

The West Wing Weekly  
1.08: "Enemies"

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina. Today, we're talking about episode eight, season one of *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: It was written by Ron Osborn and Jeff Rino.

JOSH: With story by Rick Cleveland, Lawrence O'Donnell, and Patrick Caddell.

HRISHI: It first aired on November 17th, 1999.

JOSH: And it was directed by Alan Taylor.

HRISHI: So, this is the first episode that we've encountered that Aaron Sorkin didn't write, and really one of the very, very few in his whole four season tenure on *The West Wing* that he didn't write.

JOSH: He is not credited, other than I guess as the creator of the show, on the episode. Bear in mind, he was also writing another entire series as this was going on, *Sports Night*, so, you know, give him a break. Yeah, he took one off.

HRISHI: So can I blame you, partly, for the fact that he didn't write this episode? You're partly to blame, right?

JOSH: Sure. Certainly. I'm comfortable with that.

HRISHI: Do you feel like you could tell he didn't write this one?

JOSH: Yeah, I do think so. That being said, I enjoyed it very much. It's tonally a little bit different from what preceded it, and, from what I recall, what came after it. But, not jarringly so. To me this almost played - and this is gonna sound like a criticism but I don't mean it as one - it played almost like the sitcom version. Not in a horrible, jarring way. The focus felt on, sort of, light, comic, romantic interplay among the characters. Which is, of course, part of the show prior to this, but not the focus, perhaps.

HRISHI: Right, especially the Sam/Mallory part.

JOSH: And I found myself laughing out loud at parts that were just- it was, kind of, delightfully humorous. I thought Rob Lowe was very funny in this episode.

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*CHARLIE: Leo wants you to write a message from the President.*

*SAM: He wants me?*

*CHARLIE: Yeah.*

*SAM: He wants me to write a birthday message from the President?*

*CHARLIE: Nancy Beckert needs it tonight.*

*SAM: Are you sure he doesn't want someone who, you know, isn't staggeringly overqualified for the job?*

*CHARLIE: He specifically asked for you.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: We really got to learn more about Sam.

JOSH: And a focus on Sam apart from the Laurie story that-

HRISHI: Finally.

JOSH: - that we've been bemoaning. And I think, in that sense I think he kind of... His character blossoms a little bit. And we know that Rob Lowe has great comic chops but you can see it here, even in... There's just a moment, to skip ahead, when he's working on I think the second draft of the birthday message and he just pounds the table in frustration. It's just funny. There's a couple funny physical bits. He walks into a wall at one point when he's just distracted and it was fun to see him in that mode. That's one of the things I think they did do well. In the absence of Aaron I thought they stayed true to his characters well and it's almost like he said to them, "Just keep it in the ballpark. I'll be back. Keep it in the ballpark. You don't have to move anything too far forward. A little advancement on relationships and let it live in that world for an episode." And they did well with it.

HRISHI: Yeah. You know, they're writing partners, Jeff Rino and Ron Osborne, they've written together a long time. Before *The West Wing*, they started on *Mork and Mindy*.

JOSH: Wow.

HRISHI: And they wrote on *Night Court*, and they wrote on *Moonlighting*. So it makes sense that they're writing the Sam and Mallory story.

JOSH: There you go. A, you know, light, romantic, comic background. The episode has a light touch other than the final beat of it, which we can discuss later.

HRISHI: Yeah. This is the only episode, incidentally, of *The West Wing* that they are credited with as writers. I think you're right. The lightness was really nice and I didn't think that it didn't work. There was only one part where I felt like this didn't work.

JOSH: And are we steamrolling right to the end of the episode, or it's something before that?

HRISHI: No, it's actually something before that. The part that really jumped out to me was a part that Mandy says, when she's talking to Toby, trying to get him to go along with the strip mining, to eat the attachment about the land use rider. Just listen to this sentence, it's crazy. She says...

[West Wing Episode 1.08 Excerpt]

*MANDY: Would you tell him that signing the bill and thus swallowing the bitter pill of strip mining would not foreclose a PR approach that would trumpet banking reforms, while at the same time excoriating the special interest strip mining scam - which by the way is what I'm happy to call it? Tell him that.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Well, if I'm not wrong, that's mainly fodder for a punchline from C.J.

HRISHI: You think so?

JOSH: I do, because I think her response is...

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*TOBY: Do you understand what she said?*

*C.J.: No, but she seemed pretty confident.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And in that sense I think you are picking up on something, which is that it's a set-up punch line. Which is, you know, the stock-and-trade of sitcoms. So I think that's not the greatest comic moment of the episode. That's sort of a fallback into an easy duh-dun-duh-duh-duh-duh ba boop!

HRISHI: Right. It felt like someone trying to write like Aaron Sorkin and not being able to do it. But also just the sentence doesn't make any sense. Excoriating is like, it's the wrong part of speech. It should be "While at the same time would excoriate..." the whole thing is – it's a mess.

JOSH: Yeah. I think it's a set-up and a punch line and it doesn't quite fit and it's not funny enough to account for itself for its being there.

HRISHI: OK. But yeah, that was something where I was like, "this would not ever, ever happen in an Aaron Sorkin script."

JOSH: In the opening scene, in which Bartlet is holding forth on National Parks - much to the dismay of Josh Lyman, who would like to go home and catch four hours of sleep before he has to return to work - uh, Josh actually calls him a nerd.

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*JOSH: You're quite a nerd, Mr. President.*

*BARTLET: Really?*

*JOSH: Yes, sir.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Which brought to mind that many of our listeners have pointed out that two episodes earlier, when Bartlet is holding forth on "dw" words and the existence of only three, excluding dweomer, that "dweeb" is a word. And I even checked to see, well, maybe it wasn't a word in 1999 but in fact it was. I found a 1991 article referring to its inclusion in the Oxford English Dictionary. So that's a miss. Or what I think what people were saying during this poker game, they might, in fact, have called the President a dweeb for the way he was acting. [cross talk] And yet they missed the word itself.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

JOSH: Referring back to our discussion of last episode, one of my objections on the credibility issue to "The State Dinner" was Danny Concannon's seeming free access to C.J.'s office, and I was delighted when I watched him walk in and C.J. says to him:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*C.J.: How is it that my staff just lets you walk in here?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's like they heard you.

JOSH: Yeah, it is. Thank you for addressing my very complaint. That being said, when there's an issue of credibility I'm not sure whether the best thing is to have someone within the show to actually point it out. I don't know if that mollifies the situation or shines a big ol' light on it but...

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: I like that moment anyway.

HRISHI: I liked it too. And there's a moment in this episode that I really dug which is in the briefing room when C.J. gets the question about the land use rider:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*REPORTER: You're not concerned about the attachment of the land use rider?*

*C.J.: I'm sorry?*

*REPORTER: I said, the White House isn't concerned about the attachment of the land use rider?*

*C.J.: That's being worked out and I can go into more detail later.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Danny turns and looks at him and I really- just in that little moment got an appreciation for his position. His affection for the people who work there, for C.J. most of all, but I feel like for the administration in general; but then also his journalistic instincts and his duty as a reporter to call them out. You know, you can imagine in some more terrible version that he would, I don't know, come to her defense or something in a moment like that or- you know, like, he's remaining impartial as a reporter ought to but at the same time...

JOSH: He knows that she's been caught off guard.

HRISHI: Yeah. He catching all of the pieces, he knows all of the dynamics of what's going on and, I don't know, I thought there was something in his look there that revealed a lot. Like it felt like there were some layers there between his affection and his duties as a reporter.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And later how he lets it go... He lets the whole story between the President and the Vice President go, but on the condition that if the stenographer loses her job then he will write about it. You know, he's got a really specific kind of moral compass, I guess is what I'm trying to say.

JOSH: That said, as I was watching it I think I wrote down, 'Mildred must be fired.' Now that's a slam dunk.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: If the person taking the minutes at a high level cabinet... Yeah, I mean, I don't know if there are criminal charges to be filed but certainly you've got to investigate it. You've got to figure out what really happened, whether it was in fact she who was the leak and fire her.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That was kind of glossed over but I thought, "OK, maybe I can get it, the reporter's gonna try to protect his source, but you can't: 'Oh, let it go. Oh, Mildred. That's just Mildred. That's how she does.'"

HRISHI: I was surprised that - yeah for all that that Danny even - while not saying who it was, he really lets it slip. He clues C.J. in to who it is because he says:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*DANNY: Cabinet officers weren't the only people in the room.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, he might as well have said "I cannot give up my sources" as he was drawing a stick figure labeled "Mildred" and pointing at it.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's like, "I don't know who it is. [whispers] It's this guy."

JOSH: I think he did pretty much give up his source. Yeah, that's a good point.

HRISHI: Now that we're talking about a moral compass, that does seem weird that he would let C.J. draw the conclusion so easily. And yeah, of course she would get fired for that. But we also don't know what the circumstances were in terms of how he got the information out of her. Maybe she'll get a stern talking to and a second chance.

JOSH: I don't buy it. Not in my administration.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Well let me ask you this – Let's talk about the incident itself. Because I guess I also wondered whether... Is this a major story that you gotta keep under wraps?

HRISHI: I think it is, just as much as it was, you know, they say a fist fight between Leo and the Vice President's got juice. Well, this is the President and the Vice President. It really makes it seem... If that becomes a story it looks really bad for them.

JOSH: I guess. But there wasn't a lot of substance to what transpired. Basically he got spanked and I thought the President looked kind of bad.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And again this episode is called "Enemies." But the only real enmity between two characters comes between Bartlet and Hoynes. The rest of the enemies are really frenemies.

HRISHI: There was Broderick and Eaton and Crane.

JOSH: But we don't even see them. They don't count. Well, maybe they do count. But you know, in my mind it referred more to... Mallory and Sam have a little friction, but it's really romantic interest, and Danny and C.J. have it, but they're really kind of hot for each other, and Mandy and Josh have it. I don't really know what's going on there, but...

HRISHI: Alright, well if you're bringing up the title we have to talk about the last scene then.

JOSH: Yeah, ok. I guess we'll go there. I was hoping to, you know... Well, we're never going to be a chronological podcast. We just aren't. Although we've been doing the episodes in order and for that I applaud us.

HRISHI: [laughs] As opposed to alphabetically?

JOSH: That's right. Which would be absolutely legitimate but I think ultimately confusing.

HRISHI: The enemies have to be, right, it's Broderick, Eaton, Crane, and then the Vice President and the President. These are the enemies that are being referred to in the title.

JOSH: Is that what Josh is talking about? I'll be honest, the final moment not only didn't work for me at all, I had trouble even trying to construct any sense out of it. It almost felt like, "Is this the end of a different episode? Because this doesn't really apply in any way that I can think of to the episode I just watched."

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*JOSH: We talk about enemies more than we used to.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I don't know what you're talking about. There was a lot of talk about National Parks, but... It's one of those moments where it actually tells you the power of film and

sound and music, because I started to feel something and then I had to think to myself, "I don't know what is going on. I don't know what he is talking about. This feels very dramatic and this feels like a moment where like, hey yeah, you know what, you're right. But I don't know what he's talking about."

HRISHI: TV power, baby. Don't think too hard.

JOSH: Maybe not. Maybe I shouldn't. But you're the smarter one. So give me some... What were they going for?

HRISHI: Ok, here's what I think it is. When Mandy goes into Josh's office earlier in the episode she says to him:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*MANDY: You're fighting the wrong fights and you're doing it for the wrong reasons.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So the real fights in this episode are between the President and the Vice President and between the administration and Eaton, Broderick, and Crane. And both of those conflicts are about retribution. They're about political retribution and that's cheap. There's a distinction being made. The episode is called "Enemies," it's not called "Opponents." They're not just on the other side, everybody here is trying to get revenge. And that's... Those are the wrong reasons.

JOSH: I'm liking this. I knew I could count on smart guy. I think I'll buy it. I think it actually, uh, also applies to Bartlet. Hoynes comes to him and wants to sort of resolve what happened in the Roosevelt room and by the end we've gotten an admission from Bartlet.

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*BARTLET: You shouldn't have made me beg, John. I was asking you to be the Vice President.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He's pissed over how hard he had to work to get Hoynes to join the ticket. So, like you say, if it's... If that's what Josh is referring to it has purchase here in this scene, too, because that's really just wasted effort for the President and the Vice President at this point, to just be taking shots at each other and that's all Bartlet really did. He just took a shot at Hoynes in front of the rest of the Cabinet.

HRISHI: Yeah, it was completely petty. And Broderick and Eaton and Crane, their beef is also with the fact that they lost.

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*TOBY: It's retaliatory, sir.*

*BARTLET: For what?*

*TOBY: The campaign.*

*BARTLET: What did I do to them during the campaign?*

*TOBY: You won, sir.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So, same thing. And, again, that's where his beef with Hoynes started, too. He beat Hoynes. This is also the part where he said:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*HOYNES: What did I do to make you treat me this way?*

*BARTLET: John.*

*HOYNES: What did I ever do to you except deliver the South?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But, we also know that they got womped in Texas.

JOSH: That's right. That's what I thought of.

[West Wing Episode 1.02 excerpt]

*C.J.: The point is we got womped in Texas.*

*JOSH: We got womped in Texas twice.*

*C.J.: We got womped in the primary and we got womped in November.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So I guess he delivered the South except for Texas. His home state.

JOSH: His home state. You would have thought there might have been a little more conversation there, but...

HRISHI: Yeah, it takes a little bit of the attack off of his line there.

JOSH: What did I do? Ok, yeah, I did lose Texas, but the rest of the South!

HRISHI: Apart from my home state, I delivered a bunch of...

JOSH: A lot of neighboring states.

HRISHI: Early on, when Hoynes is in the Cabinet meeting and he starts talking and I'm like, "ooh this is so... Like, is this supposed to be him being presidential?" Because this does not feel presidential. Like, is this bad writing? And then of course he's just sort of being procedural and it seems like he's trying to inspire you know get this... He felt like a beleaguered CEO trying to talk at a staff-wide meeting or something.

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*HOYNES: I should begin by welcoming all of you to our third Cabinet meeting. Our first in six months. And I know the President would want me to point out that these meetings offer us a unique opportunity to come together and exchange ideas and discuss our goals for the future.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And the when the President walks in the whole tone changes. His whole approach changes and you can see the way the people respond to him is completely different.

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*BARTLET: This is the saddest looking Cabinet I have ever- look at this, I have an agriculture secretary here who's never eaten a vegetable in his life. Everybody sit down you're freaking me out. Good morning, Leo.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You know with Hoynes it's like, "yeah alright, get on..." They're just not responsive to him.

JOSH: He's got the respect that Hoynes is maybe trying to earn in his absence.

HRISHI: Yeah. Like I think that the Vice President is trying to act presidential. The President doesn't need to act presidential, he is the President. So, when he walks into the room he can open it up with a joke. He's funny, he's light.

JOSH: Well that almost goes back to... Hoynes at one point sort of slaps C.J. down by saying:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*HOYNES: And I'd like to remind you that whatever regard you may hold for me personally you are addressing the office of the Vice President.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's right, you carry the office with you and Bartlet's got the office of the President.

HRISHI: Yeah, and when he walks in he's got the whole room just kind of like shifts in their seat and, you know, gets comfortable in a way... Like they're both showing more respect and also having a better time. It's pretty impressive.

JOSH: True.

HRISHI: But I think that also sets up that moment when he goes to Mildred and he starts doing this dressing down. It makes it even more tense because you really feel like all attention is on him and then he's using it and he's like focusing it like a laser on the Vice President and being like, "oh, are you an idiot?" I love on this show when we have long silences. The awkward silences are so wonderfully used here.

JOSH: In a dialogue-heavy show those silences really land. It's a very tense moment... It's really just public shaming. Because even the substance of the smackdown - there's not much to it, the Vice President says:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*HOYNES: Surely our first goal has to be finding a way to work with Congress.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Which to me is maybe very much in keeping with what Bartlet later says:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*BARTLET: You don't think our first goal should be finding a way to best serve the American people?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Exactly, it's like... Yeah.

JOSH: I thought Hoynes would say, "Oh yeah, I just thought working across the aisle might be the best way to get something done." It's not like Bartlet lays down like, "Ooooooh snap! Good point." It was more like "Wow dude, really? That was kind of harsh and unnecessary and you're not making a really particularly good point even."

HRISHI: No he's just making a pedantic one really.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Shouldn't you actually talk about governing, and the first step of governing is, like, getting things done. The point is irrelevant and petty.

JOSH: Completely.



HRISHI: [sighs] Bad form, Mr. President. But then he owns up to it, the fact that he only did it because he was mad.

JOSH: Yeah, it was... "Petty" is the right word.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: You're our music guy... Is Chinese opera unbearable? Because, man, there is no love for Chinese opera in this episode.

HRISHI: There really isn't.

JOSH: I'm like, dude, Leo, you guys are subscribers to the opera. Even Leo's like:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*LEO: Is there another way, any other way, we can fix this?*

*MALLORY: Dad.*

*LEO: Did you hear the President tell you about my day?*

*MALLORY: Yes.*

*LEO: And now Chinese opera?*

*MALLORY: Ok, coffee and dessert.*

*LEO: Now you're talking!*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I'm like, "These are your tickets!"

HRISHI: This will happen again and again where there's a funny response to sort of the more formal arts in the show. One that you wouldn't expect. You'd think, "Oh these guys are in the White House. They should be appreciators of highbrow culture," but actually they're like "Nah, not really."

JOSH: Not too sophisticated.

HRISHI: "Yeah, I was gonna have a beer and watch the football game." One thing though that was funny about it being Chinese opera... The Chinese opera also figures into the story of Richard Nixon, because when he had what was one of the most important milestones of his administrations which was opening China up...

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: Opening trade relations... Anyway, they went to the Chinese opera. While he was there.

JOSH: Oh, interesting.

HRISHI: Him and William F. Buckley and all those guys.

JOSH: And Nixon strikes me as someone who probably didn't love Chinese opera.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I expect it more of Leo.

HRISHI: But, I don't know, Chinese opera? I don't know much about it. That's all I know about Chinese opera. I know that Nixon went to see the opera in China.

JOSH: I don't know a lot about Chinese opera but I know what I like, Hrishi.

HRISHI: And you like Chinese opera?

JOSH: Uh, I'm gonna say yeah. Yes, I do.

HRISHI: If the opera's half as good as the food.

JOSH: There you go. The only problem is just you want to see another opera almost immediately.

[HRISHI laughing]

JOSH: Damn it, I'm better than that. Or maybe I'm not.

HRISHI: OK, so our major plot lines... It is kind of a thin episode. We've got three stories, though. We've got the conflict between the President and the Vice President in the Cabinet meeting; we've got the land use rider and Josh trying to figure that out; and then you've got Sam, Leo, Mallory. The lighter, kind of more domestic dramedy of that. Ok, so we start early on with Leo and Mallory at the hotel that Leo's staying at, which is apparently very fancy.

JOSH: The coffee's certainly dear.

HRISHI: They've got some tension and it really comes to light what really is happening when Leo and the President actually start talking about it later on. Where he says:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*BARTLET: She doesn't see what the job is, Leo, and anyone would have to see it to believe it. And even if they saw it, and even if they believed it, what would it matter?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes, since we're talking about it, what did you think of their... And I know it's essentially supposed to be a light, comic plot, but Leo and the President conspiring to ruin Mallory's date with Sam? While on one level kind of cute, it's also sort of back to the "these women" kind of guys and their kind of female cock-blocking Leo's daughter. If I can say that phrase and have it stay in and retain our C for clean podcast. I mean how old do you think Mallory is? She's an adult grown woman.

HRISHI: She is indeed.

JOSH: And for her dad to be...

HRISHI: Still interfering? Meddling?

JOSH: Interfering with a first date it's just a sort of really bad overstep.

HRISHI: But you get the feeling that it wouldn't be as much of an issue except that it's Sam.

JOSH: Yeah, but...

HRISHI: Right? That it's with a guy that he works with?

JOSH: I guess.

HRISHI: I think the conspiracy is less about trying to ruin her love life, and more about they have this ulterior motive of trying to get her to cut Leo some slack by giving her some primary experience of what it's like to have your social life ruined by the demands of the White House. I don't know, do you think that that's misogynistic?

JOSH: I think it is lightly so. Although not in a meta way where I have to blame the show. I think Leo and Bartlet...President Bartlet. Some people object when we call him "Bartlet," by the way.

HRISHI: Definitely is a thing for me every time.

JOSH: Oh do you? Ok, so-

HRISHI: Every time you say "Bartlet," I'm like...

JOSH: Oh, I'm the one that does it!

HRISHI: I think so. I'm guilty of doing it too, but I think you're a bad influence on me.

JOSH: Ok, well then out of respect for you and those listeners who have written in - including, I think my friend Ben Acker - I will try to keep it to "President Bartlet" and Leo.

HRISHI: Yeah, even if you don't respect him, Josh, respect the office.

JOSH: You're exactly right. That's why I always say "Vice President Otter", instead of just "Otter". I respect the office. Yeah, they're old school and not always in the most flattering way. Yeah, I did take it as a bit paternalistic. I mean this is a grown woman trying to have a first date and she seems very capable of choosing people she want to go out with and Sam even comes to Leo and asks for permission and he says, "No problem" and then [cross talk] behind the scenes goes to great lengths to prevent them from going out, yeah.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. Yeah, I feel like it's Leo's version of the *Arrested Development* plot of trying to enforce, "This is why you always leave a note."

[Arrested Development Episode 1.10 excerpt]

*J. WALTER WEATHERMAN: That's why you always leave a note.*

*MICHAEL: Well, those lessons worked, didn't they? I mean we still leave notes to this day.*

*LINDSEY: Oh, that's what that was about.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh that's good. That's very good.

HRISHI: Went to crazy lengths to have this kind of lesson imparted on his children, or on his child. So, he just sabotages things and the President's in on it on both sides. He really makes Sam do a second draft on the birthday message. But, there's this other part that they set up that I think is actually nicely done, where, at the beginning of the episode, Toby and Sam are having trouble writing.

JOSH: It's flat. They're wondering where their talent has gone.

HRISHI: That's why I kind of bought it when the President says, "Why don't you give this a second draft?" and Sam is kind of baffled at first but then, you know, you see him... He really sinks his teeth into it and then Toby joins him. I think it is because like... Can they at least get this thing done, you know? And this is a chance again for them to... A chance to write is a chance to do something great, to be eloquent.

JOSH: I laughed out loud at Toby and Sam staying late and sort of getting into it with each other over the birthday message.

HRISHI: The part that made me laugh out loud hardest in this episode is when Toby is standing over his shoulder and he's now stolen Sam's line:

[West Wing episode 1.08 excerpt]

*TOBY: I wanna nail this.*

*JOSH: What is it?*

*TOBY: It's a birthday card for someone.*

JOSH: For who?

TOBY: I don't know.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I did like that. That was a nice sort of comic way to further illustrate the dedication that these people have to their job and that sort of obsession. And, a nice little, more serious layering for Mallory to get a little insight into her dad by seeing Sam choosing to stay late and continue working on the birthday message rather than go out to coffee with them.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: You know we sense that there's some resentment about her parents splitting up and the amount of responsibility that falls on her dad for his dedication to his job but she even says:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

MALLORY: *You are so exactly like him.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And we get a little sense that it sort of leavens her feelings toward her dad.

HRISHI: As we're talking about it I feel like this episode actually deserves more credit than maybe we gave it on first blush.

JOSH: I certainly enjoyed it and it went by quickly. I found myself not writing down a lot of notes, finding great places to dig in, but smiling, laughing out loud several times, and enjoying the ride.

HRISHI: Yeah. What else did you laugh at?

JOSH: I laughed at that Toby moment. I laughed when Rob Lowe did his hitting the desk thing. He really, he just wanted it so badly. I laughed when he walked into the wall. I like me some slapstick. I also laughed during President Bartlet's reading of the Chief of Staff's day, Leo's schedule.

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*BARTLET: He met with the Director of the CIA and received an intelligence briefing regarding stores of plutonium in a country which shall we just say is not on our Christmas card list. He brokered a compromise among Senate Democrats for funding of something fairly trivial but I can't remember quite what this was... Oh yes, of course, the U.S. Army! Yes. He met with my Chief Council to discuss the news that it's possible I've broken several federal laws in the week and may have to serve from one to three years in prison after resigning my office in disgrace... How'd that go by the way?*

*LEO: We're fine.*

*BARTLET: Cool.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: There's something about the delight he took in it. Martin had a nice, light touch, He seemed to be enjoying it so much that it made me laugh with him.

HRISHI: So, when Sam is really buckled down, even when he's let off the hook later... It is a nice illustration of the lesson that the President and Leo wanted to impress upon Mallory that this episode... They're all about duty, they're all about honor and they're all about duty. But this one, you know, he has a sense of duty. Of wanting to... Even just

something so simple as this birthday message, he would rather write that because that's his job and that's what he's responsible for. Even when Leo was like, "Eh, you're fine. Your first draft was fine." He's like, "no, it wasn't." And yet Mallory's moment where she says, "You are so exactly like him" leads to also the sort of the, I thought, the most touching moment which was Sam saying in response:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*SAM: That is the nicest thing you've ever said to me.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Very sweet.

HRISHI: In a courtship moment to be able to say that to your potential date and her dad at the same time that's a... That guy has game.

JOSH: Indeed. Very good point. I also noticed – pure tangent – but in that early scene when Mallory's asking Sam out, he's got a hair issue. And I hope we can freeze frame him like we did with Bradley's tie.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: He's got a weird piece of hair just sticking out right side of his head...

[HRISHI laughing]

JOSH: It's bad. It's definitely...the hair person on set: big miss. And I guess to Rob's credit...doesn't carry around a little mirror. Even Rob Lowe has a hair thingy sometimes.

HRISHI: At the risk of being accused of being... whatever, I'll also say I thought CJ looked great in this episode, especially in the... There's a scene when they're waiting to talk, she and Sam are waiting to talk to Leo and she's chewing gum...

JOSH: Does she swallow her gum in that scene? I was trying to decide. It seems to be gum but then she does like a funny comic thing where they're both waiting to talk to Leo and there's kind of just a weird awkward moment. They're both sitting there and she seems to swallow whatever was in her mouth.

HRISHI: Really? No, because I think she's still chewing by the time she gets up and leaves.

JOSH: Well you're always right, so I'll accept what you're saying.

HRISHI: Anyway, I thought in that in that scene she looked pretty hot. Is that... Can I say that?

JOSH: That's Allison Janney. I think you can.

HRISHI: Once again, the episode mostly feels like it could be contemporary. It feels pretty timeless. But there is one moment where it really, uh, the age of the show really hits. Which is...

JOSH: And what is that?

HRISHI: When we come in on Hoynes.

JOSH: Oh I know, Internet talk.

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*HOYNES: This just in. The Internet is not a fad.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughs] So quaint.

HRISHI: I mean it's 1999 but... This might shock you, Josh, but I was an early adopter of the Internet.

JOSH: That does not, in fact, shock me.

HRISHI: But there were already Internet plotlines in *Sports Night*. At this point are people still suspecting that the Internet is a fad? Speaking of antiquated though... Here's a nice story, another parallel out here in the real world... Congresswoman Carolyn Maloney from New York saw this episode and was inspired by it - so the legend goes. She was inspired by this episode and took the same idea of taking Big Sky Federal Reserve and turning it into a National Park through the Antiquities Act. She wrote to President Clinton in order to save these two forts that were on Governor's Island in New York. She wrote to President Clinton and said, you know, "By the power of the Antiquities Act you should turn these into national landmarks." And that's how we got Governor's Island National Landmark in 2001.

JOSH: That's fascinating.

HRISHI: Yeah. I'll put a link up to the press release that talks about that. Here's one more thing, speaking of Big Sky... They keep talking about Big Sky like it's nothing. They're like, "Well, you know, it's just a pile of rocks."

JOSH: I bumped on the pile of rocks things too.

HRISHI: Yeah, Big Sky, Montana is beautiful.

JOSH: Isn't Everest a big rock? [BOTH laugh] That whole big pile of rocks thing...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I think President Bartlet refers to it that way...

HRISHI: Yeah!

JOSH: When they mention it to him. And he's like the King of National Parks! And he's like:

[West Wing Episode 1.08 excerpt]

*BARTLET: You understand it's a bunch of rocks, right?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I don't understand. And it's also just like, have you been to Montana?

JOSH: Gorgeous.

HRISHI: The place is incredible.

JOSH: Stunning.

HRISHI: It also holds a special place for me in my...not my heart. I related it to Josh's confession, much like your confession with Janel about hating outdoorsy things.

JOSH: I don't hate outdoorsy things. I just took a shot at swimming holes! By the way, God forbid I should say anything without getting flack for it. Someone objected that I was painting with too broad a brush with regards to Jews and the outdoors. I enjoy the outdoors. Fair enough.

HRISHI: Well...

JOSH: I generalized for a cheap laugh. But go on.

HRISHI: For the most part I have no love for the outdoors. I inherited this from my mom, and I generally think like outdoorsy things, especially in a sort of an American tradition, I leave that to white people to do.

JOSH: Mmm!

HRISHI: And...

JOSH: Interesting.

HRISHI: My mom was born in India and her take on it ,when asked about camping, she said, "We worked so hard so that we don't have to sleep on the floor."

[BOTH laugh]

HRISHI: So, I've been to Big Sky, actually, and it was on one of the rocks, one of the giant rocks in the pile of rocks, that in an attempt to impress a girl, I tore my ligament in my knee and just ruined my knee completely.

JOSH: Wow! See in my in my experience that would not impress a girl. I wouldn't even think to tear a ligament in order to impress a woman.

HRISHI: [laughs] Ah ha, yes.

JOSH: That's a weird instinct.

HRISHI: I just went for it, I was like, "Watch this... No."

JOSH: Was it like you were trying to... Like, "Yo, look at me climb"?

HRISHI: [sighs] No, I-

JOSH: Or, "I'm gonna jump off"?

HRISHI: We were on a ski trip. I very foolishly agreed to go on a ski trip, but, you know... I'm gonna fall into the same trap that you did, speaking too generally, but I'm brown and I don't belong on a ski slope. Indian people are not meant to ski. We come from a tropical climate. Why are you gonna put me on a mountain with snow and tell me, 'Come down real fast.' and expect to have that go well? It didn't go well. I mean it didn't go well in that I destroyed my knee. It did go well in that she did marry me.

JOSH: Ohh! It's Lindsey. I didn't want to ask.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I didn't want to dig too deep.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Ah, well, that's a happy ending!

HRISHI: I guess so. For everybody except for my knee.

JOSH: And I'm gonna go out on a limb and I'm gonna predict that the same people who feel that I talk about myself too much, and that I generalize about my people, will be charmed by your story.

HRISHI: I doubt it. I don't know.

JOSH: I think so. There's a general love for you.

[HRISHI laughs]

JOSH: This is my sense. There's a consensus about you. I'm a bit more polarizing. So be it!

HRISHI: There was some pretty mean stuff being said to my, to my poor thirteen year old self. Someone was like, uh, “No wonder this guy knew about Dungeons and Dragons,” based on the picture.

JOSH: But look at you now, come on.

HRISHI: OK, let’s take a break to thank our sponsors and when we come back we’ll answer some questions that were sent in by listeners.

[ad break]

HRISHI: So, recently we put out a request to you, the listeners, to send us recordings of yourselves asking us questions.

JOSH: This is kind of our Big Block of Cheese attempt.

HRISHI: Yeah, it was inspired by that. So here are a few questions that were sent in.

JOSH: This episode: Pepper Jack.

HRISHI: [laughs] What?

JOSH: I think every time we do Big Block of Cheese we should have... We should visualize... We should all be visualizing the same type of cheese. This week: Pepper Jack.

HRISHI: So our first question comes from Castle Suzanne on Twitter, @CastleSuzanne, and she asks:

[listener recording]

*“Hi Josh. Hi, Hrishi. It’s Castle Suzanne. My question is, how much feedback did you guys have during read throughs? Like, did you ever say your character wouldn’t have said that? Or, all of you had a different point of view of the politics that was going on? Just wondering how much input you guys had. Or was it, ‘This is written and this is how it’s gonna be’? That’s my question. Thanks.”*

[end recording]

JOSH: That’s a good question, actually. So, *The West Wing* read throughs, certainly no discussion happening during the read through. Read through is sit down - they would take place in the Roosevelt Room - and everyone would sit around that big table. It’s the first chance for everyone to get to hear what’s coming up next and most importantly a chance for Aaron and for the writers to hear how the script is playing out loud. So, your job at the read through is really just to read it. Give it your best go and read it and the writers take it from there. Now, I can’t speak for other actors. My point of view, with regards to my job, is that I’m not there to make suggestions. If you wanna hire me as a writer and pay me to be a writer, I’ll write. Otherwise, I’m handed a script and my job is to say those lines in that order and make it work. I always felt there was a collaborative sense at *The West Wing*. I think if I had a problem with something I could have brought it up like, “I don’t know, is that really how Will would approach that situation?” But that’s just not how I’m built. I feel like you tell me what I’m saying, what the situation is, and my job is to make it work. I suspect there were other actors who did have that kind of interaction but my take is always my job is to say what they wrote.

HRISHI: I feel like it would be harder to take that kind of license in a room with Aaron Sorkin.

JOSH: I feel like I really came up in the Aaron Sorkin School. I have great respect for the text because on an Aaron Sorkin show you don’t paraphrase, you don’t ad lib. I’d like to



meet the actor who's gonna ad lib better dialogue than he wrote. And there would be a script supervisor and if you made a small mistake it would be corrected. You had to be word perfect and the best story I have to illustrate this is that I once had a scene in which, in the script, the word "the" appeared twice in a row: "The the." Clearly a typo. And so during rehearsal I kind of jokingly said, um, "I'm gonna say 'the' once." And one of the ADs or, I can't remember whoever it was, said "I'm gonna call up to Aaron just to make sure."

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: I was like, "Are you serious?" We had to break for three or four minutes while he called up and he came back and he said, "Yeah, that was a typo. Just say 'the' once." And they started to roll camera and I said, "Well, hang on one second. Do you know? Did he say which one I should cut?"

[HRISHI laughs]

JOSH: And for a moment I thought that they were going to call back upstairs.

HRISHI: Nicely done. Nice work.

JOSH: Yeah, you don't change the text. And then I think part of the question was also about political point of view and that really, to me, that would be insane. Even bringing up... I don't care what my character thinks, what his political point of view, whether it falls in line with mine, whether it's diametrically opposed. I mean that really just isn't the job. You know if you as an actor are arriving with some sort of agenda that you feel needs to be served by your character's dialogue then...

HRISHI: Or not necessarily yours personally, but like if you feel like you've inhabited this character so long there's a sense of, "Well, I just know this character and, and this is not something that this character would say. It feels out of line."

JOSH: Ok, I understand feeling that way, but I think that's just not how it works. When you're an actor it may be frustrating but your job is to inhabit a character who says the things the writers have put in your mouth and you've got to make it work. Not that there can't ever be a discussion. There's certainly things the writers and producers can explain to you that might enlighten you. But the idea of lobbying for a change because, "I know my character and this is not what he would say or do" to me is not the job. So, I have a question that comes from coincidentally a woman named Priya Hirway.

HRISHI: [laughs] My sister.

JOSH: Yeah. I thought she might be. She wanted me to pose to you the following question:

[listener recording]

*Hey Josh, this is Hrishi's sister, Priya Hirway. Has Hrishi ever told you about the expressive dance that he used to do to the opening theme music?*

[end recording]

JOSH: No. No, he has not told me about this dance.

[HRISHI laughs]

JOSH: But I'm gonna make him do so now, on mic. Hrishi?

HRISHI: Well, so, my parents' house where me and my sister grew up is... There's just one story, and there's a living room and then there's a hallway where all the, you know... My parents' room, my sister's room, and my room. And my room is at the end of the hall

and I don't know how this started... So, in Snuffy Walden's theme to *The West Wing* you know, it starts with this big this build, the drums roll, and you get that big swell...

[opening music plays behind HRISHI speaking]

HRISHI: ...until it crashes into the opening notes and my sister is also a big lover of *The West Wing*. She's the person who first got me into *Sports Night*.

JOSH: Bless her.

HRISHI: She's the person I first experienced binge watching with.

[music fades out]

HRISHI: So, we would binge watch DVDs of *The West Wing* and, at one point... This is how it started, I think. In my bedroom at the end of the hall, I would hear her playing the next episode, or the next episode would start and we'd already be... It would already be like our third time seeing it so I would run in to grab something from my room and then run out down the hall, like the wood floor, in my socks and then emerge in time with the opening swell sort of Risky Business style.

JOSH: I was gonna ask. I'm seeing tighty whities, but...

HRISHI: [laughs] No, fully dressed.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Well, no shoes. You know, you need the socks for full sliding. And so I would stop somewhere in the middle of the hall so that... She'd be in the living room watching TV and I would just slide with my arms outstretched...

[JOSH laughs]

HRISHI: You know, and then: ta-da!

JOSH: Mm-hmm. Can you give me some ages?

HRISHI: Oh this is early twenties? Late teens, early twenties.

JOSH: Mmm-hmm.

HRISHI: Um, yeah.

JOSH: A lot of people, uh, wrote their own lyrics to the opening credits.

HRISHI: If you sang the actors' lyrics or whatever we'd love to hear them. Record... You should keep sending us questions, but also send us your version of *The West Wing* theme with you singing whatever lyrics you would sing when it comes on. We want to hear them. And if you're not too embarrassed to share them with us we will play them on the podcast.

JOSH: And Hrishi this... It's a great idea, but let me ask you this, is there a number of iTunes ratings that were we to hit you would put up a video of you performing the dance you did? [laughs] I mean, it's now a grand tradition...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...of hitting targets and putting up something embarrassing.

HRISHI: Well, it would require me being in Massachusetts.

JOSH: Wow.

HRISHI: I'd have to go back to Massachusetts.

JOSH: It's a site specific dance?

HRISHI: I think so. I just don't know how... I mean. It really needs a long hallway, you know, because you need to have... I need to be able to really rev up and run down the hallway and then slide out.

JOSH: I'm gonna challenge you here. I've got to believe there's some place closer to the West Coast where this dance can be performed and keep its integrity.

HRISHI: Ok, I'll keep an eye out for it and then I'll let you know about the stakes at that point. When we find a location.

JOSH: That is it for the Pepper Jack edition of-

HRISHI: [laughs] Oh jeez.

JOSH: Of Big Block of Cheese Day on The West Wing Weekly.

HRISHI: For the record, I'm gonna voice my objection to this cheese branding.

JOSH: And for the record I will always, whenever we do one of these, mention what cheese is being paired with these particular questions.

HRISHI: I think you're bringing in plenty of cheese on your own.

JOSH: Boom. You win.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: [laughs] What's next?

JOSH: Pepper Jack!

[Outro Music]