

The West Wing Weekly
0.03: "Big Block of Cheese II"

[Advertisement omitted]

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly, the final West Wing Weekly episode of 2016.

JOSH: Woo!

HRISHI: I'm Hirshikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Today we've got a special bonus episode. We're gonna be taking questions and answering them. After this, we're gonna be taking a couple weeks off for the holidays, so no episode next Wednesday or the Wednesday after that. We'll be back January 11th, 2017 with another regular episode.

JOSH: What a remarkable thing for us to do. [laughs] I mean let me just pat us on the back. We are special, special podcasters.

HRISHI: This is sort of like our version of the Big Block of Cheese Day that is featured regularly on the show.

JOSH: And in a virtual fashion by the Obama Administration. He did a couple virtual Big Block of Cheese Days.

HRISHI: That's right.

JOSH: Oh, I almost forgot. I'm going to have to come up with a cheese. This is your least favorite thing. [cross talk] I almost forgot your least favorite thing!

HRISHI: [cross talk] I know. I wasn't gonna mention it. I was waiting for you to do it, and then I when you didn't I thought, oh, maybe I might be able to get away without it, [cross talk] without being subjected to a type of cheese.

JOSH: [cross talk] No, you're not so lucky. I think today, we're going to pair our questions with a lovely Midnight Moon. Have you had Midnight Moon?

HRISHI: I'm not sure that I have. I thought you were going to go for the more obvious feta, because it's kind of a party.

JOSH: Oh, or because you're fed up.

HRISHI: Oh that's good too.

JOSH: Not really. [laughs] Yeah, we're going with Midnight Moon. This is a fairly new cheese. It was created by Cypress Grove Chevre, of Arcata, California, so it's a —

HRISHI: Isn't new cheese technically milk?

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah, I see what you're saying. It's a newly developed cheese, made from goat's milk that has been aged for at least a year. I think you'll like its warm, nutty flavor. We will try to give warm, nutty answers to your questions. It's a perfect pair.

HRISHI: Let's dive in.

JOSH: Ok, let's. Do let's. Also, just want to say generally, thank you to everybody. We got a profusion of queries from a variety of people. It actually touches me that so many people sent in questions. I wish could answer more, but do resubmit your questions, if we don't address them, in future Big Block of Cheese Days, Big Blocks of Cheese Day, Big — [laughs]

HRISHI: Attorneys-general.

JOSH: Thank you. It was something like that I was working towards.

HRISHI: Well, this first one comes from Alex.

[Voicemail excerpt]

ALEX: Hey Hrish, Josh. It's Alex from Melbourne, Australia, here. So much of The West Wing's success is down to the phenomenal group of actors who personify the characters we know and love on the show. But in an alternate universe, where our legendary cast wasn't available, I'm keen to know which other actors you'd tap to bring their own, different takes to some of these roles. And Josh you cannot nominate yourself in every category. Can't wait to hear back. Thanks.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Ok. Fantastic accent.

HRISHI: And fantastic question.

JOSH: And a terrific question. Delighted that we have listeners in the Antipodes. And, here we go. So fantasy. So what are the criteria? Are we working, are we going to address the question which actors today at this moment would be right for making the show now?

HRISHI: I think there's no wrong answer, and I think you can have whatever parameters you want.

JOSH: Wow, you are a real lefty. Am I going to get a participation trophy when we're done?

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Just for offering any kind of answer?

HRISHI: I'm curious to see how you set this up. I'm really excited about mine, but I wanna hear yours first.

JOSH: Ah. Well I think, having worked with me for thirty-some-odd episodes already, you won't be surprised to find that I'm a little underprepared, and so I feel a better approach would be to start with your answers, and maybe they will stimulate my mind.

HRISHI: Ok. [laughs]

JOSH: I mean, let me toss some, ok? I'll give some.

HRISHI: Yeah, give me some of yours.

JOSH: Ok. Should we start with Bartlet, or do we work our way up to him?

HRISHI: You do all of yours and then I'll do all of mine.

JOSH: There is no all of mine. But, I have pondered Bartlet. I know that Sidney Poitier was

originally bandied about and considered. I don't think that — is he alive? This is a weak point in my knowledge base, we know that.

HRISHI: [laughing] He is alive.

JOSH: OK. I thought so. That said, maybe a little long in the tooth at this point to play the role. Also I will put Robert Redford in that category. I know he was bandied about, or he was originally the actor for whom *The American President* was being developed. He also, bit long in the tooth at this point. So more apt actors for today. I think Denzel Washington would be an interesting Bartlet.

HRISHI: Mmmhmm. Interesting.

JOSH: Yeah, well, he's smart, he's sharp, he's badass, but he can be vulnerable. And he radiates a certain sharpness and intelligence. I would like to see Daniel Day-Lewis's Jed Bartlet.

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: Yeah. I'm not, as you may have picked up on, I'm not going for the actors I think we could lock up in a deal to play the role for seven years.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah, that's fine.

JOSH: [cross talk] I'm playing full-on fantasy league.

HRISHI: That's what I meant by the parameters can be whatever you want.

JOSH: Yeah, fair enough then. My two top choices are Denzel and Daniel Day-Lewis.

HRISHI: Those are really compelling.

JOSH: Ok. You want me to just go through more, or will you give me your Bartlets?

HRISHI: No, I want you to give me the rest of yours.

JOSH: I gotta find a spot for Tom Hardy, because he is I think probably my favorite actor of the moment. So I think Tom Hardy's Sam Seaborn [cross talk] would be interesting.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Wow. Would he wear the Bane mask?

JOSH: [laughs] That's actually, that's an interesting take.

HRISHI: Sam Seabane.

[West Wing episode 2.11 excerpt (modified)]

JOSH: You what we could use?

SAM: [voice distorted like Bane from Batman films] Newspaper?

JOSH: See, that's what I'm talking about. This is teamwork.

SAM: [voice distorted like Bane from Batman films] It really is!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughs] In my estimation, Hardy's capable of anything. I mean he's, I've seen him in so many different kinds of roles, and I think he would be an interesting and equally dreamy Sam Seaborn.

HRISHI: Wow, that's so great. I had no idea of your love for Tom Hardy.

JOSH: I do. You know what happened is for some reason, I think just by chance, I saw him in three or four movies in about a week. And, I just kept saying to my son, “it’s Tom Hardy again!” This guy’s unbelievable. I mean I saw him in, I think I saw him in *Warrior*, and what’s the one about the British — *Bronson!* — notorious British prisoner. Then he’s in this movie. You can see I’m very good with titles. What’s the one where he’s basically on the phone for the entire time?

HRISHI: It’s called *Locke*.

JOSH: *Locke!* Oh my god! A brilliant performance. I mean if you pitched me, “Hey, there’s a guy in a car on the phone for an hour and a half,” I would say, “I don’t think I wanna watch that movie,” but he is riveting, just brilliant, and riveting, and real, and somehow incredibly compelling. And then he’s *Mad Max*. The guy can just do anything. So he’s my choice for Sam Seaborn. Let’s see. I think Elisabeth Moss, now, would either be possibly a more compelling Mandy or a very interesting C.J.

HRISHI: I like that. She’s a fantastic actor. [cross talk] So good

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah she is. She’s great. She’d be a very different C.J. from Allison, maybe less of a comic creation but I think it would be interesting to see what she did with the role. Josh Lyman, I think would have been interesting had he been played by Matthew Perry, who would join the cast later in the show’s run and who would work with Brad Whitford on *Studio 60*. I think Matthew Perry would have been a great Josh Lyman.

HRISHI: Hmm.

JOSH: That’s all I get? A “hmm”? I think we touched on this briefly but Adam Arkin would have been a very interesting Josh Lyman as well.

HRISHI: And you already know he’s Sorkin-approved.

JOSH: Right, exactly. That is all, largely off the top of my head, that I have got, although there are obviously roles that I haven’t addressed, and so I reserve the right to continue to comment and come up with things as you share your no doubt well-thought-out response to the question.

HRISHI: Well, I got really excited about this question. Josh, do you ever watch the show *Adventure Time*?

JOSH: No. We discussed this. I’m sure I would love it.

HRISHI: It’s so good. You would love it. It is up there for me with among my favorite shows.

JOSH: Well, would it stand up to a episode-by-episode podcast, cause I’m looking for something three years from now.

HRISHI: [laughs] I think it would, and there is actually a podcast about *Adventure Time* that’s out there. But, it’s really great. Anyway, one of the things that I love in that show — the main characters are Finn and Jake: Finn the human and Jake the dog.

JOSH: Sure

HRISHI: But they occasionally have episodes that are told within the show, one of the characters is like writing their own stories, and in that story, all the characters exist, but they are gender-swapped. And it’s called *Fionna and Cake*, instead of Finn and Jake. It’s *Cake* the cat and *Fionna* the human, as a girl, so I thought it’d be fun to do *The West Wing* where it’s all

gender flipped.

JOSH: Oh, no wonder you were so loopy-goopy with the criteria. [cross talk] You were just setting yourself up. Ok.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Exactly. [laughs] Exactly, so this was really fun for me, but I did it based on, mainly based on Season 2, so I have no Mandy in my, my cast. So, for Samantha Seaborn, Anna Kendrick.

JOSH: Mmm, good casting.

HRISHI: Smart, big name. You know she can bring in the ratings. I think she could play both the sort of really idealistic, really sharp, kind of funny and sweet character that Sam Seaborn is on the show. For Charlotte Young —

JOSH: [laughing] Charlotte Young, very good!

HRISHI: Charlotte Young, playing the assistant to the President, Gina Rodriguez.

JOSH: Of?

HRISHI: Jane the Virgin.

JOSH: Ah, I don't know that show.

HRISHI: She's terrific, and I think she's just an amazing actress, and yeah, I think she would be great and I wanna see her in more things. And I think she would be great in a role that's sort of like the outsider coming in, and who has to like learn to hold their own, and I think she would be really compelling.

JOSH: Great.

HRISHI: For C.J., Lin-Manuel Miranda.

JOSH: Lin-Manuel Miranda as C.J. LMM as C.J.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Mm-hmm.

HRISHI: He has the charisma and the potential to play awkward in the moments when C.J. has to be really awkward but funny and also fierce and just like, ultimately so beloved by so many, the way Allison Janney is.

JOSH: I like it, very good. I'm looking forward to Toby, cause Toby could stay Tobi.

HRISHI: Exactly, so playing Tobi Ziegler, Tobi with an I —

JOSH: Yes, hit me with your Jewess [laughs]

HRISHI: Not a Jewess.

JOSH: Ok, it's Toby Ziegler though.

HRISHI: I know. I was thinking, I was like, maybe this would be a — have to figure that one out, but Octavia Spencer.

JOSH: Octavia Spencer. Ok, sure. African-American Jewess.

HRISHI: Yeah. Maybe a Hebrew Israelite — black Israelite? [cross talk] I don't —

JOSH: [cross talk] Sure. Falasha community, certainly. Great actor.

HRISHI: I'm not worrying about that problem, but yeah. She has the —

JOSH: You're not worried about the Jewish problem, is that what you're saying?

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: That's big of you, that's really big of you. On behalf of my people, thanks for your concern.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. Ok. Octavia Spencer clearly could hold her own in terms of the demands of the acting of that role.

JOSH: She can act.

HRISHI: And I think she could do curmudgeonly in a really great way, and also, the kind of frustrated idealism of Tobi.

JOSH: Yeah, very well thought out. She's a — actually — terrific choice.

HRISHI: Awesome. For Leo, I'm going to stay within the world of *The West Wing*. I think Anna Deavere Smith would be a great Leo. Actually, Lana McGarry.

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah. That's very good casting.

HRISHI: Alright. I'm gonna just keep going down the list.

JOSH: I applaud your greater, as per usual, your greater preparation and thought.

HRISHI: I have a few more. Jess Lyman.

JOSH: Jess Lyman, sure.

HRISHI: Played by Liza Weil.

JOSH: Ooh, that's good. She can handle the fast-paced dialogue.

HRISHI: Yep, she acquitted herself well in her one episode of *The West Wing*. And, in the new *Gilmore Girls* episodes, she is I think the standout, and her adult Paris Geller in those shows would be such a great female version of Josh Lyman.

JOSH: Ah, no kidding.

HRISHI: Really, really cocky, and funny, and

JOSH: Competent.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. Extremely smart. Ok and now for the big one, for President Jocelyn Bartlet, Carrie Fisher.

JOSH: Carrie Fisher, I like it.

HRISHI: An icon from the seventies.

JOSH: She just walks on with the presence already, and weight behind her. Sure.

HRISHI: And can be funny, but also kind of, could do the pedantry of the president, but also the kind of grandparental thing. You know, like the fun sweet part, but also the fiercer and highly intellectual parts too.

JOSH: Sure. And maybe you haven't considered this. Who would play her husband Abbott Bartlet?

HRISHI: Yes. [cross talk] Dr. Abbott Bartlet. I felt like I had no choice, but, it would have to be Harrison Ford.

JOSH: [cross talk] Dr. Abbot Bartlet, sure.

JOSH: Ooh, nice. I think it's going to be trouble casting them ever since she came out with having had an affair with him. I think it's, I don't think they're going to get along well on set, is what I'm afraid.

HRISHI: Oh really?

JOSH: Yeah. But, I also think you're going to have trouble in the negotiations, trying to book Harrison Ford for seven out of thirteen episodes.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: But I like it, I like it, that's very good.

HRISHI: And then I had a few others that I threw in.

JOSH: Bring it.

HRISHI: Ok. Mr. Landingham, played by Wallace Shawn.

[JOSH laughs]

[excerpt from The Princess Bride]

VIZZINI: Inconceivable!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] Yeah, ok, good.

HRISHI: Jane Hoynes, Vice President of, from, Texas, played by Robin Wright.

JOSH: Good, nice.

HRISHI: The fierce adversary.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: Playing the role of Alden Hayes —

JOSH: Alden Hayes? I can't even keep up. Who's that?

HRISHI: The male Ainsley.

JOSH: Oh, sure.

HRISHI: Miles Teller.

JOSH: Miles Teller. Mm-hmm. Sure. We're not going Southern?

HRISHI: Does he not have a little bit of —

JOSH: I'm sure he can do it. I'm sure it's in his wheelhouse. I'm sure he's got the range. I was just trying to think, what's the —

HRISHI: He seems believable to me as, both a Republican, as well as the kind of guileless

quality that Ainsley has sometimes.

JOSH: Sure, he has the right look, that's good. He looks, looks the role.

HRISHI: Then a couple others, for fun. Fitzwallace, Jane Lynch.

JOSH: Oh that's funny, I was just thinking you were gonna say Jane Lynch for — ah, I've already forgotten. [laughs] What was? I don't know. Yes, good casting.

HRISHI: And then one more for fun, playing the role of Linda Tribbey, Catherine O'Hara.

JOSH: Mm-hmm, nice! That's kind of a little bit of a shout-out to Eugene Levy's almost playing Toby Ziegler.

HRISHI: [laughing] Oh, yeah, exactly, yeah.

JOSH: Nice, we finally got an SCTV person in there. Fantastic, I love it. And in your alternate version of *The West Wing*, we would do our alternate version of our podcast, and then the alternate version of our listeners would complain that we're always harping on why the women treat the men so badly.

HRISHI: Exactly, exactly. Oh, I forgot one person. For the role of Danny Moss, this is a little bit of —

JOSH: You know that I can't even follow? Every time you throw out a name, I don't even know who you're talking about.

HRISHI: Danny Moss? Donna Moss.

JOSH: Gotcha. Right. I literally didn't even make the connection. Ok, yes?

HRISHI: [Laughing] What about Lucas Hedges?

JOSH: Great. Never heard of him, no.

HRISHI: Oh, he's a young guy. He was in Manchester by the Sea, which is currently racking up a lot of accolades. And he's just tremendous in that. And I think that he's gonna be big, and I think that he would be a great assistant to Liza Weil's Jess Lyman.

JOSH: Well, I'm sure you're right, but since I know nothing about him I think I will just take the position that you're wrong, and I don't think he would be good in the role.

HRISHI: [Laughs] I'll take it.

JOSH: Ok. Well done. Asked and answered

HRISHI: Thank you for that question. There's another question that we got that is kind of related. This one comes from Will.

[Voicemail excerpt]

WILL: Hey Hrish and Josh, I'm Will DeBoer from West Lafayette, Indiana, now living in Salisbury, Maryland. I rewatched all The West Wing again over the summer, and I couldn't get over how incredible the character development was. So, with revivals being in vogue nowadays, done well, and I can't stress that enough, not just a reboot for the sake of a reboot, whose West Wing origin story would you most want to see played out. I wanted to get your take on who you'd base a West Wing prequel around. Thanks, and what's next?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I really like this question.

JOSH: So do I. Fantastic question. And it pairs nicely with our fantasy-league casting.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm. Do you have an answer for this already? Do you know? [cross talk] Do you know who you'd?

JOSH: [cross talk] Of course not. No, I think you'll find that I've not prepared for any of these. I've set the bar low. I think of this as a bonus episode that nobody really rightfully should have assumed we were gonna make, and that they don't have coming to them, and so just the fact that I showed up today, I'm hoping, is enough. I've set the bar very low and I still might manage to crawl under it. But look I showed up and I unplugged my cat fountain. Anything beyond that is icing. Here's why this question appealed to me though. We got many questions and have in the past about a reboot of *The West Wing*. "Josh, you have a connection to Aaron, can you reach out to him. What do you think?" Netflix has been involved in reboots of *Arrested Development* and *Gilmore Girls* and all that and my response is always the same. I don't think — in fact I'm quite certain — there will never be reboot of *The West Wing*, because Aaron —

HRISHI: Or not a reboot, but a continuation.

JOSH: Yeah, yeah right, actually right. In fact there could be reboot, you're right I misspoke. There could be a reboot. A continuation I think will never happen because for that to transpire Aaron would have to accept the goings-on for the three and a half seasons after he left, and I don't think that's something he would ever — as he says he's never even seen the show — so I think it's quite clear, his point of view is that the characters and the world and the universe ceased to exist after he left. So I don't think he's gonna, he's not gonna pick up where we left off at the end of Season Seven and opine as to what takes place thereafter. But, this origin story idea — yes?

HRISHI: Well I was gonna say, I agree with you because there's so many character developments that happened that seemed so divergent from maybe what Aaron's intent for some of the characters might have been. But one place where people have suggested, and I think could be compelling, not to dwell on this, since this wasn't the question, but where the continuation could actually happen would be picking up with Sam Seaborn and then, you know, but we would have to maybe, we would maybe have to get rid of all the other characters and just have it be built again around Sam Seaborn, because that storyline could be something that lives in isolation away from whatever happened in Seasons Five through Seven.

JOSH: Yeah, no, certainly, that's an intriguing notion. But I think you'd want some of the other characters to come in and —

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right, yeah

JOSH: [cross talk] I just, I think for, I think for Aaron, it ended when it ended for him.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And so I don't think he, I think that's not a bad pitch what you just gave, but I don't think he would go for it. But I can imagine, and I think I will actually share the idea with him, for which I will get no credit nor money but which I will be a consulting producer, if this all works out. I

do think it's actually a great pitch to have younger actors portray younger versions of these characters that already have a huge fan following. And, if I had to pick one character, although I think it's a viable idea around any number of these characters, I would I think center the television series once again around Jed Bartlet, and I'd take him back many years. I'd like to see him in college and post-college, and you know each season could flash, you know, time could pass, many years could pass between seasons. But I'd like to see his rise as a young man, his entry into politics, his meeting young Leo, and I would like to follow that path all way up to how we know him, and through the series. I think it'd be fascinating.

HRISHI: I think that I agree with our listener Will, that I think Leo would be a really compelling choice, but I'm gonna pitch a slightly different version, where it would just be about two characters simultaneously on their rise up through the ranks: one in D.C., a young Leo McGarry, and one, a young Fitzwallace, rising up through the U.S. military.

JOSH: Mmm.

HRISHI: And their two paths kind of interweaving, coming in and out, but showing two different parts of these kind of institutions of America, and their rise, and maybe the difference between a young white guy, and a young black guy kind of at the same time.

JOSH: Nice, very nice. Substantive.

HRISHI: And I have my casting choices for these two.

JOSH: I figured you would. And what women would you cast?

HRISHI: [laughs] For this one, I went back to guys.

JOSH: Disappointingly traditional of you.

HRISHI: [laughs] So for young Leo McGarry, what do you think about Jesse Plemons?

JOSH: For young Leo?

HRISHI: Mm-hmm, yeah. I love him. I think he's —

JOSH: Oh right, you know what? I love him too. I was thinking of somebody else. I was thinking of Jussie Smollett. I've reached the age, Hrishi, where I don't know anybody's names, I'm easily confused, and my mind wanders. So yes, Jesse Plemons, great actor, very very good casting, because I could see him as a young, John Spencer. You know, he's a great actor, and also I think that works for me, the visual and the manner of it all.

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah. [cross talk] Great.

JOSH: [cross talk] Well done. God, you're good. Yeah.

HRISHI: And then for a young Fitzwallace, what do you think about John Boyega?

JOSH: I was thinking more of Jussie Smollett, but I think that's because we were just talking about Jussie Smollett. No, great. That's a good idea. Very, very good casting! Yeah!

HRISHI: Oh good. [cross talk] I like that.

JOSH: [cross talk] He's terrific. You nailed it.

HRISHI: Awesome.

JOSH: And when we finally get to young Bartlet, whom do we cast?

HRISHI: Oh, um...

JOSH: Not Charlie Sheen, cause I hear he's, he can be difficult to work with.

HRISHI: Well let's see. How young are we going? If we're going contemporary with these guys

—

JOSH: Cause I was thinking Jacob Tremblay. Not really, I'm just kidding. [laughs] I just wanted to say Jacob Tremblay.

HRISHI: What about Sir Christopher Nealing-Roach, in that case?

JOSH: Nice, very nice. Um, do we have a young Bartlet?

HRISHI: I'm sure we do. What about — this is just off the top my head — but what about John Gallagher, Jr.?

JOSH: Mmm. I like it. A mighty Sorkin player, a terrific actor, and I could see it. I see it. Very good. Done and done. Well done.

HRISHI: All right. Of course everybody should tweet at us and leave us comments with all the ways in which we're wrong, or who you would pick instead.

JOSH: Yes, hopefully this is just the launching point of the conversation, and I think it will be interesting to see everyone else's fantasy picks.

HRISHI: Yeah. I was gonna put up my list for my gender-swapped West Wing, so if people wanna refer back to it without having to listen to all of our pablum, they can.

JOSH: Right on.

HRISHI: Ok, so that was great and thank you, Will. That was a great question.

JOSH: Yeah. What say we take a quick break and come back later.

[Break music]

[Advertisements omitted.]

[Break music]

HRISHI: Ok, here's a question from Andrea.

[Voicemail excerpt]

ANDREA: Hi Hrishi and Josh, this is Andrea from Kentucky, and my question is what has been the most surprising moment for each of you during this rewatch. Hrishi, I'm wondering if there's anything you can still be surprised by, given how many times you've watched it, and then with Josh, I'm wondering, since this is kind of a brand new experience for you again, what has been the most surprising for you. Maybe it was a guest star, or a scene that really surprised you.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So one thing that I loved about this rewatch was the scene with C.C.H. Pounder as Secretary O'Leary.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: I loved that scene. Maybe this is just came up for me because of us talking about these kind of alternate casting versions, the Sidney Poitier as president and all that stuff. I think that when I first saw the show or the first several times that I'd seen the show, I knew that scene, but I didn't know the part that she was almost cast as C.J. C.J. is so, to borrow a word that you've used, so indelibly Allison Janney that I had never really even thought about the idea that somebody else could have played her. But C.C.H. Pounder, in that scene, is so great and I love the dynamic between her and Leo. And I was surprised — you know this time now, when we do our research and stuff and we were talking about that — to watch that scene again. I feel like I saw it with new eyes when I consider her as, cause I was simultaneously watching it for itself but also imagining her in the version of the show where she played C.J.

JOSH: Oh, yeah. Very good. Alright.

HRISHI: And that was in Celestial Navigation, just a reminder.

JOSH: Very controversial episode for us. [laughs] And, I'm gonna say, I think, maybe for that reason, the most frequently name-checked episode in our podcast. I'm gonna say, what episode do we get Kathryn Joosten's brilliant performance in that scene when Mrs. Landingham is talking about her sons?

HRISHI: Uh, I believe it's in, In Excelsis Deo?

JOSH: Yes, you're correct. I think that scene, again, I watched the show when it originally aired, never revisited it, and didn't spend, I don't think, really any time pondering it after watching it originally. I mean I always loved it, but in this return viewing, I think I had forgotten that Mrs. Landingham was more — Mrs. Landingham, I should say, in the hands of Kathryn Joosten — was so much more than the kind of lightly comic foil for President Bartlet that I remembered her to be. I had a very positive memory of her and I remembered certain things about her ongoing plot line, but I didn't remember this specific episode and, you know we discussed it a lot at the time in our episode of the podcast, our corresponding episode. I was knocked out by her acting in that scene with Charlie, and the way that she continues her work as she tells this just utterly devastating story about the death of her sons. So that really kind of set me back on my heels when I rewatched it.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm. One thing that's not about the show itself, but one thing that has been surprising for me as we've gone through this, is realizing how many people, just how many people, feel so passionately about the show, who feel the same way that I do. Like I thought that it was a small club but it turns out the club is so much bigger than I ever realized.

JOSH: Well, if you're surprised, I'm doubly so, because I always feel that you are the one, as the driving force behind The West Wing Weekly, that you were the one who had the foresight that there would be an audience. I think we were both surprised that this audience that is as passionate as it is and also the size of it, but I feel like you always knew that the love was there. So I'm really blown away when I see the numbers of downloads and then I see the responses on Twitter and on our website and Facebook. So in that sense the whole endeavor has been a bit of a delightful surprise.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm. Ok, here's a question from Steven in Atlanta.

[Voicemail excerpt]

STEVEN: Hey guys, this is Steven in Atlanta. I'm very interested in podcasts when it comes to behind-the-scenes things. So, stepping away from the show itself, when do you guys record, how do you record, where do you guys record in your homes, and how much do you edit down from what we actually get to hear? Just curious about the inner workings of the podcast itself.

[End excerpt]

JOSH: Great series of questions from Steve. And those questions echo similar inquiries from many other listeners, so this was a good one to choose. Let's see, let's talk about how we make the podcast.

HRISHI: Sure.

JOSH: I'll probably learn. There are some things that you and I don't even discuss in terms of our approaches before we hop on the mic together. First of all I would say you and I have a shifting — like the sands of time, so shifts the schedule of The West Wing Weekly.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: And it's a week-by-week plan of when are we gonna actually have an hour, or really a couple hours to sit down and chat with each other. It gets a little bit more planned out ahead of time when we have a guest, because we like to interview our guests, if we can, when we can, in a studio, so that Hrish, and I, and the guest are all sitting and looking at each other and having a conversation. Often times we can't quite pull that off, so we just all hop on the phone, and a classic normal Hrish and Joshy episode, we are each in our own homes, I in Malibu, you in —

HRISHI: The Eel Rock neighborhood of LA.

JOSH: Nice. And, uh, we look at each other through Facetime, so we can see each other.

HRISHI: So I can see you making faces at your cat.

JOSH: At my cats, exactly. And I can see you sometimes shirtless in your office.

HRISHI: My office is my garage, and it gets very hot in here sometimes.

JOSH: By the time we hop on the mic, I have generally watched the episode to be discussed once, or twice. I prefer to do it twice so that I can watch it once without that kind of overly analytical approach where I've gotta be writing things down. So I can just kinda watch it, and then on a second watch I take notes, usually without stopping the run of the show too much. So just kind of as I'm going, "Oh that's an interesting Toby moment," or "I don't know if this scene quite..." and sometimes I'll go back and replay a scene and think about its position in the episode or whether it worked for me or something. Basically I find little bullet points that I know I want to bring up with you. And what do you do?

HRISHI: I usually am familiar enough with the episode that I remember what's gonna happen in it, and so often times what I'm doing is I'm watching and I'm pausing in the middle of a scene or in the middle of the episode to do some research, to you know, something... a character will say something, and then I'll pause it and be like, I want to find out more about that and then that'll lead to a rabbit-hole of internet research and then I'll come back to it. You know, so I'm sort of taking notes as I'm watching, at the same time. But, there are times when I just want to enjoy the episode, and so then I'll do something similar to what you said. I'll just watch the episode one time through, and then I'll watch it again, taking notes that whole time. So I'm watching and

making notes of things mentally, but I'm not actually writing things down.

JOSH: Yeah. After taking notes, I will also use the internet, and I will do little bit of research. If there's is a particularly issue-driven episode and I want to read a little bit more about hate crimes or gun control or whatever the issue being discussed is, I will often do that. And then I will occasionally, kind of, lightly skim critical response to an episode. I don't like to read too much because then I feel like I'm gonna take somebody else's ideas and represent them on the mic, but I like to get a little bit of a sense of how people responded usually at the time that the of the first run.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm.

JOSH: And then and we hop on the mic and we just start chatting. We don't we don't really pre-discuss. Very rarely do we discuss what we're going to discuss on mic or what our approach is gonna be. It's pretty free-wheeling, as I'm guessing most listeners can tell.

HRISHI: In fact we try and avoid pre-discussion, because a lot of times I wanna see what your reaction's gonna be, and get it captured on the mic.

JOSH: Right. Ok so then, we have our hour and a half — would you say on average, discussion?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And we record our ads and we chat, and we socially chat a little. After we finish recording, what happens next Hrishi?

HRISHI: So then we take the recording and first we send it to our audio mixer. His name is Zach McNeese He takes what I've recorded on my side and what you've recorded on your side, and he combines them into one audio file. Then he sends it to our friend Margaret Miller who is in Minneapolis and she's got a background as an editor. She worked at Harper Collins, and she's a friend of mine from college. And she goes through and suggests places where we should make cuts. Things that are, where the conversation maybe is not flowing as well or things that aren't, jokes that maybe didn't work so well or just things that could be truncated or even sometimes moved around structurally.

JOSH: Or one of us saying, did I use that word correctly?

HRISHI: Yeah exactly.

JOSH: And then we pause and Google, and say, oh, yeah yeah. You did.

HRISHI: Yeah. So she's the first part of that, and then we kind of do a listen and have our own edits, and then all the stuff goes to Zach, who takes all of the notes and he cuts everything together to make it sound like a smooth conversation that takes place over an hour, usually, instead of an hour and a half. And he mixes it and he makes us sound good. He makes one version of the episode. That's our rough draft and then he sends it to the three of us and all of us listen to it and we might suggest additional notes, additional cuts, maybe a place to drop in a clip where we think, oh this needs a little extra illustration by hearing the actual bit of the show that we're talking about. Then we do another round. Zach is also making suggestions, as well.

JOSH: He will often drop in subtle comic audio elements too, [cross talk] which I love.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That's true. Fun to discover. And then it goes back to Zach and he does a final polish on the whole thing. Then he sends me the audio file to upload to our server so that it can go out to iTunes and Stitcher and Google Play and all those things. And I upload it to our website with the episode description, which I'm always trying to get somebody else to do, but somehow that always manages to be my job.

JOSH: Well, and let me say, this is a good chance to give you a pat on the back and credit where credit is due, because people will often say: "Oh, those, the song lyrics on the website were hilarious," or "the description is particularly funny," and that's always you. So, hat tip to Hrishu.

HRISHI: I would certainly love it if you wanted to take a stab at it, cause I think they would be funnier.

JOSH: Well as this point we know how good you are at it, so as much as I do want to do that extra work, I feel that I'd be robbing the listenership of your great wit.

HRISHI: [laughing] That is really big of you. Ok.

JOSH: Yeah, isn't it?

HRISHI: That's basically it. And then we get into fights on Twitter and on the website.

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah, and the rest is just battling it out publicly. Wow. This little discussion really made me appreciate how much work I'm doing on this.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: No really, if I'd heard that description and hadn't bought a pin yet, I would so quickly buy a couple.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm. I mean the podcast is a job. It's work. It definitely takes, besides the hours of talking, there's a lot more that goes into it: the watching and the researching, booking guests, interviewing, editing, revising, editing again, all that stuff is, you know, it's not nothing.

JOSH: So let me ask you this. When you originally pitched me the idea, and how simple it would be to execute, you were just lying?

HRISHI: [laughs] I miscalculated, for sure. I remember pitching you on the idea that the show would be much simpler to make than Song Exploder, which is hours and hours and hours of editing, and I think that's true.

JOSH: I'm sure that it is.

HRISHI: But I forgot, somehow I thought that adding a second podcast, I was like, this will be easier because it's, at least from my perspective, I can, I have Song Exploder, it's so labor-intensive, but then we could do The West Wing Weekly and it'll be so much simpler, forgetting that I still have to also make Song Exploder.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And so no matter how simple The West Wing Weekly is, it's still more work and it turns out the actual work is pretty significant.

JOSH: Right. This just reminds me that you're someone who does not yet have two children.

HRISHI: [laughs] It's true. No, I have two podcasts instead.

JOSH: Yes, as someone who does, I could have told you how much more work in your life the second child would create.

HRISHI: Yeah, and these are both also supposed to be my side gig, in addition to music. Right now we're enjoying the relative lull of you being on hiatus from Scandal. That's gonna, all these things are gonna be even more tricky when you guys go back into production very soon.

JOSH: That's true, but carry on we shall.

HRISHI: Another part of the process that we should mention too is that behind scenes we work with the network Radiotopia which is part of PRX. You hear us say in the credits now, ever since we joined in Season Two. PRX is a non-profit based in Cambridge and Radiotopia is the podcast network that they developed in partnership with Roman Mars, who is the host and creator of the show 99% Invisible, and Song Exploder is part of that network, and then they invited West Wing Weekly to join this fall. And they help us find sponsors for the show and generally help us run as a more efficient process.

JOSH: That is true, and I will also say — I guess this is a good time — that the other Radiotopia podcasts are wonderful. I've been, one at a time — I wanna make sure that I know my colleagues are up to. They're really very different, and each is kind of distinctly terrific in its own way, and I'd recommend that people, all those people who are saying we don't put out the show frequently enough, go listen to some of the other Radiotopia podcasts.

HRISHI: A lot of award-winning podcasts in there Josh.

JOSH: Why do you always have to rub my face in the awards?

HRISHI: [laughs] There's a lot of awards under the Radiotopia hood.

JOSH: Mm-hmm.

HRISHI: Radiotopia is, by the way, made possible by a grant from the Knight Foundation, as well as MailChimp, and by donations from listeners like ours and all the other listeners to the Radiotopia shows.

JOSH: Right on.

HRISHI: Ok, here's a question from Sarah.

[Voicemail excerpt]

SARAH: Hi Josh. Hi Hrishi. Thanks for letting us ask questions for Big Block of Cheese Day. My question is, if you could bring any topic to the attention of the president, which topic would you bring to the Big Block of Cheese Day? Thanks so much you guys.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Fantastic, substantive, apt question for this television series. Shall I go first or you?

HRISHI: You go ahead.

JOSH: Ok. I really like this question. It's very West Wing-y. I would say, with a new president just weeks away, the issue I would like to bring up the most is hunger in this country. I recently went to an incredible installation called "This is Hunger." There's an organization that support

and I love called Mazon: A Jewish Response To Hunger. It's an advocacy organization, takes its inspiration from Jewish social justice, but its mission is to eradicate hunger in the United States and Israel, for anybody who is hungry, regardless of religious denomination or anything else, and they have something called "This is Hunger." And I urge you to go to this website, thisishunger.org, and you can see about this big rig truck that is traveling around the United States in a tour, and it's an installation that I experienced with my daughter when it was in LA. I think it's now in Arizona. But last week we went, and it's a multimedia experience that puts a face on the issue of hunger in our country and it's shocking to learn if you don't know that there are over forty million people that face hunger in the United States. It's like one in eight people. It's a national disgrace. There are things that can and must be done, and I am concerned that the new administration — Paul Ryan has already talked about trying to cut two billion and change out of SNAP, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, what we know as food stamps. And so I'm concerned with a President Trump and a Speaker Ryan, that this is gonna be an issue that gets even less attention and funds than it deserves, and that's the issue I would bring up to the president.

HRISHI: I think it would be great right now if we just took a second, as the year comes to a close, to highlight some of the organizations that we support, charities that we would love to highlight as people are thinking about maybe places they wanna make contributions. Mazon is a great one. You turned me on to that charity, and I have donated.

JOSH: You are a good man. And let me spell it for people. It's M-A-Z-O-N dot org, Mazon being the Hebrew word for food.

HRISHI: And we'll put links up to all these on the website. I'd love to shout out the Pablove Foundation, which was, a long time ago, partly responsible for you and I eventually making this podcast, [cross talk] because I recruited you to work on a benefit event that I was organizing.

JOSH: [cross talk] True.

HRISHI: Pablove is a foundation that fights childhood cancer by funding programs for the arts for children who have cancer and also funding research grants. It's a fantastic organization based right here in LA. It's very near and dear to my heart. It's Pablove dot O-R-G. I'll put a link to that as well. Also this year I'm gonna be donating to the Southern Poverty Law Center, which astute listeners may remember from episodes of *The West Wing* itself. The Southern Poverty Law Center is a nonprofit that combats hate, intolerance, and discrimination through education and litigation. You might remember they were the people who Sam was trying to get Josh to join forces with in order to sue the Ku Klux Klan.

JOSH: Excellent. Can I throw a second one out there then?

HRISHI: Of course.

JOSH: [laughing] You've inspired me. There is an organization called Bet Tzedek. You'll notice I like to support organizations that have a Jewish inspiration for the great work they do but that do work on behalf of people regardless of who they are or what they believe or their sexual orientation or anything. So in other words, I like the Jewish inspiration that helps everybody. I feel like it's good PR for the Jews. [both laugh] So, Bet Tzedek, these are the Hebrew words for the House of Justice, and they take their inspiration from a verse in the Torah that says "justice

you shall pursue,” and for the past forty years they’ve been providing free comprehensive legal services for low-income families in LA, and they do amazing work, and their website is Bet Tzedek, B-E-T-T-Z-E-D-E-K dot org. I also do a thing on Twitter, a 54 — Jews also like multiples of 18 because 18, each Hebrew letter correlates to a number and 18 correlates to the word “chai,” which means life, so we always feel that it is propitious to give charity in multiples of eighteen. Anybody who gives a donation of \$54 to either of my two organizations, I will follow you on Twitter, I will read what you say, and I will gently chuckle, if you're actually funny. [Hrishi laughs] So, I wanna throw that out there. If you wanna do a similar thing, and maybe there’s a different multiple you wanna use, go for it.

HRISHI: No, I don’t wanna follow anybody.

JOSH: Good choice. [both laugh] My feed is very clogged. It’s clogged with generous people, but it's clogged. [Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: I feel like we would be remiss also not to remind people about Justice for Vets.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: A great organization, and their mission is to support veterans when they've returned back to the US, through Veterans Treatment Courts. Veterans Treatment Courts are transforming the way veterans are handled in the criminal justice system, trying to keep veterans out of jail and prison. And, speaking of Mrs Landingham and In Excelsis Deo, of course we had a long discussion with Melissa Fitzgerald, about it, but that is also near and dear to our hearts.

JOSH: There you go. So if you want to take some of that pin money and do some good with it, it’s alright with us.

HRISHI: Yeah. We will accept that. Ok, should we get to our last question?

JOSH: Let's wrap it up.

HRISHI: Ok. This is from Sarah. She's a high school senior, which is awesome. Here's her question.

[Voicemail excerpt]

SARAH: Hello Hrishi and Josh. My name is Sarah, and I'm from San Diego, California. I would like to know if you have any recommendations for a good West Wing quote that I can use for my senior quote in the yearbook. Thanks!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Could she sound any cuter?

HRISHI: [laughs] I love that young people are listening to our podcast. It’s so awesome.

JOSH: Yes, well I mean, there you go. It speaks to the ever-regenerating audience for The West Wing and the fact that, you know, with Netflix and similar services, the show is evergreen. It also speaks to the quality of the show that it stays relevant to each new generation of young people, but I think it's fantastic that she’s watching *The West Wing* and that she's listening to our podcast. I’m terrible at questions like this, as I'm guessing you would guess. Sarah sounds lovely and cute and confident and smart so, I may be off in this, but I wanted to think of

something that my character, even though we're not up to his entrance in the show, said. And so, this is what I'm suggesting, if you are as sometimes socially awkward as Will, "What? I'm always like this." [Hrishi laughs] That's my quote.

HRISHI: [laughs] That's your quote? "What? I'm always like this."

JOSH: Yeah. "What? I'm always like this." There's a question C.J. asks him, "What, did you take an awkward pill today?" and he says "What? I'm always like this." So it's a little obscure, and probably not a great senior quote in a yearbook, but I feel like you're gonna answer this well, so that's my answer.

HRISHI: Well I'm just gonna go straight down the middle, not try and throw any curveballs or anything, and say the one that I think probably everybody listening to this might be thinking of: "Decisions are made by those who show up."

JOSH: Hard to top that.

HRISHI: It's kitchen magnet-y. It's senior quote-y.

JOSH: And boy did we just learn that lesson as a nation.

HRISHI: Exactly. I guess if you did wanna have an alternate one, I might say: "Ok,

JOSH: "Ok,

HRISHI: "What's next?"

[Outro Music]