

The West Wing Weekly
2:04: In This White House
Guests: Ambassador Deborah Birx and Emily Procter

[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 season 2, episode 4. It's called "In This White House" and we'll be joined later on by special guest Emily Procter who makes her first appearance in *The West Wing* as Ainsley Hayes.

JOSH: The teleplay is by Aaron Sorkin. The story by Peter Parnell and Allison Abner. This episode was directed by Ken Olin and it originally aired on October 25th, 2000.

HRISHI: Here's a synopsis from TV Guide. "*The West Wing* gets a right-winger as young republic lawyer Ainsley Hayes signs on as associate White House counsel. She's offered the job at the insistence of the President after he sees her demolish Sam on a TV talk show. Meanwhile, the president of an AIDS ravaged African country visits the White House and spars with drug company executives."

JOSH: So, our discussion of this episode with Emily Procter is coming up, but first since the AIDS crisis in Africa is a central part of this episode we wanted to get some real-world context for the issue.

HRISHI: I spoke to Ambassador-at-Large Deborah Birx. She was previously the director of the CDC's division of global HIV and AIDS and now she serves as the United States Global AIDS Coordinator.

DEBORAH: This is Debbie Birx, the Global AIDS Coordinator from the US Department of State.

HRISHI: Thank you so much for joining me and talking to us on The West Wing Weekly.

DEBORAH: Happy to do it. It was a show I always watched.

HRISHI: How accurately, in this episode, do you think the AIDS epidemic was characterized?

DEBORAH: I think it was characterized extraordinarily accurately. So, we really, and the world had really, not turned its attention to how severe the epidemic was in Africa. And I think it captured it so well in that, that 1999-2000 was the amazing turning point for the US Government to really recognize the amazing death and destruction. I was working in Kericho, Kenya and patients would come in by the cartload and the matrons of the hospitals would send them home because... And they would say to me "If I save them today they will be back tomorrow, and they will still die. There is nothing we can do." So, it captured not only the statistics on that episode but the horror of this disease and the reality of that in sub-Saharan Africa.

HRISHI: How does it look now? Is the situation as dire or is the situation better now?

DEBORAH: Well that's why I'm so thrilled that you're doing this podcast. Because from that and around that same episode, there was the first Congressional delegation that went to Africa. There was the Durban meeting in 2000 where Nelson Mandela called on action around the world. And out of that grew the first legislation and then came PEPFAR. PEPFAR stands for the President's Emergency Plan For AIDS Relief. So, it started out launched in 2003 as an emergency, to really stem the tide of really ripping apart the social fabric of communities with 20%, 30% of adults dying. And so, in that moment, and in those days that followed and around this episode, the US investment in this and then the global donor community invested in this, changed the world forever. And so, we don't talk about AIDS in that same way in Africa anymore. And so now, when you look at sub-Saharan Africa, we have implemented those solutions that were suggested in the episode. You know, President Bush, a republican, started PEPFAR at a \$15 billion investment and President Obama expanded that by \$55 billion so that it has become probably the most impactful, results driven and spectacularly successful public health program ever implemented. But was only possible to have that success through a republican to democratic transition, that shows that we can have an outcome that is breathtaking when you look back from where we were in 2000 to where we are today.

HRISHI: Ambassador, thank you so much for talking to me about all of this.

DEBORAH: Well thank you for bringing *West Wing* back to a podcast that allows us to really talk about HIV in a way to bring awareness again to this disease that has not stopped and that we have the potential to stop if we're once again devoted in that bipartisan, creative way that brings innovation and funding together with leadership in countries to make a big change.

HRISHI: Thank you so much.

DEBORAH: Absolutely! What's next?

[Intro Music]

JOSH: Thanks to Jacqueline Dover for coordinating our interview with Ambassador Birx.

HRISHI: And now were joined by our next guest, Emily Procter, who makes her first appearance on *The West Wing* in this episode as Ainsley Hayes.

EMILY: A name I would have stolen for my child. If I hadn't of already used it.

JOSH: Ha! It is a good name. [Laughter]

HRISHI: How well do you remember this time? Do you remember when you were filming this episode?

EMILY: I remember the day that it filmed. I remember the day I went in and had to work on a Saturday or a Sunday. I think I worked on a Sunday to reshoot the newsroom scene and to reshoot the cafe scene.

JOSH: Why reshoot?

EMILY: I think because I did not nail it the first time. [laughter]

JOSH: That's hard to believe.

EMILY: That's good. Oh my gosh. I rewatched it and I was like, "Missed opportunities!"

JOSH: Oh well, what actor doesn't watch and feel that way. I felt the exact opposite. Just to pump you up, I feel like you, more than I think, and I've watched just about everything Aaron's ever written you come on like such a breath of fresh air on this show, because it's almost a whole new paradigm for a Sorkin character. No, it's true. [Emily laughing]

HRISHI: Yeah, it's true.

JOSH: Southern cadence. One of the difficult things I think, sometimes is to do your own thing when you're doing Aaron's stuff because he's hyper articulate. He writes hyper articulate characters. There a lot of common characteristics among Sorkin characters and to come in and put your own stamp on it without seeming like you're trying to put your own stamp on it, I think is very difficult, but I feel like it's exactly what you did.

EMILY: Well you give me far too much credit for being capable to do it the other way. [laughter]. I'm glad that that's how you see it. I just chose to do something different.

JOSH: Well, you were you. It's not always easy to bring that when you're doing Aaron's stuff, I think. It's a very natural fit, although as a viewer, I think, "Oh wait, here's something new, here's a completely..."

HRISHI: It felt like a new instrument in the orchestra.

JOSH: Better put.

EMILY: Thank you. [cross talk] Thank you, guys.

JOSH: [cross talk] That's how it's generally run. I go on for a long time and say something badly and then HrishI comes in with a single sentence. [laughter]

EMILY: The distiller. We'll just refer to you as that.

JOSH: So how did you get the job? How did it come to you?

EMILY: Oh my gosh. First of all, I should just say Josh and I were talking right before you showed up, if I had watched the episode and I thought I was going to wait and watch it right

before I came, which was just, so, gut wrenching. It just makes me so nostalgic. I was watching it and just thinking, I was just so thankful in hindsight of not completely messing it up and then looking at scenes and thinking, “Oh, why didn’t I hit that harder?” And also just sitting in the kitchen of the house that I bought because I was lucky enough to have been hired by someone in this business, and the fact that Aaron and Tommy and John took a chance on me and I was just sitting there watching it, and feeling teary-eyed.

JOSH: Aw.

EMILY: Gosh, it was such a special moment in time to be a part of that. I’m just so thankful to have been included.

HRISHI: When was the last time you saw the episode?

EMILY: I typically never watch anything that I do. I am not entirely sure I’d ever seen the whole episode.

JOSH: Truly, you’re first episode [cross talk] on *The West Wing* and you’re not sure you had ever watched previous to this?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Wow

EMILY: Yeah, [cross talk] I don’t know that I had.

JOSH: [cross talk] Interesting.

EMILY: I’ve seen clips because I would have done something people would have said, “Oh, here’s a clip.” But I think I tend to not watch any of it. I’m not good at watching things I’ve done [cross talk] and feeling good about it.

JOSH: [cross talk] I feel the same way, but it took me awhile to get to that. I used to think, “I’m on TV, come on!” [laughter] You know, “Ginger get the popcorn. Let’s go!” But then pretty quickly, for all the same reasons, it’s impossible to watch yourself. That’s one of the nice things about theater, you can remember it however you want. [cross talk] I was fantastic. [laughter]

EMILY: [cross talk] Exactly!

JOSH: Then when you’re confronted with the actual rewindable moment after moment you can just see it again and again and you go “Why did I make that choice?” or “Why did I say it like that?” or “What was I thinking?” It’s not as much fun.

EMILY: No.

HRISHI: I’m so curious that you said missed opportunities when you watched it. Like what? [cross talk] Was there anything specific?

EMILY: [cross talk] Oh my gosh I really should have hit the correction of the Sam Seaborn character about his missed geography harder. I should have given them... here I am, many many seasons into network television, and I should have given them a harder tagline. And I feel like I sort of robbed everyone of their moment. For me not understanding that that was how those things worked.

[West Wing Episode 2.04 Excerpt]

AINSLEY: The bill contained plenty of money for textbooks, Mark, and anyone who says otherwise is flat-out lying. And we should tell the truth about this... textbooks are important, if for no other reason than they accurately place the town of Kirkwood in California and not Oregon.

MARK: And we're in business. We'll be back...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I disagree!

JOSH: I completely [cross talk] disagree.

EMILY: [cross talk] Really?! So you liked that it was kind of softer?

HRISHI: I loved that.

JOSH: It was just the doing of it.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: In other words, you had the facts at your disposal and a composure with which you presented the facts and that was really all it took. I mean, [cross talk] that was...

HRISHI: [cross talk]: Yeah.

JOSH: ... that was the slam that he needed, and that the moment needed. I liked that.

EMILY: You guys are sweet. [cross talk] Thank you.

JOSH: [cross talk] I like that you didn't hit harder. But also, who knows? You may have given them the harder one and they decided in the editing room that this is the one.

EMILY: Thank you. You know what? Maybe that's what I should say. I'm really glad they didn't use the better take. [laughter]

JOSH: Oh, that's funny. Well here's an interesting thing early on that was crossing my mind. We've talked about it before. Boys' club is the nicer way to put it. Sometimes just sexism and

it's really, I mean, right from the beginning of the cold open, we've got Ted McGinley, who has appeared in every television show ever.

EMILY: Ted McGinley, who... I was watching that... Ted McGinley, who looked the same when I was younger, as he looked in that, as he looks now that I'm older.

JOSH: He's one of those guys.

EMILY: We need some tough questions asked to Ted McGinley.

JOSH: Yeah...

[West Wing Episode 2.04 Excerpt]

MARK: No, no, it's not. She's got blonde hair, long legs and she's a Republican, so she's...

SAM: She's in show business.

MARK: Yeah.

SAM: A young, blonde, leggy Republican.

MARK: Yeah.

SAM: I thought it turned out they didn't know anything?

MARK: They don't.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: They're really boiling down all the sexism and misogyny right into like a little concentrated dose, everything that you might fear about the show or about the characters within the show, and like here it is, only to have it then get blown away.

JOSH: This is another one of those moments where sometimes, Aaron, you don't know where he's going and he's way ahead of you often. [cross talk] And then sometimes...

EMILY: [cross talk] Oh my gosh.

JOSH: ... he's teeing up, clearly, you're going to come in and you're going to pulverize them, but he can sometimes say "Hey, this is what I'm going to do and then I'm still going to make you laugh or surprise you or do it in a fresh way. So even though I'm sort of telegraphing where this is going, you're going to enjoy it."

EMILY: Well, it was one of those things as I was watching the episode that I was just so struck by. Talk about somebody teeing it up for you, he teed up an episode for me which was so incredibly generous and in many ways, we all know Aaron's own political stances at his own

expense. And I thought what a generous thing to have done just for, I mean, as we sit on the eve of a new president coming into the office, to do for all of us. To say let's really show the best of who we are on both sides. I also thought it was interesting in the episode about how many things are relevant today, the drug pricing...

HRISHI: Mm hmm

EMILY: [cross talk] It's so interesting.

JOSH: [cross talk] Oh yeah . He does it with the Big Pharma subplot and gun control. He really gives both side very well-articulated spokespeople. And that's, I think, usually our favorite, when Aaron argues both sides [cross talk] well.

EMILY: [cross talk] Yes! And then, equal amount of dramatic tension and humor. I mean it was just, I just...Thank you Aaron. It was really fun. [laughter]

HRISHI: So, do you remember the days leading up to getting the job?

EMILY: I remember everything about it. And that's what was also fun about watching the episode. I remember where I was standing. There were many scenes where I remember being just being off stage and watching them do it and listening to try and get comfortable with being on that sound stage. I remember the background actors that passed me. I started in background and I remember them doing crosses and I remember how they were choosing to do it. And I remember the two republican guest actors and having this moment of feeling like "Oh my gosh, I'm here as a guest!". This is really my team, but yet, I was going to kind of step into the other team for a moment in time. I will never forget my audition process for that part and I will never forget, oh it's going to make me cry, [cross talk] John Spencer.

JOSH: [cross talk] We have a rich tradition of crying on this podcast...

EMILY: Ok

JOSH: ...so we welcome it.

EMILY: Ok. John Spencer. I was standing in his office, you know. I'm sure everybody maybe has been caught up to speed. But when you're a guest on the show, they bring you to the set way earlier than they bring the people who are there all the time. Because they're studying and tired. And I was just sort of standing there with all this long amount of time to be nervous. And I hear John coming down the hall and I hear him say, in way too loud a voice, "If the new girl doesn't work out, we don't have to keep her, do we?" [laughter] And I believe it was Tommy going "No, absolutely not!" and then it was "John, meet Emily, Emily meet John. Who?" And also a coffee cart had arrived that day from the Network because Emmy nominations had just gone out...

JOSH: Oh interesting.

EMILY: ...It was one of those things, it was just sort of a joke like I just thought "This is just horribly...horribly difficult."

HRISHI: So, he meant...I thought there was going to be another part of that story where then he comes in and is like "Just kidding!"

EMILY: No. [laughter]

HRISHI: No?

EMILY: No.

JOSH: So, what did you get when he walked in?

EMILY: After I did the scene he said, "I think she's fine." [Laughter] I used to go over to John's house. He's very sweet and he used to tell me how much he appreciated our on-camera relationship and having this sort of like parental relationship with Ainsley's character. And I would go over to his house, and he would set up obstacles around the pool, and, you know, high stakes, there's a body of water and he'd put a pot and John was a great gardener, he has all of these roses. I don't know if people know that about him. He was [cross talk] a wonderful rose gardener.

JOSH: [cross talk] I didn't know that. I never made it to his house.

EMILY: He lived in one of the canyons and he had this beautiful rose garden and he loved his roses and he would set them out and set out pots and set out hoses and we would time it. And he would have bagels and things and we would loop it and time it and he would say "I want you to know this is how this works." He was so... I'm going to cry. He was so great to me.

JOSH: So, wait are you telling us that John Spencer set up a walk-and-talk obstacle course around his pool for you guys to prepare?

HRISHI: Rehearse off-set?

EMILY: Yes.

JOSH: That's an incredible story.

EMILY: With roses and bagels.

JOSH: With roses and bagels. I'm gobstopped. This wasn't for the original episode? This was...

EMILY: It was for episode number 2.

JOSH: No kidding.

EMILY: Yeah, I think. I know I'd done an episode or maybe it was that episode. I don't remember.

JOSH: It's a fantastic image!

HRISHI: Yeah. It's so sweet.

EMILY: I went up a couple times. And I just adored him. [cross talk] And just thought he was the bees-knees.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah, he was a doll. You guys do have great chemistry.

EMILY: It's thanks to John.

JOSH: Well, it takes two. [laughter]

HRISHI: I was wondering how much you were able to use, Ainsley the character is coming into this White House with all these characters who have a very specific dynamic and there are scenes where your character is just sitting there watching as it unfolds, and you have to be nervous and sort of maybe a little bit intimidated but stand your ground. I was wondering how much of that you got to just use from your own feeling of coming into a very similar kind of equivalent as an actor.

EMILY: Gosh, I was really the only time I was really able to watch and feel nerves like that was during scenes that I was not in. I remember watching a lot of Allison's scenes and letting myself feel that. Because I was so nervous, that I think if I had let anything like creep in, I would have been done for. And in the Sam Seaborn news show part, I'm writing on that pad of paper because I thought if I just give myself a physical activity to try and force myself to stop. I remember I was crossing things out and I had to get to sixty before I could look up and if I had not done that I don't think I ever could have ever looked up. It was so terrifying for me. I was so young and so did not expect for this opportunity to come my way. Even to read for it, let alone to be the person who was actually gonna get to act it. It was a bit of an out of body experience.

HRISHI: Let's talk about how you got the opportunity. It's a huge role in just this one episode. They even have a different designation in the title, in the credits, it's not guest starring, its special guest star. Which I thought was a reference to how much dialogue you had to do in the episode. So, it's a huge part and does it go to your agent?

EMILY: I think at that time I had done enough to have been given an audition but not enough for anyone to really consider me as someone who would get the job. And it was a fluke that it was mine and I remember that I went in there and Aaron was reading, and I had no idea who Aaron was. I thought they had hired an actor.

JOSH: We've heard some similar stories. He likes to read [cross talk] with actors.

EMILY: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: Do you remember which scene you were reading?

EMILY: I don't. I remember I stood up. And I remember I kept throwing my pages down and then I went and sat and I remember thinking, "Gosh, this actor is really good, I should tell him." And, so I leaned in and I whispered, and I said "You're really good. Thanks for that. Thanks, you." And he was like "Well, okay." And I remember John and Tommy sitting on the sofa in John, the casting director's, office and them kind of looking at me, and thinking I must not have done a bad job. They look kind of like "Oh, okay." And I remember I had worn what I thought someone would wear in her position. I had worn lavender pants from Zara that were kind of trousers. I mean, something that, I don't even know why I had them. They might have been part of a costume or something. And they called and said, "You know, we think Emily did a nice job with this read" and they said "But...", and they were like "But? But what?" "We're not sure if she's kind of attractive or maybe attractive enough for what we're going for." And then they, they had a comment about my pants, about my purple pants. And so, I changed and went in a different day. And then I went in for another read and was I horribly nervous, because at that moment, to go back to your other question, it actually landed on me that I might get this job.

And then I was a wreck! I was a hot mess. And I remember Tommy Schlamme walking out of the office and him going "Hey! What happened?" I was like, "I am nervous!" and then they gave me a chance to come back and test for it. And I remember, I thought, I am just gonna pull out everything I can think to pull out to be distracting. I wore like a halter top and fake eyelashes.

And I thought, well, if anyone's mind wanders maybe they'll just be like "Are those lashes real?" and I drove a full-size bronco at the time, it was back before I was aware of what kind of effect that had on the environment and I didn't have air conditioning, so I put all of these frozen ice packs in my car and duct taped them in front of all of the vents. [laughter]

JOSH: Wow

EMILY: ...and I rolled up and I remember the guard giving me my pass to go on and him kind of, like I could tell he was kind of like "Good luck. You might be swimming in a bigger pond than you're used to."

HRISHI: That's awesome.

JOSH: So, when you're testing for people who don't know necessarily, I assume that means you're reading for the studio and the network and just the next audition in front of all the brass that I guess have to sign off on hiring, especially someone who is going to be a major significant recurring role.

EMILY: Exactly.

JOSH: And it is always, I'm always so nervous. Auditioning is a terrible...

EMILY: Oh, it's awful.

JOSH: ...thing to have to go through ever. But then, when all of a sudden, the stakes are really high, you can taste the job, like now I really am knocking on the door and then there's [cross talk] ultimately another 12 people in the room or something.

EMILY: [cross talk] [singing] Food, glorious food!

HRISHI: Does any of this process happen on set or on camera or is it just for the people in the room?

EMILY: There may have been. I think a lot of times now it's videotaped. This time, it was, I, God, I don't even remember how many people were in there, but I remember it was in that little side building of Warner Brothers. That white building that had the long hallway. Do you know what I'm talking about?

JOSH: Mm hmm.

EMILY: I guess maybe it's still casting?

JOSH: Mm hmm.

EMILY: It was nice because you didn't have to sort of traverse the entire lot and be like "Oh, where am I going? I'm late, I can't find it! Oh, now I'm really nervous!" You just pulled up and the guard felt sorry for you and you parked your dirty car and went in and sat down and signed in. And they saw two or three of us.

JOSH: That was my other question. Do you remember who the other people were? [cross talk] Not that...

EMILY: [cross talk] I don't

JOSH: ...but there a couple of other women there to read for the role?

EMILY: Yes.

JOSH: Because that's always fun. "Hi"... "Hi."

EMILY: And I remember it was the time before when I said, "I'm really nervous," and then Aaron came out after that one and said, "Are you really nervous?" And I said "No." And I thought it was so sweet. It made me feel like I had a partner. Like I had a teammate. And it was just one of those moments in time where I just, I have no idea how I got that job. [laughter] Because I'm a terrible auditioner. I'm horribly nervous. I can't read for a soap commercial. And the fact that I read for that and it actually went my way is a miracle.

JOSH: You must have been very good. [laughter] I know you don't want to face that [cross talk] but as you were in the role, you must have been quite good.

EMILY: [cross talk] Maybe?.

JOSH: Do you remember how you find out? Was it a long wait?

EMILY: I don't remember how I found out, which is really funny. But I remember calling, my parents are divorced, and so when I called my dad, my dad is just a great mentor for me. He's a really awesome person, but he's also not a big crier and I told him I got it and he got a little weepy. And I said "Dad, why are you crying?" and he said "I was afraid you'd be disappointed forever." And I thought "Ach!" Now as a parent I'm just like "Oooh uhh."

JOSH: Oh, what a sweet sentiment.

HRISHI: Yeah.

EMILY: Yeah.

JOSH: He was just so relieved.

EMILY: He was relieved! He was like "Ohh." Thank god!

JOSH: So, you got the job. And what was the job at that point?

EMILY: I think it was a one-and-see or like a one-with-an-option-for-four?

JOSH: So that's like, you got the job, [cross talk] but you still have to prove yourself.

EMILY: [cross talk] Oh my gosh. Yes.

JOSH: The pressure does not immediately dissipate.

EMILY: I think it went something like "We like you. We're not going to keep you forever, but we'll have you back some more." And I was like "Ok, great!"

HRISHI: There's one part that I'm wondering about specifically. When Leo says:

[West Wing Episode 2.04 Excerpt]

LEO: You have an interesting conversational style, you know that?

AINSLEY: It's a nervous condition.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I was wondering if he was responding to the way you delivered his dialogue or if that was a line in the script that gave you a cue as to how you were going to deliver your lines.

EMILY: Oh my gosh, I don't know because I do have a tendency, I'm surprised if you haven't noticed, I talk very fast sometimes.

HRISHI: A real asset for this show.

JOSH: Yeah, it's not a liability in an Aaron Sorkin production. [laughter]

EMILY: I don't know. Chicken and the egg?

HRISHI: Let me put it this way, did you change anything about the way you delivered the lines from your auditions to when you were on camera? Was there anything in the direction or anything that they gave you that might have changed how you approached the dialogue?

EMILY: Well, I do remember and watching the episode today, I've thought about that. I do remember when I was creating an arc for Ainsley for the show, thinking I really need to be calm here and centered and listen because, if not, it's just going to sound like the 13th chime of the clock. She's just going to seem like a lunatic. I think I probably changed more to accommodate for the slow rather than the speed. I think the speed is a natural tendency. But, I really do think that Aaron wrote this brilliant character that I happened to understand, which was very fortunate for me. I remember what made me think of this moment is, you said, "Do you remember any direction [cross talk] that I had been given."

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

EMILY: And one thing that I do remember about being on *The West Wing* is up until that point it was the 90s. And sort of in the 90s, if you wanted to be in the young Hollywood game you needed to be in a certain amount of indie movies. You needed to have done sort of like a "group of young people out to have a good time" movie. I had done my version of that and I think because I had been sort of been this blonde southern actress in Hollywood I had been sent down a different path and I was being allowed to be a serious actress on *The West Wing*.

And I remember there was a moment of being directed where it was suggested to me that I was playing a sexy take on this character and I was utterly sort of shocked and confused that that had been suggested to me because it was so not even on my radar that sexuality was even remotely being sort of injected into this character. And I thought "Oh, she's being seen this way regardless of my take on her," and I think that's interesting [cross talk] looking back on it now.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That must have been a crazy, crazy piece of feedback to get in the middle of a take.

EMILY: Well, it was! Because, in a way, it made me feel reduced to a bag of tricks. I was like, "I am not smoking a cigarette. You know, I'm actually sitting here..." "

JOSH: Not doing a thing.

EMILY: "... I'm not doing a thing! I'm not shmacting. I'm actually trying really hard to portray this person as she's been written." I have often thought about that and thought "Was that this person's idea of what I was doing? Was I doing something that had been left over from previous takes? Or is it just sexism when you say, 'Oh, we're introducing this character as the opposition in political party. Additionally, we want this to be a sexy character?' How does that add up in the scenes?" There was a moment where it did, and it made me sad. But it all worked out in the end.

HRISHI: You have so many scenes in this episode. Do you remember was this all a regular, you have to do this all in 8 days?

EMILY: Gosh, I don't remember because there was so much else. I do remember back then I wanted to make myself feel that I was really a part of the show 'cause I knew if I felt separate that it would really work against me emotionally when I showed up. So, I brought all this stuff to my trailer. I brought throw pillows and candles and I hung things and I sewed curtains! I'll never forget, I think her name was Cathy, the AD, the base camp AD with red hair?

JOSH: Yeah, I think she's been mentioned before. I think it's prior to my time but I've heard a lot about Cathy.

EMILY: Cathy, I'll never forget, came up to me at the end of the episode with a box. [laughter] And said, "So, we're going to be signing you out after the next scene and we're going to have to ask you to pack up your things." And it occurred to me in that moment, that they thought that I might not have known that [cross talk] I wasn't staying.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That you weren't now a star of the show.

EMILY: [laughing] Yeah.

HRISHI: Had you worked with anyone from the show before?

EMILY: No. But one thing I did that made me really nostalgic also in watching this episode is Debbie, who was my stand in on the show, was with me for the 10 years on *CSI: Miami*.

JOSH: Oh, is that right?

EMILY: Yes.

JOSH: I was looking at that. You did 232 episodes, I think, of *CSI*.

EMILY: If you say so. I think to be able to spend that amount of time with people, as an actor, is so fortunate. It was really neat to see Debbie in her *West Wing* incarnation. I don't know if you would have ever had an opportunity to be on set with Debbie, but she is a fierce, tiny person.

JOSH: Ha.

EMILY: The most lovable. We called her kitten in a bonnet, because she just ruled with an iron fist over at *Miami* and people would be new and they'd be like "Did your stand in just yell at you?" and I'm like "Yeah, she did!" [laughter] And they'd be like "Did she just yell at the director?" I'm like, "Yeah, she did!" That's what she does. That's Debbie.

HRISHI: Tell me about stand-ins. Was she brought in to be a stand in for Ainsley or was she somebody who's just there as a placeholder on the series?

EMILY: She worked background and then I think when I showed up they said "Oh my gosh, this is a good..." they usually match by height and by color so when they're lighting they get an adequate representation of what you'll look like in the shot, under the light.

JOSH: This is so the actor can go back to their trailer and be with their throw pillows...

EMILY: Yeah.

JOSH: ...while the scene is being lit.

EMILY: Light meditating...

JOSH: Exactly.

EMILY: ...candle burning.

JOSH: So, did you guys just hit it off and you took with her with you to *CSI: Miami* ?

EMILY: Well I loved Debbie. But I sort of felt one foot in, one foot out on *West Wing* because I was most definitely not a regular. But I was also not guest cast, so when I went to *Miami* I remember the person saying to me "Who would you want?" and I said, "I wonder if I could have my stand in from *The West Wing* ?" And they knew who she was! And the next day Debbie showed up. And it was a match made in heaven.

HRISHI: That's so cool.

EMILY: [cross talk] I should call her.

JOSH: [cross talk] Good story.

JOSH: Yeah, we might have to get Debbie in here [cross talk] for a word or two.

EMILY: [cross talk] And she'd be like "Hey, what? What are you doing? Do they have work for me?"

JOSH: Actually, I might be scared to call her!

EMILY: Debbie's amazing.

JOSH: One of the things I love about the addition of your character to the show and your performance is that, on one level, it just shakes things up. You've got a republican on board, being hired, and it's just fun to see how the ripples of that and how different people react to it but also, every time there's new characters, also just seeing that world from a new character's point of view. We get to see you planning not to take the job, but major things go down while you're there and you're there as an observer and it gives us a little view in again, fresh eyes to that whole world.

HRISHI: I like that there have been times that we have sort of intuited the smugness and the arrogance of the characters and sometimes it's even articulated by someone on the show. But it's usually articulated by someone who we might not like, or we're set up to not like. But here is a character that is presented as this foil who, actually, we are kind of already rooting for, even though she's an outsider. You know, she gets to call them out on what they're doing both to her friends and then to their face. And I think that felt like a new kind of dynamic on the show too.

[West Wing Episode 2.04 excerpt]

AINSLEY: I find this administration smug and patronizing and under the impression that those who disagree with them are less than they are, and with colder hearts.

[end excerpt]

EMILY: I have no idea how Aaron wrote that. I was watching that today and thought "I really don't know how he was able to stack the deck so hard for me against his own personal convictions." And then there were all of these beautiful things happening in the episode with the visiting president and language and it was shot so beautifully, and I just thought "Here, in this magnificent episode, he has taken the time to set me up so people don't hate me." And I sort of flash back to the Rob Lowe roast recently where the same was not done for the inspiration of my character, Ann Coulter, she was like...[laughter]

JOSH: She got pilloried.

[Comedy Central Rob Lowe Roast excerpt]

JEFF: Ann's against gay marriage. What's your thinking on that? If I can't get a husband, they shouldn't either? [laughter]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: They hit her hard.

EMILY: Yeah, they did.

HRISHI: Ann Coulter was the inspiration for your character?

EMILY: I think this is true.

HRISHI: Did they tell you that explicitly?

EMILY: I remember hearing it mentioned and I don't know if it was mentioned by casting office or by my agents, but I remember there being a moment of Ainsley being Ann Coulteresque.

JOSH: I guess I didn't realize she was that high profile all the way back then.

EMILY: I think she was starting to stir up trouble. She was starting up trouble in this brand that was unexpected. In this, sort of, blonde lipsticked brand.

HRISHI: If only Ann Coulter were more like Ainsley. [laughter]

JOSH: That's what I was thinking. I'm glad you said it. I think Aaron... yeah, did her some favors in the rewrite.

HRISHI: Had you watched the show before you got the job? Were you watching before?

EMILY: Mmm hmm. I had.

JOSH: Had you watched all of season 1? Were you a fan of the show or you had seen a [cross talk] couple of episodes?

EMILY: [cross talk] No, I was a real fan of the show because I just was amazed by how beautiful it was. I just remember seeing it and thinking "How are they doing that? That is such a beautiful looking show," and personally I really love space and seeing space and they really showcased that, I think, so well, in a way that very few shows have done before. This is what it looks like and feels like to be in the White House. And I remember roaming the halls when I wouldn't be working, and I did do a few gymnastics in the oval office and I got in trouble. I do have a photograph. [laughter]

JOSH: Do you still have the photograph?

EMILY: I have a photograph of me...

JOSH: Will you share it with us?

EMILY: ...doing a handstand.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Can we post that?

JOSH: [cross talk] Oh my god, please let us put that on our site.

EMILY: Yes. I've seen it fairly recently, so I know it's in a photo album somewhere.

HRISHI: I read a thing that Tommy said that they built a set to have a lot of glass for the walls so that the throw of the camera would be especially long so that you're not just seeing the thing

that's right in front of you, but you'd see a layer of people behind you and people behind them and that means that it has to have all of the space that you're talking about. Like you were saying, thinking about the background is that those actors have to be on the whole time, the length of that shot they have to be really doing something to create the depth that's in there.

EMILY: Well, I think that one thing that Aaron is particularly deft at doing is creating a team. He creates a team that the audience roots for to succeed and that was really obvious on the set of the show as well. That was part of what was so nostalgic about watching it because it was like missing a group. It wasn't just missing a story and so many of those actors in the background, we've run across each other since then, but they were truly committed and felt very much a part of the scene and the acting experience and got the respect that, quite frankly, they deserve because they are a part of the scene.

JOSH: And on the rare occasions when something doesn't quite work even in the background you notice it...

HRISHI: Right.

EMILY: Yeah!

JOSH: If somebody's pushing it too hard or it's just not quite there. They do pretty much generally, day after day, episode after episode, really help create the whole world of work that's going on.

HRISHI: I remember you had a scene with Sam Jaeger.

EMILY/HRISHI: The young reporter.

HRISHI: Who is on *Parenthood* .

EMILY: Oh, I was trying to remember his name! Oh, he's on *Parenthood* ?

HRISHI: Yeah, he's Joel on *Parenthood* .

EMILY: Is he really?

HRISHI: Yeah.

EMILY: Because I was watching, and I was like "That guy is so good. He's so subtle. I wonder what he's doing?"

[West Wing Episode 2.04 Excerpt]

C.J.: I'm not gonna wave you off the story, but I can't tell you anything about it.

BILL: [stopping her] If they were selling the Iraqis drilling equipment, that would be in violation of sanctions, wouldn't it?

C.J.: Grand jury investigations are secret, Bill. I can't tell you any more about it.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I had another thought during that scene, because immediately I thought, "Oh! Rookie move." As soon as she had said it... And you can that see she catches the mistake too. But I thought that interchange is enhanced by the flashbacks we've now had of C.J. coming from the world of entertainment. Whereas normally I would have said, "How could someone in her position have made that mistake?" And it turns out... it's a great plot point where you come and explain it's not actually something she has to lose sleep over, she's fine. All of that is enhanced by Aaron having given us flashback, and a sense of where C.J. came from.

HRISHI: Yeah.

EMILY: Mmm hmmm.

HRISHI: I want to go back to that part of you scribbling, that you had to do that scribbling. There are so many times that in the show where I find myself wondering, "Was that a directorial choice, was that in the script, or was that an acting choice?"

JOSH: I guess that was an actor thing. [Laughter]

HRISHI: That's great! I have seen that episode so many times. And I think about that your head is down as you start speaking, as you start formulating your response to Sam and while he's speaking you're writing furiously. It gives so much to that moment and to realize you were just doing it to give yourself some time, it's incredible! Was there any kind of conversation?

EMILY: You know you always wonder, "Is it the transference of emotion or energy?" My energy was so uncomfortable, personally, in that moment and I thought, "If I am I looking at him, waiting for him to stop speaking, I will not be able to have a confident voice when I open my mouth." So, if I am busy, if I am too busy to look at Rob Lowe, who is talking to me on camera right now, then maybe, when I enter into it, I'll sort of get out of Ainsley's way and she can take over.

HRISHI: I was wondering if there were any things that happened on set? Any notes or anything that you got, about how to play the scene or something, that came up while you were shooting that changed the way you might have approached it?

EMILY: Absolutely! I remember in the reshoot of the scene where I meet with my two republican friends, comrades, whatever they would have been. I remember Tommy coming up to me and we had done the take a couple of times, and I was very steely about it. He said, "It's okay to have an emotional reaction and the emotional reaction that one might have in this

moment. And I had been dead set against doing that, because I thought it was just too...I don't know...it just didn't seem like what I should be doing on a serious show. I shouldn't be having this emotional moment. Whatever you do don't cry."

[West Wing Episode 2.04 Excerpt]

AINSLEY: The people that I have met have been extraordinarily qualified, their intent is good. Their commitment is true, they are righteous, and they are patriots. [after a moment, with tears in her eyes] And I'm their lawyer.

[end excerpt]

EMILY: After we shot the take that they ultimately used, he was like, "That's how you do it! That's how you do it!" And I remember thinking, "Oh, this is okay to be like intermittently emotional, like this as a serious character is okay, which is really interesting." I feel like there is still such a sticky moment with women trying to figure out how to balance availability of emotion and seriousness of work ethic, and it happened in that moment. And Tommy said, "Go for it!" I've thought about that moment often, since then, it was a very nice thing for him to have done for me.

JOSH: I'm intrigued about this reshooting of the scene.

EMILY: Yeah.

JOSH: Was that what they felt they didn't have,

EMILY: Yeah.

JOSH: ...that that was what they wanted to go after? That was it?

EMILY: Yeah. I think they were just missing something in the emotional arc of it. It was so heavily weighted against the emotion of what was happening in the other storyline. The one thing I regret, in rewatching that scene, is leaving at the end of it. Getting up to leave, 'cause I always hate when scenes are buttoned. And I just thought, "Where is she going? Why is she leaving?" I mean, I don't think you would just stand up and leave. My friends would be calling me, "You just left, why'd you just leave?" [cross talk] I regret getting up.

HRISHI: [cross talk] I didn't mind it. I liked it. Because you're meeting these guys. You didn't even know but they're kind of talking behind your back. Saying like, "It doesn't help that she looks like a Gap dancer. I'm sure they didn't mind that!" And so then, it's almost like you intuited they weren't actual real friends.

EMILY: Oh, that's so funny because when I heard that I was like, "Oh thanks, guys!" [Laughter] I didn't know that's what they were saying. Who knew? I wouldn't have tucked my hair behind my ears.

JOSH: You mentioned the president of...is it, Kundu?

HRISHI: Yeah.

EMILY: I have not been saying it because I'm uncertain.

JOSH: Kundu, right?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I'll just jump in, Kundu! I can say it.

HRISHI: You can say it.

JOSH: Played by Zakes Mokae [pronounced *Mokay*]. I've also heard it pronounced Zakes Mokae [pronounced *Mokai*]. So, I could be wrong about that. It's possible in the last two sentences I mispronounced 17 words. [laughter] A fantastic actor. Tony winner for *Master Harold and the Boys*, in which play I saw him on Broadway. An incredible actor. And another one of those actors where I had to rewatch scenes and think, "He's not doing anything. Why is he so compelling?" He doesn't appear to really be doing anything. He's just, kind of, living it in the moment and he's incredibly compelling, and powerful, and moving, and he's just one of those guys who's got it.

HRISHI: His delivery is also, like yours, very specific and very pointed. Like when he says,

[West Wing Episode 2.04 Excerpt]

ALAN: This isn't about profit...

NIMBALA: [pointedly] Sir!

ALAN: [after a moment] This isn't about profit...

NIMBALA: Sir, you have interrupted me again.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He was riveting.

HRISHI: Yeah.

EMILY: He really was and then the end scene, when he dies, [cross talk] there's so much weight to it.

JOSH: {cross talk} And it's just a note on a little slip of paper. This guy, who's made this incredible impression. Dignity and the story he tells about this father. That's a wonderful moment in a scene. And then the whole episode takes a big left turn. That, even though I've seen it

before, I didn't see it coming. It's very unexpected! And yet, the way everything plays out and the way it ties into the discussion of the coup and your observing it through the door, it's another one of those really layered episodes, where Aaron recently described to us how he would write an episode on the heels of having completed a Sports Night episode. I don't know how under the pressure cooker, the time pressure cooker, that was the creation of *The West Wing* episode, how he's able to layer things and think through how everything is going to pay out. It's another one of those episodes where everything does.

EMILY: It's got to be like the escape tunnel in *The Shawshank Redemption*. You just get in it [laughter] and you just crawl through it.

JOSH: That's right!

EMILY: Emerge out the other side free. And that entire performance, he just teed it up for Martin Sheen. It was just like, "Here you go."

JOSH: President Bartlet, by the way, early on, he's taken glee at the fact that Sam has been smacked down by a woman.

[West Wing Episode 2.04 Excerpt]

BARTLET: [stopping at his desk] Hey, did you see Sam get pureed last night on Capital Beat? [puts on his glasses]

LEO: [amused] I didn't see it, but I have heard tell.

BARTLET: He got diced and sliced by a woman named Ainsley Hayes.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh, even President Bartlet's a little part of this boys' club.

HRISHI: Yeah.

EMILY: Yeah. .. I have a daughter and so this is something I think about a lot.

HRISHI: I think that's what is so great about Ainsley's character even in this first episode, is that it's really a kind of character that we haven't seen on tv. It's very rare that you get to set up somebody who's poised to be leggy, blonde, beautiful, republican, is going to be the source of all evil. But then actually have this person be righteous, and intelligent, and compassionate all at the same time. I don't know that there's been a character like that on tv before this.

EMILY: I don't know that television allows characters like that to be on it.

HRISHI: I mean even to buy into the cliched take on *The West Wing* that it's liberal fantasy, but just to the extent that 95% or 99% of stuff that comes out of Hollywood is gonna be left leaning

or liberal. It's just based on the people who are making it. That character is just not gonna [cross talk] appear at all.

EMILY: [cross talk] Maybe in that moment it was American fantasy?

HRISHI: Right.

EMILY: Maybe in that moment it was belief in America?

HRISHI: Yeah, no... and that's why we certainly hear and see listeners from the podcast who are across the ideological spectrum and I think that it's because of characters like Ainsley and other speeches...even speeches that some of the staffers make, that give them a sense of "My opinions are being respected. Even if they're often being disagreed with, they're still being respected here."

EMILY: And well laid out. Aaron really laid out the argument well.

HRISHI: Right.

EMILY: In many cases... I remember there is a future episode where I thought, "Oh gosh, please don't make me argue that. That is, to my core, going to be fundamentally very difficult for me".

HRISHI: Mhmmhmm.

EMILY: And he wrote it so that I didn't have to do too much thinking about it. Just like, "Say these words."

HRISHI: You're from North Carolina, right?

EMILY: I am.

HRISHI: And Ainsley's from North Carolina.

EMILY: She was originally from Montana.

HRISHI: Really?

JOSH: I was going to ask you about that.

EMILY: Yes.

JOSH: Whether it was writing to the actor or the...

EMILY: No, she was from Montana and when I read it I thought, "Oh my gosh, someone has actually written a Southern woman for the first time." Because, so often, I think it's not done exactly...The south in many ways is very matriarchal. My father will tell you that patriarchies do not work, only matriarchies work. And so I was raised with a group of women that were very

much, sort of, raised to be in charge. And I'm sorry that's very sexist. Here I am, like anti-sexist and I'm being totally sexist, but I loved that she was very outspoken and very confident and was fair. And when I went in to read it, I thought I cannot read it without a southern accent. I just can't make the choices that will have that work out. And so, I read it with a Southern accent and as I was leaving someone said, "You do know she's from Montana," and I was just so nervous that all I could respond with was "Yeah!" And then I left. And so, I just continued to read her that way and then Aaron, very nicely, the morning of, he was like "I was thinking maybe Ainsley could be from North Carolina." I was so relieved. [laughter]

JOSH: I'm glad you're on board because she's going to be from North Carolina.

EMILY: I was like "Good thinking!" because it's too late now. I'll never forget having that conversation with him. North Carolina is really rubbing me the wrong way right now, but I love my state and I am from there and I believe that there are great people there and that right now is just a horrible moment that hopefully will lead to better moments. But it made me so proud that he was like "Would you like to be a well-spoken person from North Carolina?" and it made my family really proud! So that was a gift.

JOSH: That's fantastic. Dayton, Ohio got a couple of shout-outs in this episode, I don't know if you noticed.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Martin Sheen, Allison Janney, and Rob Lowe, all from Dayton, Ohio. There's a mention in the Capitol Beat scene and then very prominent placement of President Bartlet's Dayton Flyers coffee mug in his office. It's almost like, were they selling those on the Warner Brothers store or something?

EMILY: Auction, school auction.

JOSH: Again, balanced arguments, which we've talked about a few times. Even I think in the Big Pharma meeting and scenes surrounding it. It's clear, at least, to me as a viewer where my sympathy lies. But even big pharma gets its arguments in. Seems to be the Chief Executive of the big pharma company, played by Len Cariou, Tony winner for *Sweeney Todd*. I'm sure he's a multi-Tony winner. I like to bring it all back to my theater going experiences. [laughter] I believe I saw *Sweeney Todd* when I was twelve on Broadway. So, it's a great... it's a meeting, it's a head-to-head of two great theater actors and he's gruff and certainly less sympathetic than the President of Kundu but he makes some reasonable points in the discussion too. It's not a black and white situation at all.

HRISHI: Think about Big Pharma. Could you ask for a better strawman? You could get away with setting them up as the villain as they have been set up so many times. And even they get some reasonable points courtesy of Aaron.

[West Wing Episode 2.04 Excerpt]

ALAN: We agree that something must be done. But we don't think we're culprits, and we don't think there is an easy or obvious solution. And we think you should be aware of the dangers involved in some of the proposals made here today.

[end excerpt]

EMILY: How different do you think that scene would be if it were written today?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh yeah it would be a polemic.

JOSH: [cross talk] It would be a Martin Shkreli monster.

HRISHI: Martin Shkreli wearing his Wu Tang record around his neck. I don't that think Big Pharma was any less reviled then than it is now, but it just happened to be...

JOSH: No, we've had some big, some high profile... between the EpiPen and Martin Shkreli it's really on our minds now. I think they were just lucky to have been written by Aaron.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: He was looking to give a balanced portrayal.

HRISHI: The scene that you have right before they announce the coup. When you have the big debate about guns with Sam and Josh, I was so uncomfortable watching it because of how abrasive they are. The confrontation between the three...

[West Wing Episode 2.04 Excerpt]

AINSLEY: This White House that loves the Bill of Rights, all of them – except the second one.

SAM: [looks at Josh nervously] This is the wrong place to talk about guns right now. I thought your column was idiotic.

AINSLEY: Imagine my surprise.

SAM: [getting steadily more emotional] But for a brilliant surgical team and two centimeters of a miracle, this guy's dead right now. From bullets fired from a gun bought legally.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love the little physical thing when Sam says, "This is not the place to talk about guns right now." And he kind of steps forward to physically add to the confrontation and you see Brad checks him with his shoulder. It's not to stop him necessarily, but almost like a thank you in some ways it felt like, "Okay, maybe restrain yourself but also thanks for stepping up."

JOSH: Yeah, it's kind of both sides of it.

EMILY: There is some really interesting physicality throughout that whole scene and the Ainsley character is just very still with her back against the wall, which, I thought, was really kind of poetic. The shot of the two of them and that sideways over and when Rob sits into it and adjusts his tie. It's very comfortable and relaxed and "This is my place." I love the way they directed that scene and how it looked.

HRISHI: Sideways over?

EMILY: So, Sam sits down on the desk in profile and pulls out his tie. And then you see Brad come in and they're both kind of in this weird profile facing each other.

HRISH: Hmm.

EMILY: And I thought "Gosh, even with the shootings days being that long they took so much time to set up this really beautiful shot!"

HRISHI: I also loved the scene you had the one-on-one with C.J.

[West Wing Episode 2.04 Excerpt]

AINSLEY: You didn't break the law. Attorneys and jurors are under a gag order. Witnesses are free to say whatever they want, and anyone is free to repeat what they've said. You know, I'm not sure that laying low and hoping nobody noticed was the best strategy here. Next time, you should really run it by someone in the Counsel's Office. Anyway, I should go see Leo.

C.J.: Yeah.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You get her off the hook and there's again, so many layers to that of being like, "Well, she's appreciative and relieved." But it's also this awkward moment of this relief being delivered by this person who's essentially an antagonist to her.

EMILY: You're very sweet to say that. When I look at that scene all I see is me being completely in awe of Allison's talent. Her having to work twice as hard because I am not, to use the word of the day, as fluid with her. I'm just getting lines out as best I can. 'Cause I'm so impressed with her. And she's having to just fill in all the spaces because I'm just sitting there googly eyed. Like, "Hah, look at it. I can't believe it's right here." [laughter]

JOSH: I did not see it that way.

HRISHI: That's [cross talk] amazing!

EMILY: [cross talk] Oh man! I did, I did! I was just like, "Poor Allison!"

HRISHI: I was wondering in those scenes, in between takes, like in that scene or in between takes with Bradley and Rob, did they stay in character? Did they stay kind of standoffish to you? Or as soon as the cameras stopped rolling was everybody relaxed and friendly and nice?

EMILY: First of all, Rob is one of the world's best flirts. I feel like if he had been born the generation before, he would have been Cary Grant. It's just so effortless for him. He just shows up and puts everyone at ease and is like "I'm impossibly good looking but it's my gift for all of you."

JOSH: Here, have some?

EMILY: Yeah, have some! [Laughing] You just are like, "Wow, that's so great." I think of Allison still for two reasons. She caught me in one of my worst human moments in an airport ever and I don't think I've seen her since then. I was just like, "Aaargh!" at the airport, and then was just like "Oh, hey Allison." And also, she had back trouble, which is something I eventually ended up with back trouble and I think about her on her feet, working and I think in some of those scenes she may have been wearing slippers.

JOSH: It's funny that you say that because in the film *Big Night* ... spoiler alert! In that film there is a big night.

EMILY: Really? [laughter]

JOSH: There's a big party and a meal and she's in fancy clothes and clearly fancy shoes and there is a quick shot of her in her slippers. There is a gaffe!

HRISHI: Wow!

JOSH: And we're gonna put that up on our website.

HRISHI: All right.

EMILY: I think of Alison as being in her slippers.

HRISHI: Well, I'm relieved but a little bit disappointed that they didn't go full method on it and kind of ice you out.

EMILY: They were so sweet to me, so sweet to me and made me feel really comfortable. I have such fond memories of being there.

HRISHI: By the time that you guys had wrapped on this episode, did you already know you were going to be coming back for... they said, "one and possibly four," did you already know you were at least getting the second one?

EMILY: I don't think so. I can't remember. It was such a "Charlie and the golden ticket" that anything I got I was just happy with, you know, it was enough. I don't even think I dared myself

or allowed myself the thought that it would go on and on and on because it just didn't seem possible.

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

EMILY: You know I miss that I didn't get to see a lot of those other scenes shot.

HRISHI: 'Cause you'd only be there for you own scenes.

EMILY: Yes, I got to see a lot of C.J. scenes. But not the other storylines. Those were just different days.

HRISHI: Right, I'm just remembering now that you said you hadn't watched the episode probably since [cross talk] [unintelligible]

JOSH [cross talk]: She may not have watched it originally.

HRISHI: So, you might be seeing some of those things for the very first time.

EMILY: Yes!

JOSH: That's wild!

EMILY: I remember having a party and seeing pieces of it and I remember making trail mix and occasionally walking out and feeling so tight. Like my hands were tight and I was making things and I was like "I hope people were having fun. And, oh my god, I'm on tv."

HRISHI: That's awesome. Was it a big party?

EMILY: I would say there were probably 18 people there, just in my apartment, in my living room, my friends. So many of us who were trying to get jobs and in various stages of "Oh, I got a really good job," "I got an okay job," "I don't have any job." And I had gone a really, really long spell without any work. It's sort of like the classic actor story when you ain't got nothing, you got nothing to lose. Like last audition sort of thing when it came across. I had a lot less nerves because I didn't know how much longer I would actually be able to say this is a good career choice for me. And so, when that came through, I was like, "Well, I'll just go for it. Because this is probably my last audition. At least I get to read this material for another human, let alone in front of the box with people watching."

HRISHI: Once you did this initial run of Ainsley did you notice things change for you on the audition or offer side? Did more things start to come in because of *The West Wing* ?

EMILY: Well, Aaron and I have had this conversation where he always says, "Why did you leave?" and I always say, "Why did you not keep me?" Its lovers spat. I would have stayed there forever. But I did get an offer. I got an offer and I remember it was a simultaneous offer from John Wells for something else. I really loved this other thing and really wanted to do this other

thing with John. And just in the ways that sometimes as actors you don't have any control over what job is going to be yours, that is kind of how things worked. And so, I ended up on a show and I'll never forget Marg Helgenberger saying on the pilot, "That girl from *The West Wing* is not going to make it here." [talk over]

JOSH: [cross talk] What? There's always one real...

EMILY: [cross talk] I love Marg, but I was like where's the table read? Aren't we going to rehearse it? Run these lines?

JOSH: You got a little spoiled by the way things went on *The West Wing* .

EMILY: Yeah! They just sort of opened the van door and you roll out with your props and shoot some people and get back in. [laughter] And like "Next scene."

JOSH: We've talked about it. How it's rare air and a rare approach to making television was *The West Wing*.

EMILY: Yeah!

JOSH: It was, indeed.

EMILY: When I was watching this episode and I was looking at all of them having their meeting in the boardroom, the only thing I see when I see the boardroom is [cross talk] table reads!

JOSH: [cross talk] Table reads! Yeah, I feel the same thing.

EMILY: And I remember asking when we went to *Miami* and I was like, "Where do we table read?" And they laughed at me! [laughter]

JOSH: We don't even have a table.

EMILY: Yeah, they just laughed at me. They were like "Stand and read it in front of the camera."

JOSH: All right *West Wing* girl.

EMILY: Yeah.

JOSH: That's funny. There's a scene among Josh, Toby, the President of Kundu, and his interpreter, in which Brad Whitford has something under his lower lip. I haven't been this excited since discovering the hair thingy! I don't remember which episode it was, when Rob Lowe had a hair thingy. Brad Whitford has a lip thingy! I don't know if it's a pimple? No, it disappears during the scene and we'll put a still of it up on our website.

EMILY: Oh, wow!

JOSH: He's got something. I sent a still of it to you, Hrish, you can confirm [cross talk]. There's something there.

HRISH: [cross talk] I can confirm. There's something there.

JOSH: He cut himself shaving? There's something weird on Brad's lip.

EMILY: It was probably something from the coffee cart

JOSH: It may [cross talk] have been a muffin.

EMILY: [cross talk] That Emmy nominee coffee cart.

JOSH: Oh wait, this is like forensic. This is very *CSI*. There's forensic evidence suggesting that it's some sort of celebratory pastry.

HRISH: It's one of the finest muffins or bagels in the land.

JOSH: Indeed.

EMILY: It might have actually been because it rolled in there with all sorts of people like "Amazing! You're amazing!"

JOSH: I'm going to put that up and see what the fans think.

EMILY: But there was also, wait, who was it on?

JOSH: It's on Brad Whitford.

EMILY: But he always has his Carol Burnett belch to friends out there.

JOSH: Huh.

EMILY: Was that to you?

JOSH: [cross talk] No.

EMILY: [cross talk] Who did he do that too?

JOSH: He is a very burpy actor. I don't know that it was a thing.

EMILY: No, it's a thing!

JOSH: He does a "Mmmhmmhmm". He talks and does a weird thing. But that's like saying hello to somebody?

EMILY: Yes, and it is my understanding and, granted I could have dreamt this and it became reality, but it is my understanding that he and a friend of his from school had this sort of ongoing [cross talk] thing.

JOSH: [cross talk] This is fantastic. I love that you're solving a lot of things forensically for me. Because I know exactly what you're talking about. I always just thought it was a weird Foster Brooksian-type drunk guy thing he does in his delivery sometimes. So, you're saying it's a shout out a friend?

EMILY: I think that he has a friend and the two of them in acting school used to see how many times they could get it in a scene. And I do think, at one point, it required a talking-to from the brass to say, "Too many times!".

HRISHI: That is the way he speaks.

JOSH: That is brilliant!

HRISHI: I always thought it was a...

JOSH: ...a weird acting technique. That's what I thought. [cross talk] A weird thing that Brad does...

EMILY: [cross talk] No. It's actually like his sixty-line scratch, except he's doing it to show off!

JOSH: That is hilarious. I love Margaret as a character and how she's developed late season one into season two.

[West Wing Episode 2:04 Excerpt]

AINSLEY: The woman who works out there who I imagine is your secretary offered me coffee or a soft drink.

LEO: Ok, so...

AINSLEY: She was also kind enough to ask for my coat.

LEO: Excellent.

AINSLEY: She seems to be a very good secretary.

LEO: Well, she'll be happy to hear that. She's standing right outside the door.

[Leo bangs on door]

MARGARET: Ow!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: The Leo/Margaret relationship is very special.

HRISHI: Even before Ainsley comes in, when she introduces her she's like:

[West Wing Episode 2:04 excerpt]

MARGARET: Leo,

LEO: Yeah

MARGARET: She's here.

LEO: Good.

MARGARET: Should I send her in?

LEO: Yeah.

MARGARET: You want me to stay here?

LEO: Why?

MARGARET: In case something should happen.

LEO: What would that be, exactly?

MARGARET: I'll bring her in.

LEO: Thank you.

[end excerpt]

EMILY: The behind the scenes take, Nicole was really, really sweet to me and we did things outside. We would go roller skating...

JOSH: At the studio?

EMILY: No, we would go roller skating at Moonlight Rollerway in Glendale for fun.

JOSH: That's cute.

EMILY: I was always obsessed with her hair, she did her hair herself. She did it in rollers, because I was like "How is this happening?" She had a tortoise that lived in her..., she had like one of those two-strip Hollywood bungalow-style places where she lived off of Highland, and it was small and had a Murphy bed, and it was just really sort of glamorous and what you would think old Hollywood would be, and what you would think Margaret would live in. And she had a tortoise that would hibernate underneath her sofa and ...

JOSH: That is hilarious.

HRISHI: That's so great. Yeah, Margaret seems to me always to be a throwback to a different era, like she's somehow been transported into the 90s and early 2000s from some other show that happened in the fifties.

JOSH: Yeah, like she should be in black and white.

HRISHI: Yeah exactly. [laughter]

JOSH: ... just the one character, that would be a [cross talk] strong directorial choice.

EMILY: [cross talk] Oh, my gosh, that would be awesome.

JOSH: I have [cross talk] another...

EMILY: [cross talk] She was awesome.

JOSH: ...weird moment. I'll have to check, but I believe there's a scene... Leo and the president are talking, they've worked their way in, they've a quick little interchange with Charlie. Then there's a cut and they go into the Oval to have that big scene when the president will then say he wants to hire Ainsley. And that cut looks very much to me, it seems clear to me, they filmed that scene later. The scene where they're just starting with John Spencer and Martin walking into the Oval, and Dule had been sent home, because he had one little line that is just off camera and I can hear that it's been looped.

[West Wing Episode 2:04 excerpt]

BARTLET: Where are we?

CHARLIE: They're are all set, so whenever you are ready.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Absolutely, there's an ADR thing, I even stopped it and I said to...

JOSH: I knew you as an audiophile would be able to confirm this or deny it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: So, you did.

HRISHI: Yeah, I was watching this episode just on my laptop with my wife Lindsey and when that happened, I'll sometimes point out ADR, and then so I stopped, and I was like "Did you hear that? That's ADR, right?"

JOSH: Oh, I'm so proud of myself, this is making my day.

EMILY: Josh, I don't know your remembrance of it, but I remember doing very little ADR on *West Wing* .

JOSH: I, yeah...

EMILY: If any.

JOSH: I don't really recall doing [cross talk] ADR...

EMILY: [cross talk] Rarely.

JOSH: ...for *The West Wing* .

EMILY: Yeah, I don't really either.

JOSH: Dule, who was masterful at somehow disappearing [laughter], he probably did a lot of ADR.

EMILY: He just did like a little [cross talk] tap dance...

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

EMILY: ...and spun out of the room.

HRISHI: The part I was remembering when you brought up that scene is, we get the reappearance of Leo in the double-breasted suit.

JOSH: Huh.

HRISHI: And that brought me back [cross talk].

JOSH: [cross talk] And pocket square.

HRISHI: Yeah. And that brought me back to your purple pants, your lavender pants. When it came time to actually do wardrobe for Ainsley, did you get a sense of, "Oh, ok, this is how they..."? You know after having...

EMILY: Lynn! I remember going to see Lynn, and it's funny that you should ask that. When I was looking at a lot of those things I remembered thinking, which of the Washington suits... I remember thinking, I wasn't really that far off with my lavender pants. But, the scene we were talking about in the office, where we're talking about gun control, I am wearing a brown suit that kind of became their go-to suit for me. Because people would get assigned different colors, and somehow or another I managed to have a brown suit, because there really aren't that many

good looking brown suits, and in every scene where I was with a group with other people I'd be in the brown suit.

JOSH: You'd get brown.

EMILY: I'd get browned out and, I remember saying to Lynn, "Can I not always wear the brown suit?" Because it was really scratchy and it was kind of a tweed, and she was so disappointed because it had a texture and it was this different color and you could see she's like "...ok." [Laughter]

HRISHI: It was her chance to do something, [cross talk] to introduce her own new instrument.

EMILY: [crosstalk] Yes.

EMILY: Yeah, and then we went to the Emmy's that year and she said, "Emily, I have a dress for you," she said, "It is brown." And I was like "That's ok." [laughter]

JOSH: Is it scratchy?

EMILY: I was like, "I'll wear it. Thanks for getting me something."

HRISHI: That's pretty great, that Lynn Paulo was giving you guys clothes for the Emmy's, that's fantastic.

EMILY: Oh, she had racks and racks and racks, and everyone would go down during lunch or time off, and try on clothes. She did everything!

HRISHI: Wow, did you have a stylist at that point?

EMILY: Lynn and Frankie! I have never really had a stylist and if you look back, you'll see that that's true [laughter]. And in fact, we went to the Emmy's, I always think about, I had my hair in this kind of up-do and that was the up-do that I did to wash my face and put on make-up. And this is something that a lot of girls may relate to, but y'all may not... Sometimes you'll put your hair up to wash our face, or put on your make up, and you're like "How did this happen? This actually looks like a hairstyle!" [laughter]

JOSH: Done.

EMILY: I weirdly, just rocked that thing right onto the red carpet and every time I see a shot from that award show I think, I cannot believe that I stood out there with my face wash-hair.

JOSH: Oh, we're going to put that photo up too! We've got a lot of good supplemental material for this episode. Here's another thought I had... One little moment that I loved, when the president of Kundu, when he finds out about the coup, he says, "Where are my children?" That's his immediate response, and I just thought that that was a very touching little moment.

HRISHI: I also liked that that was something that they translated.

JOSH: Hmm.

HRISHI: There was a choice not to have him say it in English.

EMILY: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 2:04 Excerpt]

BARTLET: Mr. President, three hours ago there was a coup in your country. The AFRC has taken the capital.

NIMBALA: [speaking in foreign language]

TRANSLATOR: Where are my children?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought that was something, too. I liked those moments where he switches to English, when he decides not to use the interpreter.

EMILY: I loved that they put Martin in that Notre Dame sweatshirt, at the end.

JOSH: Hmm.

HRISHI: Right.

EMILY: There is something about that kind of sweatshirt, and the shape of it, and the fullness of it, that said that it was something that he had had. This was a comfortable thing for him, that he could have wandered over from his personal side of the building to wait and see what happened. And I loved the marriage of personal and professional in such a simple way, and it really hit home. It just really looked vulnerable and it is hard not to watch that scene, when they say they executed him in the airport, and not cry and not wish and hope that everyone who is in charge would behave so steadfastly to their service. And, I watched that today and I just thought, "Oh please, I have hope for all of us."

JOSH: The other thing that occurred to me, or kept occurring to me as I watched, was that the Ainsley Hayes storyline in this episode is such an illustration of what Aaron believes and stated through Robert Guillaume's character in *Sports Night*, Isaac:

[Sports Night Episode 1:03 excerpt]

ISAAC: If you are dumb, surround yourself with smart people and if you are smart, surround yourself with smart people who disagree with you.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's funny, it's such a, like a distillation of Aaron's belief. How would that work at *The West Wing* that you would see other writers, consulting producers, and other creative team?

EMILY: Well, if you didn't know it before today, you may have realized that I am an extrovert. And when people walk by, I try and get them to talk to me and I think that was just one of those situations. There were just so many interesting people there and because I was a guest cast member, even if it was special, I had extra time, and so people would often just sit with me and talk. I have just these very special, warm-hearted memories of my experience and how people were to me and how kind and utterly fulfilling. In my career as an actor it will probably be the thing where I'm like, "Oh gosh! I really felt like I was allowed to fully play my sport." And encouraged and that's as an actor, is rare.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: That's awesome. Thanks so much.

EMILY: Oh my gosh, you guys, thanks for having me!

HRISHI: And that's it for our episode. Thanks for joining us and we hope you will join us next time.

JOSH: And currently you can pre-order one of our classic *West Wing Weekly* lapel pins by clicking on "pin" on our website. And, Hrishi, big news!

HRISHI: We're very excited to announce the introduction of our first T-shirt!

JOSH: Wooooo!

HRISHI: We're partnering with Cotton Bureau for a limited edition run of *West Wing Weekly* T-shirts. The way Cotton Bureau does it is this, they put up a design for two weeks and then collect all the orders that come in during that time and then produce and print the shirts and send them out. So for the next two weeks, you can go to thewestwingweekly.com/shirt and order one for yourself or get one for you and for a friend. And if it goes well, we might make more. But for now, the shirts only going to be available for the next two weeks. The shirt itself is called "The Signal." It's an instructional guide on how to give the Signal, the move that means "safe departure," and also, for us, means that you have spotted a fellow *West Wing Weekly* listener. Probably by their lapel pin, but maybe by other means.

JOSH: But here's the thing, I'm gonna up the stakes...If I run into you and you're wearing the shirt with the lapel pin on it, I will just spontaneously jump into your arms. But you have to catch me.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: You have to catch me.

HRISHI: In addition to instructions on how to give the Signal on the front of the shirt, on the back TWWW, which stands for *The West Wing Weekly* and is also our hashtag, written out in fingerspelling in ASL. A little nod to Kenny and Joey Lucas.

JOSH: It's a nice shirt.

HRISHI: You can get the shirt by going to thewestwingweekly.com/shirt and the pin by going to thewestwingweekly.com/pin.

JOSH: And thanks to everybody who has bought some merchandise and supported the podcast. In the meantime, follow us on twitter. I'm @JoshMalina, Hrishi's @HrishiHirway. The show is @WestWingWeekly.

HRISHI: Emily Procter is @EmilyProcter and Procter is spelled T-E-R at the end, not T-O-R. And PEPFAR is on Twitter as well, @PEPFAR. You can learn more at pepfar.gov. You can also leave a comment for us at our website, thewestwingweekly.com.

JOSH: Or you can leave a comment and a "like" on our Facebook page, facebook.com/thewestwingweekly.

HRISHI: You can also leave a like on our website, although people don't seem to be doing that so much. I wish they would.

JOSH: I know, it bums you out.

HRISHI: It does.

JOSH: Do it for Hrishi.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

EMILY: What's next?

[Outro music]