

The West Wing Weekly  
1.20: Mandatory Minimums  
Guests: Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson and Kathleen "Bird" York

[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 20 from Season 1. It's called "*Mandatory Minimums*."

JOSH: It was written by fan favorite Aaron Sorkin, and it was directed by Bob Berlinger - incredibly nice, funny, great guy and an excellent director. I worked with him on, I think, something like twelve episodes of *Sports Night* . He directed me in my brief appearance in a TV movie starring Charisma Carpenter called *See Jane Date* , and - he's great.

HRISHI: And now he's directing *See Jane Cregg* .

JOSH: Ah. There you go!

HRISHI: Coming up later in the episode, we're going to be joined by Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson of Gary, Indiana to talk to us about the issue of mandatory minimums, and we're going to be joined by Kathleen York, who makes her first appearance in the series guest-starring as Andrea Wyatt.

JOSH: Ok, music guy: Gary, Indiana. Made famous in what musical?

HRISHI: *Our Town* ?

JOSH: Good guess, but it's not a musical.

HRISHI: [laughs] *Our Town* isn't a musical?

JOSH: So, I guess that would be among the worst possible guesses.

HRISHI: [laughs] It's on a stage!

JOSH: There's a song in *The Music Man* - oh, now I've given it away - *The Music Man* .

HRISHI: Is it *The Music Man* ?

JOSH: Since your original guess was a straight play, I figured I'd just zoom right ahead to the correct answer: *The Music Man*.

[sings]

"Gary, Indiana,  
Gary, Indiana,  
Gary, Indiana,  
My home sweet home!"

I may have made up "My home sweet home," but the "Gary, Indiana" part I know is in there.

HRISHI: I don't know if I've previously expressed to you that I'm not really a musical guy.

JOSH: Well, it certainly landed with incredible weight in your guess of *Our Town* .

HRISHI: [laughs] Yeah...

JOSH: I'm also now questioning whether you're a theater guy.

HRISHI: Nah, not so much.

JOSH: Interesting! Should we get into it? I mean, really, do you dislike musical theater as a genre?

HRISHI: I do dislike musical theater with some, you know, notable exceptions.

JOSH: Wow. Ok. *Hamilton* .

HRISHI: *Hamilton* , sure.

JOSH: What else?

HRISHI: *My Fair Lady* .

JOSH: Hmm. Classic.

HRISHI: You know, I'll tell you - *Chicago* is really the kind of thing that exemplifies what I dislike about musical theater.

JOSH: It's the nadir of musical theater for you. And why is that?

HRISHI: It's not even necessarily musical theater so much as it is - movie adaptations of musical theater.

JOSH: I was wondering! So it's really Richard Gere, and someone else's tap dancing feet, and Renee Zellweger who have ruined *Chicago* for you.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Because it's a fine musical.

HRISHI: Too broad, and too silly, and - I don't know - there's not a lot of subtlety in musicals.

JOSH: Oh, Hrishi. It's possible you're sitting too close to the stage! [they laugh] Jesus. Try the mezzanine!

HRISHI: I love *Fiddler on the Roof*!

JOSH: Oh, what is that? Is that for me personally?

HRISHI: No, I'm just saying. I'm talking about other musicals I've talked about on this podcast that I've enjoyed.

JOSH: Thanks. [sarcastically] I enjoy Bollywood!

HRISHI: I don't! [Josh laughs] Maybe that's where my musical distaste comes from! It started early on.

JOSH: Come on!

HRISHI: No, didn't we talk about *Fiddler on the Roof* in an episode? I think we did.

JOSH: Maybe. Putting the two together, have you watched the video of Lin Miranda's wedding reception...

HRISHI: Yes!

JOSH: ...with that great number from *Fiddler on the Roof*, "To Life (L'Chaim)"? It's pretty great! Pretty great.

HRISHI: And when I say *Fiddler on the Roof* and you say "Is that for me?" it's all for you, really. As a musical theater guy, anything I can scrounge together in terms of love for musicals, it's all for you.

JOSH: I was just wondering whether you were pandering to the Jews.

HRISHI: Umm, no more than I usually am.

JOSH: [laughs] By the way! Someone - Jim, by name - wrote on our website that he's over the "Jew discussion," as I think he put it. "Nobody likes it, Josh. Really. Nobody." And so I will try at least once an episode to mention Judaism and things Jewish, [Hrishi laughs] if only to alienate Jim.

HRISHI: Yeah, that would be...

JOSH: We've hit our quota for this episode, so we can move on.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Yeah. But also, let me lastly add, on a happier note, that it was pointed out to us by Pam, and a couple others - we discussed the title "Six Meetings Before Lunch," and we were puzzled over its relevance, and we tried to count the meetings. Apparently, the "Six Meetings Before Lunch" title is a reference by Aaron to a line from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* . It goes:

"Alice laughed. 'There's no use trying,' she said. 'One can't believe impossible things.'

"'I daresay you haven't had much practice,' said the Queen. 'When I was younger, I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.'"

What do you think? Do you buy it?

HRISHI: If that's where it came from, that's fine. But it's pretty thin.

JOSH: As am I. [Hrishi laughs] Well, I've been dieting. Just wanted to give myself a shout-out. [Hrishi laughs] By the way, this episode, which we are thus far avoiding discussing, first aired on May 3, 2000. I failed to mention that earlier. Shall we jump right in? Is there any way to ease back into a discussion of the...

HRISHI: Let's start here. Josh, what did you think?

JOSH: I liked it a lot, because I felt like the one episode flowed right into the next.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And that sea change in the show in Season 1 that we discussed that began in "Let Bartlet Be Bartlet"... They hit the ground running in "Mandatory Minimums," and we see it's a newly-energized President and a newly-energized senior staff that has now decided they're going to do their thing, come what may. They're going to roll the dice. There's a lot of weird clichés I just threw out there. [Hrishi laughs] I don't know why.

HRISHI: Yeah, there's a palpable sense that the energy has completely changed from the last episode.

JOSH: Yeah. And I like that.

HRISHI: At the beginning of the episode, President Bartlet is speaking at a hotel, giving a speech, and C.J. is talking to the press. And another thing that's changed is her dynamic with Danny Concannon.

JOSH: Oh, indeed. Indeed. It is the coldest of shoulders she's offering him these days.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's almost worse, because she's treating him professionally. You know, he tries to say something to her and she says, "Oh, Danny, you're not going to want to miss this." It's

somehow colder. It's not like she's just giving him the silent treatment: She's just - he's not special.

JOSH: Right. That's right. I was just going to guess that you liked, as I did, the whole sort of psyching Josh up to speak to the Senator, right...

HRISHI: Yeah. I loved it.

JOSH: ...that Sam and Toby are doing. And then just the little button where he tells him to take his legislative agenda and shove it up his ass?

HRISHI: Yeah. I did love it. What I especially loved is that Sam is trying to do it and then Toby tells him to back off. And then Sam's like, "But you told me to do this!" and he's like, "And now I'm telling you 'no.' Back off."

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Even before that, we get the reason for the call. We see the Senate Majority Leader and his staffer, who we met in the earlier episode, realizing that despite their threat, the Bartlet administration was going to go ahead with their plan. I didn't do a synopsis for this episode. Should I do that real quick?

JOSH: Oh, please!

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Have you prepared one or are you freestyling?

HRISHI: I have prepared one.

JOSH: Bring it.

HRISHI: Here we go: In this episode, President Bartlet names two campaign finance reformers to the FEC, aka the Federal Election Commission. The administration is also taking on a drug enforcement policy by addressing mandatory minimums in sentencing. Time-traveling, mischief-making pollster Al Kiefer returns to help gauge the upcoming battles they have to fight as a result of the new "Let Bartlet Be Bartlet" policy they've adopted. And Joey Lucas comes to help, and Josh is all a-fluster as a result. Toby asks for some help from his - gasp - ex-wife, Congresswoman Andrea Wyatt.

JOSH: Nice! There's a lot of personality in that synopsis. I think we're done with the NBC synopses.

HRISHI: Yeah. Unless that was maybe too much personality.

JOSH: No. No. Loved it.

HRISHI: So, we get - before they get the call from the Senate Majority Leader's office - we get a look inside the office as they're talking and they're watching the speech. And there's this weird little bit that I kind of like where he asks about Cognac? Do you remember this part?

JOSH: Ah, yes, the distinction between Cognac and brandy.

HRISHI: Yeah. He says, "This is brandy and not Cognac. Anyone know the difference?" And one of his staffers says... [laughs] It's so good! She says the answer, but she doesn't actually answer it and he says... Here's the exchange:

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*STAFFER: Cognac is supposed to come from the...*

*SENATE MAJORITY LEADER: Cognac region of France! That's right.*

[End excerpt]

JOSH: Hah. So, do you find that a little character-revealing thing where he wants to be the one [laughs] who actually gets to answer? He kind of robs her of her moment. It speaks to a littleness of character in him.

HRISHI: I do! I think that that is a little tiny characterological insight, that this guy is a dink.

JOSH: Yeah, I think you're absolutely right, and that's a great little thing that could run by without even being noticed. [Hrishi laughs] I like that you picked up on that. A great little touch by Aaron. And Senate Majority Leader - unnamed, I believe. He has no character name, but he was played by Bruce Weitz, famously of *Hill Street Blues*, and I found him strangely Leo-like. He seemed to me like the GOP version of Leo, almost in appearance. I don't know. It's hard for me to articulate, but something about him really reminded me of John Spencer and Leo. This is like a doppelganger Leo.

HRISHI: Hmm. Because he's kind of tough?

JOSH: Yeah, he has a toughness? And also there may actually be a similarity to their features. He looks similar, and... Yeah, he's got a kind of grittiness to him.

HRISHI: Yeah. Speaking of *Hill Street Blues*, sort of, did you ever watch the movie *Cop Land*?

JOSH: Of course because my dear, dear friend Noah Emmerich is in it!

HRISHI: That's right! And John Spencer.

JOSH: Ooh, I forgot that! And Sylvester Stallone.

HRISHI: And Sylvester Stallone, yeah.

JOSH: Who else? It has quite a cast, that movie.

HRISHI: It's an amazing cast, yeah! Harvey Keitel and Robert de Niro and Ray Liotta and Annabella Sciorra...

JOSH: Damn. That's a cast!

HRISHI: Oh, it's crazy. Janeane Garofalo is in it. Robert Patrick. It's huge! Who does...

JOSH: It's like the "It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World" of cop movies.

HRISHI: Right. And Noah plays the deputy for Sylvester Stallone, right?

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Anyway, John Spencer is very hard-boiled in that. He's a bad guy, but he's very hard-boiled and tough in that movie.

JOSH: He may be hard-boiled, but he's a good egg. [Hrishi laughs] I apologize to everyone. I don't even know what that means.

HRISHI: As Josh shows himself out, I will say you guys should all watch *Cop Land*.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: It's an underseen movie, I think.

JOSH: I agree. I might have to revisit it.

HRISHI: I will watch that with you if you ever want to. There's another part that I liked in that cold open: When Josh finally gets the call that Sam is bucking him up for, Donna comes and she brings him a phone. And their exchange, it's really great. It's so clipped. It has that Sorkin kind of rhythm to it.

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*DONNA: Josh.*

*JOSH: The call?*

*DONNA: On the cell.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: And this is the part that I love. She says, "On the cell." She's holding a cell phone, and she says, "On the cell."

JOSH: Hah.

HRISHI: Where else would it be? [both laugh]

JOSH: You notice all the little stuff. I didn't even pick up on that. That's odd.

HRISHI: That's a great detail. But I like that even Donna seems sort of resolute in that moment. You know, Josh has kind of been ignoring Sam as Sam tries to buck him up, and it almost feels like Donna and he are on the same page. They're, like, here to get the job done.

JOSH: Right.

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*JOSH: Hi, Senator. Why don't you take your legislative agenda and shove it up your ass?*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: It's a great cold open. It's a great toss to the main titles, as he literally tosses the phone.

JOSH: Hah.

HRISHI: Oh! I was going to say that Josh's "You can take your legislative agenda and shove it up your ass" felt like a return to the Rahm Emanuel roots of this character. [Josh laughs]. As we get into the episode, we get a return to one of my favorite things, which is Toby over Sam's shoulder as he tries to write ...

JOSH: Yes, yes. I think that's good. That's very good.

HRISHI: ...the birthday message. I loved that. And then here, he's just giving him [expletive deleted] as he tries to write something, and he's like,

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*TOBY: Sam?*

*SAM: Yeah?*

*TOBY: You're going to come to a verb soon, right?*

[End excerpt]

JOSH: Are we jumping past the breakfast scene?

HRISHI: Uhh, no.



JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: This is one meeting before breakfast.

JOSH: Nice.

HRISHI: And I love [laughs] this, too. In that one scene too between Toby and Sam. Sam says:

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*SAM: Ok. You know what this is called?*

*TOBY: Bad writing?*

*SAM: Imagery.*

*TOBY: Well, you say potato.*

[End excerpt]

JOSH: [laughs] That's a great exchange.

HRISHI: It's really great. I want to believe this is part of the energy of the "Let Bartlet Be Bartlet" momentum, but it feels like - even the way they are poking and prodding each other here - feels energized, and excited. If you could ever imagine saying that Toby, as a curmudgeon, could somehow also seem energized, he seems energized in this moment. I also noticed that in this episode - I saw a little bit of grey at Rob Lowe's temples, and...

JOSH: Huh?

HRISHI: ...it looked so good [Josh laughs] that it actually made me look forward, for a second. In a brief moment of [Josh laughs] unrealistic [Hrishi laughs] expectations, I got a little bit excited.

JOSH: You think when it finally comes in for you, you'll start to look like Rob Lowe.

HRISHI: [laughs] Exactly. That's all that was holding me back before was my lack of grey hair. [laughs] And now?

JOSH: Yeah, it hasn't played out that way in my experience. [Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: I have started noticing a few grey hairs at my temples, so I think that's part of it. I was just trying to put a good face on it, literally and metaphorically.

JOSH: Are you in the plucking-out stage

HRISHI: No, I'm just in a kind of "looking at it and, you know, contemplating my mortality."

JOSH: Ahh, yes.

HRISHI: Not actually doing anything about it.

JOSH: Well, is there something to do? Is there any hedge against mortality that I'm unaware of?

HRISHI: [laughs] Right.

JOSH: Like, at the first sight of a grey hair you should have yourself cryogenically frozen?

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: What are we talking about? [both laugh]

HRISHI: That would also be a good title for this podcast. I like that this episode continues our exploration into the quirks of Margaret's personality:

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*MARGARET: Yes?*

*LEO: The list of names I gave you before?*

*MARGARET: Dalton, Dawson, Foxworthy, Grier, Morgenthau, Stackhouse, Sugarbaker. LEO: You didn't need to memorize it.*

*MARGARET: Couldn't help it...*

*LEO: Ok.*

*MARGARET: My mind works that way.*

*LEO: Yes. Call their offices...*

[End excerpt]

JOSH: Yes! We're getting a lot of Margaret. She is really growing and developing as a character, and I'm enjoying her. Now we're at the breakfast scene, and she is, in a very OCD-like way, setting up the table for breakfast and arranging things just so. Right? The napkins, the silverware, she's really got a whole... thing.

HRISHI: It's great. And she asks Josh if he assigns his clothes days of the week [laughs] when he reveals that he's wearing his regular Tuesday suit. Josh can't catch a break in this episode.

JOSH: No, indeed he can't. And let me ask you: Is that suit a particularly fantastic suit?

HRISHI: Well, like President Obama's tan suit, I think just the fact that you're wearing a suit that isn't dark is noteworthy.

JOSH: I see. That's what stands out.

HRISHI: It does.

JOSH: M'kay. Fair enough. I accept that.

HRISHI: I think it doesn't stand out quite as much because we have a daytime scene outside here, which is very rare. This season has been so dark, so dimly lit, that I was shocked to see a scene that was so bright.

JOSH: And then later in the episode, we will get Andy and Toby strolling by the Potomac in another outdoor scene.

HRISHI: Yeah. Showing off those production values.

JOSH: But it is - It's funny. They're such office denizens that it's almost jarring when you see them outside in an open environment.

HRISHI: Yeah. No dramatic shadows cast across half of their face. No chiaroscuro.

JOSH: Ooh. Nice. Nice use. Have a ten-dollar word.

HRISHI: I loved when Sam and Toby are walking to the meeting. Sam sort of tries to do a telladonna for our episode and its title as he talks about mandatory minimums to Toby. But, you know, normally in the telladonna format it feels like one person is saying "Here's some information." It's expository and it's presented in a "Here's some information. Let me ask you a question about that. Let me give you some more information." But in this one, that purpose was being served while also moving the plot along, too. Like, Toby gets to disagree with him.

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*SAM: Mandatory minimums are racist.*

*TOBY: I understand that.*

*SAM: They're a red herring.*

*TOBY: I understand that, too.*

*SAM: It's a way of looking like you're tough on crime without assuming the burden of being tough on crime.*

*TOBY: Everything you've said I understand.*

*SAM: I'm saying...*

*TOBY: We do things one thing at a time.*

*SAM: But I'm saying we don't have time to do things one thing at a time!*

*TOBY: We're talking about...*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: And then the best part of it is that it turns out they've gone past the place where the meeting is just because...

JOSH: ...Sam was enjoying the walk. [both laugh] They're a funny twosome, Sam and Toby.

HRISHI: They are. Would you say they're a bit like you and me?

JOSH: Umm... Except aren't we both Sam?

HRISHI: [laughs] I was going to say we're both Toby!

JOSH: Are you suggest - How dare you! Are you suggesting I'm Toby? Am I the misanthropic... Well, I guess of us two, certainly. That's how you were parceling it out, right? [laughs] I'm Toby and you're Sam, right?

HRISHI: [laughs] I already said the thing about the grey hair. You know I'm...

JOSH: You're younger, and tall, and handsome, and charming...

HRISHI: ...I'm completely in the, uhh [laughs]

JOSH: ...and positive and a ray of light. Like Toby.

HRISHI: Ok. Look, I started this episode with a level of wishful thinking, so just let me see it all the way through. [both laugh] Are you saying you have something against Toby?

JOSH: No. Indeed I don't.

HRISHI: There you go. While they're talking about Josh's suit, Josh let's out a few "Donnaaaa!"s

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*DONNA: You should notice that Josh has on a nice suit.*

*MARGARET: That is a nice suit!*

*JOSH: Donna!*

*DONNA: We'll call it his "Joey Lucas suit."*

*JOSH: Donna!*

*DONNA: You know, from now on...*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: They're so great. They're so wonderfully wounded every time she said something, it's just... It's like he might as well be saying "Moooom!"

JOSH: Yeah. It's very grade school - the level of teasing about Joey Lucas. What was your take on "nervous hoolelia"?

HRISHI: I was about to ask you that one!

JOSH: I can address it. I was wondering, did you look into it at all? Or do you have an initial reaction? I'm mainly excited to discuss it because of Jew-hater Jim, because this is going to lead right into another discussion in which he has no interest.

HRISHI: Oh I loved that little bit of dialogue, and I've always assumed that that wasn't a word, but I liked that anyway. But I feel like you have some insight for me. Is "hoolelia" a real word?

JOSH: It is not! However, there is a Yiddish word, chalaria. And there is a saying: "nervous chalaria." "Chalaria" in Yiddish literally means "cholera,"...

HRISHI: Hah.

JOSH: ...or a plague, and there is some construction, I think it's some construction of American Jews, where a "nervous chalaria" means a "nervous wreck." And so clearly - and I don't know if Aaron in writing this was even cognizant of why he was doing this - that's what "nervous hoolelia" is, for sure. Now, there is no - I don't know if Sam's religious background is ever explicitly dealt with. We know that he likes to sail as a hobby, so there is strong anecdotal evidence [Hrishi laughs] that he's not Jewish.

HRISHI: [laughs] Right.

JOSH: However, I think grandma might have been! Or somebody! Somebody on Sam's grandmother's side is Jewish. Because "nervous hoolelia" is clearly [laughs] a version [Hrishi laughs] of "nervous chalaria," a Yiddish phrase.

HRISHI: Yiddish is for everyone, right? I certainly use a lot of Yiddish.

JOSH: Absolutely. But there's no discussion. [both laugh] Neither of the Jews jumps in and says, "I think you're thinking of 'chalaria,' as in 'nervous chalaria.'" [Hrishi laughs] So that made me laugh.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: So we've got Joey Lucas again.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Marlee Matlin back in the show. And I was thinking we've never mentioned - and this has been an oversight - the actor who plays Kenny who signs for her.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And that's an actor named Bill O'Brien. And he's actually, I think very, very good. We get precious little of him as a character. It's not like we get a lot of dialogue or maybe almost none that's just Kenny. It's usually Kenny speaking for one or the other of the participants in a conversation, but I have a sense of who he is, and he is able on the fly to be very much in the moment. I buy him as a person in this world. I give him great credit. And it sounds like he has a very interesting background as well. He worked for the NEA [National Education Association], and before that he served for seven years as producing director and managing director for Deaf West Theater. And that's the company that now has a great production of *Spring Awakening* on Broadway. So he's got a major background. Very interesting storyline. I think he's very good on the show. It's been pointed out to me by several people that I had used the term "hearing impaired," which is considered offensive, and I certainly had no intention to be offensive. It was just ignorance, and that the proper...

HRISHI: Nomenclature?

JOSH: ...nomenclature - the proper nomenclature is "deaf," both hearing-wise and culturally. That's the correct word to use. And that is the word I will use moving on.

HRISHI: He is incredibly impressive, I think, both as a character and as an actor. Like, I think that we've talked about how the show celebrates people who are great at their job, and I think in a very subtle way it celebrates how great he is as an interpreter. He's there; he's not in the way. I mean, it's just amazing to watch. Even in this fictional context of just, like, how much he manages to stay out of the chemistry between Josh and Joey. I mean, that chemistry is so electric, even though there's somebody in between them actually saying the words that are her part of the conversation.

JOSH: Yeah. Very well-put! It's a beautiful, physical performance. He's in numerous walk and talks. There's an agility and an elegance to the way he moves with them through scenes.

HRISHI: And I also really appreciate his voice. He has a really gentle and modulated voice. And it's so cool how he represents the voice of Joey.

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*KENNY (as JOEY): Your staff likes to decorate their desks with hand lotion?*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: I like the little gender-switching that happens, that you have a male interpreter for a woman. And just the way he speaks both says a lot about his character while also influencing our reading of her character.

JOSH: Well-put.

HRISHI: It's complicated. It's a layered, subtle, nuanced thing. As opposed to most musicals [Both laugh] And yet, still, Josh can't catch a break with Joey.

JOSH: No. He has less game than I would have anticipated.

HRISHI: Yeah? You would've thought that he would have game?

JOSH: Uhh, yeah! I mean, Josh Lyman as brought to life by Brad Whitford has great confidence...

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: ...to the point of cockiness. And it doesn't carry over, [laughs] at least in this instance, to his interactions with the fairer sex because he can't seem to quite make it happen. I mean, we know from - is it "20 Hours in L.A." - when he saw her with Al Kiefer and there was clear chemistry between the two of them. And then even after she, in a very funny moment in this episode, [Hrishi laughs] announces out loud:

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*KENNY (as JOEY): I'm not sleeping with Al Kiefer anymore!*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughs] Right.

JOSH: Even after that - Dude, how much more of an introduction do you need? Make it happen...

HRISHI: [laughs] Yeah.

JOSH: ...ask her out! But even with that, he seems to lack game.

HRISHI: I think you're right, that we are meant to assume that he would have some pretty good game. And so, therefore, the fact that he's got so much trouble now, with Joey, is an indication

of how much he likes her and how intimidating she is - that she's thrown off even this normally arrogant guy.

JOSH: Yeah. Very good. I was about to say, I think probably it's an indication of the depth of his feeling.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Yeah. You're right.

HRISHI: Speaking of formidable women, let's talk about Congresswoman Wyatt.

JOSH: Yes! Our first introduction to Toby's ex-wife.

HRISHI: Yeah. Really, our first introduction to the idea of Toby as a romantic person.

JOSH: As a human being.

HRISHI: [laughs] Every other character has had some kind of reference or plot point, even minor ones, about their love life outside of the office except for Toby, at this point.

JOSH: Yeah, that's right.

HRISHI: You know, one thing that people have noticed, is that even though we're now this many episodes into season one - we have seen in the past that Toby is actually wearing a wedding ring, even though we've never mentioned - there wasn't any mention of a wife or an ex-wife or anything like that. The fact that it's his ex-wife and he's still wearing his wedding ring actually is a really beautiful detail and says a lot.

JOSH: Yes, I agree. And actually, at your behest, I posed the question to Aaron, because I think it is theorized among the fandom that it was the ring that led to the character development or to the character being written. And so I asked Aaron about that. I said: "So, we are about to discuss episode 1.20, 'Mandatory Minimums.' We meet Andrea Wyatt for the first time. *The West Wing* lore has it that you noticed Richard Schiff was wearing his wedding ring on camera in a few episodes and that prompted you to write an ex-wife for whom he still carries a small torch. True?" And he wrote back: "True. We were a few days into shooting the pilot when I noticed that Richard was wearing a wedding ring. I went to him and said, 'You know, Richard, I didn't think Toby was married.' He said, 'Yeah, I don't think he is either.' I said, 'Why is he wearing a wedding ring?' and Richard said 'I was leaving that to you to figure out.' [Hrishi laughs] And so it came to be that Toby was still in love with his ex-wife." So that's a great little story.

HRISHI: That's great.

JOSH: And true! Not part of the apocrypha.



HRISHI: Yeah. Well, that sort of messes in some way with everything that we've discussed about backstory.

JOSH: Ahh... In other words, you think Richard was, effectively, creating his own backstory.

HRISHI: [laughs] He forced the hand of backstory.

JOSH: Literally.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: With his own hand.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: He forced Aaron's hand.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah. I guess so. I guess Richard is more clever than most. And Aaron can be influenced. I did that with my character. I wore an eyepatch in my first episode hoping that Aaron would write me as a pirate, [Hrishi laughs] but it didn't work.

HRISHI: I thought you were going to say... something. This was my version of a Josh joke: "I did that by showing up to my first day of shooting being impossibly handsome, thus forcing them to write my character as someone who was very handsome."

JOSH: That would have been funnier. I wish I had said that.

HRISHI: Well, I learned it from watching you. [laughs]

JOSH: That's what rewriting is for.

HRISHI: [laughs] Ok, so let's talk about Andrea Wyatt, formidable sparring partner for Toby. And later on, we're going to talk to Kathleen York about her first day playing this character.

JOSH: "Bird," as she's known casually.

HRISHI: And professionally, as a musician.

JOSH: Actually, you're right. Yes. And she sings like one.

HRISHI: Like a musician?

JOSH: No, like a Kathleen.

HRISHI: Ah. Ok. I do love that she's just trying to get Toby to sit next to her on the grass, and by him not sitting next to her, it both seems like he hates nature and also that he's a little bit scared of her.

JOSH: Like, yeah, 'I better keep my distance.' She's taunting him with pie. Which was Thomas Dolby's original title for "She Blinded Me With Science."

[Song: "She Blinded Me With Science" excerpt]

*THOMAS DOLBY: [sung] She blinded me with science / [spoken] She blinded me with science!*

[End excerpt]

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: I think he went the right - it was a good choice. I'm going to get a Josh Joke in here by the end of the podcast. I'm off. I'm working at about level five. [Hrishi laughs] One thing I noticed, too, is that scene, I think, begins with Congresswoman Wyatt saying "What a lovely day it is!" and he says "Yeah, it's a beautiful day" and it just isn't. It's kind of a gray, overcast day, [Hrishi laughs] and I'm wondering whether that's supposed to be somehow revelatory character-wise or it's one of those things where nobody thought, like, "Hey, maybe we should tweak this opening line, since we only have one day to shoot this." We're in D.C., and it isn't particularly a nice day. It looks really cold to me.

HRISHI: [laughs] Like in the last episode: "As I look upon this beautiful vista."

JOSH: Right. [laughs] Ahh, there you go! Ooh, you're good!

HRISHI: But I like the interpretation that she's just - you know - she's an optimistic, positive person. Not necessarily the type of disposition that you would pair with Toby.

JOSH: Hmm. Maybe that's why it didn't work out.

HRISHI: What do you think of them as a match?

JOSH: I like it. I mean, I immediately like the vibe between them. It makes me intrigued. It makes me want to know more. I mean, we're not told a lot, or we're told, actually rather, almost nothing about what happened or what their particular story is. But I can feel in Richard/Toby that there's still a lot there. Like, this woman means a lot to him, and I can see sadness in him. But I can also see that she still feels a lot for him as well, and while their relationship is playful, and clearly amicable, there's greater stuff going on underneath that maybe they avoid.

HRISHI: Yeah. I find it a little bit heartbreaking, actually.

JOSH: Yeah, it is.

HRISHI: Because they seem so great together. And I think there's a little bit of - seems like she has all the power and Toby is just really in love with her and she knows it. And so she's being kind to him without reciprocating.

JOSH: Hmm.

HRISHI: Right? It doesn't seem like she's in love with him the way that he's in love with her.

JOSH: Well, yeah. I think if you're going to try to say who's got the emotional advantage, it is she. But I see real fondness and also there's - she sort of touches his lapel in a later scene in his office in a way where I see that there's still something there - I think even in the way she looks at him. And yeah, I would say overall the feeling is just sadness and lost potential, because they do seem like they could be a very good couple.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And like most good writing and acting, it makes me want to see more. It leaves me wondering, and wanting to see them together more, and wanting to learn a little bit more about what their story was.

HRISHI: Absolutely. I'm glad you mentioned the thing with the lapel. That made me think of when Donna adjusted Josh's suit...

JOSH: Bowtie?

HRISHI: Yeah. And much more than the kind of like, weird awkward kissing between Zoe and Charlie, I like the - maybe I'm a prude - but I like the touching of a lapel as the most intimate thing that can be done.

JOSH: Yeah. I agree with you. They're very good together. It's good casting. "Bird" is terrific in the role, and it makes me wonder - we'll have to ask her later - it makes me wonder whether they knew each other before and how long they got to work together before they started filming, because...

HRISHI: Yeah, that chemistry feels lived-in.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: There's a great moment when they're in the Oval Office with Al Kiefer, and it's time for lunch, and they break for lunch. And everybody gets up and leaves the room except for Al Kiefer. [laughs] They all just leave him sitting there.

JOSH: Like he wasn't even invited to lunch.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: There's a little mention earlier - a little discussion - that revolves around something I'd brought up in an earlier episode as to whether it's a pollster's job to lobby his client, or just to provide the numbers and get out.

HRISHI: Right. And I think the same thing happens here as what happened in "20 Hours in L.A.," which is that they just want the numbers from Al Kiefer, and he wants to actually spin it into policy.

JOSH: Right. And he is working overtime to make his points.

HRISHI: Right. And they are humoring him, but really they are not interested at all.

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*AL KIEFER: It'll doom the midterms in November, it'll haunt you at the convention, and if you manage to get renominated - which is far from a lock - there's no way you win reelection.*

*SAM: Al's Mr. Good News Happy Guy.*

*KIEFER: Sam...*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: He just doesn't seem to get that they just aren't that into him.

JOSH: Hah. [laughs] That's right.

HRISHI: You know, one of my favorite bits in this episode is when Paul Provenza's character comes in to meet with Sam...

JOSH: Steve Onorato?

HRISHI: Steve Onorato, yeah. ...and there's just a couple of lines, but the dynamic just kind of shifts back and forth. And I get surprised a little bit as the discussion goes - when he restates the threat that they had made previously, that the FEC nominations are going to be a deal breaker, and it's going to bring on this onslaught of political repercussions. And he's trying to sort of, you know, make a trade or make some kind of deal with Sam. And Sam is saying, you know, one: this isn't my fight; I'm not your guy on it. And two: we've already kind of made our decision. And Steve Onorato makes this disparaging remark. It starts off when he says:

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*STEVE: You can have all the strategy sessions you want. No one you need's going to take your phone call. And you, Sam, can go back to writing speeches for when the President meets the Girl Scout who sold the most cupcakes.*

SAM: *Cookies.*

STEVE: *Huh?*

SAM: *Girl Scouts sell cookies, not cupcakes. And it was a pretty good speech I wrote. It was about volunteerism.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: And you think that there's like... Ok, that's going to be the rub, is that, like, this guy tries to take a shot at Sam, and Sam's gonna be like, correcting: "This idiot doesn't even know what Girl Scouts sell," and he says "cookies."

JOSH: Which is a classic Sorkinism, right...

HRISHI: Yes, definitely.

JOSH: ...when the other side - when the evil side - you think scores a good point, but then they mix up Arthur Miller with Arthur Murray.

HRISHI: Exactly. It's definitely an echo of that. But then there's this other turn to it, where he says, "That was a pretty good speech that I wrote. It was about volunteerism." It turns out that this thing, what seems like a hypothetical insult that Onorato's throwing at him, actually is referencing a real speech, and Sam actually does take some real umbrage to it. And that there was this, like, beautiful ideal behind it as well. And then it keeps going! Like, it feels, again, like the way that a - the argument gets a little pettier there as he's walking away, and he's like, "Keep up the good work, Sam!" And Sam responds again. He says, "I will." Like, you really see him getting pissed and testy at that point, and I love that it just kept going. Little twists.

JOSH: I forgot to mention one little moment in that first Andrea/Toby scene. Did you catch that she called him Pokey?

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

TOBY: *And making decisions for myself is my birthright!*

ANDY: *Good to get that off your chest there, Pokey?*

TOBY: *Yes.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: Yes, I did. [laughs]

JOSH: So you get that reference - I don't know - as a younger man?

HRISHI: Pokey? Like Pokey and Gumby? The horse in *Gumby* ?

JOSH: Yes. Pokey, Gumby's pony friend, is kind of like the Eeyore of the *Gumby* series.

HRISHI: (cross talk) Right, of the Gumby World. Yeah.

JOSH: The more down-to-Earth - and I love that. It was just a great little throwaway that speaks to their relationship. I like that a lot. [Hrishi laughs] Gumby and Pokey.

HRISHI: That's pretty good. That's pretty good for Sam and Toby. As a duo, they're kind of like Gumby and Pokey.

JOSH: Yeah, absolutely, I can see that. How do you know Gumby and Pokey?

HRISHI: I don't know, that's just in the pop culture miasma, I guess.

JOSH: Ooh, nice. Get down! Chiaroscuro, miasma, and what's going to be the third one? If you say ichor at any point, which is the fluid that flows in the veins of the gods, [Hrishi laughs] I'm going to quit the podcast. But of course, now I've said it. [Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: And you quit. [laughs]

JOSH: And I quit. I've just been looking for a way out. But hey, too much work ultimately.

HRISHI: That's definitely true. This is a great, just a great episode. We haven't said it yet I guess, but this is a fantastic episode. Are you with me on that?

JOSH: Oh, I agree with you. I also - I'm at the point now too - as we're seeing the finish line of our first season of the show - where I just keep getting knocked out at the quality of the show and this insanely great season of a show that was written as [emphatically] Aaron was writing the second season of *Sports Night* . And though he had help in - you see other names in the credits and he has a writing staff and all that - but it's shocking. It's an astounding achievement and the show is ramping up!

HRISHI: Yeah!

JOSH: It's not like he's crawling to the finish line and just going to, you know, take a vacation while someone else runs the show for another few years. He's going to continue, but he's also - we're also steaming towards the finale.

HRISHI: Yeah, you had said about "Let Bartlet Be Bartlet" that was your favorite episode so far. How does this one compare to that?

JOSH: Umm. Again, I'm very bad at playing this game...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...because sometimes I think, "What do I really think?"

HRISHI: It's kind of a pointless game. I will admit that I'm asking kind of a pointless question.

JOSH: Well, this also feels like Part Two to me.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I like how the energy of "Let Bartlet Be Bartlet" just blows right into this episode so it almost feels like a two-fer for me.

HRISHI: Yeah, I think that's a great way to look at it. It's hard for me to separate the two. I mean 1.19 is made to be a better episode because of 1.20.

JOSH: It'd be like Gummy without Pokey.

HRISHI: [laughs] There's some great fire between Danny and C.J. when they finally do get it all out there.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And I love how as things are heating up, and they go into C.J.'s office, they see Carol, and they both still say, "Hi Carol." "Hi Carol." [laughs] as they...

JOSH: That is funny. Mid-fight.

HRISHI: Yeah. Just after C.J. gets berated by Leo.

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*LEO: These amateur mistakes make me crazy, C.J..*

*C.J.: Yes.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: Felt a little bit cruel, especially when Josh has already said, "She knows that she's made the mistake. She knows that was something she wasn't supposed to do."

JOSH: And she's going to go right out there and fix it.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: It felt a little bit much, like, "Dude."

HRISHI: Yeah, Leo has no chill. And C.J. has to kind of sit there and take it. But when Danny tries to do the same thing, she's like, "Nuh-uh." And you feel like she's letting out frustration, not just at him but also at what she just had to sit there...

JOSH: ...and take it.

HRISHI: And it's great. But they're both great. I don't think either one of them gets the upper hand in this. C.J. says,

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*C.J.: Congratulations. You're a movie star; you're also on the outside looking in for a while, so get used to it.*

*DANNY: Used to it? I'm paid for it! What you don't understand...*

*C.J.: Don't tell me what I don't understand! I'm not in my freshman year anymore!*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: And C.J. also gets to throw out, "Don't tell me what I don't understand!" as if in response to every single episode that has come previously to this. She is really firing back at all of it. I wanted to ask you about your thoughts on the title. "Mandatory Minimums" of course is about the sentencing policy where...

JOSH: That has led to mass incarceration.

HRISHI: Right, but - maybe I'm reading too much into it - but I think just by virtue of the fact that you make something a title, it invites you to look at a possible deeper meaning or a double meaning. And I was wondering if the phrase "mandatory minimums" then ends up getting lifted off the page for you, and you start thinking about other things it might mean or be referencing.

JOSH: Well, now I feel like I certainly should have. [both laugh] I can't say that it did. I sort of took it more as the sort of elephant in the room that they will not, or they have chosen not to, address but that Aaron has. It's the focus of the episode, if not of their legislative agenda at this time.

HRISHI: Ahh.

JOSH: That scene - maybe improbable as it may be - in the Press Room where Leo wants Margaret to get in touch with this list of seven people and get representatives from each of them and she keeps asking what it is and of course with her interest, ours builds as well. And then it leads to this great scene in the Press Room...

HRISHI: Right.



JOSH: ...of use of leverage almost to the point of extortion where [laughs] he essentially lets them know that each of these Congresspeople has a relative who has gotten off easy because of the type of drug that their relative happened to be on.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And that he has this information, and that he will use it publicly. Risky play for someone who himself is a recovering addict. But it is a pretty powerful scene...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...and use of power. And so, behind the scenes they are addressing the issue.

HRISHI: Yeah, and I think that - I like that they are so galvanized. That despite the fact that Toby said earlier, "We're going to do one thing at a time," they decide they're not going to do one thing at a time. They're throwing their hats over the wall both on the FEC and on drugs.

JOSH: Right, they come around. Well, let me hear, so what is your secondary meaning to the title that went over my head?

HRISHI: The phrase "mandatory minimums" when removed from the just sort of literal context of the sentencing world - I was thinking about what that could possibly also mean. And I was looking for something about the idea of the very least that you could do, right? The very least that you could do, or contribute, to still make something happen or get the job done. They're still trying to get rid of mandatory minimums, right, both in sentencing - but I think there is also this sloughing off of their former selves. Where they were maybe doing whatever they had to try and stay in office, trying to not lose reelection. And, I don't know, maybe now they are getting rid of mandatory minimums. They're not just doing the bare minimum in order to stay in office, they're actually throwing their hats over the wall.

JOSH: I like it. See, this is where you are invaluable. I actually like that unpacking of the title. I'm a little bit more short-sighted and I was just focused on whether it should have been "Mandatory Minima." [Hrishi laughs] And that's where my contemplation of the title ended. [both laugh]

HRISHI: There's a really beautiful discussion about the actual policy and Leo being the voice of that threat when the President says to him later on,

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*BARTLET: If there's anyone qualified to talk about the benefits of treatment versus criminal action, it's you. Is there anyone whose life would be better right now if you'd gone to jail instead of rehab?*

*LEO: No.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: And this is part of the reason why I was interested in talking to the Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson of Gary, Indiana. Before she was mayor, she was Attorney General of Indiana, and she was a judge. And she has also been the CEO of the National Association of Drug Court Professionals. Our friend Melissa Fitzgerald works for Justice for Vets, and the National Association of Drug Court Professionals is the umbrella organization that Justice for Vets operates under. So I thought she could talk to us about her take on this discussion between treatment versus enforcement, and also catch us up on where we're at now in 2016 versus where we were in 2000.

JOSH: Fantastic.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for joining me.

MAYOR FREEMAN-WILSON: Thank you.

HRISHI: Your honor, have you ever watched *The West Wing* before this?

MAYOR FREEMAN-WILSON: Yes, I have. I was a fan when it first came out and so - yeah I did.

HRISHI: I wanted to talk a little bit about your background. You're the mayor of Gary, Indiana now, but could you tell me about your history with the drug courts?

MAYOR FREEMAN-WILSON: I got involved with drug treatment courts when I was a judge in the Gary City Court. That was back in 1996 and the drug courts had gotten started in '94, so I was privileged to be in on the sort of early efforts to create drug treatment courts. I did a lot of the training with the national organization, the National Association of Drug Court Professionals, and then ultimately had an opportunity to lead that organization. I came back to Gary to practice law. I was a defense attorney, and spent some time, even prior to my drug court involvement, as the Attorney General of Indiana. I've seen this issue from just about every side of the equation, up to and including having individuals in my family who were addicted to alcohol and other drugs, and to see the devastation that occurred in their lives. Both being addicted, and being imprisoned as a result of that, can have a tremendous impact on families and on communities.

HRISHI: What was your reaction to the way *The West Wing* discussed the issue of treatment versus enforcement?

MAYOR FREEMAN-WILSON: Well, there were two things that struck me. The first was, while we've moved light-years since the episode first aired, there's still this sentiment that it is some type of evidence of a moral deficiency when people are addicted to alcohol and other drugs, even though the fact that it is clearly a disease has been proven, documented, all of that. So that was the first thing that struck me. The second was how do you get the general public to buy in? Do you talk about it in a cost, in a dollars and cents analysis? Or, do you take it to the next level and really talk about the racial implications of it? Because of course by doing that, you will make everyone uncomfortable. And I really love the scene where they brought the staffers in

from the congressional offices and said, "Hey, this is what we are prepared to do if you start down that road." Because that helped them to have it in context.

HRISHI: Right, it put the hypocrisy in high relief.

MAYOR FREEMAN-WILSON: Yes.

HRISHI: What about on the issue itself of mandatory minimums? Do you find yourself still having to make some of the fundamental arguments, like just the idea that treatment works or that mandatory minimums are racist? Do you still find yourself having to give those arguments voice?

MAYOR FREEMAN-WILSON: I don't find that I have to provide that argument, or advocate for that position, as much as people just don't know. People will say, "Well, we do have treatment. There are NA and AA groups all over." But that's not really treatment. So it's the education that really is not available for those who make dollar decisions. Not only does it work for the individual, but it's much more cost effective if you think about the fact that you could spend anywhere from \$30K to \$50K, depending on which state you're in, incarcerating someone, and you could spend as little as \$3000 to \$7500 actually providing treatment to that same individual. And that's not even talking about the impact of not having to have children as wards of the state. So there are a whole variety of cost-savings that aren't simply just factored into the dollars for incarceration versus dollars for treatment argument.

HRISHI: What about recidivism?

MAYOR FREEMAN-WILSON: So you've got a 70% recidivism rate for the traditional route, but for drug court, you only have a 25% recidivism rate.

HRISHI: So 30% success with incarceration versus 75% with treatment courts?

MAYOR FREEMAN-WILSON: Yeah, that's a big, big, big difference.

HRISHI: Your Honor, thank you so much for talking to me. I'm such a fan of yours and everything that you're trying to do in Gary, Indiana.

MAYOR FREEMAN-WILSON: You're too kind. I'm honored to be a part of this podcast and really find it intriguing because the debate on so many of these issues continues even today.

[Music]

JOSH: Do you like that scene where - I do - where Bartlet, President Bartlet, is in bed, the President Bed, and [Hrishi laughs] and one by one pretty much everyone on the staff enters and talks to him.

HRISHI: I do like it. I like even the setup of "Well, I have to be awake in four hours anyway."

JOSH: Right. [Hrishi laughs] To me, I think this is also a little nod from Aaron to the stateroom scene in the Marx Brothers' movie, *A Night at the Opera*, in which person after person after person comes into the ship's cabin until it's ridiculously overflowing with people. [Hrishi laughs] I kind of wanted it to reach that point. But it made me laugh.

HRISHI: Yeah? So Leo comes in. Leo's talking to him; he wakes him up. I love that throughout this episode, including in that moment, Josh just keeps announcing his status with Joey to everybody, regardless of whether it's appropriate at all. [both laugh]

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: He's so in his head about Joey that he just keeps blabbering about it. He just keeps talking about it to Leo and Leo doesn't even realize that Joey Lucas is a woman and not a man. [laughs]

JOSH: He's not quite up to speed on the Joey/Josh romance.

HRISHI: There are so many good bits, like the "I met with Congresswoman Wyatt." [laughs] He's like,

*[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]*

*TOBY: You call your wife Dr. Bartlet?*

*BARTLET: Just for the turn-on.*

[End excerpt]

[Both laugh]

HRISHI: That's great. "Sometimes I call my wife Dr. Bartlet." [laughs]

There was another thing I wanted to mention. I was going to say there's more about Josh and Joey when they finally do connect and he says,

*[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]*

*JOSH: I wore this suit special today. This isn't my regular Tuesday suit.*

*JOEY: You have a regular Tuesday suit?*

*JOSH: No.*

*JOEY: For me?*

*JOSH: Yes.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: That's about as close as we see him get to actually asking her out.

JOSH: Yeah, that's right.

HRISHI: We didn't talk about Charlie's refrain in this episode:

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*CHARLIE: That's a fine looking woman, Josh.*

*JOSH: Yes.*

*CHARLIE: I could help you out.*

*JOSH: Help me out with what?*

*CHARLIE: She's a fine looking woman.*

*JOSH: Stop saying that.*

*CHARLIE: I owe you a lot, Josh. You got me this job. I'd like to pay you back.*

*JOSH: By helping me out?*

*CHARLIE: By helping you out.*

*JOSH: What makes you think I need any help?*

*CHARLIE: She's a fine looking woman, Josh.*

*JOSH: Get away from me.*

[End excerpt]

JOSH: Oh dear. It made me smile, I don't know if it's appropriate. [Hrishi laughs]

I did like - regardless of the recurring verbal leitmotif of "She's a fine looking woman" - I did like the idea that maybe Josh does need a little advice from Charlie in this arena.

[Both laugh]

HRISHI: I love that. As we've said, Charlie is the one that has managed to pursue and maintain a healthy relationship, so why not let him give some advice?

JOSH: This is true. I get such a kick too out of watching Dulé because we're still friends. He's so young...

HRISHI: [cross talk] [laughs] You're still enjoying that?

JOSH: ...in this first season, and you know, he just looks like such a kid. And there's something in his eyes that's very funny, kind of mischievous and he's like, "Alright, I'm here if you need me. I'm just saying." There's something very charming about him in this episode.

HRISHI: In the moment when they are about to break out *The Godfather* metaphor, and Sam is talking to Josh and Toby and they explain to him what the political jujitsu that Onorato is trying to pull on him really broke down to, and he says,

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*SAM: Are you saying he - he tried to practice on my...*

*TOBY: ...credulous simplicity?*

*SAM: Yeah!*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: This is actually a reference that Aaron is making to a musical

JOSH: That's right. It's from the big, 11 o'clock number in *Our Town* . [Hrishi laughs] No. [laughs]

HRISHI: My favorite musical! [laughs]

JOSH: That's right. No, actually you are correct. It's from the classic Gilbert and Sullivan operetta, the *Pirates of Penzance* , in which the Pirate King says, "Do you mean that in order to save his contemptible life, he dared to impress upon our credulous simplicity?" And if you don't know Gilbert and Sullivan, there's a great, probably early 80s movie version starring Kevin Kline as the Pirate King. So if you want to hear him utter that famous line, you can.

HRISHI: I love that kind of reference is completely slipped in there and you wouldn't necessarily know it. And if you didn't know it doesn't take anything away.

JOSH: It's like a *West Wing* Easter Egg.

HRISHI: It is. Yeah. And I love how -- you know, of course, Lin-Manuel Miranda did this a lot in *Hamilton* - little things that turn out to be references to *The West Wing* . So it's nice that there is a predecessor.

JOSH: Yeah, Easter Egg... It's like an omelet.

HRISHI: [laughs] Exactly.

JOSH: Layers upon layers. Actually, now that you say that it makes me think. Have you seen the - what they call the *Hamil-tome* ?

HRISHI: I haven't seen it, I mean in person. But I've seen it on the Internet.

JOSH: It's pretty fantastic. I bought a copy for my daughter - we're both pretty big *Hamilton* fans - and it would be kind of great if Aaron did a similar companion piece to *The West Wing*, or if someone else did it on his behalf, finding all the little references.

HRISHI: Isn't that what we're doing?

JOSH: Oh yeah, that's right.

HRISHI: Ok. [both laugh]

JOSH: I guess what I'm really saying is, you and I should have a book deal. So if anyone's listening, [memos@thewestwingweekly.com](mailto:memos@thewestwingweekly.com) would be the place to offer us a book deal.

[Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: Ok, so my question about this quote: Is Toby just making fun of Sam Seaborn there? Or do you think that's an accurate way to describe that character - that he has, like me perhaps - a credulous simplicity?

JOSH: Yes, and though I think Toby poses it in a mocking slash negative way, I think it's also one of the nicest characteristics and one of the nicest qualities about Sam Seaborn. And then he gets absolutely riled up [both laugh] when it's made clear to him what happened. I was curious about that moment. Did it play like it made sense? Because Toby and Josh immediately realize what's going on here, that they planned to tee Sam up so that they can just absolutely slam him with the Laurie scenario. Did that track for you?

HRISHI: That they would do that? Or that Sam wouldn't get it?

JOSH: That they would get it. Is it so clear that this must be what - that's the politics of this - and these seasoned guys just see right away that they want to get him? What reason would there be to get Sam out ahead of this so, no, it must be Laurie? Because they just share a mutual laugh immediately.

HRISHI: Yeah, I guess so. I guess I bought it. I mean, I believe that these guys are seasoned chess players and maybe Sam would have seen it as well if it weren't for the fact that he had this face-to-face interaction and he does, you know, have this optimism and he takes people at their word.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And these two guys are cynical and they are one step removed from it so they can see it as - can see where the strings are being pulled.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: He's the Deputy Communications Director and here's the staffer of an opposing party senator coming out and trying to say, "You're actually an important guy." So definitely there's something suspicious about it as we're watching the scene with Sam and Steve. It seems a little bit fishy even though we don't totally know why. It's kind of adversarial, but it's also seen as amicable, like he's putting on a good face. But we know this guy...

JOSH: Clearly he's got some ulterior motive for approaching Sam, that's true.

HRISHI: Yeah, I certainly wasn't able to parse that in that moment when those guys say, "Oh that's - this is the reveal." I bought it. I bought it.

JOSH: I bought it too. [Hrishi laughs] No I get ya, I think you're right.

HRISHI: On that note, let's take a quick break and then when we come back, we'll talk to Kathleen "Bird" York.

[ad break]

JOSH: Hrishi and I are pleased now to welcome to the show an accomplished screenwriter, singer/songwriter, and actress. Gentle listeners, here to talk to us about playing Congresswoman Andrea Wyatt, is Kathleen "Bird" York.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for joining us.

KATHLEEN: Thanks for asking me.

HRISHI: I wanted to start by asking you about - before you actually shot anything - how you came to the role of Andrea Wyatt. Had you been watching the show already? Were you familiar?

KATHLEEN: I hadn't; I think I had seen one episode. I had a music career, so my music, especially then, was taking a lot of my time, so I wasn't spending a lot of time watching television. But my sense from the material that I read was they need someone to bat Toby around a little bit. That was my sense. I definitely have that as a natural attribute in my own personality, kind of taking the piss a bit out of people. I enjoy that. So, it was the day after my birthday that I met, and I remember I had - you know I usually don't ever drink before a meeting - but I had a couple glasses of champagne or something. It was my second meeting and I said to Aaron at one point, because it was a big mouthful of dialogue - surprise, surprise, Josh Malina, that never happens on that show - and at one point I needed to do it again, and I said,



“I’m so sorry, it was my birthday last night and...” And then Aaron goes, “You have a hangover?” And I said, “I wouldn’t call it a hangover, but...” and he seemed to like light up.

JOSH: Were you reading with him?

KATHLEEN: Yes I was, I forgot that part! Yeah, so I read with him. And then I got the gig.

HRISHI: When the part comes into your agent or something, they say, “Ok, this is what we’re looking for.” And there’s some sort of description of the character...

KATHLEEN: I thought I was too young for it. I was concerned that people would assume that I was much older than I am and that absolutely did happen from doing the show. I’d been working for a long time prior to that show and that show got a lot of attention within the business. And people just tacked another 10 years onto me.

HRISHI: That’s funny. I was thinking about that earlier today. I was thinking about Margaret on the show. Nicole Robinson was 27 when this season was being filmed and I just assumed that the character of Margaret was a lot older too. Right? Does she come across as a 27-year-old in this series?

KATHLEEN: No.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah. No, that’s true.

KATHLEEN: She’s so good in that.

HRISHI: I think part of it is in how they dress the characters, I think, and what they have to say.

KATHLEEN: Yeah, people would say to me, “Oh you know, you were so dowdy. You always looked so dowdy.” I would spent a lot of time online looking at every single congresswoman at the time and how they dressed because I wanted to tell the truth about what that was. And now congresswomen are completely modern looking and they don’t all wear those completely chunky St. John knit suits. But they did then. And I played her from my heart up. I didn’t play her from my waist down much. It didn’t seem appropriate for me to include my lower chakra in a lot of that. Because she’s hard; she’s a bleeding liberal, but in intellect. And it was a constant game of chess, which I was so honored to play with Richard because he is - when someone is a mo-fo that means they are Miles Davis, like a genius at what they do - but Richard is such a mo-fo at the sword fight.

JOSH: He’s all lower chakra, that Richard. (All laugh)

KATHLEEN: You know, you had to stay on your game. It was a chess game for us, romantically and emotionally, for our characters. So that even though we’re talking about policy, it was just Pinteresque in how steep that subtext was. There were just levels of our marriage being

discussed even though - at least that was the choices I was making - so I never went home cocky. I never went home thinking, "Oh I nailed that scene." I was always, "What else could I have put in there? How else could I have gotten him?" even though we are completely just discussing policy, but it's basically "How can I take the power back?" It was a constant power-grab. Back and forth, is how I always interpreted those scenes.

HRISHI: I wanted to ask you about the sword fight, as you put it, because I know from Josh and from everyone that we have talked to, about how exacting the dialogue is and how you have to stick exactly to what's on the page. But in the scenes in this episode that you have, there's moments where you and Richard have to engage in a lot of cross talk.

[West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

*TOBY: What are you doing getting into cars with guys that have been drinking?*

*ANDY: [cross talk] Cause I'm a grown woman.*

*TOBY: [cross talk] That's what taxicabs are for.*

*ANDY: [cross talk] And I will get into whatever car, yes.*

*TOBY: [cross talk] And also, I can still do that.*

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: You're talking at the same time so often and I was trying to figure out how you could've balanced what was on the page and you guys are getting cut off - you're cutting each other off - so I was wondering was that all on the page? And how did you figure that out - what the director had to do and what you guys had to figure out- to make that happen?

KATHLEEN: We ran it, that walk and talk, next to the monument. We ran it a quadrillion times. We did that over and over and over and over and over and over again. I remember it was endless. And we really threw down in between the retakes too. As the camera was resetting, we were running that scene. I love to run it and run it and run it and run it. So it was great for me to realize I had a partner because some actors are that way and some aren't. We just ran it a zillion, hundred, quadrillion times, like it went on forever. I remember because it was a lot of dialogue and it was an exterior walk and talk. Which as we know, the walk and talks were a thing of their own on that show.

JOSH: Was that the first scene you guys shot together?

KATHLEEN: Yes.

JOSH: And you were in DC?

KATHLEEN: Yes.

JOSH: Actually it makes me laugh. At the very top of the scene, you say, "It's a beautiful day" although it looks like it's kind of cold and overcast that day. Was it cold that day?

KATHLEEN: That's right. That's where Andrea comes from. That's like Frick and Frack, right? She's always like, "It's a beautiful day!" and "Have some of this pie!"

JOSH: He's less thrilled to be outside.

KATHLEEN: Which is the dynamic, so it's so right there on the first page. It's almost Hepburn/Tracy to me in a lot of ways.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes, absolutely.

JOSH: [cross talk] I agree.

KATHLEEN: [cross talk] That's what I got. They needed almost a period type clip to this character and the way she delivers her retorts to him. So the interruption was on the page. We did not add anything. So the clipping back and forth was exactly as written.

JOSH: Did you meet Richard that morning, or had you worked with him at all in LA?

KATHLEEN: I had never met him before.

JOSH: So you just flew to DC, met him, and hit the ground running.

KATHLEEN: I was told by Richard, sort of coaching me, letting me know, "Oh by the way, you can't pause at any point after a comma on this show. You can only pause after a period." And I was like, "What?" And it was another long walk and talk. And Aaron was on the set, and then Aaron explained, "I write meter, and this is how it is, and this is how I like it. And there's a reason for it, and yes, I just need you to do this." And so we just did a bunch of walk and talks and I don't know if it was that day, but one take I paused a little bit and Aaron let it go. And I remember Richard going, "That's no fair! Why is she getting... Why are we printing that take? She paused after a comma!" And I never forgot that. It's almost like when your brother or something - kind of teasing. But he was kind of surprised that Aaron printed a take where I actually paused after a comma. [Josh laughs] And he's so fun. He's so fun because he just shows so little.

HRISHI: Were you surprised at all by what it was like to play against Richard?

KATHLEEN: No, he's just really good. He's just really, really good. It was fun to try to break his wall. I don't mean Richard, I mean the character - to mess with it. And like I said, when I first read the material, I didn't think, "Oh they want to bring in a new Congresswoman to discuss policy." They want to bring in someone to poke at this man's armor and I'm the woman for the job - [Josh laughs] and have a little fun with it.

JOSH: So you jumped onto the show, not really having watched it much. How quickly were you thrown into sort of the phenomenon of *The West Wing* ? Was it instant?

KATHLEEN: You know, it never stopped. In the seven seasons I was on the show, every time I felt like there's a race going on, and everyone else is seasoned and warmed up and I'm just dropped in. I'm sure anybody else who recurred on the show who was not on the show weekly could say the same. You literally had to be - your pace had to quicken, your jaw had to move faster, you had to get on this train. This train was going. And it was intimidating sometimes, and I usually feel very confident of my abilities. But on this show, like I said, I never went home cocky, ever, once. Not that I do that on set, but there are days that you work and you go like, "Yeah, I earned my pay, or I earned my reputation or whatever." And this show was always, "Ugh, I hope that was good enough! I hope I got that!" I mean Aaron wrote - and everyone on that show - they wrote dialogue for me that was really smart and issue-oriented and important. All I did know was that I was up against a formidable force in Toby who - this wasn't like a furry, little kitty cat. So I thought that I didn't have to soften the discourse.

JOSH: Thanks for joining us.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for talking to us.

KATHLEEN: Yeah!

HRISHI: And that's it for our episode.

JOSH: Thanks for joining us. We hope you'll join us again. Until then, you can follow each of us on twitter. And really, why don't you? Just do it; it's a single click. Hrishu is @HrishuHirway and I'm @JoshMalina.

HRISHI: Hrishu is spelled H-R-I-S-H-I, in case people have been having - someone tweeted at me that they had a hard time finding me. Maybe because of the H.

JOSH: Malina is spelled with an A. [Hrishu laughs]

HRISHI: Mayor Karen Freeman-Wilson is @KarenAboutGary and Kathleen York is @BirdYork. "The West Wing Weekly" is @WestWingWeekly officially. And we're also on Facebook, facebook.com/thewestwingweekly. This episode was produced by me and Josh, and edited and mixed by Zach McNeas.

JOSH: If you would like to leave a comment or a question, either pro- or anti-Jewish, [both laugh] you can do so at thewestwingweekly.com. In addition, if you would like to support the entire endeavor that is "The West Wing Weekly," there is a great way to do so: You can pre-order a West Wing Weekly Lapel Pin.

HRISHI: It's at thewestwingweekly.com/pin.

JOSH: It costs \$15 and provides \$16 worth of enjoyment. Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

KATHLEEN: What's next?