Bartlet instead.

JOSH: I see, okay, well for me I felt provoked for the first time and really hooked by the episode with that speech because it was uncomfortable and I was trying to sit with is this what it seems to be, should I give it just face value or is this just crass politics after all this negative stuff he comes in and he looks like the bigger guy that the rest of the party even. I don't know, I just, I liked sitting with that uncomfortable feeling trying to figure it out during the flentl as opposed to the wrap up but I see the value in both.

HRISHI: Yeah, I didn't like it up until that part. I actually did not like that moment when he's giving that speech until the president says he just picked up 5 million democratic votes. Then I was like aaah that's, that actually worked for me to admire Vinick more. Like the moment of him giving President Bartlet compliments I was like, ugh, they're trying to get me to like him more and I'm resistant to it. And then when it turns out he's doing that and it works out as a win for him as well, I was ah, this guy, is really, he's on top of his game.

JOSH: Alright. I felt like I was part of the electorate watching it before the president told me what I should think about, okay it's just that. I don't know. I also, you know, this goes back to other things. I don't like somehow when our heroes are the defining element of what happened or how or what to feel. I'd rather draw my own conclusions sometimes.

HRISHI: I mean I guess that's it, I wouldn't have drawn that conclusion, so I needed it.

JOSH: Well, I guess what I'm saying is, I'm not saying that's not my conclusion, I think it's somewhere in the middle. I think it's sort of more interesting to go, I don't know exactly, you know. Vinick is classy, it does seem like the kind of thing, he didn't praise any policies of Bartlet's like he ran, he kind of walked the line so he was able to accomplish both.

HRISHI: And that's what's so great because it wouldn't work if he were a different kind of Republican or a different kind of candidate. The fact that he is moderate and he is, you know, the reason why the election is so dangerous is because he is the kind of candidate who can pick

up not only Republican votes but make a lot of independents break for him and even possibly pick, in moments like this he can even pick up Democratic votes. We disagree, that's fine.

JOSH: Yeah exactly.

HRISHI: I thought it was interesting what Toby says when he watches the speech because what we talked about in the last episode, the contrast between Santos and Russell in the Oval Office with the President and then Vinick and the President eating ice-cream. Toby says

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*TOBY: Arnold Vinick just positioned himself as Jed Bartlet's natural successor.*

*ANNABETH: How'd he do that?*

*TOBY: Without one mention, without even an illusion to either one he managed to dismiss Russell and Santos as puny, dwarf like children trying to get a seat at the grown-ups table.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's the same thing that we said, I'm feeling like these two are children and these two are the adults.

JOSH: Yeah, I wrote that down as another moment I didn't like.

HRISHI: Really?

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Because you felt like it was enough in the previous episode the way that it was depicted without having to be stated explicitly.

JOSH: Exactly. It's funny that you draw the parallel yeah, so that's just a stylistic thing, I don't like the, I guess it's feeling spoon fed. It's like, I kinda get what's going on you don't have to say it. I guess some of these moments feel like in case you missed it, here's what happened.

HRISHI: I don't know, I guess like, I don't that I would expect everyone whose been caught up in the text of what he's been saying and like following along with the episode to also catch the fact that he only talked about the president and he didn't talk about the other nominees and therefore because of doing that, this is the end result, this is what he gets out of it.

JOSH: See, I don't think that's a problem. In the Aaron Sorkin *West Wing* lots of people missed lots of things all the time and that's what, that's why I think it was a more interesting, more sophisticated show. It's like wait, did I, did I get that right, what just happened? Instead of going let me just make sure, these are the ten things you have to know at the end of this episode.

HRISHI: I mean, I agree with you that there are things, as we've talked about in this episode, there are things that I'm like, okay, that I think were misses, but these I don't think qualify for me. I feel like they're, a, I feel like they're worth mentioning what he's done. It gives you a little bit more explicit ammo about how shrewd Vinick is. I think you might end up being like so

caught up in what he's saying about the President and stuff like that, that you might in fact miss the fact [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] So what?

HRISHI: That you might in fact, miss the important sort of political stratagem of not mentioning either of them by name.

JOSH: To me that's not a catastrophe, some people didn't pick up on something.

HRISHI: I mean, I think you're sort of overestimating the Sorkin years at this point right now.

JOSH: Maybe, so, forget any mention of the Sorkin years. In terms of television and good TV, I like TV where it leaves you going wait a minute, what exactly happened there, or that seems, she talking about. I like being in that messier area where I'm not 100% sure exactly what every moment means, what every word and have a character tell me.

HRISHI: I mean that's what I'm saying, I think I've, I agree with you. I also feel like that, I don't want to be spoon fed, but it's also possible to go the other way and be like, hey, you're missing an opportunity to sort of, show us something.

JOSH: But I agree, I feel like they did show it to us. I like the show it to us part not the tell us what happened part.

HRISHI: Yeah, I understand what you're saying.

JOSH: Let's take a quick break now and when we return HrishI will speak with Jennifer Palmieri.

[Ad break]

JOSH: Our guest this episode is Jennifer Palmieri. You've heard her on our podcast before. She was the communications director for the Obama White House before leaving to work on Secretary Clinton's 2016 Presidential campaign. She's also the author of the bestselling book *Dear Madam President: An Open Letter to the Women Who Will Run the World*. HrishI spoke to her about this episode and how it compared to the Democratic National Convention in 2016. Hillary Clinton obviously got the nomination but there were over 1800 delegates for Bernie Sanders so it wasn't the perfectly smooth convention process that a party would hope for, much like in *Things Fall Apart*. Here's their conversation.

HRISHI: When you watched this episode did it feel similar to your experience at all? That uncertainty and chaos and desire for party unity?

JENNIFER: It filled me with anxiety, residual anxiety from previous experience and it also filled me with anxiety for 2020.

HRISHI: Yeah

JENNIFER: And imagining what the 2020 Democratic convention was going to be like and imagining myself in the position of, as Josh was, trying to convince the candidate who came really far in the process but didn't seemingly have enough votes to get the nomination and you

know, do you convince that person to take the number 2 slot and like how hard that is. They did a good job with the tension like between Josh has to come back face Leo and Leo's upset because Santos hasn't taken the running mate slot. You know I've had that same kind of tension because I worked for President Obama and then I was working for Hillary and there's a sense of you know what team are you really on and Leo pushes Josh like.

[West Wing Episode 6.21 excerpt]

*LEO: You are gonna do this. For us. For the president. For your party.*

*JOSH: I'm not, 'cause I don't agree with it.*

[end excerpt]

JENNIFER: As if to say you're still a part, remember what family you're a member of.

HRISHI: And so what was the fight like that that you had?

JENNIFER: There was a little tension about how the Obama White House handled the Russia investigation for example, right? So there were some people in the Clinton world that wanted the Obama administration to be more forward leaning about the role that they could see that Russia was playing. And some frustration that they weren't being more aggressive. It is a tough moment when you have to look at your friend and think I'm not sure where your allegiances lie anymore, or where they should. Because you're all so sympathetic, you're thinking well, he's working for the other candidate now and as much as he loves the president, your obligation is to your new boss and advising him.

HRISHI: So President Obama officially endorsed Secretary Clinton on I think it was June 9<sup>th</sup> of 2016.

JENNIFER: Mhmm

HRISHI: Was there pressure from your side of things on the Obama team to come out sooner than that? It's one of the points of tension in The West Wing, that the Bartlet administration is not going to endorse any of the Democratic nominees. He says he's going to stay neutral but he wants there to be unity and so they can come out with a clear candidate. Of course, if he were to actually endorse one of them it would help things along in that process.

JENNIFER: Yeah.

HRISHI: Did you feel like, were there people, maybe you or your colleagues were saying come on, let's just like, can we just make this happen, she was his Secretary of State. Why won't you just come out and endorse explicitly?

JENNIFER: I knew President Obama had a lot of love and respect for Hillary Clinton, wanted her to be the next President. But I also respected that, you know, he understood as the President, as the head of the party, he wanted to stay neutral and they really didn't do things to help us and thought that that might help bring everyone together better at the end. And that he could be there at the end to be a peacemaker. I will admit that I had like a couple of panicked phone calls that I made during the primary. Early on, I called Valerie Jarrett and I was like, I don't know, like I'm really worried about this. I thought that Sanders is a really formidable

candidate, he was good at it and I thought that we could be like, in a bad situation and I wanted my friends in the Obama White House to know. In case you think it feels like we got it, it does not feel like that at all. And Valerie told the president and Valerie told me that the president said oh that Jen, she like worries too much.

BOTH: Laughter.

JENNIFER: Which is, I was like, well, it's errr, sort of true that I do. Sort of true that I was right, sort of true that he was right cause in the end she did win and she did win pretty handily. But I tell you like where I felt supported by my friends in the Obama White House was I could tell they weren't in the press trashing us. You know, a lot of people were saying why is it so hard for Hillary Clinton to lock up this nomination. They were the only people that I knew, you know like weren't out there trashing us, weren't rolling their eyes about why can't they get it together and that was, you know, more of moral support that I feel like I got from them. Because every nominee does have to win a nomination on their own. You know, I think if President Obama had tried to weigh in for Hillary I'm not sure that it would have made that much difference early on but like what does help is just the moral support of your friends and colleagues either not trashing you or you know, like if you want to call and to just vent about how hard it all is. They're like, yeah it is but you know what, you guys are doing great. You have like a really tough race you gotta run and you're doing great.

HRISHI: I think that's shown so well in the episode. Josh has Leo whose somewhat neutral but still clearly has this position of wanting to support him but then he also doesn't have it with Toby, you know he looks to Toby for some kind of collegial, moral support and Toby still feels betrayed by him from having left. Were there people who said, when you told people that you were going to go work for Secretary Clinton, did you have people saying what are you doing, why aren't you finishing this out with us?

JENNIFER: Yeah, in the beginning, not everyone thought it was such a great idea in the beginning. I'm very close with Denis McDonough who was the White House Chief of Staff. Denis was not very super fired up in the beginning at the idea but the way I had looked at it and the way I think President Obama looked at it was it was the best use of me. Because I had worked for the Clintons before, because I had been through a lot of hard political fights, so Denis and the President both came around.

HRISHI: I wonder how you feel about this comparison. There's the Josh Lyman comparison we already talked about, but in some ways the character on *The West Wing* that might be most similar to your position in this episode is Will Bailey, my esteemed co-host Josh Malina's character because he's running the candidate whose running with this level of incumbency, you know, the sitting Vice President who is the presumptive nominee and has the lead in the number of delegates even though it's proving to be a fight. Is that a fair comparison?

JENNIFER: Yes it is. I did have that same thought and it's like, it's the least fun job in politics is working for the uber front runner whether that is the sitting Vice President or a former Vice President or as it was with Hillary because every question you get is basically why are you not doing better. Right, it's like you don't get *The West Wing* like inspiration and thrilling moments where your guy or gal comes out of nowhere to capture New Hampshire. There's none of that, it's just all a battle of attrition.

HRISHI: Before the decision was made that Senator Kaine was going to be the running mate, was there a discussion for the sake of party unity or anything like that, to try and get Senator Sanders to be the Vice Presidential running mate?

JENNIFER: Yeah, it was discussed and, you know, Hillary and Sanders had private conversations themselves. I don't know what those discussions were.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JENNIFER: We considered it very seriously because, you know, it could make a lot of sense but in the end we thought what you really need is a governing partner. Under that measurement Kaine goes to the top of that list. And you know also consider she was asking, some of the people she was consulting about this are people who have had the job before right.

HRISHI: Right.

JENNIFER: Her husband and President Obama and not that they said take Tim Kaine but they both said you know you gotta remember this is someone you're going to spend every day with, hopefully you're going to spend every day with this person for the next 8 years.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JENNIFER: So think about that. How are you going to feel when they walk in the room, when they walk into the meeting every morning. And, as well as, obviously, can they do the job.

HRISHI: Do you get to weigh in on decisions the DNC made about the Convention? Like having Senator Warren as the keynote speaker?

JENNIFER: Yes. I would say that the convention staff was careful not to include the Clinton team in any of that planning until we got to June and she had secured enough delegates to be the nominee although she wasn't officially the nominee and I suspect that they continued to talk with Sanders team all through that as well. You know, keep them abreast on the chance that something could happen at the convention and then he could get, he could become the nominee. It was not something I had expected but Senator Sanders was the one who nominated her from Vermont and put her over the top as Hillary did in 2008 for President Obama.

HRISHI: Right

[Audio from Democratic Convention 2016]

SANDERS: Madam Chair. I move that the convention suspend the procedural rules. I move that all votes, all votes cast by delegates be reflected in the official record and I move that Hillary Clinton be selected as the Nominee of the Democratic party for President of the United States.

[End audio]

JENNIFER: It was really generous of Senator Sanders to do that. I certainly thought the same of Hillary when she did it in 2008.

HRISHI: Yeah, that's a classy move.

JENNIFER: Yeah, it's a total classy move. It really does have this physical moment where the party literally comes together and makes a decision that you're going to support this nominee and I think that ritual matters. It's an interesting thing to think about what Milwaukee's going to be like because all options are possible including a brokered convention where we have a situation like Will did on the show where you're deciding who the nominee is in Milwaukee, that could happen.

HRISHI: Do you have any advice for the campaigns that are heading into 2020 about what they should expect, what makes the most sense and what they might need to do for the sake of party unity?

JENNIFER: Yeah, I think that it's very hard to game that out. I think you gotta look at the moment you're in and think, you know, do I believe my candidate is the best candidate to win the nomination and if so, then your advice has gotta be, you know, to your boss, hang in there and stay in it and not think that this is a dry-run for something else.

HRISHI: There's something kind of unfair about the process in that throughout the primaries you're trying to convince people that this is the only answer. But in a situation like, certainly like on *The West Wing* but even in 2016 where it's a little bit close you've got this whiplash where after the nominee is announced you have to ask everybody to suddenly switch gears and everybody is supposed to come together and support this one person who had been your opponent just days earlier.

JENNIFER: I know and it's hard to wrap your head around. I remember, you know I worked for John Edwards in 2004. He lost and I went to Ohio on behalf of John Kerry but I gotta tell you, the day I got my [Jpalmieri@johnkerry.com](mailto:Jpalmieri@johnkerry.com) email address was a really rough day. It was, you were just like, this is so soul crushing.

HRISHI: Really? Wow. That is fascinating to me, that moment that you get your email address and your heart sinks.

JENNIFER: Brutal, it was brutal. I had my John Edwards bumper sticker on my car for a while and somebody was like you, really, you can't be driving around Ohio with a John Edwards bumper sticker on the car. But, after you've done it once you know it's part of the ritual of democracy and, it's something I've always felt privileged to be part of and you wanna help your team see it all the way through.

HRISHI: Well Jennifer, thanks so much for coming back on the podcast and giving me your thoughts on this episode. It's always a pleasure to speak to you.

[music plays]

JOSH: That does it for another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*. Thank you for joining us. Thank you to Zach McNees, Margaret Miller and Nick Song for their help with the show.

HRISHI: Our next episode is going to be a live episode in Washington DC.

JOSH: Woo!

HRISHI: And it will be the finale of season 6.

JOSH: And we'll be joined by Kate Harper herself, Mary McCormack and LOD, Lawrence O'Donnell.

HRISHI: Until then, thanks for listening. Thanks to Radiotopia for letting *The West Wing Weekly* be a part of your family of excellent podcasts. You can learn about all of the shows at Radiotopia.fm.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

JENNIFER: What's next?

[Outro Music]