

The West Wing Weekly
1:06: "Mr. Willis of Ohio"
Guests: Janel Moloney and Ben Casselman

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Man: Mr. Willis. Mr. Willis of Ohio votes yea.

[end excerpt]

[Intro Music]

JOSH: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Today we're talking about Episode 6 of Season 1 of *The West Wing*. It's called "Mr. Willis of Ohio."

JOSH: Written by Aaron Sorkin and directed by Christopher Misiano.

HRISHI: Coming up later, we're going to talk to Janel Moloney.

JOSH: Who plays Donna.

HRISHI: But first, Josh, where do you want to start?

JOSH: The poker game and the atrocious table etiquette. Are you a poker player? You're not really, are you?

HRISHI: No, I mean, I know the rules or I understand them basically, but I'm not really a poker player.

JOSH: Then we should play.

HRISHI: Ha.

JOSH: Uh, I will say I am a big poker player, and it made me cringe a little bit. Very poor poker etiquette being displayed in this particular game, the game that opens the episode.

HRISHI: Oh. I would have never noticed that. How, how so?

JOSH: Uh, well...couple things that I noticed – splashing the pot and string betting. I think every single participant in this game is splashing the pot. That's when you make a bet, or you call a bet, you throw your money into the main pot, into the middle, rather than leaving a little space, putting it just in front. And the reason this practice is frowned upon is that when you just throw your money into the middle of the pot, it's difficult to determine whether you've put in the right amount.

HRISHI: Ah.

JOSH: So the proper thing, you make a five dollar bet, you put your five dollar chip or five dollar bill just in front of the pot. I don't just throw it in the middle and think, well, I guess that guy put in the right amount.

HRISHI: Oh, well that doesn't sound nearly as satisfying as throwing it in the middle.

JOSH: Well that's true, that's film poker, where it feels good. But then the other thing I noticed is a very blatant string raise that Toby makes.

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Toby: I see it...and I raise you five.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: There is no legitimate poker establishment in the world in which this would be acceptable because basically, I can get a read off you, perhaps. You bet five dollars and I say, "I call," and then during the pause, I look at you and then I say, "Oh, and I raise thirty dollars." So I can sort of play you, get a sense of how you react when I just called. You can't really make two statements. Once you say I call or I see it, you've called the bet and your option to raise is gone.

HRISHI: It's like taking your hand off the chess piece.

JOSH: Yeah. Right. There you go. That's a very good...that's a smarter-guy example, which is exactly what I would expect from you. So, yeah. Of course, this is a casual, social game so I'm not criticizing the filmmaking per se, but personally my head would spin off and float out of the room if I were a participant in this game. And we'll have to see coming up in a few seasons when I join the show, I'm in a poker scene and I can't quite remember, but I like to think that I held the players to a higher standard.

HRISHI: Aaron Sorkin's a card player too though, right? I think I read that.

JOSH: Yeah, yes, that is true, though he is no stickler. That's where I got to know Aaron very well. He was always the ultimate poker host. We would play at his apartment near Lincoln Center and he always had more money than the rest of us, even before *The West Wing*, which is great, so he didn't care too much about playing well. He was just there to have a good time. And for the real poker players, this is exactly the type of person with whom you want to play. And here's the other thing, the most egregious thing, uh, and thanks to my dad for pointing this out to me, not sure how I missed it. In the middle of a round of betting, C.J. deals the final card, the hold card. It just doesn't make any sense. You don't deal cards in the middle of a round of betting. I hate to have to do it, but I have to call BS on this entire poker scene.

HRISHI: Ok, but for me, it doesn't matter what it means, I just love the sound of it. I love hearing C.J. rattle off the cards at the beginning.

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

C.J.: Nine, no help. Jack, no help. Eight, possible flush. King, possible flush. Ace, no help. Six, possible straight. Dave of love for the dealer, Ace bets.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: The Dave of love. That's also in the card scene from Sports Night .

[Sports Night Episode excerpt]

Dana: Jack of diamonds, ten of hearts also known as the Dave of Love. Eight of hearts which is just known as the eight of hearts. Aces bet.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I'm pretty sure that the Dave of Love is something that Aaron carried with him from a real poker game he had played in, thinking it was common poker parlance, when in fact it was just something specific to the game he was playing in, like an inside joke.

HRISHI: Ok good, because like I said, I'm not a poker player, but I know what the terms are and that didn't mean anything to me.

JOSH: Nor does it mean anything to anyone other than, I think, four or five people that used to play poker with Aaron Sorkin.

HRISHI: Ah, ok.

JOSH: I noticed as long as we're still early on in the episode, for the first time, I really noticed that the credits begin with Rob Lowe and then Moira Kelly and then they're alphabetical, right? And then you get "and Martin Sheen." So clearly, Rob and Moira Kelly are the quote unquote stars of the show, or they were intended to be.

HRISHI: Oh, and another thing about the opening credits that we didn't talk about in the last episode is that they have now transitioned from that computerized version of the theme. We've now arrived into the moment where we have the fully orchestrated version of it.

[West Wing theme song excerpt plays]

JOSH: Oh, that's interesting. I hadn't noticed that.

HRISHI: Another thing in this episode is President Bartlet's nerd-dom really steps up.

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Bartlet: There is one fruit whose seeds are on the outside. Name it, please.

C.J.: Is it the kumquat?

Bartlet: No.

Bartlet: It's the strawberry.

All: Ah!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, the guy's essentially running his own game show during the poker game, asking them ridiculous questions when they just want to play cards.

HRISHI: Although, I have to say, I've got a really embarrassing confession that I'm going to make here.

JOSH: You knew all the answers?

HRISHI: No, worse than that actually. When he asks the question...

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Bartlet: There are three words in the English language and three words only that begin with the letters "dw."

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And so I'm thinking of them in my head...

[Resume West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Toby: Dwindle, dwarf and dwell.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I was like, but there's also dweomer. There's another one. This happened to me the very first time I watched this show and then now, you know, however many years later, I had the same thought again this time when I was watching. I was like, wait, what about dweomer?

JOSH: Wait, what is the word you're saying?

HRISHI: Dweomer, d-w-e-o-m-e-r, is a word that I just know as a word in my brain and then I was like, you know, I should check and see rather than...if I'm going to call out the show for forgetting one, you know, I should look it up. And, uh, this is so sad -- it's a word from Dungeons and Dragons.

JOSH: I can't tell you how much that makes my day. Doubly so because I did not know the word. Um...what?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I'm delighted that I didn't pretend. Like with the red shirt, I admitted that...my own ignorance. It's just more nerd-dom on your part.

HRISHI: Yep. I, yeah, I can't call anybody out on anything because I thought they forgot a word that was a word from Dungeons and Dragons.

JOSH: And since we're on it, what does dweomer mean?

HRISHI: It's like an aura...like...it's an aura that a magic object gives off.

JOSH: See, and the funny thing is that if you look at the two of us next to each other, you look like you would have had all sorts of social opportunities during high school...

HRISHI: Wait, really?

JOSH: ...and would not have played Dungeons and Dragons. Whereas, I look like I would probably have been a dungeon master, and I've actually never played.

HRISHI: I should send you this picture that my dad just sent me of me at thirteen, like, in my prime D&D phase and you would be even more delighted.

JOSH: And you realize by mentioning it that, you know, we will have to post it.

HRISHI: Oh, God, no. Ok, we're editing this out. We're editing it out and I am not showing it to you.

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: It is...

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: It is so mortifying.

JOSH: You have to post it. You have to post it on our website, thewestwingweekly.com. The conversation and the picture stay. If my semi-admission about ecstasy stays in, the picture of you stays.

HRISHI: [Laughter] I promise nothing.

JOSH: Well, we'll see. Alright, back to the show.

HRISHI: Ok, back to the show. So, after the poker game we get into what is one of the major planks of this episode, which is talking about the census. And this episode is a great example, an early example, of a *West Wing* episode that's really talking about something that in maybe any other context, would be really dry, just a matter of civics at its most boring, the collecting of data.

JOSH: Yeah, this is the first clear example of something that the show, and that Aaron, will do often, which is give a little Civics 101 lesson.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: In this case, C.J. coming to Sam and saying, "I've been talking about the census for a while in front of the press and I don't know what I'm talking about." And she has a great line there, and it's one that I don't think I even realized I had pinched from this episode, but it plays over and over in my own head in just regular life. She says...

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

C.J.: So pretend for the purposes of this conversation that I'm dumb.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right. And I think that all the time. And I think it even ties in thematically with the episode. I think openness and humility and coming to an issue with a certain naiveté, I think it's lauded in this episode. Congressman Willis has it, uh, C.J. has it. She just says simply, "Explain it to me." She goes to somebody that she knows has a command of the issue and she says, "Just sit me down, pretend I'm dumb and talk to me." Which is kind of a great quality. Um...I didn't quite buy it that C.J. had no idea what the census was, but, Aaron is doing a public service here, um, although I think he would tell you that that was never his aim. But, he's laying out certain things that some viewers might not have such a grasp of.

HRISHI: Yeah. Well, when I first saw the episode, that definitely informed my understanding of what the census was. I got the civics lesson out of it. Um, but, I have to call out Sam, because even though Sam's one of my favorite characters, in these first few episodes, I'm realizing he kind of gets on my nerves with like, the Lori thing and then here, he's being kind of a prick. C.J. says...

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

C.J.: I'm admitting to you that there are things I do not know.

Sam: And I'm telling you that I don't think anybody would have any trouble imagining that there are things you do not know.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, I bumped on that too. I was like, that's completely uncalled for, man. It didn't feel like a laugh line. It was mean.

HRISHI: Yeah. On the other hand, I think there's a familiar complaint that comes up that a similar dynamic exists between Donna and Josh often. We haven't seen it yet, but the same sort of thing where to walk through the exposition of figuring out what piece of legislation, or explaining the issue that they're working on, they do it through conversation between Josh and Donna, where Donna doesn't know and Josh is sort of Socratically explaining it to her. And in this case, their dialogue isn't framed that way. This is another thing that I love about *The West Wing*, which is that they present both sides of an argument eloquently. Even though we know where the politics of the show were going to eventually land. I mean, because we know the, we know the politics of the characters. But, in this case, Donna's voicing her displeasure with the surplus and decrying a nanny state of the Democrats and Josh defends his side.

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Donna: We have a thirty-two billion dollar budget surplus for the first time in three decades .

Josh: Yes.

Donna: Republicans in Congress want to use this money for tax relief, right?

Josh: Yes.

Donna: Essentially what they're saying is they want to give back the money.

Josh: Yes.

Donna: Why don't we want to give back the money?

Josh: Because we're Democrats.

Donna: But it's not the government's money.

Josh: Sure it is. It's right there in our bank account.

Donna: That's only because we collected more money than we ended up needing.

Josh: Isn't it great?

Donna: I want my money back.

Josh: Sorry.

Donna: We're not done. What's wrong with me getting my money back?

Josh: You won't spend it right.

Donna: What do you mean?

Josh: Let's say your cut of the surplus is seven hundred dollars. I want to take your money, combine it with everybody else's money and use it to pay down the debt and further endow social security. What do you want to do with it?

Donna: Buy a DVD player.

Josh: See?

Donna: But my seven hundred dollars is helping employ the people who manufacture and sell DVD players, not to mention the people who manufacture and sell DVDs. It's the natural evolution of a market economy.

Josh: The problem is, the DVD player you buy might be made in Japan.

Donna: I'll buy an American one.

Josh: We don't trust you.

Donna: Why not?

Josh: We're Democrats.

Donna: I want my money back.

Josh: Then you shouldn't have voted for us.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And really, Donna makes the winning argument.

JOSH: At the end of the episode, certainly.

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Josh: How much were the sandwiches?

Donna: \$12.95

Josh: I gave you a twenty.

Donna: Yes, as it turns out you actually gave me more money than I needed to buy what you asked for, however, knowing you as I do, I'm afraid I can't trust you to spend the change wisely. I've decided to invest it for you.

Josh: That was nice. That was a little parable.

Donna: I want my money back.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Even though it's jokey, it feels like they're sparring with real political ideas, and I feel like it's, you know, the opposition, the opposing side that comes out as the more righteous one. Or, at least, that's the takeaway that I had.

JOSH: Yeah, absolutely, that's how it lands when she doesn't give him his money back. It also...it made me laugh that she wants her \$700 back and she wants to use it to buy a DVD player, and DVD players -- I had to look it up -- were in fact only introduced in 1997, at which point they cost about \$1000 dollars, so perhaps at this point, a couple years later, a DVD player might indeed have cost \$700 dollars.

HRISHI: So, the other major part of this census conversation is a reflection of a real debate that happened during the Clinton Administration over the use of sampling and the appropriations bill and the 2000 census. Uh, this episode originally aired in November, 1999, and so the 2000 census was coming up, and this was an issue, trying to figure out the use of sampling data.

JOSH: Do we know the end result in reality?

HRISHI: Actually, to explain this better to us and to catch us up on where we're at with the census, we're going to turn to Ben Casselman. He's a reporter for the website FiveThirtyEight, which if you don't already know, is an incredible website that covers news, and politics, and sports, but with statistics and data really at the heart of its stories.

So, Ben, can you tell us, where are we at now?

BEN: So, the very quick update on where things stand regarding sampling is that the Supreme Court ruled in 1999 that sampling, at least for the purposes of congressional apportionment, is barred by law. But the Court didn't address constitutionality. So presumably, if supporters of sampling could win over enough Mr. Willises, they could change the law.

HRISHI: And has the underlying question been addressed?

BEN: So the problem is just as big as ever. The 2010 census undercounted minorities by about one and a half million. We undercounted African Americans by about 2%. It might be worth noting that the census has become a whole lot more politicized since *The West Wing* aired. There have been significant efforts by Republicans in Congress to cut back funding for the census and to limit what you can ask about. So while on the world of *The West Wing*, proponents of accurate data scored a big victory, here in the real world, we're mostly fighting to hold on to what we already have.

JOSH: So there you have it. A happier ending in TV land.

So, Joe Willis, Democrat of Ohio...one thing that I noticed, or that I had to go and check to make sure I was right...We are told that Joe Willis has taken over his wife's House seat.

HRISHI: Right. She passed away.

JOSH: She passed away a month earlier, and I think he says the word that he was "appointed." Now, in fact, when a House seat is vacated, I guess for any reason, say a death vacancy, it's filled through a special election. There is no interim appointment. So this is a little fudge on the part of *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: Ah.

JOSH: Yeah, there are certain states where a Senate vacancy can be filled with an interim appointee, by that state's Governor, but that is not the case with the House. And,

in fact, a special election can sometimes take up to six months. So, it can take a long time to actually fill the vacant House seat.

HRISHI: Huh.

JOSH: I guess they didn't want these characters to be Senators, because it was an appropriations bill, which has to originate in the House, but also plot-wise, they didn't want this guy to have won his wife's seat. They wanted to present him as this guy who, even as he walks into the Roosevelt Room, he says, "Oh, you know, I'm no Congressman." So I guess it's a little dramatic license.

HRISHI: Huh.

JOSH: Also, beautiful performance by Al Fann.

HRISHI: Yeah, he got me. I got a little lump in my throat when he was talking about his wife.

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Mr. Willis: I'm not nearly as smart as my wife was. I went to night school because I went to work pretty young. I tried to understand the things that Janice brought home from the office, but I wasn't in her league. I never understood what she wanted with a dummy like me.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right. Again that was, to me, that was a tie-in with that humility and that modesty. And another thing that I found interesting in this conversation, Toby cleverly has Mandy read Article 1, Section 2 of the Constitution.

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Mandy: (Quoting the Article 1, Section 2 of the U.S. Constitution) Representatives and direct taxes shall be apportioned among the several states, which may be included within this union, according to their respective numbers, which shall be determined by adding the whole number of persons, including those bound to service for a term of years.

Congressman: Well you said it right there. It says "which shall be determined by the whole number of persons." The whole number of persons, not the end of an equation that some statistician got off of a computer. It says so right there.

Toby: Actually, that's not what it says.

Congressman: What do you mean?

Toby: Mandy left out a few words, didn't she, Mr. Willis?

Mr. Willis: Yes.

Toby: Mr. Willis teaches 8th grade Social Studies. Mr. Willis knows very well what the Article says. It says, "which shall be determined by adding the whole number of free persons, and three fifths of all other persons." Three fifths of all other persons – they meant you, Mr. Willis, didn't they?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And one of the things I think is interesting, a lot of times people misunderstand the three-fifths compromise, thinking that it was a slight to the peoplehood of slaves, but in fact the three-fifths compromise and the wrangling that went on at the Constitutional

Convention of 1787, it was the Southern states – they would have preferred to count slaves as two people.

HRISHI: Hmm.

JOSH: it was the Northern states that wanted to lessen...

HRISHI: Oh, because the slave population would give the Southern states too much weight.

JOSH: Right. Apportionment in Congress, representation. So Southern states, so, first of all, the slaves didn't have the right to vote at this point. So Southern states were happy to count them, because this is how they would determine the number of representatives they would have in Congress. The Northern, non-slave-holding states would have preferred not to count slaves at all. So, it's interesting, the way this scene played out. I had to remind myself of that argument. Um, in the end, the slaves were counted as three-fifths of a person for purposes of both apportionment and direct taxability, so, one favored the Southern states and the other favored the Northern.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: But in the end, really, all Toby's trying to do is make these congress people acknowledge that this original language was archaic, and that's sort of his way in.

HRISHI: Yeah, he does it with some dramatic flair and, and some shaming in the way that he pulls it off. Would it be too much if I drew out the poker metaphor here?

JOSH: Oh, please do.

HRISHI: Well, the way that he's outwitted them is, like, he gets them to go all in, you know, by saying, "See, the Article is not arcane --- or, archaic." And he really gets them to put their stamp on it, and then he reveals his last card and shows, "See, you guys are wrong and I'm going to take all the chips now and, um, we've won."

JOSH: Ah. That's beautiful. That's perfectly apt. That is what he does. He certainly outplays them and then in the end, it is Joe Willis' openness and humility and willingness to consider what the other side is saying that allows him to change his mind and get some movement on the issue.

HRISHI: Then the other huge part of this story is this field trip with Zoe.

JOSH: Preceded by the first appearance of Ron Butterfield, played brilliantly by Michael O'Neill, a great guy.

HRISHI: Yeah, and it's the first introduction to the idea of the danger that comes along with the Office.

JOSH: Yeah, that's right. And I immediately thought of how little changes, because during Obama's eight years, we've been hearing these stories. I feel like again and again and again...

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Reporter: He jumped the White House fence last night, raced across the North Lawn and was able to get inside the building before he was caught. An official tells CNN the Secret Service...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah, so this doesn't feel like fiction for the sake of fiction. This feels like, very real.

JOSH: Yeah, and I read a nice interview with Michael O'Neill and we can put the link up on our website. It's from a UK site called TV Wise. And he pointed a great little moment of Martin's.

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Ron Butterfield: Sir, it appears from her statement, you weren't the target.

Bartlet: I wasn't?

Butterfield: No sir.

Bartlet: Who was?

Butterfield: Your daughter.

Bartlet: Zoe?

Butterfield: Yes sir.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And Michael says, and I'm reading now, "At that moment, you could feel the temperature in the room change, and all of a sudden, Martin's character went from sort of self-deprecating -- he was trying to defuse the situation -- to a singular focus. And man oh man, when I watched that land on him, it really gave me a whole new respect for what's possible as an actor, because instantaneously, I knew what the cost was of that. He made have been President of the United States, but he was a father and from the day they join us, the job is to protect them." Michael O'Neill's words. I thought that was great, because he's right, it's a super moment in that scene.

Was there a time, or in 1999, was it ok for underage people to go into a bar like that in Georgetown?

HRISHI: No, it wasn't. I was confused by that whole scene because, I mean, ok, it's a college bar so maybe you can get in. But usually there's some kind of at least superficial checking of ID. So, does she have a fake ID? And then, how is it actually ok for Josh to bring an underage girl into a bar?

JOSH: Right. He kind of laughs it off. He's getting called on the carpet and yes, he takes sort of a, "Geez, Pops, what's the big deal?" kind of response.

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Bartlet: What were you doing taking my daughter out to a bar?

Josh: You told me to, sir.

Bartlet: I told you to take Charlie. When Zoe said she was going, I just assumed you were going to go have malteds or something.

Josh: Malteds, sir?

Bartlet: Yes.

Josh: What is this, Our Town?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: You know, I would have thought, yeah, this was a grotesque lack in judgment.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Dude, what were you doing?

HRISHI: And, in DC, where we've already seen Josh gets recognized by fangirls, people really don't notice the First Daughter? They don't know what she looks like? But they know the Deputy Chief of Staff?

JOSH: Yeah. Yeah, you would have thought there would have been a roped-off crowd of people just staring at them as they had their drinks.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's an odd situation. And they are ultimately approached by three not particularly creative, racist, homophobic frat boys. And let me ask you this, did you recognize any of them?

HRISHI: I did, yeah. One of them is Eric Balfour.

JOSH: Yep. Well, I should have known that you...I was excited to have recognized that myself. I should have known you would, too.

HRISHI: Yeah, I really loved *Six Feet Under*. That's where I know him from.

JOSH: Oh, and you know what really struck me about this scene was the use of the word "faggot."

HRISHI: Yeah, me too!

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Frat boy: What are you doing here with this girl, huh? Huh? You know to me, you look to be Dr. Faggot.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah, you know, it's really shocking. Although, I think maybe in those days, the late '90s, early 2000's, at least in my own experience, it wasn't that shocking to hear someone yell "faggot" at me, and...but, now in this re-watch, it did stop me. And I feel like even as much as it sometimes feels like we're nowhere with, like, North Carolina passing H.B. 2, there are times when you hear something like that and it feels so foreign. And I think that's probably an indication that progress has been made.

JOSH: Right. It felt of another time, both in general and on TV.

HRISHI: The person who really steps in to save the day when they're at the bar is Charlie. And this is also starting to cement how much I'm rooting for Charlie. Like, it's so sweet that the President is, like, "Take him out, he doesn't have any friends, he works all the time and my heart goes out to him." This poor guy, his sister is away, so he's just going to be home alone. And then they take him to this bar and he's, he's so insecure there.

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Charlie: You think they know I don't go to college?

C.J.: Who?

Charlie: All these people.

C.J.: Charlie, you're twice as smart as anyone in the room.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But then afterwards, after those guys get taken down by the federal agents, he's like...

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Charlie: Now I'm having a good time.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He really won me over there.

JOSH: Yeah, that's a nice moment.

HRISHI: Yeah, I spent so much time and effort in college avoiding bars like that as much as possible.

JOSH: Yeah, not exactly my scene either. Well you, I assume you were playing Dungeons and Dragons mostly. It would have been, would have been too noisy in that environment to get a decent game going.

HRISHI: No. Please. We don't call them games, we call them campaigns. So, after that scene, I think the conversation that happens between the President and Zoe really lays out in the most bare-faced terms the idea of what could happen and how dangerous it is to have a President who's a father, and how that could conflict with matters of State.

JOSH: And the specificity of his nightmare scenario suggests to me that it's something he thinks about.

HRISHI: Yeah, he's definitely spent time on that particular nightmare. But then there's another nice moment of TV fiction here when he's done with his tirade, yelling, and Zoe's reaction to it all is...

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

Zoe: You're right. I'm sorry.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then they make up and everything's fine and I'm like, oh that's a very understanding teenage daughter.

JOSH: Yeah, indeed. I think with most teens, that would have led to three days of silent treatment.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: So, it's not a, it's not a momentous episode of *The West Wing*. I like it very much.

HRISHI: Yeah, I actually maybe prefer the not momentous episodes. I love the civics episodes, and this is the first one of many to come, and I appreciate it for that.

JOSH: Yeah, no, I absolutely agree and, in fact, prepping for this, even when it was something like, "Hey, I don't think Willis would have been appointed to his wife's seat," even when it was something that I did catch that was slightly off, it made me want to dig deeper and learn a little bit more about how the government works. And I've had lots of people come up to me who are in government now or they're studying PoliSci in college, and they'll say that it was *The West Wing* and the way that politics was presented that inspired them. Aaron will say, "It was never my intention, all I ever wanted to do is to make an hour of TV that entertains people and makes people feel in the end – that was worth it, that was worth watching." But, in fact, we'll do this again and again, point out situations where he enlightens and explains the workings of our political system.

JOSH: Our guest today shot to fame playing Donna Moss on *The West Wing* for seven seasons, a role which garnered her two Emmy nominations. She has appeared since off-Broadway in *100 Saints You Should Know* and *Love, Loss and What I Wore* and on screen in all sorts of projects, including *Brotherhood*, *30 Rock* and *Alpha House*. And she can be currently seen on HBO's *The Leftovers*. Additionally, she's asked me to

mention that she'd like a second series that pays a ton of money. I'm happy to welcome to our podcast, Janel Moloney.

JANEL: Excellent. Let's go.

JOSH: Janel, right off the top, I want to point out that just before we hopped on the mic together, you emailed me to say that you hadn't watched the episode we were planning to discuss. Is that right?

JANEL: Correct. It wasn't the entire email. The entire email was, "I hope you would spot me because I haven't watched the episode in 750 years" and you said "no, I'm going to just out you right at the top." So, thanks a lot Josh.

JOSH: Right, and then here's part two of the outing, and I think I know the answer to this question. Have you listened to our podcast yet?

JANEL: No, I assumed I was the first one.

JOSH: No, we've had Dulé as a guest, we've had Eli Attie.

JANEL: Nice, nice.

JOSH: We're here to talk about Season 1, Episode 6 of *The West Wing*, "Mr. Willis of Ohio." But, more generally, we want to talk to you about your journey on *The West Wing*.

JANEL: Ok.

HRISHI: Yeah, how did you get started? Do you remember when you got the role?

JANEL: Yes, I do. I had met Aaron and Tommy and Josh Malina, by the way, on *Sports Night*.

JOSH: Oh, that was you?

JANEL: Yes, that was me. I'd done one episode, had a lovely experience, loved Tommy and Aaron, went back to my hostessing job after that. And then, basically quit acting...this is important...quit acting, sort of decided I wasn't going to be an actor anymore because I didn't feel terribly successful. Little did I know, that was just part of being an actor. And then I got an audition for C.J.'s role. Aaron Sorkin stopped me in the middle of my audition and told me I was doing well. It was like, "Well, then why are you interrupting me, because it's really hard to do well! You crazy person." And then I didn't get it, obviously. This woman, Allison Janney, got that role, rightly so. And then they offered me the role of Donna Moss and they said, "It's not a regular. It's a small role. There's no guarantees past the pilot. If you want to do it, here it is." And I didn't have to test, I just had to go and meet Tommy and Aaron again, and I did and that was that.

HRISHI: Was there a direct correlation between having done *Sports Night* and you getting the audition for C.J.'s part?

JANEL: I think they really loved what I did on *Sports Night*, and I think they wanted to work with me again. And then it was one of those things where, I had auditioned really well for John Wells several times. The casting director, John Levey, really supportive of me, and then Tommy and Aaron. So, it's like, it's a perfect...it takes a perfect storm plus a little miracle and God knows what else mixed in there to actually get a job. I always say that if I had tested for Donna Moss, I wouldn't have gotten it.

JOSH: Yeah, I will say to my agent, "If you can possibly keep me out of the room, I think I have a shot at this."

JANEL: [Laughs] Yeah, yeah. So, I, I mean, I was literally working in a restaurant and it was one of those pilot seasons where there were no roles for anyone over 17 years old.

And so, I thought, alright. And I knew that the pilot was very good, but I didn't know how good it was. I just knew it read really well and I was just focused on my little, my little role.

JOSH: Your chemistry is just sizzling with Brad off the top. Did you, did you know Brad Whitford prior to

shooting the pilot?

JANEL: Never met the guy before I met him that first day.

JOSH: And did you guys hit it off right away, or was it all on the page? Was it a combination?

JANEL: I think we hit it off, but not as much as it seems like we do from watching the show. It took me about four or five episodes to realize that everybody said we had such great chemistry. I was just focused on trying to be, like, you know, the best actress I could be, and make something out of what I was doing, and that's what I did. And I always say this about Donna – in the pilot, it's a petite role, but all the parts are there, you know? There's the heart and the commitment to Josh. There's the dry humor and there's the kind of irreverence that is so winning, but the main thing of that first show is, she basically is saying that, "I'm not going anywhere without this guy. And this guy is, you're going to thrive Josh, you're going to do it, you're going to be ok." And it just is so clear that she was in love with him. And I decided, as an actress, I'm just going to be in love with this guy, whoever this guy is, he's my guy. And fortunately it's Brad, who's pretty easy to love. And, so, it seemed to work out well.

JOSH: And he was fully haired back then.

JANEL: Yeah, he was a lot easier to love then than he probably is now.

JOSH: Yeah, no. Now it would be an insurmountable acting challenge.

JANEL: He's a great guy. He's a great guy. And you know what? I...every single scene I did was all about loving him. If it was about a bill being signed or anything, I was just finding ways to please him and unravel him in some way. Eat him up. You know, if you really are into someone, you could be sitting there and talking about the news and you're sitting there thinking about taking their clothes off. And that's the way, that's the way life is, really. You know, the writing is just so incredibly good that, if you have a simple choice like that, it supports it so beautifully because it's so, so good.

JOSH: And that brings us really to this specific sub-plot of this episode. The Josh-Donna plot is about your dissatisfaction with the fact that the budget surplus, uh, that the money doesn't go back to the taxpayers.

JANEL: Oh, yeah, and I want my taxes back.

JOSH: And you really get the best of Josh, finally, at the end. He gives you some money, he wants you to buy something, and you keep the extra change by explaining that you feel you'd make a better decision about how to spend it than he would, turning, you know, his entire point about keeping the budget surplus, on its head. But, as you say, the whole thing might as well have just been a little love story.

JANEL: I remember that really well and the only thing I really would like to say is, I had a very weird hair thing going on that day. I'm not sure. They, like, slicked my hair back. I'm not really sure exactly what that's about.

JOSH: I think the hairstyles evolved, particularly for the women.

JANEL: In the first season, they were a little spooky. They were a little too realistic about, with Washington. Tommy was always like, "Oh, we want the girls to look just like they do." And it's like, yeah, then I would be wearing Express clothes and, like, rumpled and dirty and...not dirty, someone's going to hate me. Sorry, Washington.

JOSH: Yeah, we'll forward the email to you.

JANEL: I was wearing, like, super expensive clothes that nobody in my position would ever have been able to wear. But, Tommy fought the good fight for a long time. He's like, "No, I want Janel to look like an assistant. I want her to look normal. I don't want her..." And I'm just like, "Please, can I wear some false eyelashes. Please can't I? Please can I wear something tight?" No! So. I remember that episode very well and I, and people loved that, that "give me money back" thing. They just loved it. There's a few things that I feel like people quote, and that's one of those things that people really loved that, "I want my money back."

HRISHI: My first question was going to be, how long did it take before the subtext of Donna and Josh's relationship came out. But, it's amazing that you got it right off the page from the pilot script. I was wondering if there's a point where it shifted from that kind of subtext to something more explicit. Did you guys ever have a conversation, either you and Brad or you and Aaron or Tommy about how you were going to play a scene? Or how you were going to do it to kind of play up that chemistry?

JANEL: The creatives did not want to exploit it. I think if Tommy had his way, nothing ever would have happened between us. I remember Alex Graves directed the Christmas episode in the first season and he came on and he was the first person, the first director, the first person really to articulate, "Oh, so you guys are in love. You're in love. This is, like, totally mutual in love." And I had always known that that's sort of my thought process. But to have someone say it in front of Brad and I was kind of, like, embarrassed. And I think Brad was kind of hesitant because he didn't want to be, you know, it was so successful you didn't want to, like, mess with it. So, Brad was kind of held back about it and then Alex was the first person that put one shot in. He allowed Josh to look back at Donna and have this, like, little bit of longing on his face after he gives me a present. And you're like, "Oh my god, he's in love with her!" And that was the first time. And that really solidified it, which I thought surely wouldn't even make it in the show, because they didn't want to make it that overt. But, they did. They put it in and it was, that was the moment, I think, for them. The best thing was just to milk it as long as possible. I always knew that I had a job if I was his assistant. The second, like, I became his lady, then Donna's fired. Goodbye, Janel. So I was like, I was really scared to do anything more than what I was doing.

JOSH: Good thinking.

JANEL: Yeah.

JOSH: Thankfully, your guys' romance was in the day before these horrific relationship names that fans come up with, so you guys are just Josh and Donna. You would have been Jonna or Dosh, which really just doesn't have the same beauty to it.

JANEL: Yeah, that's true.

HRISHI: If we were going to do a shipper name though, what would you pick? I'm going to give you a couple of options besides the ones that Josh just listed. Do you like Joshatella? Or Jonnatella? Or Lymoss.

JANEL: Lymoss is cool. Yeah.

HRISHI: I mean, none of them are cool, but...but they're all at least better than Dosh.

JANEL: You know what? You can't imagine the show without Josh and Donna now. I think you can't imagine the show. They do all these stupid things where they put actors in the room and have them sniff around each other to see if it works. Sometimes, there's just magic and, you know, it might not be, it might be, it might take for them to get into the room and actually start working and, um, I just was, you know, it was just meant to be. They were sure that Moira and Brad were going to have this, like, you know, this, this thing, this great thing and it just didn't really work. And then meanwhile, the Josh-Donna thing worked. And lucky for me, Aaron was not super far ahead in his scripts, because, if he had, if he was the guy that had written six scripts in advance, I literally would still be at the restaurant that I worked at before I got *The West Wing* .

JOSH: That's actually a really shrewd observation. Writers tend to write to what they're getting from the other actors and Aaron, since he wasn't so far ahead, he had an opportunity to do that with you and Brad.

JANEL: The reason why I'm on the show is because in the third episode, I got this great teaser. And Brad said, "Do you want one more?" And this was before I had a voice at all. I had no voice in the show. I couldn't ask for another take. We had done this really long walk and talk and I was like, "[Expletive deleted]. It was good, but I know it could be just a little bit better." And they called cut. They were like, moving on and Brad said, and this is why I love him so much. He looked at me and he's like, "Do you want one more?" And I said, "I do." And he said, "I need another." And they were like, "Ok, going again." And then it just, like, what you see on that, the beginning of the third episode, I think it's "Proportional Response," is just this, this thing that happens. It's like the whole relationship. And it's the most fun relationship ever. And you want to see more of that. And that's all there is to it. After that episode, Aaron sent me this giant thing of roses and this handwritten note. It touched me so much, it was like all these years of, of struggling and not knowing and not feeling seen or appreciated or doing the work that I do for all these people and nobody thinking it was any good. And then having Aaron and Tommy think that I was so, so talented. It was really, it was deep, it was pretty deep. So if they had decided, oh we're going to pay you five dollars an episode, I probably still would have done it.

HRISHI: That's amazing.

JOSH: Let me ask you this. When is the last time you watched an episode of *The West Wing* ?

JANEL: Um...maybe five years ago. I was walking by my parents' television on Thanksgiving and there was, like, a marathon and my character, this person, was walking across the screen saying all this stuff. She seemed very smart. And talking about something or other, and I was completely stunned because I did not remember the day, the plot, the story, what I was going to say. It might as well have been a stranger.

JOSH: You always get that funny situation where a fan of the show knows so much more about the series than the actors who were involved in making it.

JANEL: Always. When you're doing a show, it's so experiential, you know. It's so, like, you're just in it and trying to get your lines learned and get your part done that the whole is not really your concern. Your job is to, like, make your character and get your words done and not slow the whole day down, and be successful at your thing.

JOSH: You're a small part in a big machine.

JANEL: Yeah, and I remember, like, Aaron would be like, I'd say, "What was the name of the episode that I did blah, blah, blah?" And he'd be like, "You don't remember the name of that episode?" And I'd be like, "No, dude. I do not remember the name of that episode!" And he's like, "It was, you know, 'A Proportional Response!'" And I'd be like, "Sorry." And he remembers, because, you wrote it, Aaron, and you remember everything anyway. But you wrote it. I-I-I just acted in it.

JOSH: Right. We live our only little story line, and even that only once. You don't even necessarily watch it after.

JANEL: And you're trying to learn the one that's going to come after lunch. You're still working on that one, you know, so...

HRISHI: So, you were a recurring character in that first season, but you're in every single episode. And then in the second season, you were credited as a regular cast member. I was wondering if that was just like a thing in name only. Did it feel like there was a change when it went to the second season and you're in the opening credits?

JANEL: Well, it was a nice proud moment when I was officially part of the cast. I was in my trailer, like, a half a mile away from everyone else, going to the bathroom in the, in the public restrooms and like, like...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JANEL: And I remember one time I had the flu, I like, I had the terrible flu. And I was like, "Can you just put me in a trailer that's empty next to the sound stage?" And they're like, "No." And I was like, "Dude, I'm Donna! Can I just have a...can you just put me in the trailer next...I'm already a regular for next year!" And they're like, "No, no, we can't."

JOSH: Dulé had a very similar story. He said he was three weeks away from moving back to New Jersey, kind of giving up on acting when he got the job. And he also said that in that first season, when he was a guest star, that his trailer was miles away from where it needed to be.

JANEL: Yeah, we were like, why do we have to walk where we're out of breath by the time we get to...But it seems like sweet problems to have at this point. It was all very fat and glamorous and much appreciated.

JOSH: And also, given this wild success of the show earlier on, you knew you were settling into multiple years of employment, right? Which is a rarity.

JANEL: You know what? Looking back, you start to think that it's going to be forever. You really do. You kind of feel like, "Oh, this is my life now," you know? And that it's...it goes pretty fast, actually, now that you're...when you're looking at it from this, this side. It was such a big experience, right Josh? I don't think that many people have the experience that, that we had. The particular sweetness of coming in completely unknown to everybody and making myself indispensable, which was my goal, was really satisfying creatively, super satisfying.

JOSH: Getting a television series that runs at all is, like, winning the lottery. But getting something as special as *The West Wing* is beyond, beyond.

JANEL: And also, you know, we're on this show about the White House, so then you also have the surreal thing of, like, you know, Madeleine Albright is coming up to you at night and being like, when you're on the set and being like, "Hi, hello, I'm Madeleine Albright." Or, your cast, you're like, you're out to dinner and President Clinton is sitting there. It's just...that is something that was very rare and special to doing a show about

them, about those, about Washington. They liked it and they embraced us and it was pretty exciting.

JOSH: That must have been pretty intoxicating. By the time I was on, they were like, “No. We got nothing special for you. No, you’re not going to meet anyone. Nobody’s going to consult with you. There’s no research to be done. Here’s your script. Do that. You know?”

JANEL: Well, it was really glamorous when, when Aaron and Tommy were there, you know? And, and especially before...I mean, we had this little window right before 9/11 and, and it was like, you were just kind of floating on air. And then that horrible thing happened and it just shifted, politically, the world. And then Bush came in and, then we were just on a really successful, really smart show. But before that, you got this little extra lift and this headiness that was, I think, unique to our experience. People are still so obsessed with this show. It’s like, Josh – tell me this is not true. Being on *The West Wing*, it’s as if I’m on a hit show that is currently on television.

JOSH: Yeah, the fandom is insane.

JANEL: New fans, young fans, every single day, they come up to me. Netflix has literally changed the way that people watch television.

JOSH: Hail, Netflix!

JANEL: And we’re currently on a hit show called *The West Wing*.

JOSH: Yeah, it’s just the money has stopped coming in, that’s all. Alright, you know, let’s go there then. We’re getting our new *Gilmore Girls*, there’s, uh, was *Arrested Development*. What do you think about the idea, constantly asked for, some sort of return to *The West Wing*? Could you do it? I mean, the magic’s really already happened, but...

JANEL: I don’t know. I think it’s really, it’s tricky.

HRISHI: Ugh, don’t break my heart.

JANEL: It’s tricky. Obviously, if Aaron Sorkin was like, “Hey, Janel. Ring, ring. I’m doing a thing and obviously you’re going to be in it,” then I wouldn’t say no, because it’s Aaron. I would do a, I don’t know, a commercial that he, that he wrote. But I, I think it’s kind of lame, really. I think they’re all kind of lame.

JOSH: The problem with an Aaron Sorkin reboot of *The West Wing* is that, I guess Martin as Bartlet would have to wake up and everything from the middle of season four onward would have to be revealed to have been a dream. Because there’s no way Aaron’s going to pick it up where we left off.

JANEL: Yeah, right, right. Some things are just meant to be what they are, and I really feel in my heart that this is what...and, and Aaron has so moved on in so many ways that I just can’t imagine...why would he want...what would he get out of going, out of revisiting this? It’s clear what all of us sorry actors would get, but what would, what would he get? And really, he has to be the one to really get something out of it, you know? And I think he’s doing...I don’t know, I’ve heard he’s doing fine.

JOSH: And speaking of, we’re all going to be in Austin, Texas together at the ATX festival, right? You’re in.

JANEL: Yes, I’m hoping that I’m going to be there, yes?

JOSH: Oh, you’re holding out for more money? I’m getting zero.

JANEL: I'm getting negative zero, so....

JOSH: Oh, good. Finally, finally. I'm finally out earning someone.

JANEL: I'm finishing *The Leftovers* in Austin, which is where we shoot, so I'll be there.

JOSH: That'll be fun.

JANEL: And I can show you all the barbeque places and all the swimming holes and all the, the good places to drink.

JOSH: Well, I'm Jewish, so I need kosher barbeque, and I don't swim.

JANEL: You don't swim because you're Jew... Jews don't swim?

JOSH: No, well, you know, I swim in pools, but you said swimming hole. We don't, we don't do swimming holes.

JANEL: Why? It's not kosher?

JOSH: Because it makes our mothers nervous. "You're going to die in that swimming hole!"

JANEL: No, you won't. But I, but there was a snake one time when, in the one that I was in.

JOSH: Forget it. I'll swim in anything as long as there's a ladder to get out.

JANEL: Ok. It's a good place. This is another thing that's kind of an interesting this, is, is....I don't know if you've felt this way, but, *West Wing* is, it's a big, creative experience in your life, and it's not easy to move on from that in a certain sense. You have to really let go of things in order to move into other shows and to other levels of quality. It's such a sublime, creative experience, right Josh?

JOSH: Yes, absolutely. And then it ends and you think, "Am I ever going to do anything remotely like this again?"

JANEL: And the answer's no.

JOSH: Probably. You're correct.

JANEL: But, you can have a great time doing other things. I think for all of us, even Allison, there's a sweetness, creatively, to that experience, which I think people are probably not going to match the rest, in the rest of their creative lives, no matter how successful they are.

JOSH: Yeah, it was magical in front of the camera and behind the camera. This group of people was a very special, close, funny, smart group of creative people.

JANEL: ...That got along really well and, I always say, if we were at a party and we didn't know each other, we would have found each other at that party. You know, I'm on the subway and people say, "Was it as much fun as it looked like?" And I say, "Oh, it was so much more."

JOSH: So much better.

JANEL: I try not to make it, have it make me sad also, because, you know, you're walking around going, "What am I...what else am I going to do? What's my creative life going to be? Where am I going to work?" And, you know, all that stuff and then, like, somebody on the street starts crying when they see you. And like, "Donna Moss!" It's so meaningful to people. So you have to kind of constantly balance this thing that was a million years ago, that you don't want to be so deeply meaningful in your present

life, because you have a present life that you have to, you know, make new, and refresh, and reboot all the time, but you also honor this, this thing that you did that was very, um, really wonderful. And, you know, you really appreciate it. And the longer you're away from it, the more you appreciate it, you know?

JOSH: Absolutely.

JANEL: You know, having children and living away from LA and all that has really helped me. Now I feel like I needed a good amount of time to kind of get over the success of it. Unfortunately. Maybe, maybe, me so more than other people for some reason. I was so...it was my first big job, you know? I literally was like, a hostess after the pilot of *The West Wing*. It took me two episodes to quit my job in a restaurant. So it was very, a very big experience for me, whereas, like, Brad or Allison, I feel like they already had, you know, careers at that point.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Yeah, for me it now inhabits the category of "They can't take that away from me." Whatever else happens in my career, yeah, I was part of that, so I treasure it.

JANEL: Yeah, it's true. People always say, "I miss *The West Wing*. I miss Donna." And I'm like, "I do too, dude! Yeah, I hear you!"

JOSH: Will you come back and discuss other episodes? And if we give you, say, two months' heads up, will you actually watch them?

JANEL: Yes.

JOSH: Are you avoiding them? Do you not want to watch them?

JANEL: I – I do not get a lot out of watching myself and I worry that I'm just going to be, like, mourning my little waist and my long mane of hair or something. I just was like, I don't need to, it's like seeing these pictures of you walking around and being sexy and brilliant, like, in professional makeup and professional hair and beautiful, expensive clothes...it's just like, who needs that, you know?

JOSH: No, I totally agree with you. The reason I'm enjoying doing this podcast is because we haven't gotten up to anything I'm in yet. So I'm just watching my friends, whom I admire and love, do their great work.

JANEL: I think you were the only person out of this whole group that actually could handle doing this, because you are, like, a crazy person. You used to go on, like, these...I mean, now, Twitter is the perfect thing for you. You should just, like, I feel like that was invented for you, Twitter.

JOSH: I thrive on malice and enmity.

JANEL: And he would go and, like, look on these websites that I don't think even exist anymore. And in the morning, he'd come and be like, "Oh, they called me a bald, ugly Jew."

JOSH: It might have been "hideous little troll," I want to say.

JANEL: I don't remember. He loved this quote, and he'd always tell people and it's like, why are you telling...why are you telling people? But you loved it, and, and it's like, I don't feel like you'd be damaged. If I tried to watch these shows and talk about them, I would damage me. I couldn't do it. I do really well doing the thing and then, not thinking about it or looking at it.

JOSH: That's perhaps the most healthful approach to it.

JANEL: Yeah. Uh, uh, um...what's his name...I don't know, I'm forgetting his name, Sam Seaborn.

HRISHI: Rob Lowe.

JOSH: Rob Lowe?

JANEL: Rob Lowe. I loved Rob Lowe, but I for some reason I couldn't remember his name in it, for that moment. But he, he could watch himself and I'm like, yeah, if you're like the prettiest man in Hollywood, sure you can watch yourself. Like, I was sitting one time next to, um, I have to say, I was happy to be sitting next to Warren Beatty at an event at Aaron's house. Annette Benning is on one side of me, and I said...I don't know why, of course I asked him this question, I said, "How do you feel about watching yourself?" I asked Warren, "How do you feel about watching yourself on screen?" And he said, "I have no problem." And I was like, well, of course you don't. Those are the experiences we had on *The West Wing*. It's like, I'm sitting in between Annette Benning and Warren Beatty.

HRISHI: That's awesome.

JOSH: Yes, special times. And whom do you meet on *The Leftovers*? Please, drop somebody's name, just give us something.

JANEL: Um, Jen Aniston I saw, Jen.

JOSH: That's what I was looking for.

JANEL: I had to remind her, really remind her, who I was. I was like, "Um, I know I'm playing a corpse now on this show, but..." No, she couldn't have been cuter and, what's his name? I can't remember his name either.

JOSH: Rob Lowe?

JANEL: No, the other one, that's the star of *The Leftovers*.

HRISHI: Justin Theroux?

JANEL: Justin Theroux, yeah.

JOSH: This is amazing. I don't...I love it.

JANEL: Are you wondering why I'm not working more?

HRISHI: I love it.

JANEL: You guys, I have two small children. I've done more things this day than I bet either one of you have done for the past three weeks combined.

JOSH: How dare you, madam. How dare you? I have two children. They're teenagers. They require a lot of love and care.

JANEL: Yeah.

JOSH: Just today, I made chicken salad because my daughter's coming home from the east coast and she likes chicken salad.

HRISHI: Not chili?

JOSH: Oh, nice callback. No. She likes chicken salad.

JANEL: Nice. That's good. I like chicken salad.

JOSH: Ok, before we finish, are there any other incredibly famous actors whose names we can remind you of before we go? Anyone else you can't quite place, like Justin Theroux and Rob Lowe?

JANEL: No. I just, they have this thing in common. They're both so incredibly handsome that you're like, why do I want to be on camera with you? I don't think I do.

JOSH: I felt that way in my early scenes with Rob Lowe. It's, like, who needs this contrast?

JANEL: I felt the same way.

JOSH: Right. Well, Janel, this has been a ton of fun. And you're agreeing to come back again, correct?

JANEL: Yes.

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

JANEL: You're welcome.

JOSH: By the way, I've discussed it with Hrish, and if you want to see that picture of him at thirteen -- and believe me, you do, I've seen it now -- then we're going to make a little contest out of it.

HRISHI: It's a bet, in the spirit of the poker game at the beginning of the episode.

JOSH: Oh, yeah, there you go. The bet is, if we can get up to, what Hrish, 1000 ratings...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...on iTunes for our podcast, by the release of next week's episode, Episode 7, you will...say it here...

HRISHI: I will, even though I really don't want to, I will post the photo on Instagram, @hrishihirway on Instagram.

JOSH: Oh, it's also going on thewestwingweekly.com. We can do this, people. We're about halfway there as of this recording, so we need people to really pile on.

HRISHI: Ok, to keep this poker thing going, I'm going to raise you...

JOSH: Bring it.

HRISHI: If we can get to 1500 ratings or reviews on iTunes...

JOSH: That's a lot.

HRISHI: That's a lot. But, if we can get there, then you have to also put up a picture of yourself at thirteen years old. A bar mitzvah picture, maybe.

JOSH: Wow. Uh, yeah, I have, I have such things under lock and key. Yeah, I'll do that. And if we get to 2000, I will perform my bar mitzvah in its entirety at a free concert in Central Park. Alright, you're on. Let the games begin.

HRISHI: Thanks so much to Ben Casselman and Jody Avirgan or FiveThirtyEight, for their help on this episode. Thanks to Janel Moloney for joining us, and thank you for listening. Until next time, you can find The West Wing Weekly on Facebook and on Twitter, @thewestwingweekly. I'm @hrishihirway, Josh is @joshmalina and Janel Moloney is @nellymoloney.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

JANEL: What's next?

[Outro Music]