

The West Wing Weekly
3.02: "Manchester, Part II"
Guest: Connie Britton

JOSH: Hey there! I'm –

[Laughter]

JOSH: I'm trying to add my own twist to it.

HRISHI: Go ahead! You do you.

[Intro Music]

JOSH: Well, hey there! You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: Today we're talking about season three, episode two – Manchester Part 2. It was written by Aaron Sorkin. It was directed by Tommy Schlamme – same as Part 1. And this one aired first on October 17th 2001.

HRISHI: Coming up later in this episode, we'll be joined by Connie Britton, who played Connie Tate in this episode. Here's a synopsis.

JOSH: Or a hrynopsis. Why won't you embrace it? Is it because you're modest?

HRISHI: I don't know... It's –

JOSH: [cross talk] It's a hrynopsis. With an 'h'.

HRISHI: It's silly for me to say something that includes my own name. It's like talking about myself in the third person. That would be weird.

JOSH: You know who likes to do that? Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: [laughs] I knew it! I saw it coming!

JOSH: That's the beauty about the way *West Wing* stays one step ahead of the viewer. I like to telegraph where I'm going with my dad jokes. It's different. They balance each other out.

HRISHI: [laughs] It's nice. It's good to give the listener a sense of predictability.

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: Alright, here's a synopsis.

JOSH: A hrynopsis.

HRISHI: [Laughs] It's the second half of the two-part season three premiere. As with last week, we're in two different timelines: shortly after the president's decision to run for re-election, and four weeks later at his home in New Hampshire. The operation in Haiti was a success, but things are still pretty icy between the president and the First Lady and everyone on the staff knows it. And C.J.'s worried about the rest of the world knowing it too, as she considers her future as Press Secretary. Josh is confronted with the political reality of his actions on the big tobacco lawsuit. And the staff and the political consultants of Doug, Connie and Bruno are trying to bridge a familiar chasm between style and substance.

JOSH: Damn, you're good!

HRISHI: I tried harder this time.

JOSH: It shows. I wish you'd send me these before I watch the show. I feel like they would help me. They would keep me focused.

HRISHI: [laughs] I can do that.

JOSH: I'd appreciate it. Before we jump into the show, can I just say there is news from the wonderful world of octopuses?

HRISHI: Ooh! Octopotus!

JOSH: [laughs] Wow. It's been a full season, I think, since we talked about – there was a time where I thought we might check in with octopuses biweekly.

HRISHI: Mmhmm.

JOSH: But we've really ... it's been a whole season without discussing them, and it turns out I read in a news story – I'm sure we can link to it – that octopuses can and often do tweak their own RNA, which affects their biology and, I think, often their neurological system and apparently this is a bombshell in the world of octopuses and speaks to their incredible adaptability.

HRISHI: Wow! That's ... scary.

JOSH: It is!

HRISHI: More news from the terror fronts of the world of octopuses.

JOSH: Mmhmm.

HRISHI: We could start a separate podcast about this. We could call it cephalopodcast.

JOSH: Nice.

HRISHI: [laughs] The cephalopodcast—look for it in the future.

JOSH: Yeah. And I think it will be apt when we have eight listeners.

HRISHI: Exactly...What else you got?

JOSH: That's it!

[Laughter]

JOSH: That's all I've got. I mean, I've got some on the *West Wing* episode.

HRISHI: Alright.

JOSH: My very first impression was that we get another delightful, genuine excited Sam Seaborn moment in the barn in the opening when C.J., with horror, spots a snake.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

C.J.: There's a snake over here.

SAM: What kind?

C.J.: I don't know and—

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Of course Sam is a herp guy, and excited to maybe find the snake.

HRISHI: [laughs] A herp guy? He speaks parseltongue.

JOSH: Nice. It's a big thing, though. I have—my son himself is only into skating, but he has some friends [cross talk] who are way into—

HRISHI: [cross talk] Also parseltongues?

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah, basically yes.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh wow!

JOSH: You know, they do this – they go around looking for snakes. I think they call it herping, which is an atrocious [laughs] way to refer to a pastime for kids, but—

HRISHI: What's even worse is the people who are their fans. They're called herpes.

JOSH: Wooo! [laughs] Yep. Exactly. They lay these boards out, which I guess snakes like to either lay on in the sun, or under, and then they go and they find snakes. And I suspect Sam is one of them.

HRISHI: Yeah. He's just a real nature lover.

JOSH: Yeah, I guess so.

HRISHI: Let me ask you, which of the two Manchesters did you like better; part one or part two?

JOSH: Well, without really pondering why, I liked part two better.

HRISHI: Me too.

JOSH: Hey! I bet you're going to explain to us why.

HRISHI: Maybe it's just the fact that we get some resolution of things that are set up in part one. It's unfair to compare them because you should look at them as one big episode. But I like part two better—the first one felt so dense and you're trying to keep track of everything, and here it's more like we get to focus in on individual moments and individual dynamics that kind of resolve in nice ways here. So, you get to feel both the tension and the resolution, whereas in part one maybe you only get the tension.

JOSH: Very well-articulated. And I think that is, in fact, what I was responding to without even realizing it. Yeah, there's some good payoff and there were sort of tensions raised in the first part, and we get to see them more fully developed and addressed and paid off here.

HRISHI: Mmhmm.

JOSH: These aired on separate weeks, right?

HRISHI: Yeah, October 10th and October 17th.

JOSH: Yeah. So, I wonder if that was the original feeling, having to wait a week to see how things move on.

HRISHI: Yeah. They could have also called it, instead of "Manchester Part One and Part Two", they could have called it "Hitting the Wall Part One and Part Two".

JOSH: Hmm!

HRISHI: Because you get C.J. in part one and then Josh in this one.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

JOSH: I could've picked up the phone, I could've ...

Donna: [cross talk] Josh ...

JOSH: [hits the wall] God!

Donna: What's this about?

JOSH: [sighs]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I like those moments a lot. I like that their frustration gets the better of them and they actually have to act out physically.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree.

HRISHI: The phrase 'pissed at' is used a lot in this episode.

JOSH: Wow, I don't think I even really noticed it.

HRISHI: Let me enumerate them for you.

JOSH: Please.

HRISHI: One, Leo says—

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

LEO: You know what, C.J.? Stop being pissed at me about Haiti.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: ... and then Abbey says to the president—

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

ABBEY: You're pissed at me?!

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I'm trying to read here.

ABBEY: You're pissed at me! I don't believe it! I don't believe you!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: ... and then Doug says it a bunch of times, which I thought was, you know, interesting that it happens a lot during this episode, but it also ... the last one, when Doug says—

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

DOUG: You're more pissed at him than the press is. You're more pissed at him than the party is. You're so pissed at him, you're pissed at me.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: ... that part was a call back or a little Aaron Sorkin reuse from "Mandatory Minimums" —I don't know if you remember this—from [chuckles] "Mandy-tory Minimums," back in the days of Mandy.

JOSH: Minima.

HRISHI: [laughs] When C.J. said –

[The West Wing Episode 1.20 excerpt]

C.J.: Do you have any idea how pissed people are at you? They're pissed at me! That's how pissed they are at you. They want to know how the hell...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Wow, look at you! And do you just know that, you just remembered that?

HRISHI: I knew that I had heard it before. I took me a second to remember whether I had seen it in *The West Wing*, in *Sports Night* or something else. So, I had to pause the episode and just kind of file through the mental Rolodex of who was saying it and I thought it was C.J. I texted Kevin Porter, creator of the Sorkinisms supercut, last night, just to confirm. I said “Isn’t ‘you’re so pissed at him you’re pissed at me’ reused by Sorkin somewhere? Doesn’t C.J. say it to Mandy?” and Kevin wrote back—he was like “Yeah, maybe in ‘Let Bartlet be Bartlet’”. And then I said “Maybe ‘Mandatory Minimums’?” And I looked at “Mandatory Minimums” and I found it.

JOSH: Like that. In the future, can we refer to it as Mandatories Minimum?

HRISHI: [laughs] Yes. We should.

JOSH: Without commentary, let’s just do that sometime down the—and then we can enjoy the responses on the website.

HRISHI: [laughs] OK.

JOSH: Let’s do that. And I like that, rather than Googling it, you went to Kevin Porter.

HRISHI: [laughs] Just confirmation.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: It’s good to have a fellow nerd like that in my contacts list.

JOSH: Mmhmm.

HRISHI: I was gonna say Rolodex, but I just said Rolodex, so ...

[Laughter]

JOSH: You could have said fanny pack.

HRISHI: Wow. Well, not with all our British listeners.

JOSH: And that whole ‘pissed at’ supercut you just gave us, seems to me that’s the kind of main theme of this—maybe of both these episodes; this sort of misplaced or displaced anger and resentment, and it finally all kind of starts bubbling up and getting dealt with explicitly. One of the things I loved about this episode was that very first Bartlet-Abbey scene, in which he comes in—

HRISHI: Josh.

JOSH: President Bartlet! Yeah ...

HRISHI: Come on.

JOSH: I was setting you up! On purpose!

[Laughter]

JOSH: Yes. The President Bartlet—President—Abbey scene, in which he just breezes by her—

HRISHI: President scene. Josh. Come on.

[Laughter]

JOSH: This is going to be a very long episode if you keep doing this.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: President episode. Very well written. I thought that was a very real and very good scene about a marriage where things just aren't quite connecting – the fact that he walks by her and didn't notice her, and then he kind of obsesses about that.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Abbey, you were lying down when I came in. I didn't see you.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: She hasn't really said anything about it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. Right.

JOSH: But he just wants to make sure she understands, 'Look, I just didn't see you'. It's like—it's just layered, it's arguments within arguments, and 'we're not really quite ready to have the explicit thing, but let's have a little offshoot tension' and I just really like the subtle hand in the writing and the acting of that scene. It's just not quite firing for them the way they usually do. You know, these guys fight very well. We've seen them go at it many times, and they're—generally, you can feel the love there, you can feel how many years they've been together, and like—they can't quite get their fight on yet, in this scene.

HRISHI: Right. I also loved that thing about 'I didn't see you'. It's such a strange thing that feels so real, that somebody would be apologizing for something—not going to apologize for something that actually is substantive, but—it's a weird moment between them and I like that it's not actually a point of tension between them but that he creates it as one.

JOSH: Yeah. But the other thing I thought was it's kind of like it's a shadow argument.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It points towards the real problem. She also, multiple times, has to repeat herself to him.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: And I think the real problem, the real argument to be had is that she's not feeling seen and heard.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: And so it's kind of a brilliant little piece of writing.

HRISHI: That is like a really nice, subtle way of mirroring psychology in these external ways. Less successful for me was the double Josh Lyman Freudian slip.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And this is something that's happened in *The West Wing* before—and before, I thought it was fine—when Sam Seaborn is saying to Donna in the heat of the moment, you know, saying father instead of grandfather in “Somebody's going to emergency, somebody's going to jail”. He's going on and he's like—

[West Wing Episode 2.16 excerpt]

SAM: This girl's going to find out who her father was.

DONNA: Sam. You meant grandfather.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That, like, makes sense and it feels, like, really dramatically earned. I don't know, maybe I would feel that way about these if that moment hadn't already happened, but it had, and so when Josh makes the slip of saying 'subcommittee' instead of 'the FDA', and he says—

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

JOSH: Two weeks to announce the drug. They don't have to do it on Monday. I can fix tobacco.

LEO: Tobacco.

JOSH: No, I meant ... 486.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Both of those, I was like, meh.

JOSH: You just did – because I can see you—exactly what I was about to say. I shrugged off those moments. I thought, ‘is this supposed to land more palpably?’ I, of course, not being you, didn’t even think back this has already been done brilliantly in this series, in that moment with Sam and Donna—but I think that’s exactly why, even if I wasn’t consciously connecting it; this is done in a really impactful, dramatic way, and here I think I’m supposed to somehow be more impressed or somehow be struck by something that is not particularly landing.

HRISHI: Yeah. Hey, one thing about the nature of this podcast—we talked about this a little bit on Twitter – but we talked about *Wag the Dog* last week...

JOSH: [sighs]

HRISHI: ... in relation to Haiti, and you know, the president wanting to—not wanting to invade, in a move that would seem like it was political cover for domestic issues. And in the time since we have recorded that episode, Donald Trump has attacked Syria with retaliatory missile strikes. And people have been talking about the virtue of a proportional response, they’ve called it a proportional response, which some people have wondered about since no American targets were actually affected by the use of sarin gas. But then also there’s speculation about his own version—a kind of ‘wag the dog’ moment, which can distract from stuff about Russian interference in the elections, and, you know, having a moment to come out like a strong military leader. Our episode on Manchester Part I hasn’t come out yet; this has already happened and I already know when it comes out people are going to say ‘Oh, I can’t believe you guys didn’t talk about how this connects to Syria’.

JOSH: Right. Unfortunately, we ‘lag the dog’ on this one.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Yeah, I put in the phrase ‘wag the dog’ in Twitter and a lot of people were referencing it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That’s the nature of putting it in a podcast, but also the nature of the presidency is such that impropriety, and the appearance of impropriety, and even if there’s nothing really there but you’ve stumbled into something—it kind of, it all reflects nicely on what we’re dealing with in Manchester Part 1 and 2. Should the president apologize? If he doesn’t, is he vulnerable to this kind of interpretation and the kind of process story on maybe he’s doing this to bump up his numbers. And that’s exactly what we’re talking about now. It’s all very relevant. And remaining relatively scandal free—as our previous president of eight years managed to do—is something to be desired as it reduces the multiplicity of interpretations the public can make over one action or another.

HRISHI: Yeah. As frustrating as it was, because of the podcast we don’t get to comment on current events in real time. That’s not our job.

JOSH: That's what Twitter is for.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. It just drives home how evergreen *The West Wing* is. Right now, *The West Wing* still feels relatively new. I know it's been off the air for 10 years. I mean, it's a product of my adulthood and I'm still in that phase of my life, and I will be until I die...

JOSH: You might have a second childhood.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Right!

JOSH: And I will take care of you.

HRISHI: Thank you.

JOSH: To the extent that I can do that from my house and not have to come to your house.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Ok, how do I get to my point? Ok. *The West Wing* has been off the air for 10 years, and yet 10 years later it's still relevant. It makes me wonder if in 20 years and 30 years, *The West Wing* will still also feel equally relevant. You know, like the difference between how much has changed in the world in 10 years—you know, there are some things that are very significant—but as issues evolve, as society evolves, I wonder if these are just stories about the mechanics of the American presidency, and so no matter what and what age we're going to be in, Aaron Sorkin has managed to find a way to, like, make it timeless.

JOSH: Yes, I suspect that will be the case and there will be technological things that will look creaky and I think people will be discussing these episodes entirely in emojis, but they will still be discussing these—you know, it's just not a museum piece...

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: ... and, you know, while some of the—while certain aspects of it might start to look creaky, I think you're right; the issues and the ideas remain and will remain as relevant as they were when the show was first produced.

HRISHI: Yeah. Ok, back to the episode.

JOSH: Oh yeah. The FDA is a federal agency, right? They keep referring to it as an independent agency. Do you know what they mean by that?

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

LEO: The FDA's an independent agency. They can announce when they want.

JOSH: The FDA's a division of HHS and technically not an independent agency.

LEO: Technically.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It is a department of Health and Human Services, as Josh says in the episode. So the FDA is definitely a federal agency, but it is a regulatory body and so it has, maybe, independence outside of the different branches?

JOSH: I don't know, I'm curious about the whole—so much is made out of it. I'm curious about whether it would be uncool for somebody to make the call and say 'hey, can you hold off on that for a couple of weeks'.

HRISHI: Right. Leo's a real teddy bear in this episode.

JOSH: Yeah. I miss his casual racism.

HRISHI: [laughs] No, he's like—in three different moments, he kind of delivers a 'screw you' and then walks away.

JOSH: Yeah, no, I love that. I like master negotiator!

HRISHI: [laughs] Right!

JOSH: I wrote down "I like Leo's style in this episode". He's confident, he doesn't give a [expletive deleted], he's decisive and I feel like he's earned the ability to be that way. We know he's warm, we know he's compassionate, we know he loves these people and he respects them, so when he's in the mode of 'I've just made a decision, I don't need to hear any more feedback and I don't give a [expletive deleted] if he doesn't like it, he can just not like it'; I like when he hits that mode because I think sometimes that's what a good leader just has to do.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And he's earned it by not being a guy who never cares about anyone's opinion. He's just like 'Look, I've processed all this. Here's how it's going to be'.

HRISHI: Yeah. Although, you know, a little bedside manner.

JOSH: I guess.

HRISHI: You know, Nancy McNally, she says—you know, Leo decides he wants Nancy to take over for the Haiti briefings, and Nancy says—

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

NANCY: I don't feel right about this.

LEO: I don't care.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: —and walks away. And then C.J. says—

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

C.J.: I'm not wild about the fact that you told Toby what we discussed.

LEO: He's the Communications Director. You don't think he should know?

C.J.: When I think it's time—

LEO: When I think it's time, I will tell anyone who works for me anything I damn please.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: —and then he walks away. [Laughs] And then again C.J. and Leo—you know, in the flashback, where she says—

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

LEO: I'm bringing in Bruno Gianelli.

C.J.: It's too early for Bruno.

LEO: No.

C.J.: Toby, Sam and Josh—the guys aren't going to like it!

LEO: They'll have to live with it.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: —and then he walks away.

JOSH: You know, it's funny though, I love all three of those moments and it didn't leave me thinking 'this guy needs to work on his manners' at all.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: I feel like those are largely moments where the victim is being too touchy-feely about a job.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Especially, even the way she says it— 'those other guys aren't gonna like it'. I mean, are you kidding me?! Do your job! Here's the decision I gave you! I actually like that, you know – maybe you could fault him for a lack of consistency, because usually they are allowed to say things like this and there'll be kind of more of a 'well, let's discuss it, let's figure this out'. But I like that these are moments—the stakes are high, time is not abundant and I just like that he nips in the bud: 'no, here's how it's going to be'.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: You know, exit stage left.

HRISHI: Although, the president does call him out, sort of, at the end. He tells C.J. that it was a mistake to bench her, that Nancy was right.

JOSH: Yeah, no, look, the president disagrees with Leo. So be it.

HRISHI: Yeah. Doesn't mean that you dislike how Leo made his decision.

JOSH: Not only do I not dislike the mode of communication, I also think the way he broke it down for Nancy McNally made a lot of sense.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

NANCY: She made a mistake.

LEO: I'm not punishing her. You're not the political face of this Administration, you have no part of the MS thing and you won't be asked questions about it.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: 'You're not gonna get the follow up questions that C.J.'s gonna get'. That one really made sense for me.

HRISHI: Totally.

JOSH: And I thought she should have grokked that right away.

HRISHI: Yeah. It actually made me wonder why the president said that it was wrong to bench her. The president disagreed with Leo, but I was wondering if he—it felt like, yeah, Leo made the point why she should've been benched; the First Lady suggested it as well. It seemed like the president was only saying that to kind of like be apologetic to C.J., but the substance of the apology wasn't actually right. It was right to bench her.

JOSH: Well that's very perceptive of you, because as you're saying it, what I think the moment is—I think you're absolutely right, that he was saying it just to make her feel better and to apologize for something, and it was something that he could blame on someone else.

HRISHI: [laughs] Right!

JOSH: He's apologizing for Leo.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: So he's not ready to buy anything back on a personal level quite yet. But, hey, I will toss you this. 'Hey, kid. I'm sorry Leo treated you that way.'

HRISHI: Right! And it was, like, a baby step for him to be able to say to her 'I need you'.

JOSH: Yeah, that's right. It was maybe like a little transition moment for him.

HRISHI: Yeah, following the First Lady's advice that once he starts reaching out to the staff, they'll feel better and then he'll feel better. And you could see it starting to work there. I do love this central conflict of these two episodes. It crystallizes a little bit more here that the problem is—the reason why those guys aren't gonna like it is, one, they don't like people coming into their house and telling them how to do their job, because they feel like 'we're experts, we got here'. You know, the president even says they kind of made the impossible possible, this dream team. And now they're being told they need consultants, they need outside help. And the real issue is it's all living under the shadow of the president's MS, the lie about his MS, and he hasn't apologized to them, and all these things that have happened, all the conflict that really lies in this episode: the president and the First Lady; Toby and Doug's argument; Sam and Connie have their little thing; Bruno and Leo; C.J.'s screw up on Haiti; even Josh's thing with tobacco—all these conflicts kind of all live under this shadow. And I love how plainly Doug and Connie just read those guys. They just completely filet their psychology in front of them and they're like 'you're acting like this because of this and this is what's really happening'. As much as those guys just lie right back at them and say 'no that's absolutely not what's happening', they get it completely right.

JOSH: Yeah. That's correct. Boy, they are closing ranks in a way—it's frustrating to watch over two episodes. They are not taking in the new people. Doug and Connie are treated, you know, with very little respect and their ideas, which seem to me to have some merit or certainly things that are worth discussion, get really just batted back at them over the net immediately.

HRISHI: Yeah. Doug's character feels like a new version of the Mandy dynamic. The mandynamic.

JOSH: [Laughs]

HRISHI: You can see that he's frustrated because 'yes, I understand all the reasons, all the good intentions behind everything that you guys want to say, but the most important thing in order to do any of that is you have to be able to get back into office and you need to do these things first'. You know, like, he's like 'I'm here for damage control'.

JOSH: 'Here to win.'

HRISHI: Yeah. It felt, again, like a more successful version of that fight that they were having with Mandy a lot in season one. Maybe here because the crux of the conflict is so much sharper; you know, you have—the MS issue amplifies everything and in season one it was sort of more episode by episode. There wasn't this big storyline.

JOSH: Well one of the things that's interesting in this whole discussion is they know there's merit to what particularly Doug is saying about potentially apologizing. They'll even discuss it among themselves.

HRISHI: Oh yeah, they said it themselves four weeks ago.

JOSH: Right. And there's also an explicit scene where Sam brings it up with, I think, Toby in this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

SAM: He needs to apologize.

TOBY Don't worry about it.

SAM: He lied.

TOBY: He didn't lie. It's what your people call a sin of omission.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And he airs out his resentment; the fact that Toby got to be in the Oval Office and yell at the president.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

SAM: That night he told you.

TOBY: Yeah.

SAM: Didn't you feel like ...

TOBY: I went crazy. I wailed on him in the Oval Office.

SAM: None of us had the chance to do that.

TOBY: I know.

SAM: We could've gotten it done. If he'd've just told us at the beginning, this would have been a whole different—

TOBY: Yeah.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: So, I mean, they're being so insular in terms of pushing off this outside help that is zeroing in on issues of merit that they will not discuss with them. I can understand the idea in the outside world, being super protective of the president and the issues involved and, you know, Sam's having a drink with a friend and absolutely

putting out this 'he owes no apology' kind of thing. But here, inside, in the safety zone of where they need to hash this all out and figure out a response.

HRISHI: And they still can't be honest.

JOSH: They won't even honestly discuss things. It's a very—it's a self-destructive way to approach things.

HRISHI: Yeah. Sam Seaborn ...

JOSH: [cross talk] President Sam Seaborn, please.

HRISHI: [cross talk] ... saying to Connie the exact same thing. Right. Using the exact same correction, where he's so pissed at the president he forgets to say President Bartlet and then four weeks later turns around and uses the exact same thing that Toby used on him.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: It's so insincere.

JOSH: Yeah, these guys have some issues!

HRISHI: Yeah, they really do!

JOSH: It also feels to me, when we finally get that, I think, excellent scene as the president apologizes to them, I feel like they're—somewhere baked into the DNA of their whole messed-up take on this is this kind of group-think that they were owed an apology. You know, 'before we worry about the president apologizing to the country, we haven't been apologized to!' You know, they have all these unresolved issues and anger and there's only so much they can say to him personally, and so much they're willing to say to others, but I think they all felt they needed that moment of, 'when's he gonna tell us'?!'

HRISHI: Oh, absolutely. I think that's absolutely true because they've been hamstrung. They are this particular dream team and now they don't get to have the lofty conversation. They don't get to have the re-election campaign that they can feel proud of because they're so stuck in damage control. I also wondered if the reason why Doug and Connie were able to read those guys so easily is because they're so similar. Like, we identify with you guys so strongly, we know—we know that this is what you'd be feeling. Because, you know, they're essentially cut from the same cloth.

JOSH: Right. Yeah, that's an interesting point.

HRISHI: Because they aren't easy deductive leaps. It takes a series of smart sort of psychological insights for them to get to the point of like 'we know why you're mad at us. We know where this conflict is coming from'. And it points to how smart those guys are, but I also wondered if part of the reason why they're able to get to that is

because—because you do kind of see how Connie is like Sam, and Doug is like Toby, you know, they have these kind of parallel roles.

JOSH: Absolutely. Yeah, I think it also probably speaks to the fact that in this world, it should be clear that the president needs to apologize.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: They have to dig into the psychology of why his staff is so resistant to the idea.

HRISHI: Yeah. Doug says, at one point—

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

DOUG: ...because if he hadn't lied then you could have run the campaign you always wanted to run, instead of a bunch of people...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: —I feel like the whole two-parter kind of boils down to that one sentence. Luckily, Haiti managed to work itself out, apparently.

JOSH: Apparently!

HRISHI: Just like, between parts one and two, it's like, alright, and now Bazan has surrendered.

JOSH: Yeah, it's sort of given us the main plot thrust we needed out of it and it can fade away.

HRISHI: Yeah. It also set up the president as this—the president drives a very hard bargain. Because we first get it with Bazan, where he says he can have these things but none of these things from his list of demands, and I think that that's a nice way to set up the conversation that he has with Bruno, which I love. They sit down and the president says “you want 12% of the ad buys,” after Bruno had just had the conversation with Leo, saying—

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

BRUNO: 15 per cent of the ad buys. You're gonna say 10. So why don't we just say 13?

LEO: Why don't we say 12?

BRUNO: Why don't we say 13?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: —and then the president's like—

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

PRESIDENT: You want 12 per cent of the ad buys

BRUNO: Ok. 12.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, I love that. My take on it is that Bartlet was listening through his intercom.

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: I think he heard everything that transpired between Bruno and Leo.

HRISHI: That's funny.

JOSH: There was no need to prep him, I don't know that there was time to prep him. He was listening, I believe.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Right!

JOSH: That was surveillance right there. I also thought that there was a great moment that explains to me why—wait, the moment on Air Force One in Manchester Part 1, when Bruno calls Margaret "Red" —

HRISHI: [cross talk] Red headed girl.

JOSH: [cross talk] takes place after his initial meeting that we're seeing in Manchester Part 2.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: And I think it is explained by how he's treated by Margaret.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

BRUNO: I'm Bruno Gianelli.

MARGARET: Yes.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: She just stares at him blankly like, 'this should mean something to me?'

HRISHI: Right. Right.

JOSH: She's—I think absolutely he's gonna get his—he knows her name. I think on Air Force One later, he calls her Red because it's like 'remember how you treated me when I first showed up?'

HRISHI: Yeah. Yeah. I think he calls her 'Red headed girl'.

JOSH: 'Red headed girl'. Very good. Yeah. And I think that's absolutely revenge for the way she treats him. Because she also walks into Leo's office and leaves the door open and he can hear the conversation between them, which is not—it's not a very flattering one.

HRISHI: Yeah, what did you think of his résumé? He got the Prime Minister of Israel elected.

JOSH: Yeah, how about that?

HRISHI: Yeah. I wonder how much that actually happens; that political operatives work in other countries as well?

JOSH: I think, a lot—I mean, what do I know? But I suspect often. I think we're finding out with Michael Flynn, people like that—

HRISHI: [Laughs] Right!

JOSH: —that certainly, it seems to be a robust business these days.

HRISHI: Yeah. So yeah, Leo gives Margaret Bruno's résumé and then Josh gives Bruno his résumé. This is my other favorite part of the episode, is when Bruno just hands Josh his ass, in this very quiet way; when he tells him very plainly how he screwed up the tobacco thing. And I loved that because this is the resolution of a plot line that's been hanging on for—

JOSH: Quite a while, yes.

HRISHI: You know, across seasons. And they've been chipping away at it a little bit, a little bit, in a way that feels very real. You know he had the meeting with the lawyers from the suit, and it's just kind of been hanging in the background. I think when we talked about it the first time and we talked about the briefcase that the lawyer had and—it's been this kind of little sub-plot hanging out in the background. And in part one, Josh is insisting on leaking the memo—you know, it's kind of a 'Let Bartlet be Bartlet' emphatic enthusiastic moment, when he's like 'light 'em up!' and Josh is like 'yeah!' and he's got this strongly-worded memo, and it feels like it's moving towards this thing; like, the winding path of this little piece of plot, this little nugget, has been so cool, because it comes in as like a sign of defeat, then they're going to get back to their roots and he's going to write this thing, and then the MS thing comes up and C.J. tells him he has to stick it in a drawer, they can't do it. And so as quickly as the rocket is kind of fired, it has to be brought back down to earth and then it carries over into this season, and you know it's going on. This RU486 thing happens and it turns out it's tied into Josh's frustration over here, and the culmination of it Bruno telling Josh that he screwed it up. It's Josh's job to see the big picture politically.

JOSH: We've also seen Josh ask other people's advice about leaking the memo—

HRISHI: Right!

JOSH: —and he's always told not to do it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And so we're getting a real insight into a weakness on Josh's part and a certain hubristic tendency on Josh's part. He actually solicits people's advice; if he doesn't hear what he wants to hear he does what he wants anyway.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And on this one, it's a big bad. He is wrong.

HRISHI: Yeah, 'cause C.J. tells him not to do it, Sam tells him not to do it and Joey tells him not to do it, it felt like "Take this Sabbath Day", when Father Cavanagh tells the president "God sent you a Rabbi, a Catholic Priest and a Quaker; what more do you need?!"

JOSH: Woah. That's good. Speaking of jokes, we get another—I'm just left-turning here for a second—we get another 'the French like to surrender' joke.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: The State Department's suggesting that we praise the French Government for their help in resolving this matter. I would, but I'm worried they'd surrender.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: This one felt extremely gratuitous.

JOSH: It sure did. It felt like it's just Aaron's got a bee in his bonnet. We've discussed this before, right?

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah. This is a repeating theme of the French surrendering; it's like, alright.

JOSH: I see an opening.

HRISHI: We've just talked about the French Government and therefore let's make a World War II joke? And then Bruno revealing the big picture of what the stakes were. You know, nobody told him the reasons why he was wrong to do it; they just told him it's a bad idea, and then he kind of brushed passed them. But Bruno really lays it out.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

BRUNO: Should've waited until the Fall when the bell rings, and then we hammer 'em with it. And Kalmbach, Leder, Ross, O'Rourke, Stevens—whoever gets the nomination has it hanging around their necks they're nicotine pushers. Plus you get the money. The sooner you get I know what I'm talking about and that I'm on your side, the sooner your world gets better. Course you got the money. I'm amazed they

didn't send it to you with candy and a stripper. Pennsylvania, Michigan, Ohio: three swing states you could've brought over with that. That's an election.

[End excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, and you see it play out on Josh's face, like 'wow'. This was a big whiff.

HRISHI: Yeah. And this is a much smaller storyline compared to the MS and other things that have been going on, Haiti—there's so much more drama around these things. You've got helicopters and sit rooms and stuff. But this is actually my favorite bit from these last few episodes, because it shows how this little bit of domestic policy conflict has these huge ramifications if it isn't approached in the correct strategic way.

JOSH: Mmhmm.

HRISHI: Those are the moves I like the most; the fundamentals of governing and political strategy.

JOSH: Yeah, me too. I have a lot of 'aha' moments where I think 'oh I wouldn't have thought of that'. But there really is a way to anticipate a lot of this. It's kind of fun to be in that head. There are experts who know this [expletive deleted], who've been through it enough times—not that everything's gonna always going to play out in the way they say, but like, 'oh, that one we should've seen coming. This really is the correct approach'. So some of their insularity as a team comes at a great cost.

HRISHI: Right. And I love how, when this is first introduced, it's meant to be a parallel to shed light on 'oh, they perpetrated a fraud against the public', you know, it serves this function in the MS plot. But then by just hanging out in the background, it kind of lingers and you're like 'why is this still there?' and it ends up having this resolution that I never saw coming. I feel like I've witnessed a great magic trick.

JOSH: Mmhmm. I wanted to add on one quick little addition to—we were talking about Bruno Gianelli's having gotten the Prime Minister of Israel elected. I thought that was an interesting little tidbit about the character, because Ron himself was Jewish—

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: With a name like Bruno Gianelli, I suspect his character is not.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And Ron himself was also—

HRISHI: He could be an Italian Jew, maybe?

JOSH: It's certainly possible, but I suspect he's not. So it's an interesting little tidbit because Ron himself was a staunch supporter of Israel in a fairly right-wing way, but it's interesting, I don't know if that was just like a little hat tip to that or...

HRISHI: Yeah. Or maybe even more fodder for the line—

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

LEO: It's entirely possible that he's never voted in his life.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Ha!

HRISHI: Because, like, it doesn't matter to him. He's so neutral that even as a non-Jew, he's gonna go, you know, where he's needed or where he thinks that the fight is most interesting.

JOSH: Or maybe where the money is. That wasn't a Jew joke! I mean, he's a hired guy!

HRISHI: Huh, yeah, exactly.

JOSH: Did you just shake your head like I made a Jew joke?

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: God, you're so prejudiced.

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: I really am your Jewish friend.

HRISHI: "My Jewish friend said..."

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: "He's one of my Jewish friends."

JOSH: It has been predicted somewhere on the message boards that it won't be long before we quote *Davey and Goliath*. Is that what that Claymation—am I dating myself again?

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah.

JOSH: "Gee, Davey."

HRISHI: There's one thing I wanted to mention about the scene between the President and Bruno, which is that we get a return of this shot—it's sort of a little bit overhead, in the Oval Office. It's the President and Bruno sitting in those two chairs and there's a shot that is above a little bit, so you can see the seal of the President, and the desk and you can see a lot of the room. And there's something about that shot that feels like an old friend at this point.

JOSH: Ha!

HRISHI: We see it in the first episode ever made of the show, and every time it returns, especially in a Tommy Schlamme joint, it feels like ‘oh yeah, this is the master key for the whole series’.

JOSH: That’s some *West Wing* comfort food right there.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: There’s a great crane shot in the outdoor set up where the president’s speech is going to take place, there’s a terrific crane shot that Tommy has constructed from—it goes from the road to the bleachers, then it goes up above the bleachers, we discover the marching band—the scope of that shot and what is going on is kind of fantastic.

HRISHI: Yeah. That scene, which is supposed to take place in New Hampshire—all that stuff in New Hampshire actually took place in Virginia.

JOSH: Oh.

HRISHI: One thing is that this episode was nominated for an Emmy for Best Art Direction, Kenneth Hardy and Ellen Totleben.

JOSH: Friend of the podcast.

HRISHI: They were nominated, I think, because of the incredible work in the New Hampshire Bartlet home.

JOSH: Mmhmm.

HRISHI: I love the art direction in there. I love the kind of grandmotherly, bed-and-breakfast quality of that place.

JOSH: Right, yeah, yeah. It does look like a B&B.

HRISHI: Yeah, the room that Josh is staying in, when Donna comes and discovers that he’s not ready at all. Also it’s a nice little shout out to Bradley Whitford’s alma mater. He’s wearing a Wesleyan t-shirt in that scene.

JOSH: I noted that as well.

HRISHI: Even though Josh Lyman has not gone to Wesleyan.

JOSH: Right, so what’s that about?

HRISHI: Just a nice little Easter egg, I think, like when Toby wears the CCNY t-shirt in season one.

JOSH: But do we know that Toby did not attend CCNY?

HRISHI: We don't know that for sure, I guess. So maybe there's a possibility—but yeah, here we know he went to Harvard.

JOSH: And now I'm back to the whole Bruno Gianelli, Italian Jew of it all.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Because he does make a reference to sitting shiva.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

BRUNO: Write me a speech, would you? One that doesn't make me think I'm sitting shiva someplace, black curtains on the mirrors.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which either means that he—Maybe he ...

JOSH: Has a Jewish friend.

HRISHI: Exactly, he knows how to make that joke that's going to cut to Toby's – both his Jewish background and also how grumpy he is.

JOSH: Right. He makes a reference even to covering the mirrors, which is something that is done when sitting shiva.

HRISHI: Right. Mmhmm.

JOSH: He knows his stuff, anyway, Bruno.

HRISHI: All that time spent in Israel. Gotta learn a few things.

JOSH: There you go. Exactly.

HRISHI: One of the things that was interesting about this episode being a two-parter that was shot as one big production is that you get some benefits that you would not normally get across two episodes airing on two different weeks, which is you have Joey Lucas in this episode, in the background of some scenes, sitting at the table in discussions. She has no lines. Joey's there, Kenny's there, and they're just there as part of, essentially, the production design; you know, increasing the production value. And normally, if you're going to bring Marlee Matlin out for an episode—

JOSH: Well that's an interesting question, because I don't know that they wouldn't have to pay her for the episode, maybe because she doesn't speak or sign?

HRISHI: No, I'm sure she did have to get paid for it, because she's on screen.

JOSH: That's a lot of money to have to pay someone to be a backer—that's an expensive background payment.

HRISHI: That's true. Charlie only has two lines in this episode.

JOSH: You know what, and I literally thought that, because I've reached the point where I'm delighted to get paid full rate for a quick appearance.

HRISHI: That's what I was wondering—

JOSH: I was like, good for Dulé! Right on, Dulé. That's an easy check right there.

HRISHI: [laughs] That's what I was thinking, when I noticed that Joey hadn't spoken the whole time, I thought, 'is this Josh's idea of a dream episode?'

JOSH: Oh yeah, well, there you go. Josh Malina's.

HRISHI: Josh Malina's dream role.

JOSH: Indeed, yes. Although there is—you reach the point when you're a regular on a TV show when you're paid for with what they call 'all episodes produced', so that it is possible, actually, to not be in an episode and be paid your full salary.

HRISHI: That's even better.

JOSH: That is even better. I mean, understand—especially if Shonda's listening—I love being—whatever I'm currently filming, I'm delighted to be in it, I love to get meaty scenes and I'm happy to be in it a lot. But I don't sit shiva when the producer calls and says 'hey, you're not in the next one'.

HRISHI: Right. You're on paid vacation.

JOSH: Correct. And I can rest and build up my resources to give a super performance the next time I'm needed.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Here's the thing about the New Hampshireness of it. There was actually lobbying to try and have those scenes shot in New Hampshire at the real Josiah Bartlet house in Kingston, New Hampshire.

JOSH: But what, they wouldn't give them the tax breaks? I wonder what the story is. Had to be money.

HRISHI: It was money. I don't know if it was, yeah, a matter of taxes or finding, you know, a crew. But for whatever reason it was going to be too expensive to do it there but one of Josiah Bartlet's descendants was actually trying to lobby to get it shot there, at his house.

JOSH: That would've been pretty cool.

HRISHI: I can't remember if we've talked about this on the podcast, but the house of the original Josiah Bartlet, the real Josiah Bartlet, signer of the Declaration was on the market for a while. I don't believe that it sold. It was listed for \$850,000 and it

includes the original house and, like, a pretty big piece of land and I feel like one of our listeners ought to organize...

JOSH: No, you and I! Kickstarter! Let's buy that [expletive deleted]!

HRISHI: Kickstarter. And we should buy that house.

JOSH: Yeah!

HRISHI: And turn it into, you know, something that this podcast hopefully represents, some mix of fact and fiction; the two Bartlets—which is the title of an episode.

JOSH: I know. [Laughs] You didn't have to do that! I was getting there!

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: [Cross talk – inaudible]

HRISHI: [Cross talk – inaudible]

JOSH: I thought, since we were talking about potentially talking about taking care of each other in our decrepitude, and I know there's a big age gap—I just thought maybe the listeners could buy it for us to live in.

HRISHI: That's right. That would be great!

JOSH: [Laughs]

HRISHI: For us to Kickstart it, it would have to have some kind of public use, and it's also on the national historical records list.

JOSH: Is there no app or website that's just, like, 'I want to crowdfund something because I want it'?

HRISHI: Oh, there are plenty, yeah.

JOSH: Let's use that platform.

HRISHI: Laughs.

JOSH: Towards the end, do you remember, we get President Bartlet explaining to C.J. ...

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I was never supposed to win. I got in polling in the single digits. Hoynes had it locked up; I got in it to give some speeches and keep him honest.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: For some reason, I just kept imagining a President Bernie Sanders having this conversation.

HRISHI: Yes. When we first talked about this—I was thinking about this episode but we hadn't gotten there yet—when we were talking about how I felt like the President was more like Bernie Sanders and Hoynes was more like Hillary Clinton; do you remember that?

JOSH: I vaguely do.

HRISHI: I was thinking about this scene.

JOSH: Huh. Except that for Bernie Sanders, ultimately, he made some speeches. [Laughs] It just didn't work out for him.

HRISHI: Right. He did keep them honest. Like, he was able to push a progressive agenda and the DNC adopted a much more progressive platform...

JOSH: Absolutely.

HRISHI: ...because he had this incredibly surprising run. I mean, it was a lot like Bernie Sanders except in the end the larger machine won.

JOSH: Yeah, there you go. Fair enough. I liked the second significant scene between Abbey and President Bartlet where she's essentially, although they've yet to have the full-on conversation, she's shifting into a more supportive mode of him, and accepting that what's going to be is going to be and he's not ready to see it yet.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

ABBEY: Why won't you talk to me?

JED: Why aren't you with me?

ABBEY: How do you know I'm not?

JED: You're not.

[End excerpt]

HRISHI: He's really not listening to her.

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: That idea of 'oh I just didn't see you' ...

JOSH: [cross talk] Yep.

HRISHI: ...it continues.

JOSH: Absolutely, he's still not seeing and hearing her. It reminded me of being in that position where sometimes you know you're wrong about something, you're not ready to admit it yet, and so one, you won't admit it, and two, you start getting really mad at the other person for not just telling you that you're right.

HRISHI: Right!

JOSH: I mean, it's just, he's just so got his back up and he's acting like someone who's cornered and defensive. Like, he knows he's done—you know, he still hasn't given his apology to the staff, he's got all sorts of stuff he hasn't quite worked out and he's still just not processed it to the point where he can see that his wife is the one who's reaching out to him and saying 'this is so not what I wanted'...

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: ...but now it's a done deal, and here's how I'm going to act moving forward. I'm going to support you.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I am introducing you. I am giving you my advice. I'm here.

HRISHI: Right. No, but he's blocked by this manifestation of his own guilt.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Ah, the way they dismiss each other is just so good.

JOSH: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

ABBEY: Read your book.

JED: Sit down. We'll talk about it now.

ABBEY: I'm not in the mood, jackass.

JED: Isn't there any way I could change your mind, 'cause I really had my heart set on it.

ABBEY: Go to hell.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's a great little example of what not to do with conflict resolution.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: I feel like at any point, someone could decide to de-escalate, and Abbey tries to and then the President rebuffs her, and then it just becomes this like matter of one-upmanship.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: And now we're going to take a quick break.

JOSH: Coming up a little bit later in the show, we'll talk to Connie Britton who played Connie Tate in a four-episode arc on *The West Wing*.

[Ad break]

JOSH: And now we're very happy to welcome to the show a Golden Globe and multi-Emmy nominated actress. You've no doubt enjoyed her work on *Spin City*, *Friday Night Lights*, *Nashville* and many other great projects. She's here to talk to us about her time playing Connie Tate on *The West Wing*. It's the fabulous Connie Britton.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for talking to us.

CONNIE: Yeah! Thanks for reaching out.

HRISHI: Could we start at the, I guess, at the beginning of the story? Could you tell us how you got the role of Connie?

CONNIE: [laughs] Well, as with a lot of whatever I'm going to answer to you today, some of it will definitely just be made up!

[Laughter]

JOSH: Just get that out of the way up front!

CONNIE: Just gonna go ahead and make a bunch of stuff up! No, so much time has passed that they're all going to be these sort of faint memories that I may kind of fill in blanks on. Or I have memories but now I'm like 'did that actually happen, is that actually true?' But the way it began, I had actually just finished work on *Spin City*. I was on *Spin City* for four years, and after that, I started watching *The West Wing* and I'd never seen anything like it. I just thought it was amazing. And then, I guess my agent brought this role to me, and they said, you know, 'they want you to come in'. I think I went in and auditioned, I'm pretty sure I went in and auditioned. But the name on the role was Connie.

JOSH: Ha!

CONNIE: And I was so over the moon; I was like, 'oh my god, I'm auditioning for *The West Wing*, which is the most innovative, exciting television happening right now! Dreams are coming true!' And so I went in and auditioned, I think—embellish, embellish, embellish...

JOSH: Ha ha!

CONNIE: ...and got the part, which also was just mind-blowing. I couldn't believe it. I could not believe that I was going to be on *The West Wing*. It was just beyond.

HRISHI: Did you ever find out the story about the name being Connie? Was there any sense that maybe it was written for you?

CONNIE: So afterwards, when I started, I sat down with Aaron, you know, and I was like 'Aaron Sorkin!' He's a genius. And so I sat down with him; he came to my trailer or something, and I just dying, over the moon. And he said that he had seen me on *Spin City* and he had named the character after me. And I was like, 'I think you're pulling my leg!'

[Laughter]

CONNIE: And yet, at the same time, in the moment, of course I was completely convinced. I was like 'wow, that happened'. This was just all too good to be true.

JOSH: Well that makes sense.

HRISHI: [cross talk] I totally buy that.

JOSH: [cross talk] He'd seen you in a political comedy, decided to cast you in a political drama.

CONNIE: That really is one of those pieces of the story that over time, I look back on it and I'm like 'mmm, really?!'

[Laughter]

HRISHI: From everything I've learned about Aaron Sorkin, it fits totally.

CONNIE: Yeah, I mean, actually, I agree with you. He works that way, so...

HRISHI: Yeah.

CONNIE: It might be true.

HRISHI: Your scenes weren't actually shot on the set of *The West Wing*. You were shooting everything in Virginia, right?

CONNIE: Oh, no, no. We shot everything in Chatsworth, that's where they shoot, in LA. But I didn't go to Virginia very much at all. I think, maybe I did one thing on location, but most of my scenes were shot there in LA.

JOSH: The big scene in the barn, was that in Virginia?

CONNIE: The big scene in the barn was in ... no, I don't think so, I think we shot all that stuff in LA. I mean maybe...no, no, you're right, the big scene in the barn—see how I can't remember?

[Laughter]

JOSH: We're trying to feed it to you. [Cross talk] We know the answers, we're just trying to get you there.

CONNIE: [Cross talk] I'm pretty sure that one was in Virginia. All I know was it was in some barn. But most of the stuff, no, it wasn't in Chatsworth. That was 24.

[Laughter]

HRISHI: Very similar show. They both have presidents.

CONNIE: Exactly. Which was another cool show. But a lot of my stuff, most of my stuff was shot at the studio in LA.

HRISHI: And what was your experience like? How did you like working on these episodes?

CONNIE: Well, I loved it. It was very challenging because, of course, the language is so specific and you don't want to miss a single word. And, you know, and it's a fast clip and all of those technical things that are true about Aaron Sorkin's writing—and that was really fun and also challenging. And after you're on for a while, you get into that groove and then it becomes less terrifying, but I don't think it ever wasn't terrifying because I really wasn't on the show that much. But I really loved it a lot. It was arduous work and I was there at the time when everybody was re-negotiating their contracts.

JOSH: Oh.

HRISHI: Ah.

JOSH: That must've been fun. [Laughs]

CONNIE: [Cross talk] There was a little bit of tumult on the set.

JOSH: [Cross talk] Yeah. A little tension?

CONNIE: I kind of went on and thought 'oh, it's going to be like I've walked into the pearly gates. This is going to be television heaven'. And I got there and it was a little bit like, people were mad at each other, you know...

[Laughter]

CONNIE: It was like, 'Guys! You're on *The West Wing!*'

JOSH: Was the regular cast more welcoming to you guys than their fictional counterparts? You know, you guys are at odds with [cross talk] the regular staff.

CONNIE: [Cross talk] No, of course, everybody was so sweet. And I still, to this day, respect all of those actors so much and that's another thing that I—sometimes I'm like 'gosh, if only I could've worked on that show longer and we really could've really hung out'. But they were all so wonderful.

HRISHI: When you had that conversation with Aaron about your character, did he give you any kind of particular insight or background or anything outside of what was on the page? Do you remember?

CONNIE: Not particularly. You know, also at the beginning, I think there was some intention that the character was going to be a love interest for Rob Lowe, and this is really just a muddled memory, but I do recall that in the craziness of the renegotiation, all that stuff, there was a lot of what they were and weren't going to do, and blah blah blah, and Rob Lowe didn't end up with a lot of choice. So it went in a lot of different directions.

HRISHI: I was trying to imagine whether or not that was something Rob Lowe would have negotiated, or that they would have negotiated him out of.

CONNIE: Yeah, I can't comment. I really, you know...

JOSH: Sure you can!

CONNIE: Like I said, I was just sort of there like 'hey guys, isn't this fantastic?!' and I just sort of had the sense that there was a lot going on behind the scenes of that. But yeah, there really wasn't very much back story. And you know, in truth, I would've loved for the character to have been developed more than it was. So you know, I kind of look at that as a moment in time where I got to have this really cool experience on this thing that I thought was amazing, and it was very finite.

JOSH: Were you getting material shortly before you shot it?

CONNIE: You know, yeah, as I recall, I think that might have happened. I mean it's hard for me to remember specifically because that so typically happens in pretty much every TV show I ever do! And to me, I do remember having material with at least enough time to really try to learn it because, as I said, it was a lot of material to learn. You had to be very on it and very detailed about it. But I do also remember getting changes sort of on the day or the night before or whatever, and being like 'oh my god! What am I going to do?!' You know, I do remember really cramming in my trailer a lot, trying to like, learn those lines.

HRISHI: Yeah. Would you guys mind if I venture maybe into uncomfortable territory for a second?

CONNIE: [cross talk] Oh, I can't wait to hear! What's it going to be?!

JOSH: [cross talk] I'd be delighted. Yeah, bring it!

HRISHI: I'm just curious about your sense about the character being underdeveloped. There are certainly conversations that we've had and we've certainly heard from people about the way Aaron writes female characters versus male characters. And Evan Handler's character versus your character, they are—obviously, they're two different characters so they shouldn't be assigned the same

personality, but I was wondering if you felt like there was any sense of that lack of development was at all gendered or anything like that. I'm just curious what your take on it was.

CONNIE: You know, I—this is sensitive. Ok ...

HRISHI: I know.

CONNIE: I think, at the time, because I do think that I often felt like 'oh I don't think it's quite as developed even as his character was', as Evan's character. But of course, at the time, it was more about it 'oh, it's because I'm a terrible actor' [laughs], you know?

[Laughter]

CONNIE: I was in full actor insecurity! But, I do think that there were other elements at play in regard to the fact that I was a woman. I mean, I did mention the Rob Lowe thing and I think he really wanted to have a love interest.

JOSH: Oh.

CONNIE: And I think that there was a lot of animosity at that time that I was kind of in the middle of. So I think that there were elements to the fact that my character was female and there was a very specific way that Aaron was looking at me and looking at the character that was very female and therefore maybe, to some degree, limited. But that I think was also based on other things that were happening in the show, you know, at the time.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Interesting. So an intended romantic sub-plot that somehow got caught up in the power play of re-negotiations between the actor and the...

CONNIE: Right.

JOSH: Interesting.

HRISHI: It's ironic, I guess, given I think of C.J. Cregg and Tammy Taylor as two of the all-time greatest—regardless of female or male or anything—two of the all-time greatest characters on TV, and it's amazing to me that you think, or you ever thought, that you were getting less than on the page because of your abilities as an actor.

CONNIE: Ah, well, thank you, that's very sweet of you. And I'm so flattered because that's amazing company, because she was, and is, so incredible. And I idolized her and still do. If nothing else, I think that's a good reminder that there's just always an element of fear as we grow and learn. And the truth is *Spin City* was the first TV thing I ever did.

HRISHI: Mmhmm.

CONNIE: Well the first, you know, series regular that I ever did. And I had a very steep learning curve on that, because all my background was theatre; I'd done very little in front of a camera, period. So, you know, for me, I really was learning on the job on *Spin City* and then when I got to *The West Wing*, which was shortly thereafter, I didn't have too much more experience, so I still felt like I was very much in the learning stages. And it was, you know, certainly an intimidating environment.

HRISHI: Right. Did it feel like maybe your experience in theatre was more brought to bear than your experience on *Spin City* in a situation like shooting *The West Wing* or did it still feel like, [cross talk] because it was TV...?

CONNIE: [Cross talk] Yeah, a little bit, particularly with the language, because I really went back to my drama school training of, you know, how I go about learning lines. And then also in terms of like just working through the scripts and all that. So it did feel a lot more technical in a different way.

JOSH: Do you employ a very specific technique? Because I always remember Allison Janney had a whole thing where she'd write the first letter of every line down. It was like this crazy, elaborate way to memorize lines. Did you employ something like that?

CONNIE: Say that one more time; she would write stuff down?

JOSH: Allison, yes, would write down what looked to me like code, and, if memory serves, I think it was the first letter of each line, or the first letter of every word, so it would say 'a, d, e, b, c'. It seemed to me harder than actually just learning the lines.

CONNIE: [cross talk] Oh that's clever! That's smart.

JOSH: [cross talk] But she swore by this technique.

CONNIE: That's really good. Mine was not quite that complex, because I basically just wrote the whole thing without any punctuation, any break in the language, like this from start to finish so that I had all the words without any kind of inflection or anything like that. So that's what I would do.

JOSH: No performance notes. I used to tease Allison, because I used to think she'd walk out and say 'a, w, b, c'. You're memorizing the letters not the words! How does this work for you? But apparently it did.

CONNIE: She's a genius, that's all.

JOSH: She is. Ultimately, that's true.

CONNIE: She is!

JOSH: Is there any subsequent job that you've had or work experience that's most parallel to your experience on *The West Wing*?

CONNIE: Not really. I mean that was a very unique experience. And I have to say, I mean, I feel so freaking fortunate. Like, you know, *The West Wing* was so—Aaron Sorkin, and that really interesting and also impactful world. And then—even *24*, which is a whole, that's a whole other thing, when the whole thing happens in one day! I remember when I was doing my wardrobe fitting on *24*; they were like 'well you'd better just pick some comfortable shoes because you're going to be running for your life'.

[Laughter]

JOSH: You'd better like what you're wearing because you're stuck in it!

CONNIE: So that was a whole thing, and then, you know, *Friday Night Lights*, that was just totally unique and *American Horror Story* was totally unique, and for me *Nashville* was really unique in a lot of ways and, you know, certainly in terms of the performance stuff. And I have to say, *The West Wing* will always be...I'll always feel so fortunate that I had the opportunity to do it, because it really isn't like anything else that I've done.

JOSH: Yeah, we hear that from a lot of people. No matter what stake they had in the show, they feel like it holds a special place in their memory. Do fans, having done so much amazing work, do fans still come up to you having seen you in *The West Wing*?

CONNIE: Yeah, they do! And I'm always, like wow—because people love that show so much, people still watch it and binge watch it. I know you guys are, you know this. But you know, I am always so amazed when people come up and say 'I was just watching you on *The West Wing*!' —I'm like, 'really? You caught those six episodes?' [Laughs] That's awesome! Now it's all coming back to me, see, we're having this conversation. It's like, yes, of course the big barn scene was yes, indeed, in Virginia; now I'm remembering because the whole cast would sort of hang out in these really cool rooms in some house, you know, off to the side.

JOSH: Despite the re-negotiations, was there fun to be had after wrap?

CONNIE: Yes there was, of course. I mean, everybody was really wonderful. That was much more sort of the underground rumblings that we knew were going on.

HRISHI: Yeah. This is really fascinating. Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to us about this.

CONNIE: Yeah! Thanks for reaching out. It was fun to walk down memory lane and, you know, make some [expletive deleted] up...!

[Laughter]

CONNIE: And then have my memory jogged!

JOSH: Can you tell us what you're up to now, what you're busy with?

CONNIE: I am up to now, kind of, taking a break. You know, after *Spin City* and then I got to do really cool—you know, *The West Wing* and *24* and I was doing really fun guest roles on things and then I started doing *Friday Night Lights* and I've basically been working in network television for 10 years without a break.

JOSH: Yeah, it's astonishing.

CONNIE: And five years into it, I adopted my son from Ethiopia.

JOSH: Oh, beautiful.

CONNIE: So I got to a point now where I'm like 'ooh, man, I can take a breath' and figure out what it feels like to be a mom where I'm not having to juggle that 24/7. So I'm doing that and then I'm really interested in developing and sort of being involved in whatever project is next from the beginning stages, because I love the creative process and I love being able to take that from fruition into reality. That's what's going on right now.

HRISHI: That sounds awesome.

JOSH: Fantastic.

CONNIE: Yeah. Thank you guys, and it's really a pleasure.

HRISHI: And that's it for our episode. Thanks so much for joining us.

JOSH: Yeah. Listen to us again next time. In the meantime, you can listen to Hrishi's award-winning, in contra-distinction to our podcast, his award-winning podcast *Song Exploder*.

HRISHI: And you can catch Josh on Thursdays at 9pm on ABC in his award-winning show, *Scandal*.

JOSH: Hmm. I forget what award we won.

HRISHI: Something, I'm sure.

JOSH: Yeah. You can tweet at us. Hrishi's @hrisihirway. I'm @joshmalina. The show is @westwingweekly.

HRISHI: Our guest Connie Britton is on twitter @conniebritton. And you can also discuss this episode with us and other *West Wing Weekly* listeners on our Facebook page and on our website. Our website is thewestwingweekly.com. Our Facebook page is facebook.com/thewestwingweekly.

JOSH: You can look for *West Wing Weekly*-related pictures up on Instagram at...

HRISHI: instagram.com/thewestwingweekly

JOSH: In addition to helping buy the Josiah Bartlet house as a retirement home for me and Hrishika...

[Laughter]

JOSH: ...you can, in addition, buy a pin; the official lapel pin of The West Wing Weekly. You can go to our website and click on the pin button, or you can go to westwingweekly.com/pin

HRISHIKA: I was watching the episode and I was thinking, when C.J. and Leo are walking through the town square, I was like 'oh, yeah, New Hampshire. Man, this makes me nostalgic for my time in New Hampshire'. I went to high school in New Hampshire.

JOSH: Oh right, you went to ...

HRISHIKA: I went to Exeter.

JOSH: Exeter.

HRISHIKA: Yep, Phillips Exeter Academy. The town of Exeter is a very small, quaint New England town. And as they were walking through I thought 'oh yeah, I just get nostalgic for New Hampshire', looking at this episode—only to find out later, as I was doing my research, that that was Virginia.

JOSH: What if you do further research and find out that you went to high school in Virginia?

HRISHIKA: Oh my God!

JOSH: That would be weird. You know what, The West Wing Weekly is a proud member of Radiotopia, which is a finely curated selection [cross talk] of the very best...

HRISHIKA: [cross talk] ...meats and cheeses. [laughs]

JOSH: What's that? Are you heckling me?

HRISHIKA: No, just...a finely curated selection of meats and cheeses. [laughs]

JOSH: Oh is that what you said? I thought you said 'oh, Jesus' [cross talk] because you didn't like my wording.

HRISHIKA: [cross talk] No, no! I liked it! I liked it! Much like a plate of meats and cheeses it's a finely curated selection.

JOSH: Yeah. It's a veritable charcuterie of the best podcasts.

[HRISHIKA laughs]

JOSH: A slice of this. A hunk of that.

HRISHI: A schmear of something else.

JOSH: A little song, a little dance, a little seltzer down your pants.

[HRISHI laughs]

JOSH: So you can check out Radiotopia at radiotopia.fm. It's really much better than I'm making it sound.

HRISHI: [Laughs] It's made possible by the Knight foundation and by listeners like you. And if you want to donate to Radiotopia, you can find that also at radiotopia.fm. It helps fund the operations of the organization, which is a non-profit, and it also helps make shows like this possible, because they make shows like this possible.

JOSH: But correct me if I'm wrong, Hrishi. Listeners can also donate directly to The West Wing Weekly by hitting the donate button on our website.

HRISHI: That's true. They can.

JOSH: Right. So here's the thing. We need you to buy us the Josiah Bartlet house.

[HRISHI laughs]

JOSH: We'd love you to buy a pin. And then we want you to donate both in a macro fashion to Radiotopia in general and to The West Wing Weekly specifically. This is the price you pay for all the quote-unquote free entertainment we provide.

[HRISHI laughs]

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

CONNIE: What's next?

[Outro Music]