

The West Wing Weekly  
3.05: "War Crimes"  
Guest: Fmr. UN Ambassador David Pressman

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today we're talking about War Crimes; both the episode, and the topic.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: Coming up later in this episode, we'll be joined by Ambassador David Pressman, who was the United States Representative to the UN Security Council and the first ever Director for War Crimes and Atrocities on the National Security Council at the White House. He's going to talk to us about war crimes.

JOSH: How about that! I wonder what podcast he thinks he agreed to be on.

HRISHI: [Laughs] The War Crimes episode of *The West Wing* is season 3, episode 5.

JOSH: It was directed by Alex Graves. It was written by Aaron Sorkin, and the story's by Allison Abner. This episode first aired on March 20th, 2002. And for the listeners at home, this is the first topless Hrishi episode in a long time!

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: Episode of the podcast, I mean. It's very hot.

HRISHI: It's a very hot day today.

JOSH: But you have air conditioning, don't you?

HRISHI: Yeah, but it's too loud to put it on while [cross talk] we're recording. Usually I try and cool off the studio before we start recording, but I didn't get a chance to today.

JOSH: [Cross talk] Ohhhh...right...that's why...right. When it gets hot in my office, I usually splash around in the kitty fountain, but it's too loud for the podcast, so...I'm also really hot. But I feel a little overweight so I'm gonna leave my shirt on.

HRISHI: I'm glad to see the pink headphones are back though.

JOSH: Ah, yes. I bought fancy headphones but my son borrows them all the time so now, I'm not sure to whom the pink headphones belong, but I'm using them today.

HRISHI: They belong to all of us now.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: Story by Allison Abner. Allison Abner, whose husband is Gene Sperling.

JOSH: Mhm.

HRISHI: This episode features guest star Michael O'Keefe. He plays Will Sawyer, the foreign correspondent who's assigned to the White House. In real life, Michael O'Keefe's brother-in-law is Michael O'Neil, who plays Ron Butterfield.

JOSH: Yeah! I knew that!

HRISHI: Oh, you did?

JOSH: 'Cause I know them both! Well Michael O'Keefe played the role of Kaffee in the National Tour of Aaron Sorkin's *A Few Good Men*. At the time, he was married to Bonnie Raitt, so she was around. And yeah, I know the Michael O'Neil connection.

HRISHI: Yeah. Michael O'Neil is married to Michael O'Keefe's sister.

JOSH: O'Keefe's a great guy. A terrific guy, great actor, deep, sweet soul, very special person. And I like, I like what he brings to this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: He's got a great, sort of, very laid-back knowing persona, I think, on this show.

HRISHI: Well, let me give you the synopsis from *TV Guide*.

JOSH: Hmm. Which is what you do when you can't be bothered to write a hrynopsis.

HRISHI: I've been pretty good this whole season. This is the first one in season 3 that I haven't written myself.

JOSH: That's true. I'm just saying, I don't disappoint.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Don't you?

JOSH: Well, yeah. You're right. Well said. Fair enough. I do in other ways. I don't disappoint by like, sometimes doing something. I disappoint by never doing anything.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Okay, here's the synopsis from *TV Guide*. I also thought this was an interesting one. There's some, some more liberties being taken. This one's a little more artistic. "The legal machinery in the MS matter begins to grind in earnest in this tense episode. The first to feel it is Donna, who must give a deposition to a house committee. Questioning her? Cliff, the Republican counsel she's been seeing. Meanwhile, the president and the vice president clash over gun control. A hotshot foreign correspondent who's new to the White House beat gets hold of an embarrassing quote of Toby's. Leo and an air force general cross swords over an international war crimes court, and Sam is intrigued by a proposal to abolish the penny."

JOSH: That's fantastic. You know why I like that synopsis?

HRISHI: Why?

JOSH: Because I picture Leo and an air force general peeing together.

HRISHI: [Laughs] I figured out what the answer was as I was saying "why?"

JOSH: Yes. That's fantastic. Way to go, *TV Guide*. "Leo and an air force general cross swords." That's good stuff.

HRISHI: I really liked this episode a lot.

JOSH: I liked this episode too.

HRISHI: What do you like about it.

JOSH: Well, I was starting to say I like the Michael O'Keefe of it all. I like that without getting explicit, I feel, there's clearly some history (perhaps of a romantic nature) between Will and CJ.

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*C.J.: You're sitting in my chair.*

*WILL: Didn't have a plaque on it.*

*C.J.: [Laughing] I've missed you.*

*WILL: Yeah.*

*C.J.: Well you've been gone three weeks.*

WILL: *I been gone two and a half years.*

C.J.: *Really?*

WILL: *Yes...*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: There's definitely some chemistry between them. I started to worry for a second that *The West Wing* was gonna go back to the C.J.-might-want-to-date-a-reporter well that they'd been to already with Danny Concannon, and I felt a little bit like "No, I don't want... C.J. and Danny is one thing. You can't just switch out who the reporter is." But yeah, there was definitely something there between them.

JOSH: I like that in their dynamic, this possibility of past romance or future romance is raised, but they don't put too fine a point on it and they don't really deal with it explicitly at all in the episode.

HRISHI: It really is just in their chemistry.

JOSH: Right

HRISHI: There's nothing in the text at all.

JOSH: Not so much in the dialogue, yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah. I wanted to talk about family stuff a little bit more. We haven't talked about Nancy, who is played by Renée Estevez. She's the aide who works outside the Oval Office along with Charlie and Mrs. Landingham [cross talk] when she was around.

JOSH: [cross talk] Once upon a time, yes.

HRISHI: Yeah. Nancy is played by Renée Estevez, who is Martin Sheen's daughter.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: I don't think we've talked about that.

JOSH: We have not.

HRISHI: It's interesting, in this episode she's never actually clearly shown on camera.

JOSH: She's an off-screen voice.

HRISHI: She's on screen a little bit but she's like, in shadow, and then there's a shot of Vice President Hoynes and Nancy where Hoynes is in focus and she's in the foreground out of focus, and then you see her again as she's closing the door like half hidden by the door.

JOSH: She's been asked to bring in beverages for the two of them.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Now, what do you make of the president's suggesting that they split a beer?

HRISHI: I think it just shows that the president doesn't know his vice president very well at all.

JOSH: You take it as that, rather than some sort of subtle gamesmanship?

HRISHI: Oh no, I think it's just, these guys aren't friends. This is a marriage of convenience.

JOSH: Yeah, I suppose so. I mean it's either that or, he wanted to shame him a little bit, I don't know. How could he not- [cross talk] could he really not know, with Leo's- I guess he could not know. Even though there's an AA meeting happening in the basement.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Really? No, I don't think- Yea. I mean, you know, Leo didn't know.

JOSH: Right, that's true. And presumably Leo, having discovered it at an AA meeting, would not share the information with the president, so-

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Yea, fair enough.

HRISHI: And then the other familial thing that happens in this episode, I think, is I really like when Sam and Donna interact. We've talked about the sort of, the individual dynamics between different pairings of characters. I really like the Sam and Donna pairing. We got it in "Somebody's Going to Emergency...", and we get a little bit here as he's coaching her a little bit for her deposition.

JOSH: Before he takes his place firmly in his own big block of cheese episode.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Right, exactly. Yeah, before that, I feel like it goes back to their dynamic that I realize is kind of fraternal, in a nice way.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. He's got an eye out for her.

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*SAM: You're gonna be sitting in a room. It's gonna feel like you did something wrong. But guess what?*

*DONNA: What?*

*SAM: You didn't. So...*

*DONNA: Yeah.*

*SAM: You got a cab out front?*

*DONNA: Yeah.*

*SAM: Come back when it's over?*

*DONNA: Thanks.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I like that they have that relationship and that it feels unique among all the different dynamics there are. One of the reasons why I like this episode so much is because there are, I think, a few moments of, just, peak Aaron Sorkin dialogue. Right at the beginning, just like there's music appreciation classes, there could be some kind of appreciation class that is taught just around the scene between the president and the First Lady in the opening of the episode.

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*ABBEY: He feels the homily lacked panache.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: It did lack panache.*

*ABBEY: It was a perfectly lovely homily on Ephesians 5:21. "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church, and gave himself up for her."*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Yeah, she's skipping over the part that says "Wives, be subject to your husbands as to the lord, for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church."*

*ABBEY: I do skip over that part.*

*CHARLIE: Why?*

*ABBEY: Because it's stupid.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's pretty great. Yeah. It's a great scene. To me, the quintessence of that scene in terms of reflecting on the writer is Bartlet's line saying "He had an audience and didn't know what to do with it." This is in reference to the church service they've just attended. That's the worst sin in the Sorkin universe; he had an audience and he didn't know what to do with it. It gives you insight into the responsibility he feels as a writer. There are just times where he could almost be stepping out behind a curtain and just directly addressing the audience. He talks about words, and the importance of words, and he talks about music, and he makes the link between words and music and that's just a classically "Aaron" way to describe writing and his own writing and how sometimes the sound of the words are more important than the substance. It's just a classic Aaron riff.

HRISHI: Yeah, we've talked about it. We've talked about it with actors from the show, we've talked about it among ourselves, and we've talked about it directly with Aaron, who had a musical theatre background, but this is the first time we really get the thesis right there in the show when the president says:

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Words. Words, when spoken out loud for the sake of performance are music...*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I thought for a second that you were channeling the episode and you were about to start singing Frank Sinatra when you said "I get a kick out of..."

JOSH: [laughs] Well, I had that written down too, with a big question mark. Really? "You make me egg foo young?" But, perhaps, he was trying to actualize the point he had just made, which is that sometimes...

HRISHI: [laughs] the words themselves are... I mean...

JOSH: Yeah. I wrote down "You know what? And sometimes the words do matter."

HRISHI: [laughs] We've had a few Rat Pack references in the last couple episodes. We had Tony Bennett. Tony Bennett's tuxedo bowtie.

JOSH: We've had Joey Bishop.

HRISHI: And here we've got Dean Martin- "Is he gonna sing Volare?"

JOSH: Oh, right.

HRISHI: Abigail asks. And then,

JOSH: Got your Sinatra.

HRISHI: Goes into Sinatra, yeah.

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*ABBEY: I'm going to the residence. I'm taking a bath, I'm turning on Sinatra.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: How does Mrs. Sinatra feel about that?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I do like how that scene and, the sort of, festive nature of it- It's a relief just to see- of course, they're still arguing in one sense, but to see the president and his wife enjoying themselves together rather than really going at each other. Although they always seem to enjoy their interaction whether it's fake, fun fighting, or the real deal. They clearly- sparks fly, and they clearly get a charge out of each other.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: But they're brought down, you know, really with a single line and a single piece of information dispensed by C.J.

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*C.J.: I'm sorry. Mr. President, Melissa Markey died.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Yeah, okay.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And it's kinda like, okay, I'm back to being the president. I had 45 seconds of enjoyment and escape and now I gotta go back to the job.

HRISHI: Right. This one line that he says, especially following so quickly on the heels of the "Words, when spoken out loud for the sake of performance are music," it's sort of like Aaron gives us the thesis and then he's like "And, by way of example:"

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: In this day and age of 24-hour cable crap, devoted to feeding the voyeuristic gluttony of an American public hooked on a bad soap opera that's passing itself off as important, don't you think you might be able to find some relevance in verse 21?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's a long sentence, and Martin Sheen delivers it so well, and so quickly, and with so much fire behind it. It feels like, "Yeah!" That's what people are expecting. It's almost like a cliché of what Aaron Sorkin might be.

JOSH: Yeah, that's true. Well, you know that's an interesting thing. Cause there's a scene, a big scene later in this episode that I feel might divide the two of us, and possibly divide, like, those people who just are absolute Wing-nuts, and then-

HRISHI: Yeah-

JOSH: Maybe less... Do you know which scene I'm talking about? It's another scene that I feel like- and this is something with Aaron; if you consume his work, like we have, and like most of our listeners do, you love his stuff, and I think you can go one of two ways, which is occasionally feeling like, okay, it's almost a self parody, or it's a little bit too much of what I know is coming. Or you just go, "Yeah, yeah, yeah!" And for me it's the scene with Toby.

HRISHI: Toby... I know. Ugh, God, you're gonna break my heart.

JOSH: Of course, I watched it and I thought "Oh, I bet Hrishu loves this scene."

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: I want to love it, and I feel that I'm supposed to love it, but I... don't.

HRISHI: Why don't you? What's your objection to it?

JOSH: So, this is one of those times where I didn't write anything down, I just thought- you know, I marked in my head "let's discuss this." Because it's hard for me to articulate. Let me unpack why I really don't like that scene.

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*TOBY: So. An item will appear in the paper tomorrow and it'll be embarrassing to me, and embarrassing to the president. I'm not gonna have a witch hunt. I'm not gonna huff and puff. I'm not gonna take anyone's head off. I'm simply going to say this: you're my guys. And I'm yours. And there's nothing I wouldn't do for you.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Although I love this family, and I love the team spirit of it all, and I love how they respect each other and how they appreciate each other, I feel like this is one of those times when Toby should have come down, assembled everybody- I'm down with that- and then he should have said "Look, one of you [expletives deleted] spoke out of school..." Like instead it's just this locker-room talk, and then shots of them kind of looking sheepishly at each other, and Sam Seaborn steps in and he kind of observes him like:

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*SAM: That was unexpected.*

*TOBY: Yeah.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I don't know. It's just so... the whole thing is just so special and precious.

HRISHI: [Laughs] You're such a cynic!

JOSH: Oh, well I don't know that I am though! I mean, I'm not such a cynic that I don't love this show. It's just... my hackles are raised? Is that a word? Is that a phrase?

HRISHI: Sure, yeah, yeah.

JOSH: I believe my hackles... I'm not exactly sure what my hackles are, but they felt raised by this scene. And, it's just too touchy-feely, ooey-gooley. And it's just... Someone did a bad thing, and it feels like "You work for me, and if I find out who you are, you know, this better not happen again," it's just, it seems to me that, especially coming from Toby should've been more... Yeah, we know he's a big softie with a huge heart...

HRISHI: But, do we know that? I mean, that's not his... you know, I think that's the thing, is like. It's revealed in bits and pieces that he's actually a softie.

JOSH: But this isn't a bit or a piece, this is a big, like, "I LOVE YOU. Love me! We all..." So I mean, if you're gonna be, Toby, who you are the rest of the time, like, alright maybe it should, you know, step out a little bit here or there, but it's just such a... I mean, it's just this side of everybody, kind of, linking hands doing an energy circle, singing "Kumbaya." It's just, it's too much for me! It's kind of like, I want to sense that they feel this way about each other and about the team, and I don't want to hear it explicitly said. Especially when you just can't really run a professional, you know, high-paced work environment like this by saying like "C'mon guys, I'm disappointed in you. I would do anything for you. I love you. Love me back and don't hurt my feelings by doing something like this."

HRISHI: Well I think that you're wrong that the other way would be more effective. I'm not saying that there isn't value in gathering everybody together and then screaming at them, but I don't think, and I don't know that it would necessarily get the result that you want, which is to actually stop this kind of behavior from happening again.

JOSH: Perhaps not. But I don't think this version is either. Somebody leaked!

HRISHI: Really? I think it would. I think that this is...

JOSH: What, you think the leaker is going to be like "Oh my God. I had no idea. He would do anything for me. He would run into a burning building to save me and my cat and I repeated something that he said to me? I'm never gonna do that again." It's just, I don't buy it. Somebody leaked! They don't give a [expletive deleted] that you think you're one team, one for all and all for one.

HRISHI: Well, I think that you're assigning a motive that we don't know. It sounds like you think that whoever did it did it because they're like "I don't care about this place."

JOSH: Well, either the person doesn't care... Look, I read the paper every single day, I read information that's been leaked, so people leak.

HRISHI: Mhm.

JOSH: And I would think most of them do it not unintentionally, but... they know what they're doing, I think.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: If this is where somebody just kind of spoke out of school and something got to a reporter that shouldn't have... there's a way to go, I think he has to sit them down and go "Hey, you guys don't realize..." but he doesn't really talk about what happened other than, like,

HRISHI: No that's not true! He says:

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*Toby: It's great to be in the know. To have the scoop, to have the skinny. To be able to go to a reporter and say "I know something you don't know." And so the press becomes your constituents, and you sell out the team.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He calls them out on the kind of petty impulse that goes along with leaking something. It's not all just like "Hey, I love you."

JOSH: Yeah, I know, and then “The press is your constituency” like, I like that line, and that’s clever. I guess, I’m not saying there’s not a good scene in here to be had. It just, to me, it becomes excessively emotional and familiar for your workplace. I don’t know, if my boss talked to me like that I’d be like “I’ve got to get out of here.”

HRISHI: Really? I would imagine that on *Scandal* you guys have conversations like that all the time. At least...

JOSH: Yes, and I often think “I’ve got to get out of here.”

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: I mean, I’m the one who takes the piss out of everyone when it gets that way. I used to do behind the scenes videos. I would be the one... One, I would do these behind the scenes videos so I didn’t have to hug anyone because I’d be holding a camera, and two, I’d be the one going “Look, it’s fake Hollywood hugging.” So I mean, I just-

HRISHI: I mean, I totally understand why you don’t like it, but I disagree with the idea that this is wrong, or this is the wrong way to do it. Or even that it’s a bad scene. Like, I can understand why you’re like ‘Ugh, this scene, like, bothers me. It’s too cheesy.’ But I don’t think that it’s bad.

JOSH: Well, I think it’s not a great *West Wing* scene, even though it is the quintessence of what a lot of people love about *The West Wing*. It isn’t for me. It isn’t a great *West Wing* scene because it doesn’t strike me as particularly realistic. Even though I know it only has to be realistic to the world created by *The West Wing*, so, I mean, this stuff does happen, but-

HRISHI: But no, I think it would- it is realistic.

JOSH: It’s manipulative! To me, it’s manipulative. It’s like, I don’t like when it’s super clear how I’m supposed to be reacting to a scene.

HRISHI: I guess it’s realistic to me in that, like, this is probably closer to what my management style would be. And maybe is. I mean, I don’t-

JOSH: Oh my God, I’ve got to get out of here. (Laughs)

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean like, you can ask the people who were in my band. This is a little bit of a tangent, but-

JOSH: No, bring it.

HRISHI: I remember, so, for a little while there was a guy who played in the *One AM Radio* with us, and he had a long career as kind of, like, more of a session musician. The other people in

the band hadn't been in too many bands, they'd been in some others, but you know, really, the *One AM Radio* was the thing that they were doing that was kind of like, the most serious. And we were friends. And then we brought in this new guy, and he had played in a lot of like, cover bands, that would play in casinos and stuff like that. A real pro. And he had talked about how on the tour bus, you know, with these like ten or twelve guys, that they would have to sign a contract, sort of like a terms of service, and one of them was that, you know, when you're in the van and you're in these like shared spaces, you listen to music on headphones, you guys- you know, you keep to yourselves. You kind of keep your voices down so that people can have privacy and have their own space and, you know, you're not taking up stuff. And he was telling us about this and Fontaine, my bandmate, was like- we were in the van, driving as we were doing this, and she was like "I think that would break Hrishi's heart- if we ever had to conduct the band that way." And I was like "Yeah, absolutely. For me, this is work, but it is also a social experience, and work is made better by feeling like I'm friends with the people that I work with. You know, I'm spending hours and hours and weeks on end on tour with these people like 24 hours a day. It's important to me that I feel warmly towards them and that I feel like they've got my back and I've got their back." And so they kind of joked that we should instead have a friendship contract, that band members would have to sign.

JOSH: Well, but here's the thing. I completely agree with you. That's the kind of workplace I like. *Scandal* is that kind of workplace and Shonda is the kind of boss that Toby is in this scene, but she's never sat us down and done *that*. In other words, whoever said "I bet Hrishi would hate that." Did you sit them down and give them a two and a half minute spiel, music in the background, about your credo and how this all works, or they've gathered that from knowing you?

HRISHI: I mean, I think, there wasn't an equivalent situation where somebody did something behind my back that would embarrass me, and I didn't know who it was. All I knew was that there was a betrayal that was going to be personally embarrassing to me and the stakes- like, the higher stakes of my job. If there were, then yeah, maybe, I would say like "Look, I don't know who did it, and I see that there's no real virtue in me going around and like, biting everybody's head off, but I'm just going to say "This is really shitty for me, and I guess I thought that we were- we were in this together, and something like this makes it feel like we aren't." You know? In hopes that like, something like that wouldn't happen again.

JOSH: Yeah, I guess it just speaks to the differences between us and among people. And as a viewer of the show, I know that Toby is like this. I can see it in the little cracks, and the pauses, and the things, and the looks. I don't want two and a half minutes of going "I'm not what I seem to be! I'm a pussycat! I loooooove you guys! I'm not gruff. I'm a throbbing, open heart!"

HRISHI: But that's the thing, is, characters don't have to be, you know, like- they get to have these shades. I think that's what's so nice about it is that Toby gets to have this moment that kind of betrays what we- we only know about his soft heart here and there through the cracks, but every now and then- he doesn't have to only be in that mold. He gets the chance to be able to expose it for what it is.

JOSH: Well, indeed he does, but I don't like it! Cause as I watch it, I mean, I thought of you. I figured it was probably one of your favorite scenes. I didn't judge you for it. I also thought, and I'm quite sure this'll be borne out on the website, "this is what hard-core *West Wing* fans"- I mean, I would never watch this scene again. And I would- but I would hazard a guess that this is the kind of scene hard-core fans *love* watching again like "Oh, "War Crimes" is- There's this amazing scene with Toby and the gang."

HRISHI: Yeah. I think it's beautiful writing.

[*West Wing* Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*TOBY: From the President and Leo on through, we're a team. We win together, we lose together, we celebrate and we mourn together, and defeats are softened and victories sweetened because we did them together.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's a beautiful piece of writing.

JOSH: I guess, but I don't like it.

HRISHI: [Laughs] And I like that you called it sort of "locker room talk." In my mind, your version of *Friday Night Lights* would have the slogan, instead of

[*Friday Night Lights* excerpt]

*COACH TAYLOR: Clear eyes, full hearts, can't lose.*

*TEAM: CAN'T LOSE!*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It would be "Go out, play football, don't lose."

JOSH: Yeah. No discussion, let's play.

HRISHI:

[Laughs] Exactly. It's good. Let's talk about the Cliff/Donna/Josh part of this episode.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: Donna herself delivers it pretty well later when Cliff comes to her apartment and she's like,

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

CLIFF: *That's right.*

DONNA: *And I thought you were a little bit smarmy with your "Donna, it's okay, you can laugh, you're just-" Was that charm?*

CLIFF: *Tell me what's...*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I thought that was great.

JOSH: Uh-huh. I was delighted that she said that, because not knowing it was coming I had written down a very similar thing, like "Ugh!" If I liked him at all, it all went out the window there.

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

DONNA: *A subpoena.*

CLIFF: *No need to thank me. Donna, this is gonna be easy, you can laugh.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. I wrote "Oh [expletive deleted] off, Cliff, you're not that funny."

JOSH: Right! I know I can laugh. I will as soon as someone says something funny.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Exactly! But that- that scene at the end. The fountain in Washington D.C.

JOSH: Yes! We were on a break!

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: and Donna at the *Friends* fountain.

HRISHI: Exactly. They're at the- at the *Friends* fountain. Which is in Burbank, not in Washington D.C.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: I actually found the google satellite image of that actual fountain, and I'm gonna- I thought we could post it on the website so if anybody wants to have all illusions shattered they can see the grassy field and plain buildings that surround it normally.

JOSH: Fantastic. In that scene, Josh to the rescue.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: As we've seen before. Josh in shining armor.

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*JOSH: If I read any of this in the newspaper, or anything happens that I don't like, I've got the entries for October 4th and 5th.*

*CLIFF: What's October 4th and 5th?*

*JOSH: You.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: What is leveraging against Cliff? Like, I don't quite understand what his threat is.

HRISHI: I guess, maybe the idea is that he's in the diary, so there is something on record that shows the nature of the relationship. He mentions in the deposition that they know each other socially-

JOSH: Testimony, yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah. But maybe there are details, if the diary becomes a matter of public record.

JOSH: "I'm going to tell everyone you have a small penis!"

HRISHI: [Laughs] Exactly!

JOSH: Or that's all I can think like- what?

HRISHI: Something. I thought that there was interesting subtext there. Like the feeling that Josh must have talking to this guy. Like "You are investigating me, you have bedded my secret love, and now I'm having to like, give you information in this like, potentially incriminating way to try and fix a situation that I didn't create." You know? It's a very particular kind of hostility. Like a really muted hostility that I really, really like. But then, when he talks about those two pages, he says "What's October 4th and 5th?" and Josh: points at him and he says "You." The way that he points and the way that he says "You" it's an echo to the moment when we first meet Joey

Lucas, when they're at the bar afterwards and he says, "The president meant it," he's like "if you get behind a real candidate then he'd support it" and Joey asks:

[West Wing Episode 1.14 excerpt]

*Joey [interpreted by Kenny]: Did he have any suggestions?*

*JOSH: As a matter of fact he did.*

*Joey [spoken]: Who?*

*JOSH: You.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And he points at her and says "you" in the same way.

JOSH: [Laughs] Interesting.

HRISHI: But I think it's more just that the ethics of the situation aren't as clear cut as Cliff is trying to make them out to be. You know, he's trying to frame it all around the idea that Donna has perjured herself.

JOSH: Right

HRISHI: But he's doing it based on this privileged information that only he has, and certainly, you know, like, Donna messed up, but just the idea that he can call her on it comes from, like, this-

JOSH: Yeah, well, I don't know actually. I mean I kind of agree with you. My thought there was if that's- if that's the dynamic, I feel like what Josh is really saying is Cliff should go now and say "Hey. I'm involved with her and I know there's a diary." In other words, I don't think it pushes him in the direction that Josh really wants it to. I mean, as far as I know, they're allowed to have a relationship because he admitted to a social relationship as the testimony began with Donna. So really what he's doing that is ethically squishy is, you know, trying to help her find a way out.

HRISHI: Right, not calling her out, yeah.

JOSH: Right, so if Josh is pressuring him, I think the thing Cliff would do is go "Alright, you're right, I better just go tell them."

HRISHI: Right. I mean I think that both of these guys are fond of her and don't want to see her in trouble if possible, and so he gets the chance to be able to say "Okay he's the only one who

knows about the diary, now he can look at the diary, and you know Donna had made this decision that the diary was irrelevant which is an idiotic-

JOSH: Right, immaterial to the-

HRISHI: Right, which is a crazy thing for her to decide on her own, but- but she did, and so now Cliff gets the chance to actually verify that, and then once he verifies that he can be like “okay it’s immaterial, it’s not a big deal that she perjured herself there.” But it is still perjury.

JOSH: Right. Any insight as to why Donna perjured herself?

HRISHI: I mean, what she says is:

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*DONNA: I was asked if I kept a diary, and I said no, only I do keep a diary.*

*JOSH: Why did you say you didn’t?*

*DONNA: I don’t know.*

*JOSH: What do you mean you don’t know?*

*DONNA: Nothing in the diary is relevant.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: She said nothing in the diary is relevant. And I thought maybe it’s only because she really does feel like those are her private thoughts and she didn’t want to make them a matter of public record, which they would be, even if they’re immaterial. Or, even that they have- this might be a stretch. But I thought maybe it is really explicit about her feelings about Josh.

JOSH: That crossed my mind too.

HRISHI: Yeah, and she didn’t want to have those thoughts out there, especially in a case that Josh was gonna be involved in. And, you know, that all these people who, you know, those are the people that she works with. And this is- those might be feelings or ideas- whatever.

JOSH: Yeah. It’s just an interesting- it’s interesting. The way Aaron writes the scene, she appears to be attempting to be very truthful and very precise. She says she doesn’t keep a photo album, and they’re about to move on, and she says, you know, I do have separate photos that I sometimes... So you know, she’s being sort of meticulous, and then she just- a big whopper of a lie, and then Cliff asks to read it back, kind of giving her another opportunity to say

“Oh, you know what, I do have a-“ and so, it is conscious. Like it is a- she’s perjuring herself. It’s no small moment that just flits by and gets the better of her. There’s something there.

HRISHI: Yeah. When we talked to Janel for the last episode she actually gave us a little bit of insight about this subplot.

[Audio Clip]

JANEL: There was a big thing for several weeks, I remember, different writers, you know, people talking to me. Maybe Aaron mentioning it. They were deciding whether they were going to make Donna kind of the scapegoat, and whether Donna was going to get in trouble. And that she was going to have information that she, like, hid, or that she tried to protect everybody from, and that she was going to be the one that went down. And then they didn’t end up doing that, so, you notice the diary thing- nothing really happens with that. It kind of fizzles out in the storyline, as I recall.

JOSH: Much to your delight, I guess.

JANEL: Yeah [Laughs] I feel like there was something- it was kind of too much like what we had felt there was so much of, like, women with the Monica Lewinsky thing and all that- just, all these different women, and it wasn’t a sexual thing, but it was like- I think they were just exhausted by this kind of a story and they just decided not to do it.

[End Audio Clip]

JOSH: That was interesting. That was enlightening. That addressed our very discussion we were having and so I suspect the answer to what we were pondering is that Aaron was just teeing up a potential other storyline.

HRISHI: Alright, let’s talk a little bit about the Leo/Adamle scene. We’ll talk about it more when we speak to our guest Ambassador Pressman but let’s talk about it a little bit first.

JOSH: So, Gerald McRaney plays Adamle. Great actor- I’ve been enjoying him lately on *This Is Us*. Do you watch that show?

HRISHI: I haven’t watched it. But I am a big Milo Ventimiglia fan from *Gilmore Girls*.

JOSH: They’re both very, very good on the show. It’s a good show. I enjoy it very much, and Gerald McRaney’s pretty winning as the doctor who delivers the triplets.

HRISHI: Okay, so I don’t know the show but I think the reputation that I’ve gathered about it is that it might be a little bit maudlin, and so I’m surprised to hear that you watch it. But maybe I’m wrong. Is it not maudlin?

JOSH: It certainly has trigger points for me, in terms of- well, here's the thing I think. I watch it with my wife and son.

HRISHI: Mhm.

JOSH: I wear different viewer goggles when I watch a show with my family. I think I'm harder on Aaron's writing.

HRISHI: (crosstalk) I suspect as much. Yeah.

JOSH: I mean, first of all, I do a podcast about *The West Wing*, and not about *This is Us*. But, I'm harder on Aaron's writing because I'm such a devotee and fan of it, so maybe that's counterintuitive, but it makes me hold him up to what I feel are his own standards, so there are lots of other shows that will go to a place where it doesn't bother me. Kind of like, the entire project *This is Us*. And it's good! I think it's very good, but it does have things that would bother me if they were on *The West Wing* with the frequency that they are on *This is Us*.

HRISHI: Yeah. I totally believe in different standards for different shows.

JOSH: I also saw someone- someone on twitter was going off on me and others- in a way that I thought was substantive and interesting- criticizing shows for being unrealistic, not judging them within their own "world." In other words, I guess he listens to *The West Wing Weekly*, and sometimes I will blast a moment for being unrealistic, or this isn't how it really works in the government, and they're saying on *The West Wing*, it's not exactly the real world. It's its own universe. So, *This is Us* is a world where sentimentality is the watchword. *West Wing*, it sticks out to me when it's too overt.

HRISHI: Did you respond to the guy?

JOSH: No. It just made me think. You know, I was trying- I was thinking about responding, and then I was just like "well, he's got a good point." I mean, I don't think enough of a point that I'll stop doing it, but I get that it could bug people. He was saying too "in the same thing where he criticized something for being unrealistic on *The West Wing*, in the same podcast, he said he loves the American version of *The Office*. Well, nobody acts like that in an office!" So, I get it. I get how that could get under somebody's skin.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I don't know if I'll have a paradigm shift in the way I view and discuss things though.

HRISHI: To defend you for a second, having not seen what this guy wrote, *The West Wing* is held up as a version of a civics class on television. Nobody's using *The Office* as a training manual.

JOSH: Right. I thought about starting to write that kind of thing, and then I just thought “He’s also just got a point.” and like, “Eh. Okay.” That could be annoying, I get it. I don’t mind being annoying though. But it’s interesting to know.

HRISHI: Mhm.

JOSH: So let’s get back to that scene. So, again, we’ll do a deeper dive later with the Ambassador, but in terms of the timing of this episode, I guess they’re basically talking about the ICC. Right? Without name checking it?

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I think they’re specifically talking about, in 1998, the Rome statute, which would set up the ICC and from what I’ve read, the United States took an active part in trying to negotiate its involvement and it felt, in the end, the government decided that they would not participate, or ratify, because they felt that the points they were trying to make that would prevent the ICC from potentially being politicized, I guess, against the United States were not being met.

HRISHI: Right. Leo, I think, frames it really well in these couple lines where he says:

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*LEO: If we don’t subject ourselves to the treaty, it’ll encourage other countries, and you don’t think that’ll undercut the UN’s campaign against war crimes?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You can support it, but if you don’t sign it and subject yourselves to the jurisdiction of the court, then it is undercutting the UN’s mission.

JOSH: Right. Even as Leo also points out in that scene that when political expediency dictates, everything else goes by the wayside anyway, you know. He doesn’t say Werner Von Braun but he refers to the Nazis that we imported to help us with our atomic project.

HRISHI: Right. It’s like he almost is buying into the idea that’s like “We should sign this thing. I mean, we won’t listen to it, but we should sign it.”

JOSH: Right exactly. He’s basically saying it’s good optics, and encourages others, and wink wink we know if we have a reason to let it fall by the wayside we’ll do that too.

HRISHI: Right. But Adamle says:

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*ADAMLE: To me, to Fitzwallace, the Pentagon, the House and the Senate Armed Services, and House and Senate Foreign Relations it's a thing of catastrophic proportions.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And later when we talk to Ambassador Pressman it turns out that that level of paranoia about signing these treaties is actually held by a lot of real people in real life. Real military and political figures who think that by doing that we are opening ourselves to these actual scenarios.

JOSH: Right. Even though, in my understanding, the ICC would only have jurisdiction in cases where the United States or whatever the government of the parties involved has failed to make a good faith investigation of its own into the matter being discussed or investigated.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah, there was just one moment that struck me that reminded me of something Tommy Schlamme told us many episodes ago. I guess it's the moment where C.J. tells President Bartlet that Melissa Markey has died. The show refrains from scoring that moment.

HRISHI: Yes.

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*C.J.: Mr. President, Melissa Markey died.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Yeah, okay.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I remember Tommy saying, in defense to my occasional criticisms of the scoring that, you know, the show had to grow a little bit or develop and find itself, and then in later seasons the scored moments would be sparser. And I thought, this is a scene and a moment that is more powerful for the lack of music and that in maybe season one probably would've had instrumentation behind it.

HRISHI: Mhm. There's a vague theme in this episode about innocent bystanders between Melissa Markey and the victims of war crimes- civilians who are killed in a bombing run. They kind of- we don't see any of them. None of them are actually depicted or anything- you know, there's no dramatization of it, but I thought that was actually kind of nice because they enter stories as statistics and sort of in the background, I feel like they loom in the background of this episode as well.

JOSH: Interesting. I think you could make an argument too that Donna's storyline is a little bit of the same. She's somebody who's caught up in something-

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That's really not of her own making. We know as an audience when she found out about the secret of the President's MS, and now she's suddenly finding herself caught in crossfires actually.

HRISHI: Yeah. Maybe the bigger theme is actually how complicated things get with escalation. That, you know, one thing happens and another thing happens and then trying to pull apart whose fault it is and who's to blame can be so impossible in a scenario like war crimes. You know, Adamle says:

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*ADAMLE: All wars are crimes.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I think that that kind of succinctly sums up what a tricky knot that stuff is, because- it's not to say there's no goodness in, or righteousness in fighting wars, but there's so much evil, just built into the idea. And then you have this church shooting where the 8-year-old girl who's killed is killed by a guy who was trying to take out someone who was shooting in a church, and that as the President says he's going to get a parade, and then you've got Leo dropping bombs in the Vietnam War, and he's following orders from Adamle who's following orders from you know. Oh, and then the other one I was thinking of was Hoynes and the president.

JOSH: Mhm.

HRISHI: In their scene which I thought was terrific, the president is like "We wouldn't even be in this if it weren't for, you know-" and he kind of trails off, but it's- there's part of the president that blames the whole MS investigation on Hoynes for having made the trip to New Hampshire that led, you know, Toby to discovering the whole- in "17 People."

JOSH: I like that that's a dodge that Hoynes does not let go, and Tim Matheson really lays into him.

HRISHI: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*HOYNES: Sir-*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: You outed me, John. With that trip to Nashua. With the oil companies. You wanted people to start asking questions.*

*HOYNES: I needed to start running because nobody told me that I wasn't! And you announced that I found out on television-*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: So did my wife.*

*HOYNES: This whole thing was mismanaged, Sir. It was blown!*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Yes it was.*

*HOYNES: Yes, it was!*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I like that he doesn't let that moment fly by. And I also like their discussion about gun control and the sensitivity Hoynes has, you know, vis-a-vis the issue and being a Texas politician.

HRISHI: Yeah. So I think that there's something there that runs throughout the whole episode. It's almost like those tort puzzles that Law students have to decode where, you know, someone's car is hit from one side and then it runs over somebody's dog, and then this other thing happens, and there's all these like-

JOSH: Yeah, all the concomitant events, and I think you're right, and particularly I thought Adamley's wielding that piece of information he knows about Leo, and that bombing run, was particularly cruel.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And he's playing it for big stakes, but what you see on John Spencer's face is the personal blow he just took. The rewriting of his own personal history. He plays it very well.

HRISHI: All I could think was that, for Leo, who's a recovering alcoholic, this is the kind of information that would absolutely, really put somebody at risk. I mean, that, to be suddenly told that you are a murderer of innocent people.

JOSH: Right. And really what he's saying is- he gave him this horrific piece of information about what he did and trying to plant anxiety that he should worry about having committed a war crime. I mean it's really, it's devious. I think it's a misread of Leo as to where Leo's going to go based on that piece of information. When I see Leo stricken into silence, I don't think he's worrying about covering his ass.

HRISHI: Oh, definitely not.

JOSH: He's pondering the enormity of what he's just learned. I mean, that's why he says to him "Why did you tell me that?"

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I mean if this was part of, you know, an attempt to influence policy or the position that the government's gonna take, that's a big misread of me.

HRISHI: Right. No I think maybe this is- blame is maybe the thing that I'm trying to dance around. How slippery blame is.

JOSH: Ahh, there you go. Yeah, because that's also a weird moment where, I mean, my interpretation of the scene is that Adamle is suggesting that he ordered Leo on this run knowing that it was a civilian target.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And then, he's dropping it in Leo's lap to make him feel guilty.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: You're right. And there's the moment between Hoynes and the president, they're both trying to back off the guilt.

HRISHI: Or assign blame to one another.

JOSH: Yeah, I think that's the greater theme or story of this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I think it's really clever and smart to set this episode on a Sunday, talking about a shooting that happens in a church, and then have the president and First Lady coming back from church, where they have this kind of light conflict about the homily to contrast their church experience with this other church experience, and frame it around this like morality of blame. I think that's all really smart.

JOSH: Yeah. There's an interesting moment too, I think, in the discussion with Hoynes where President Bartlet kind of takes a run at the whole concept of concealed weaponry, and I don't think he ties it to the actual shooting, but what he suggests is:

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: If guns are meant to deter the threat of crime, what's the point of concealing them? I mean, wouldn't you want the the criminal to see that you've got a gun?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And that's, I guess- It made me think in the church, rather than preventing a shooting- it escalated and the supposedly good guy in this scenario kills a 9-year-old.

HRISHI: Right. What do you think about the text of what the president and the First Lady are arguing about?

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: You can't just trot out Ephesians- which he blew, by the way- it has nothing to do with husbands and wives. It's all of us. St. Paul begins the passage "Be subject to one another out of reverence to Christ." Be subject to one another.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: What I would like to do is find a way to relate it to this idea of blame. The idea of "Be subject to one another" I think ties into it.

JOSH: Well I think that ties into that fantastic scene with Toby and his staff.

HRISHI: Yeah, absolutely. I think that there's- oh right, and that's another one about blame. About how do you assign blame and what's the point- I mean, again, now I like the Toby scene even more, because I see how it's framed within the idea of-

JOSH: "Be subject to one another." Certainly.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Alright, I like it now also a little more.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: I'm not saying I like it. I like it a little more.

HRISHI: Yeah, "Be subject to one another" is in some ways the opposite of blame each other for things. And I like that a lot.

JOSH: Right. Well, maybe that also ties into Will Sawyer's behavior in this episode, because he's got something that he chooses to let go by the wayside. He's being better than that.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Of course, he could've opened with [laughs] "I heard this comment, but don't worry, I'm not going to go to press with it." He makes her sweat a little bit.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Before he gives her his whole rap on the White House press corp.

HRISHI: You know, I had an interesting day on Saturday, this past Saturday. I went to the White House and I went to the briefing room. I had a tour of the briefing room from White House correspondents-

JOSH: I saw the video.

HRISHI: The podcast's Zeke Miller. And I was asking Zeke some stuff about the dynamic in the briefing room, and how it changes from administration to administration. What it was like dealing with Sean Spicer vs. Josh Earnest vs. Jay Carney, and you know, we talked in particular about Josh Earnest. A few other correspondents who I met over the weekend praised him; said that he's such a great guy. And so I- it was kind of digging into it with him and Zeke said it's not that they didn't ever have conflict. They would, often. Like he was often really annoyed with the press in the room. The Obama administration in general I think got really bothered by the rapid pace of stories being filed by the press corp. President Obama really believed in kind of the long arc, and the idea of being judged within a 40 year window or something instead of-

JOSH: More a macro take on it than a micro.

HRISHI: Exactly. And, the sort of day-to-day stuff-and now, away from Zeke's conversation, just in my own head-that idea of looking for stories and looking for things to write about, looking for things to file, and, you know, whatever the information is that you're getting in the room. And as you're writing process stories instead of policy stories because process stories are what's coming out, these start to get into what Will Sawyer's talking about when he says it's gossip. It feels more like gossip, of like, oh, did you hear this guy said this thing? And you know, even the thing about Toby. It's like, he doesn't care because it's not real news. It's just a thing that somebody said.

JOSH: Right, well the story would be that ooh, this got out. It's not even a story really in itself, it's like "Oh, we have a gotcha." Somebody said something in confidence that doesn't look great given his job in the administration.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: That's the sum total of it.

HRISHI: Yeah, and Will, I think, kind of frames these two different sides of it.

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*C.J.: Why do you think the White House is a bad beat?*

*WILL: I don't like being a stenographer, and I don't like writing gossip*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Where it's like either you are spoon fed whatever comes from the podium, or you get caught up in these, like, little micro things and you-

JOSH: Right, and this Toby quote-unquote "story" is a combination of the two. It's literally just writing down something that apparently somebody said, and that's it. That's the story.

HRISHI: Right, and making hay out of it.

JOSH: Exactly, making hay out of it.

HRISHI: Josh, what can I do to "be of subject" to you?

JOSH: Well, just keep doing most of the work on the podcast.

HRISHI: [Laughs] It's an interesting construction.

JOSH: Is that the construction? To "be of subject"?

HRISHI: Well, it's what the president says. He says:

[West Wing Episode 3.05 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: "Be subject to one another," Leo. What can I do to be of subject to you?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: What the hell does that mean? (Laughs)

HRISHI: I don't know that it's right. "'Be subject to one another,' Leo. What can I do to be *subject* to you?"

JOSH: Well, you can start by speaking English, Mr. President. So I know what the [expletive deleted] you're talking about.

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: That's funny that this- I'm realizing that there's so many things in this episode that are quintessentially Aaron. The only one of which I don't love is the Toby scene. The walk-and-talk and the thread going through about betting on football,

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That's so- it's like a *Sports Night* C-story.

HRISHI: Right, right.

JOSH: And I think that thing also, that the whole Sam interlude- every time he pops in talking about getting rid of the penny, that's a classic-

HRISHI: Oh right, that's right.

JOSH: Yeah, we haven't touched on that.

HRISHI: The big block of-

JOSH: That's a very big block of cheese.

HRISHI: The bigger copper block of cheese.

JOSH: It's just such an Aaron thing. He gets like a-

HRISHI: It's a big block of zinc.

JOSH: Oh, good point. [laughs]

HRISHI: Sorry, yeah. I interrupted your flow.

JOSH: He does find those kind of things really interesting.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: As do I, like I actually find it- it is an interesting question.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: When I find pennies, I want to throw them away. But it's money- you can't throw away money.

HRISHI: It's still something that goes on.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: That like, is actively debated right now.

JOSH: Listen, people keep tweeting Plooeey at me too. Like, someplace got a wilderness bridge recently.

HRISHI: Yeah, I think maybe it was Utah or Wyoming?

JOSH: Big block of cheese win! Interstate 80 near Parlee's Summit in Utah- there's going to be \$5 million spent to build a wilderness bridge to reduce collisions with animals, so Plooeey lives!

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: Good news. Somewhere, Nick Offerman smiled.

HRISHI: Let's take a quick break, and when we come back we'll be joined by Ambassador David Pressman to talk more about war crimes.

[Ad Break]

HRISHI: We're joined now by Ambassador David Pressman, who was appointed by President Barack Obama to be the first ever Director for War Crimes and Atrocities on the National Security Council at the White House. He was the US representative on the United Nations Security Council, and the former Assistant Secretary of Homeland Security. In 2016, Ambassador Pressman joined the firm of Boies, Schiller, and Flexner. Thanks so much for talking to us, Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Oh, it's a pleasure to be here. I'm always happy to talk about war crimes.

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: Is that what it says on your business card?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: It did, actually! For a while I had the good fortune of having a White House business card that read Director for War Crimes and Atrocities. As you can imagine, I was quite the hit in certain circles.

HRISHI: Yeah, that's why you get invited to all the parties.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Exactly.

HRISHI: Did you get a chance to watch the "War Crimes" episode of *The West Wing*?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: I did. It brought back good memories.

JOSH: Are you a *West Wing* fan?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: I am. Although, I'm also a person who has a very bad memory, so re-watching the episode reminded me of a lot of the narrative, but I'm definitely a fan. It's addictive, informative, and at this time in our nation's evolution, certainly nostalgic.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: So, I guess I wanted to just jump right in to the scene that talks about the US's participation in war crimes' tribunals. Could you give us your reaction to that plot, that part of the episode?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: I mean, it accurately-if succinctly-reflects what is a[sic] ongoing debate and tension in US policy in this area. On the one hand, you have-at least in the previous administration, leadership at the highest levels of our government, including the president, who very much believed that accountability for international crimes was essential to advancing peace in a sustainable way. And at the same time, there is a[sic] understandable-although, I think, much overblown-fear amongst some in the government that being supportive of internationalized efforts to hold individuals accountable for those crimes somehow infringes upon the sovereignty of the United States government. I mean, no- no actor or no official at any level, myself included, ever wants to see, you know, US officials called in front of a court outside of the United States to account for actions or political decisions they took while they were entrusted with the responsibilities of running the US government. There's- there's a big gap between the fears that are articulated by the character on the show and the reality. I mean, the reality is when we're talking about the International Criminal Court in this context which, in 2002, you're- when this was being made, it's the year that the Rome statute of the International Criminal Court came into force, after extensive negotiations. Now, here we are, decades later, and the grand total of individuals who've been convicted by the International Criminal Court is 4. I mean, this is not a court that is empowered and scary, this is a court that is a tool.

JOSH: Am I correct that- so, at the time of filming this, President Clinton had signed the Rome Statute knowing that it probably wouldn't be ratified in the Senate?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: That, well, that, even more so than that. I mean, he did- you're correct. President Clinton signed the Rome Statute at the culmination of the negotiations that occurred under his watch but at the time of signing the Rome Statute, President Clinton made clear that while he is signing it, he wasn't recommending the treaty to be sent to the Senate and ratified. He both signed it, and said there's still work to be done before it's ratified by the Senate. And I think, famously, when the Bush administration- George W. Bush's administration came to office, they made clear by sending a letter to the Secretary General of the United Nations that they had no intention to ratify, or to send the treaty to the Senate for ratification.

HRISHI: When you first got involved in international relations in this capacity, what was your view on the idea of sovereign immunity? I mean you said as a diplomat, as an ambassador you don't want to see American officials being taken into an international criminal court, but I mean, did you always feel that way?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: I believe that individuals who commit the grossest crimes known to man should be held accountable, but I also believe in- and this is, I think, a really important element of understanding both the International Criminal Court and international criminal justice more broadly- which is, there's an element of jurisdiction called complementarity. And what complementarity means, is it means that the International Criminal Court will have no jurisdiction over anything if the national court is investigating and prosecuting perpetrators. And so, you know, the United States of America has been at the forefront, from Nuremberg on through, of supporting efforts to hold perpetrators accountable. And we should continue to do so. When you look at where the ICC was intended to focus, it was intended to focus on perpetrators who are emerging from systems, including, you know, many that you can look to today where the state itself is involved and complicit in the atrocity, or the state itself is unwilling or otherwise unable to hold the individuals accountable. And so I don't think it's either hypocritical or necessarily intention to take the position as I do that, of course- I would never want to see an American hauled in front of the Hague. I'd never want to see an American involved in the kind of crimes in the systematic and widespread nature that they would need to be in order for the Hague to justify jurisdiction, and at the same time believe that any individual, including Americans, who are involved in these kind of actions need to be held accountable.

JOSH: So that argument about complementarity would've been maybe an interesting direction- would've been interesting for Aaron Sorkin to put that argument into Leo's mouth in that scene to get a little deeper into it.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: I mean, I think that's right. And there's also- remember that the other thing that were I staffing this Chief of Staff in that moment, I mean, there- there are other really important arguments that I think the Department of Defense in particular and, you know, values and believes hold a lot of merit which is that our own military relies upon international protections when they operate abroad. We rely upon other countries and other military forces following the laws of war and being held accountable when they do not. By virtue of supporting international justice and international judicial institutions, we're also advancing protection for our own troops when they operate abroad and, importantly, taking action that will hopefully prevent and break some of the cycles of violence that lead to mass atrocities in the first place, that then lead, often, to US military or other engagement. So, there is a long game here. Like when, you know, you start arguing that the United States of America should join the ICC, you stop having a conversation with those who view the International Criminal Court with deep suspicion. You stop having a conversation with them about "can we provide certain kinds of support, whether it be material or intelligence, to advance the court's investigation of people like Joseph Kony, or others?" That, I think, is frankly more pragmatic and more likely to yield dividends for victims.

HRISHI: Well, can we talk about some of these other examples from the past? You know, one of the things that Leo mentions is the Tokyo trials, and I wonder how much of the sense of justice that can be brought is really shaped just by the eyes of the victors in whatever conflict, you know, has led to the thing. Like for the Tokyo trials, the emperor and the imperial family, they weren't prosecuted. Even whatever sense there was that Japan as a state was responsible for crimes, war crimes, the actual imperial family wasn't held responsible. But then also, isn't there an argument to be made that President Truman committed war crimes with dropping the bombs?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Your point about victor's justice is, I think, a really important one. There is, almost always-and often appropriately-a concern that what these entities are doing amount to victor's justice. I mean, I even think in recent terms about the kind of work that's happening in Côte d'Ivoire following the war crimes that occurred there when Gbagbo and Ouattara had the standoff after the election, and, you know, one of the things the United States has been very focused on is trying to encourage the Ivorian government to prosecute, and the International Criminal Court is also involved here. But try to encourage the Ivorian government to prosecute and hold accountable those who did bad things, and when you look around and you sort of see, well, who are they holding accountable? Sure enough, they're holding accountable the people that opposed them. And that's not justice. So that's why the principled engagement of countries like the United States I think is important. But, is it avoidable? Yes, it's avoidable. But can we allow, sort of, the fear of the appearance of victor's justice to mean that we're not going to take action in the face of these situations? I really don't think so. I don't think that's pragmatic.

HRISHI: I guess I just don't understand how the US is expected to be considered a fair endorser of a tribunal if they aren't themselves subject to its jurisdiction.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: I mean, in short, we're not considered a fair, to borrow your words, "endorser" of the tribunal. I mean, there's a lot of resentment, frankly, in the international community, and the other ambassadors that I dealt with on a daily basis that, you know, "who are you to be lecturing us on international justice and accountability. You haven't even ratified the Rome Statute." But you know what-

HRISHI: Right.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: I think that really misses the point. And I'm not just- this is not political spin, I actually believe it, because, there are plenty of signatories to the Rome Statute who have signed and ratified the Rome Statute and who do next to nothing to stand up to gross abusers of human rights, or to try and ensure that gross abusers end up being brought to justice. And it is true that the United States has not ratified the Rome Statute, and at the same time it's true that the United States, at least until the recent change in Administration, the United States has been vigorous in finding individuals who are wanted by the International Criminal Court, providing support, consistent with US laws, to specific matters before the International Criminal Court, and other forms of international justice. So when I look around at what people

are actually doing to advance justice, I think the US story-certainly the US story under President Obama-is one that we can all be proud of. I just think it's a cheap political shot to say "Well, you didn't sign the Rome Statute." True! I mean, point taken. But there's a lot more to fighting for justice than ratifying a treaty.

HRISHI: Well, let me ask you about another one. In 1986 there was the International Court of Justice. I don't totally understand the difference between the ICC and the International Court of Justice. They're both in the Hague, right?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Yeah. It's easy. The ICC is doing international criminal justice for people who have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide. The International Court of Justice is a forum that's set up to resolve disputes between states.

HRISHI: Okay. It's also a multilateral body.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Judicial institution, correct.

HRISHI: So, there was a ruling that the US' covert war against Nicaragua violated international law, and, in the face of that, the US withdrew from the Court, and also the enforcement of any ruling was subject to veto power from the permanent members of the council, which, the US was one of those members and used its veto to get out of the enforcement. You said it was a cheap shot, but it just- it seems like it's more than just words and documents, there are actual consequences that could come from these bodies that the US is choosing to avoid.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: I mean, look. I referred to it as a cheap shot to focus on the US' failure to ratify the Rome Statute as being the sine qua non of the US' engagement in fighting for advancing accountability for war criminals.

HRISHI: Right.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: And I think as compared to countries who have ratified the Rome Statute, we actually have a lot- in many cases a lot more- that we've done than they have, but you're pointing to other issues. I think you're referencing-I'm not particularly familiar with the example you're referencing- I think you're referencing compulsory jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. That's sort of a different beast, but your overarching point is a fair one. I mean, the United States of America is a permanent member of the Security Council and as such we're entrusted with special powers, which is the veto authority in the council. Other countries, sometimes reasonably, feel that we're using our veto authority improperly. There has been a movement recently, in large part led by the French, to try and have the permanent members of the Security Council agree that they will refrain from using their veto in certain instances of war crimes, crimes against humanity, or genocide, but the reality of the situation is, you know, I was in the Security Council when- when the Russians vetoed our efforts to refer Syria to the International Criminal Court.

HRISHI: Right.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: I mean, the reality is that there's a very realpolitik that's happening, and for those of us who support international justice and human rights we similarly need to be pragmatic and realistic with respect to how we engage and how we can achieve the biggest impact.

HRISHI: In the episode, General Adamle and Leo, you know, are talking about this bombing run that he did where, it turns out- he didn't know, but it turns out- he had hit a civilian target instead of a military target.

JOSH: On the orders, apparently, of Adamle.

HRISHI: Right. If the US were subject to the ICC, would Leo be held accountable for something like that? Following orders?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: There's a couple of ways to respond to that. One is when a state signs on to the Rome Statute, they're saying "You can have jurisdiction- you, the International Criminal Court- can have jurisdiction over my nationals, nationals of my country, and also things that have happened in my country." So, depending on where the dam was that Leo apparently targeted, if it- were it in a country that was a Rome Statute party, states party of the ICC, almost irrespective of whether or not the United States was a member or not, and yes, arguably that act could fall under the ICC's jurisdiction. To answer your question, you would have to know, well: first, was it a war crime. I mean, was the dam that was allegedly hit, was that a civilian or military object. Usually dams are considered civilian but, you know, depending upon its nexus with the military infrastructure it's - I mean, it's a fact-specific inquiry. Once you've satisfied yourself that it was, in fact, a war crime, I think before you ever even approach the ICC taking jurisdiction over it, or investigating it, it would need to be part of a broader pattern of conduct that was so egregious to warrant the court's attention.

JOSH: That's what strikes me odd about that scene is that, in addition to it being dirty pool as a tactic on a personal level, it seems almost as, like a self-destructive stratagem from the Air Force General because it horrifies Leo to realize what he's done, and implicates the General.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Yeah.

JOSH: It almost seems counter to his purpose, which is to kind of, you know, wave him off the idea of trying to push for ratifying the Rome Statute, when it seems to me it would maybe motivate somebody who's horrified at the thought of what he had been ordered to do.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Yeah, you can see it working both ways. I mean, one of the things that I find interesting about international justice is how irrational, in some ways, people's responses are to it. I mean, it's an understandable but not entirely rational fear that suddenly American politicians or military actors are going to be hauled before the Hague. And at the

same time, on the reverse, it's amazing how influential the International Criminal Court and the instruments like it are in the calculus of bad guys around the world. I mean, even though this court has no marshals, no muscle, no means, really, to do much of anything unless states are willing to support it, and yet, still, the Shui Fongs of the world, the people who are, or were, involved in organizing some really, really oppressive and illegal activities are really concerned, were really concerned about being hauled before one of these courts. And that too if you just look at the history of it isn't entirely rational, but it certainly is a good thing that we live in a time where perpetrators and architects of some of these atrocities are beginning to look over their shoulder.

HRISHI: Do you think that the only reason why we have this attitude in the US is because of a belief in American Exceptionalism? There was an interview that Donald Trump gave with Bill O'Reilly where he was talking about Putin, and he said:

[Donald Trump/Bill O'Reilly Interview excerpt]

*TRUMP: A lot of killers. You got a lot of killers. What, you think our country's so innocent?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think something that was so shocking about that idea- to equate US leaders with Putin was shocking to a lot of people, but I think at a larger level something was crazy about our president, kind of, putting a dent in the idea of American Exceptionalism with a statement like that.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Yeah, I mean I certainly remember that interview, and how appalling I found President Trump's remarks. On the substance, there's no comparison between the activities of Vladimir Putin and the activities of the United States of America, and, as someone who has represented the United States of America at the Security Council, and have sat there and debated in the open chamber with the representatives of the Russian Federation as they trot out what they see as a parade of horrors in their mind of US actions over the years, from invading Iraq to, you know, any other number of things, it's still- no country is perfect. But to draw equivalences between the kinds of activities that, in this case, Putin and the United States have undertaken is both ignorant and reckless and wrong. But, you know, you ask about American Exceptionalism. I think that it really- I mean, call me a patriot- I think it cuts the other way, which is the world has historically looked, and I hope will continue to look to America to lead the way for holding the powerful to account, and you don't- I mean, even domestically when you look at Watergate and Nixon, I mean, the world watched that happen and watched the rule of law and this country's support for the rule of law reign supreme. Not an individual.

HRISHI: What did you think about the sort of button on the scene, towards the end of the scene? General Adame says "All wars are crimes." Do you agree with that, or did that just seem like a good piece of TV writing.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: As a matter of rhetoric, it's compelling. As a matter of law, it's inaccurate. And I- I believe war is, as someone who has spent a lot of time working on conflict and victims of conflict, war is ugly, it's awful. But there are times when the use of military force is necessary and is the moral and the right thing to do. And as a matter of law, there are lawful ways to fight war. The UN Charter spells out, in large part, the lawful ways you use force. The Security Council authorizes you to do so, or you're acting in self-defense. And then there's- the law defines ways that you are to conduct yourself in war. So, is war awful? Absolutely. Is war a crime, in the legal sense? No, not necessarily. Is war something that we need to spend a lot of energy, a lot of time, and a lot of passion avoiding and preventing? No question.

JOSH: Can you give us an idea of what it's like, a peek behind the doors of the UN Security Council? Are things no-holds-barred there? Is it very candid and intense negotiation? Or is there a lot of political tightrope walking?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Going to work every day to a place where countries as different as we view the world are supposed to sit around a table and talk and maybe come to agreement on a good day, is sort of an inspiring concept. In practice, what it looks like is it looks like a lot of people with, representatives with very divergent views arguing. But on a personal level-and were you speaking to Ambassador Power, I think she would say the same thing-I mean, one of the things that surprised me the most was just how, I mean, you're literally locked in a room with these 14 other diplomats for, you know, in my case more than three years. And you become friends, you know. So, the fact that... I remember-we're talking about war crimes-I remember going over to the Chinese representative's house, who I became very close with and a good friend of, and I looked on his table, and he had a picture framed of himself with his hand up voting in the Security Council, and I thought it was sort of cute that he, you know, he framed a picture of himself voting, and then I looked closer and realized it was- his hand was the only hand up, and he was casting the veto for referring Syria to the International Criminal Court. And this was a moment he was proud of.

HRISHI: Jeez.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: You know, this guy was my friend! (Laughs)

JOSH: Wow.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: So, we come at it from, from very different perspectives. But I think that when the council can agree, it's an incredibly powerful mechanism.

JOSH: And, on the balance, do you feel that the room is open, or intransigent?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: It depends. You know, there is an intransigence, yes. For instance, on Syria, I don't see the Security Council ever, at least in the near future, referring the situation in Syria to the International Criminal Court and that is a crime.

JOSH: Right.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: But one level below that, I think you begin to look for ways that the council can act to advance the protection of civilians in places like Syria, to advance accountability for actors. The Security Council is rendered impotent, in some respects, when permanent members of the Security Council are themselves engaged in activities that are violations of the UN Charter. So when Russia is invading and purportedly annexing Ukraine, parts of Ukraine, you know- makes it hard for the Security Council to come to agreement on what we should do on Ukraine. And similarly in Syria when the Russians are directly targeting civilian infrastructure throughout Syria and killing and participating in the killing of so many innocents, it makes it hard for the Security Council to hold perpetrators in Syria accountable. But, in those areas where that's not the case, I think that there's enormous potential for the council to do a lot of good.

JOSH: Mmm. You're reminding me of Saudi Arabia recently being appointed to the Council on Women's Rights.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Yeah.

JOSH: When that kind of thing happens-

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: There is- this is the United Nations.

JOSH: Indeed.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: There are some perversities. If you look at, you know, who's on the Human Rights Council, it often reads like a roster of some of the world's most grotesque human rights abusers. But-

JOSH: A Rogue's Gallery.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: You know, but, the point is that the US can't walk away. You know? We have to be in the room, and we have to be trying to engage to try to make these institutions including the Human Rights Council (and including the International Criminal Court) better. And so, you know, even as a non-states party of the ICC, we were working-in many respects harder than states parties of the ICC-to try and advance the court's ability to render justice in places like Darfur, Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Libya, so... the world is better when the US is at the table and in the room, always. And I hope that the current administration understands that very basic point.

HRISHI: Well, so, I'm curious what your opinion is on President Trump inviting Rodrigo Duterte to the White House-

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: [Interrupting] It's insane.

HRISHI: Is that an example of- it's insane?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Yeah! Totally insane.

HRISHI: [Laughing] I mean, it's not an example of being at the table and engaging- you know, creating a diplomatic avenue so that the US can be involved- [laughing]

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: [Crosstalk] No, no, no, no. I'm not saying that, sorry. This is important. I'm not saying that the US should be-

JOSH: *We're* supposed to be at the table.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: No, no, no. I'm not saying the US should be, you know, sitting down to engage personally the perpetrators of, in his case, Duterte's case, potentially crimes against humanity, and to honor them with a reception at the White House that would be more appropriate for, let's say, a leader who isn't committing crimes against humanity. No, no, no, that's not at all what I'm saying. What I'm saying is that in multilateral fora like the Human Rights Council, like the International Criminal Court, rather than, you know, wiping our hands of it and saying "Oh, there's a bunch of human rights abusers in the room. We shouldn't- you know, what a joke of an institution" and walking away, we should make these institutions work. You know I think the idea that President Trump is calling up Erdogan to congratulate him on his quote-unquote election-

JOSH: Unbelievable. Ludicrous.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: It's nuts. It's really unfortunate. A lot of countries look to the United States to help define what conduct is permissible and is impermissible, and when you have the President of the United States honoring the kinds of actions that are taking place in Turkey, and honoring the kinds of grotesque (potentially) crimes against humanity that are taking place under Duterte, I mean, it's really unfortunate.

HRISHI: Well, that's why I think it was so interesting, you know, if you are someone who subscribes to the patriotic view of American Exceptionalism, it feels like the American President is actively engaging in the undoing of a sense of American Exceptionalism with-

JOSH: I agree.

HRISHI: With meetings like this.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: It seems to me that there isn't any rhyme or reason. Like, it feels pretty random. If President Trump has a plan for why he would invite the leader of the Philippines who is, you know, widely accused of engaging in widespread and systematic

violations of international human rights law to the White House, if there's a strategy behind that, it's not at all apparent.

JOSH: Perhaps if we had access to his taxes.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: [Laughs] Well, I'll leave that to you guys.

HRISHI: [Laughs]

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Remember, one of the things that the ICC and all of this stuff is supposed to do, is it's supposed to isolate pariahs. And you're supposed to make people who are doing really bad things feel isolated. Feel unable to travel securely and safely to other countries, because they're wanted by the International Criminal Court, as is the case with Omar Al-Bashir in Sudan. And when you have the President of the United States, you know, looking in the eyes of someone who's accused of doing these awful, awful things and saying "Come on over to the White House," that runs counter to the idea that individuals should be held accountable for war crimes, crimes against humanity, and genocide.

JOSH: Well, you mentioned Bashir- so, he was indicted by the ICC.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Yes, and an arrest warrant was issued for Bashir by the ICC.

JOSH: And so, what are the implications then for his- his life, and his travel?

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: I think that the Bashir case is a really telling example of the limits of the court. For a while Bashir had a very difficult time traveling outside of Sudan, and was very careful with respect to where he traveled to, but that's eroded over time. And this is where, I think, the politics meets the law.

JOSH: Mhm. A sustained will.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Yeah. It's will. The International Criminal Court has no independent authority. The only ability of the court to do anything about someone like Omar Al-Bashir (or frankly, anyone else), is that the political actors in the governments that are parties, or not parties, care enough about what the court says and wants that they're willing to deliver.

JOSH: Right.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: And so Bashir, over the course of many years, has been able to travel with increasing impunity, and I think has really undermined the credibility and legitimacy of the court in a way that is very regrettable.

HRISHI: You had mentioned that there are ways of conducting war that are legal. I also feel like there's still latitude within that to do it and be despicable. I'm thinking about the-

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Yeah.

HRISHI: Comment that the Commerce Secretary Ross made, that he referred to the bombing of Syria- he said it was in lieu of after dinner entertainment at Mar-a-Lago.

JOSH: Oof.

HRISHI: I know that how one talks about an action doesn't actually inform the- whether it's legal or not, but it's hard to have the conversation about war crimes of others when we're engaged in language like that.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Well, I mean, I found those comments despicable. And, as supportive as I was and am of President Trump's decision to take some military action in response to the chemical attacks- the use of force is such a weighty and serious responsibility, from a legal perspective, from a moral perspective, from any perspective, that I think anyone- certainly a member of the President of the United States' cabinet- you would expect to internalize the weight of that responsibility and the gravity of it in how they carry out their business. As I watched the *West Wing* episode, one of the things that- I said it made me nostalgic- it made me nostalgic for a time where you felt like the people who were running your government and taking extremely serious decisions were having the kinds of serious dialogue and debate and thought that these decisions require. So, I think, when a member of the president's cabinet starts talking about the use of military force as some form of- of dessert course for a country club or whatever it is- that does not suggest the kind of maturity, frankly, that is necessary for those of us who are entrusted with these kinds, or being a part of these kinds of decisions, or advising the president related to them.

JOSH: It's a sad reflection of the times when you have to go to TV to get the-

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: [Laughs] It is. But I'm watching a lot of TV these days.

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: As are we.

HRISHI: Well, thank you so much.

JOSH: That was a fascinating conversation.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: Thank you, yeah. I enjoyed it. Thank you guys.

JOSH: And bless you for using the word "fora." [All laugh]. You don't hear that a lot these days.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: You have to speak to a multilateralist to hear the word “fora,” and if you type it into Microsoft Word, it will tell you that it’s not a word, but it is a word.

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: I particularly enjoyed that and appreciate you.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: [Laughs]

HRISHI: That’s it for this episode.

JOSH: We hope you enjoyed it. We hope you’ll listen again. We hope you’ll buy merchandise at [thewestwingweekly.com/merch](http://thewestwingweekly.com/merch). The West Wing Weekly was made largely thanks to the talents of Zach McNees and Margaret Miller.

HRISHI: You can find us on Twitter. Josh is @joshmalina.

JOSH: Hrishi’s @hrishihirway. In the meantime, meaning the days between now and our next episode, you can listen to Hrishi’s award-winning podcast, in contradistinction to this one, Song Exploder.

HRISHI: That’s right.

JOSH: You can see me on *Scandal* Thursday nights on ABC at 9/8c. What else? We have an Instagram account. [instagram.something/something](http://instagram.something/something).

HRISHI: And we’re also on Facebook at [facebook.something/something](http://facebook.something/something).

JOSH: There you go. You gotta want it. The West Wing Weekly is a proud member of Radiotopia.

HRISHI: From PRX.

JOSH: Mhm.

HRISHI: Radiotopia is made possible thanks to the support of the Knight Foundation and listeners like you. Not you, Josh listeners like-

JOSH: Although I am- that’s true, I don’t donate anything to it. But I am- [laughs] I am a fan of Radiotopia which is a curated collection of some of the finest podcasts out there.

HRISHI: Huge thanks to Ambassador David Pressman for talking to us. That was a fascinating conversation. I really, really enjoyed it, and I feel honored that he came and talked to us on our podcast about a TV show.

JOSH: Yeah, that was one of those interview we completed and then we chatted for a while about these opportunities that we're getting, and how wild it is that we get to interview an Ambassador.

HRISHI: Crazy. I know. I just got to go to the White House Correspondents Dinner.

JOSH: You looked very cute. The picture on our website, you look very sharp and adorable.

HRISHI: Well thank you very much.

JOSH: You look good in clothes, and out of clothes. And I also want to say thank you to Ambassador Pressman. Though he doesn't appear to be on Twitter, you can follow my dear friend David Pressman. He's on Twitter @davidpressman. And while you won't learn about world affairs, you will be amused.

HRISHI: I'm gonna follow him right now.

JOSH: Actually, let's do that. Could everybody who's listening just follow David Pressman on Twitter and then we'll see whether he notices that one day he gets 175,000 followers? Let's do it. @davidpressman.

HRISHI: Yeah. Tweet at him about War Crimes. Just ask him about why- why he doesn't support the US' involvement in multilateral treaties.

JOSH: Operation confuse Josh's friend.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Exactly. Okay?

JOSH: Okay.

AMBASSADOR PRESSMAN: What's next?

[Outro Music]

[Radiotopia Signoff]