

The West Wing Weekly
3.10: "H. Con-172"

[ad insert]

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: [singing & snapping] "*Josh, Josh, crazy Josh*"

JOSH: Wow.

HRISHI: [singing] "*Get Cool, Josh*"

JOSH: Look at you!

HRISHI: I thought you would like that.

JOSH: Good opener. So, you're going to embrace the musical of it all.

HRISHI: Well, this is an episode that I can sing along with.

JOSH: Well, first of all, just let me say just you're opening with song reminds me of your text message earlier in the day, which was, well, you're always, I think, sort of in contradistinction to me; cheerful and in a good mood. You're a very upbeat person. But I texted you something and your response was "fo shizzle, Josh sizzle" and I wrote back, "wow, you're in a good mood" and you wrote back, "I just bought some comics". [laughter by both] Which I thought was very endearing. I could actually tell, not from content, but from the tenor of your text message that you were in a good mood, and indeed you were, and it was because you had just bought a new batch of comics.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: You still have a song in your heart.

HRISHI: It's true. Welcome to the West Wing Weekly. I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I am Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Today we are here to sing the song of Season 3, Episode 10, "H.Con-172"

JOSH: The story is by Eli Attie. The teleplay by Aaron Sorkin. And this episode was directed by a Misiano, but not Christopher, rather, Vincent, his older bro. This is the first of five that Misiano would go on to direct.

HRISHI: A little "nepotiz"?

JOSH: Perhaps. Also, it's a little early. I should wait until we are done with this episode, but I think "Happy Halfaversary!"

HRISHI: You think?

JOSH: Well, Season 3, Episode 11 puts us at half way through seven seasons, right?

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: Yeah. We can revisit it when we're done. Because it's when we're done that we're halfway through.

HRISHI: Sure. Okay. Excluding the possibility of any bonus episodes that we might lay in there.

JOSH: Oh. Yeah. We are going to come up with all sorts of [expletive deleted] to drag this thing out. Don't get me wrong.

HRISHI: But in terms of *The West Wing* itself, we will be halfway through.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: So, there you go. Happy mood crushed.

JOSH: I didn't expect to feel fully burnt out halfway through.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Maybe I should have bought some comics today.

HRISHI: Exactly! Here's what's happening in this episode. Leo gets an offer: get the president to accept a congressional censure and then the hearings will end; meaning he won't have to testify about his relapse. Josh tries to do something about his crush on Amy Gardner. Sam is trying to pre-emptively defend against a tell-all by a former White House photographer, whose book is mostly fiction. And Charlie gives the president a map of the Holy Land, that predates the establishment of the state of Israel, much to the consternation of those in the senior staff. Well, I guess it's not really the giving of the map that causes consternation.

JOSH: I was trying to decide if I should quibble with you.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: We'll get to that.

HRISHI: Quibble away. Even though this episode is maybe not as dramatic as "Bartlet for America", it is this beautiful continuation of that episode and as with "Bartlet for America", there's nothing about this episode that I don't like.

JOSH: Huh. Well, maybe I can help you with that. [laughter by both]

HRISHI: What didn't you like?

JOSH: No, nothing even leaps to mind. I am not even sure why. I am not sure I like it as much as "Bartlet for America". Actually, I'm sure that I don't. But it is a good continuation and a fine episode of the show. Throughout it seems to me, until maybe the very end of the episode, the framing of the issue about whether or not to agree to censure, seems to revolve around – well, on Leo's side he's got that beautiful attitude of...

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

LEO: I take a bullet for the President. He doesn't take one for me.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: But on the president's side, they seem to be discussing his legacy and how he'll be remembered and how he'll feel. And it seems to me like they should all be talking about 'are we going to be able to get him reelected if we agree to this'.

HRISHI: Uh huh. Until the end.

JOSH: Yeah. At the very end it is finally brought up a bit.

HRISHI: I feel like that is Leo's point of view, more so than anyone else's, right? Leo is talking about how history will remember the president. That's what he is concerned about. I don't know that other people share that. I think other people are really concerned with the president and the reelection.

JOSH: It doesn't seem to be made explicit though.

HRISHI: Really?

JOSH: In other words, I think, if it were, everyone would be agreeing. In other words, the president can't do this and it's going to be the end of his reelection campaign.

HRISHI: If he accepts the censure?

JOSH: That's what it seems like to me. Maybe I am just wrong and it wouldn't be that big of a deal. But it seems to me that if it's a potentially legacy staining stigma, then in the short-term, isn't it going to crush his hopes for reelection?

HRISHI: Well, I think that's a possibility. The president says, "yeah, I am going to do it" and Leo says "it doesn't clear us up for the campaign". There are all these reasons why, even though, if he does it, there are still lots of issues that are left.

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

LEO: It doesn't get Abbey off the hook. She's still going to have to deal with the AMA.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Yeah.

LEO: It doesn't clear us up for the campaign. It's just a different looking stage-weight around our ankle and now it comes with a congressional seal. It doesn't give us any room to argue the point.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But I think the president, again, I think to him the moral argument for accepting the censure outweighs the political consequence of accepting.

JOSH: Yeah, ultimately, it seems to me the discussion would be more truncated, or it would be, more people would be saying “yeah, he can’t do this because this is how it’s going to affect our hopes for reelection” and “yeah, Leo, you’re right. You’ve gotta take the fall for this because the other guy is the president”.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I don’t know. Something about the framework of it felt a little bit false to me for much of this episode.

HRISHI: The people who would be having this conversation would be the president, Leo and Josh, really. They’re the only ones.

JOSH: Right. They are on the inside, which I like. I love that whole thing. “Are you inside?”

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

TOBY: I don’t know what was going on. That’s okay. That’s the way somebody wants it. But you’re inside right?

JOSH: Yeah.

TOBY: Good. If it’s something Communications is going to have to work with?

JOSH: The lawyers are talking about it.

TOBY: When I have to know I will.

JOSH: Yeah.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Right. So, you’re saying Leo should be making the argument beforehand that this is going to crush reelection hopes and Josh should maybe also?

JOSH: Well, I don’t know. Okay. In that opening scene, it seems to be more of a personal, moral battle going on rather than....

HRISHI: ...the pragmatic one.

JOSH: Yeah, rather than the pragmatic. Hey, we’re trying to win a presidential election here. This is going to be, if not a death blow, a huge obstacle on our way towards reelection. So, I, Leo, I gotta take the fall.

HRISHI: Right. I get what you’re saying now. He says “I’d take a bullet for the President. He doesn’t take one for me”. But really the first thing he’s saying is “I need to do this because my reputation doesn’t matter as much as the reelection does and we need to....

JOSH: Right. Exactly. I felt a little bit like ‘come on guys, why isn’t he bottom-lining it here immediately’. ‘I cannot do this. I am not going to do this. Because “big picture”, we are trying to get a president elected’.

HRISHI: Although, if I were in that room and that argument was being made, I would say it doesn't really help anything for the reelection by having Leo go through with it. It still tarnishes the White House because that story is going to come out and then the opposition could hang that around the President's neck. You've got a Chief of Staff who is an alcoholic, who relapsed, he shouldn't have been responsible. If you have that kind of bad judgement hiring him, there is still a negative.

JOSH: Perhaps so. Yeah, I'm not writing the entire episode [laughter]. I'm just saying what might have been discussed initially. And, this whole discussion leads me into the kind of revelation in the cold open that Cliff Calley is not the prince I thought him to be at the end of the last episode. And correct me if I'm wrong, but he has had the Chairman call for a recess because he wants to save what Gibson has – he doesn't want Gibson to spill it until he's gotten to Leo and tried to blackmail him with the information. Or extort a concession out of him – leverage it. I mean, it's really just evil. I mean, you can kind of pretend it's not what he's doing, but what Cliff Calley is doing in that scene is revealing like "I didn't have this guy say this yet, because what I want to do is say to you 'hey, he's going to say this unless you agree to this proposal.'"

HRISHI: That's definitely not how I read it. I think it's more like "if the hearings resume, it's beyond my control to stop Gibson. He's going to say it no matter what. So, here, I'm giving you some kind of out". I mean, he can't stop Gibson from speaking.

JOSH: Well, we've learned it's not even that hard to get somebody out of the room. Josh has a plan for it. I don't know. It's sort of the way it plays to me. And I'm not faulting the episode. To me, I find it interesting.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: But, except that it feels a little like...

HRISHI: You think Cliff Calley is kind of a bad guy.

JOSH: I think he clearly is.

[laughter]

JOSH: I mean, I think most people will take it how you took it. But I watched the scene over again just to make sure I was understanding and all he's using is...whatever...at the end of the last episode it was like, great, he gives this stirring speech about oh, you know, essentially "over my dead body this is going to happen" but really all he does is work the Chairman for a recess so that he can go into a room, with Leo, [HRISHI: Wow!] and say, "hey, you're [expletive deleted], unless you do this. Get the President to agree to censure". He doesn't say to him "hey, I, I, there's nothing I can do. It's outta my hands". Unless there is something I am missing. All he is doing is "whoa, whoa whoa! Gibson! Don't say that! I have a great idea! I'm going to get this guy in a room and then instead of just humiliating him, I am going to threaten him with humiliation".

HRISHI: I think it's that they're gonna get what they want without having to put Leo through that. They're going to get to what they want; which is that they want to win. Right? The Congressional Republicans need a victory against the Bartlet Administration. This delivers that to them without

having to also sacrifice Leo as collateral damage. So, yeah, he gets what he wants, but he also gets to do it in a more noble way.

JOSH: But wasn't there an actual seemingly noble Cliff Calley last episode saying:

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

CLIFF: And if you proceed with this line of questioning, I will resign this committee and wait in the tall grass for you Congressman. Because you are killing the party.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right. No mention of that here in this episode. Leo, understand if this thing continues, I will leave, I will walk out and I'll be by your side and I'll be doing press conferences about how this never should've...[laughter]. No, it's just more like, "we are going to [expletive deleted] you with your pants on if you don't agree to this." [laughter]

HRISHI: [laughing] I really don't read it like that. [cross talk] But I don't think there's any way of convincing you, so I am going to let you stand there in your wrongness and be wrong.

JOSH: [cross talk] Alright.

JOSH: I'm sure no one else will agree with me. I just, I watched it a second time and thought "is he doing what I think he's doing?". And it seems to me.

HRISHI: Sometimes I really appreciate that you have the ability to watch these episodes with the opposite of "rose colored glasses" – bruised colored glasses.

JOSH: Well, I, but I mean, is there a reason I have to?

HRISHI: No, you don't have to at all.

JOSH: I mean, do I have to hope that Cliff Calley's a good guy?

HRISHI: I genuinely like it because it's so different from any kind of reading I would've ever given it. It's really funny. Like I never would've thought to look at that exchange and be like "here's how we're getting you!" But, I'm not saying that it's wrong.

JOSH: No, you are!

HRISHI: Well, no, I am saying that it's wrong.

JOSH: You just quoted *The West Wing* about how wrong I am.

HRISHI: That's right, I, I did say it's wrong.

JOSH: [laughing] And I probably am. The other thing I wrote down was, *The West Wing* is such a paean to male friendship.

HRISHI: It really is.

JOSH: It really is. It's unbelievable.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I mean it's so....

HRISHI: You might say it's a paeon to two peens.

JOSH: [laughing] Peen to peen paean.

[both laughing]

HRISHI: Peen on peen paean. [laughter]

JOSH: Ah.....sword crossing, paeon to... [both laughing] Anyway, there's a great little – there's one visual bit I don't love and one great visual bit I do love in the cold open. One is the sort of half-second hero shot of Andrew Jackson's portrait.

HRISHI: Hmm, hmm [agreeing]

JOSH: I'm like, oh – of course, you know the episode so you know what's coming but I was like, well, something Andrew Jacksony must be coming later in the episode because what the hell was that?

HRISHI: [laughing] Did you think maybe it was going to be a “big block of cheese” episode?

JOSH: [laughing] I didn't expect. No. I thought the portrait may fall on Leo's head and knock him out and then the rest of the episode is like *Fantasia*. That didn't happen. But then there's a moment - John Spencer has this kind of weird but brilliant lateral swagger [both laugh] He kind of rocks back and forth as he walks, which I love.

HRISHI: As he walks into the, uh, opening title, you mean?

JOSH: Yeah. His own “big block of Leo”.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah.

JOSH: But he walks into the opening title and his red tie sort of morphs into the red stripe of the American flag.

HRISHI: Hmm...very nice...

JOSH: And it's very kind of beautifully done...I don't know if it was a happy accident or whether it didn't happen at all and I just thought it did, but it worked for me.

HRISHI: Yeah. I liked the Andrew Jackson portrait. It's a little, it's like Chekov's gun in Presidential form.

JOSH: Okay. Fair enough. There's a second hero shot, that I also don't like in this episode.

HRISHI: Oh? Which is that?

JOSH: There's a scene in Leo's office that ends, really blatantly, on the framed "Bartlet for America" napkin.

HRISHI: Oh, right.

JOSH: I'm just like...

HRISHI: But we hadn't seen it in that episode, so, it's just a little, it's a call back.

JOSH: I wanted to just sort of, maybe, slide by and let me catch it rather than the (singing) "ahh haaa! Napkin shot!"

[both laughing]

JOSH: I don't know. A little heavy-handed to me.

HRISHI: Uh, huh. Well, it's Vincent Misiano's first episode, so...

JOSH: That's right. We'll ease into him.

HRISHI: Though, I do like the...I think you're right. Romance, is really the "watch word" of *The West Wing*. And I like this, where there are these competing layers of self-sacrifice. "I'm sacrificing myself for you. No, you can't, because I have to do the right thing. I have to do the right thing." And in the end, even with Sam's plot throughout, it turns out, as he kind of goes a little bit crazy trying to fight this tell-all, in the end, it's also about loyalty. That the reason for it is because he can't do anything. You know, CJ really reads him at the end where she says,

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

C.J.: When it's our turn to worry about it, they won't be shy about telling us. Let's not fixate on the knuckleheaded stuff we think we can fix in the meantime. And it feels a lot like...that's what you're doing.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And he kind of, without explicitly copping to it, he turns to Toby and says "are you on the inside?" like basically admitting, that yeah, that is what's happening.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: This is him displaying his loyalty for Leo and for the President, not knowing what he can do, so he's getting hung up on this.

JOSH: Yeah. Absolutely.

HRISHI: I said to Lindsey while we were watching the episode "Sam's very sensitive". [laughing]

JOSH: It's true.

HRISHI: And she patted me on the knee and said, "Much like you."

JOSH: Well said, Lindsey! Well said.

HRISHI: I wrote down, "I like angry Sam." It's nice to see him fired up. Or doing anything at all.

JOSH: Hmm...that's true.

HRISHI: I feel like it's been a while since he's been able to express anything other than a sort of the comic side-plot. And it's nice to see him, to see Rob Lowe, getting to like, you know, use his chops a little bit and get this like interesting, if smaller, part of the episode.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree.

HRISHI: Oh! And then I had this thought. The thing that Toby says. Toby's talking about this guy, McDeere, the NBA player who was 1 for 23.

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

TOBY: A guy shoots 1 for 23 from the field.

SAM: McDeere?

TOBY: Yeah. But he goes 8 for 8 from the foul line. My question is, why are you fouling this guy at all? I'd just get out of the way and point him toward the basket.

SAM: Yeah.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: To me that felt like C.J. says "okay, so we're done talking about the book?" as they start talking about that. And I was like no, it seems is what they're talking about. This is the message that she just gave to Sam. Which is get out of this guy's way. He's 1 for 23. He's 4% right in this ridiculous thing, but if you go and raise objections, you are sending him to the foul line.

JOSH: Whew...very good. I did not make that connection.

HRISHI: Hey, speaking of which, in that scene where we get "boy [snap], boy [snap], crazy boy"...

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: She says "keep cool boy", which is not a lyric that occurs in that form, in that song.

JOSH: Is it "stay cool boy"?

HRISHI: There's like a few different – you know, it's like "get cool boy" and then the lyric is "get cool boy" and there's "keep cool cool boy", "stay loose boy" and just "play it cool boy". But there's no...

JOSH: [singing] "Breeze it [snap], buzz it [snap], easy does it". So –

HRISHI: [singing] "Turn off the juice boy"

JOSH: Maybe, uh, he's always wanted to rewrite Sondheim.

HRISHI: And, apparently, he's also wanted to rewrite *The Lion in Winter*.

JOSH: Oh, is that a - does he misquote it?

HRISHI: Yeah [laughing]

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

TOBY: When the fall is all that's left...

PRESIDENT BARTLET: [interrupting in unison with Toby] ...is all that's left. It matters a great deal.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's actually, "when the fall is all there is, it matters a great deal".

JOSH: I actually like that. One of the things I was kind of grooving on during that scene is that it's Richard, who's a great actor playing Toby, who's not. I watched that part again too. I was like Richard could kill those lines if he wanted to. He could do that play.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: He's talking about the movie of course. But Toby is not an actor, so he kind of says them in a fairly pedestrian manner and I guess maybe he even slightly misquotes, because you know, it's not his favorite quote. It's just something he watched again last night. So, I kind of like that. It's a little less polished and not the full-on performance that, you know, Richard could give it. That's also a little bit ties into what surprised me about the episode, in terms of the way the whole discussion is framed. Even if it's not a direct quote; paraphrasing that scene is suggesting that all that's left for the president is the fall. Right?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And, it's weird advice to be... I mean, well, he then says:

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: You trying to tell me something?

TOBY: No, Mr. President; of course not.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Um, obviously, he is. But what he seems to be saying is, "you gotta think about your exit strategy or how, you know, you gotta be noble in failure." Instead of saying "whatever his opinion is, how should we address this so that you don't fall and so that you get a second term". Like, Toby, of all people, has given up on the...

HRISHI: Well, I think it's that you're accepting defeat in the MS hearing with also losing reelection. And I think that there's probably some view that where it's like "we deal with this with dignity in order to like, still have a shot at the reelection.

JOSH: Right! But they're not saying that. I agree with you. You're right. I'm conflating those two things. But it seems like the whole focus seems to be on like "how should you fail at this the best possible way". Especially this group of people who got 'em there one time and are focused on getting them there a second time. Why isn't the whole discussion about, I don't know, forget your legacy or how noble or this or that. How, what's the best thing to do so that you still get reelected. Like, I can't believe that's not the whole discussion of this episode. I mean, I...

HRISHI: ...then it wouldn't be *The West Wing*.

JOSH: Well...

HRISHI: Because then it would be choosing political expediency over the moral high-ground.

JOSH: But, they're not having that conversation either. They're not saying "hey look, this may screw up our bid for reelection, but let's do what men do. Let's be people of character". They're just not even dis...

HRISHI: ...until the end.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Because the president says that explicitly. He says,

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Lots of times we don't know what right or wrong is. But lots of times we do, and come on, this is one. I may not have had sinister intent at the onset, but there were plenty of opportunities for me to make it right. No one in government takes responsibility for anything anymore.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's fantastic. I love that scene. It's a great speech. Beautifully written. And a lovely performance by Martin. I just can't believe that hasn't been the tenor of the discussion. I don't know. It's just seems...

HRISHI: ...unrealistic?

JOSH: It seems unrealistic. Not that the show has to be so realistic. I'm literally now, even as I speak, [Hrishi laughing] in my mind reading the [expletive deleted] comments. No, so I am just going to say what I think. Yeah. It's unrealistic, even in the world, in the universe of *The West Wing*, I think, or at least the discussion could have been earlier like "hey, this might screw us. But should we just do the right thing?" It's weirdly saved up until the end. And I kept waiting for it to be part of the discussion. Why isn't anyone saying the word "reelection"?

HRISHI: Okay. I did love how, in this episode, that scene with Toby, where he comes in and says “are you trying to tell me something” - “no, of course not...” and then Sam comes in to try to talk about the book and he says “I don’t think it’s a good idea to be casual with the truth”. That there are these little seeds being planted by the president’s senior staff. And with the two people who are saying those things, are two people who are not on the inside.

JOSH: Hmm...

HRISHI: It’s not Leo, it’s not Josh. So, they might be able to, in some ways intuit...like Toby, maybe, has some glimmer of what’s going on. They know there’s an inside that they’re not a part of, but they don’t know what’s happening on that inside. But somewhat inadvertently they’ve given these seeds to the president and then the president, like, chews on them. And he interprets them with the information he has; leading up to his decision in the end.

JOSH: Yeah. Very well said.

HRISHI: I like how they plant those. What did you think about, uh, I like the return to the, uh, idea of making a strong exit. When Leo and Jordan are talking about how he left her behind.

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

JORDAN: You left without me.

LEO: Well, if you’re going to make a strong exit, you really can’t wait for someone to get their purse together.

JORDAN: How long does it take to get a purse together?

LEO: A question I’ve been asking my entire adult life.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] Yeah. Good interchange.

HRISHI: But it then it reminded me of other exits we’ve discussed. In terms of making strong exits. Taking the crab puff.

JOSH: Ah, yes.

HRISHI: Taking the crab puff. Or taking a muffin. Or leaving your lawyer and her purse.

JOSH: Very good.

HRISHI: What else you got?

JOSH: Uh, just that Josh going to Toby desperate to dig something up that might upset Amy and the Women’s Leadership Coalition. That’s a funny interchange. I love, just, when Josh says:

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

JOSH: I’ve known her for a while, actually. She went out with my roommate in college.

TOBY: *Huh.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: There's like a world of indifference in a single syllable from Richard as Toby.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I don't care. Yeah. He invests a lot in that single syllable.

HRISHI: We get a lot from Charlie with even less than one syllable. Well, he has one where they're talking and he also gives a "huh" – where he's like, utterly confused. But there are two great silent looks from Charlie in this episode.

JOSH: Sam comes up to him, right?

HRISHI: Toby asks him about the séance.

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

TOBY: *On Carol's birthday, did you happen to attend a séance where they tried to contact Margaret's grandmother? [pause for Sam's reaction] No, right?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then when C.J.'s talking to the President about his underwear.

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

C.J.: *You didn't have special underwear, right?*

PRESIDENT BARTLET: *Thank you [dismissing her].*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: We get two, just great, "WTF" looks from Charlie.

JOSH: Yes. Of all the things though, that are mentioned in the book, that I think we're meant to take as apocrypha or just as non-factual, I think the president *did* do the underwear thing.

[both laughing]

JOSH: That's the sense I got in the playing of it all. That he might have tried that.

HRISHI: I just remember, um, I said Charlie has two great "WTF" looks – I was thinking about Ty Burrell in our last episode. In probably my favorite scene from the first season of "Modern Family". He talks about how he's a cool dad.

[Modern Family Episode 1.01 excerpt]

PHIL DUNPHY: I'm a cool dad. That's - that's my thang. I'm hip. I surf the web. I text: LOL: laugh out loud. OMG: oh my God. WTF: why the face.

[end excerpt]

[Both Josh and Hrishu laugh]

JOSH: That's funny. [laughter] I auditioned for that role.

HRISHI: Did you really?

JOSH: I must not have gotten it. [Hrishu laughter] I mean, I never heard back. But I just assumed, because they're in what season? Yeah. I would've heard by now. That might have been the audition scene...or an audition scene.

HRISHI: That sounds familiar to you?

JOSH: Maybe.

HRISHI: Well, Charlie, why the face?

JOSH: [laughing] Why the face.

HRISHI: I think, yeah, I laughed out loud a couple of times in this episode. Another one was when Josh is talking to Amy on the phone and he says,

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

JOSH: Sorry, there was a dog in here for a second.

AMY: A dog?

JOSH: A nice one.

[end excerpt]

[Josh and Hrishu laughing]

HRISHI: Yeah. Let's do a little, um....

JOSH: ...a little Josh and Amy?

HRISHI: Yeah. A little Josh and Amy. What did you think?

JOSH: I like them. It's refreshing to see Josh finally just explicitly admit to being ensorcelled, ha, which is funny, by a woman. It's sort of clear when he's smitten, but rarely does he just come out and say it. And, uh, it's sort of funny to see him plotting. In a way, actually, I was surprised to discover how romantically pathetic Josh Lyman is.

HRISHI: [laughing] Even after the, uh, Joey Lucas debacle?

JOSH: Well, it's much worse. I mean, because when he sits and has an actual heart-to-heart with Amy, he has even less game than I realize. [laughter] You know, it's kind of like, "I studied during college and I didn't really do any of this and now I don't know how". I was like, holy smokes! I didn't quite realize he was that guy. [both laughing]

HRISHI: Yeah. His candor there is really kind of sweet.

JOSH: It is sweet.

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

JOSH: My IQ doesn't break the bank and I wanted to do this, so I studied all the time. And, I miss something. Or it's like I skipped a year, 'cause I never learned what you do after you think you like somebody. What you do next. And every...everybody did learn. A lot of other people, anyway.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I mean that's the kind of thing that you would previously maybe never imagine Josh Lyman ever admitting, or saying or even thinking himself.

JOSH: Yeah. It was...it's a very good scene, and a very vulnerable moment for Josh. And not what I was anticipating, or not that I remembered.

HRISHI: At the end of that scene, I got, I got a little bit wistful thinking about how nice it is to kiss someone when it's snowing.

JOSH: Aww...

HRISHI: You don't get to do that in L.A.

JOSH: No, you really don't.

HRISHI: You know, and I felt like, maybe I was just too into the episode, but I was really like, I felt like that moment had a real tangible quality to it, you know, like, just being able to imagine, like, when it's snowing and Leo mentions that it's not that cold out and it's like that weather and then like kissing someone in that weather when they're warm still but the...it's so nice...

JOSH: Maybe it's time to take Lindsey to Mammoth.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I mean, I think you can make it happen. Follow your bliss.

HRISHI: Does it snow in Mammoth?

JOSH: It doesn't?

HRISHI: I don't know. I've never been. I have wistful feelings about the cold. I never actually wanna be in the snow.

JOSH: Alright, fair enough.

HRISHI: Except, unless it's to kiss. I'd go just for the kissing.

JOSH: Alright! I'll go, I'll go with you!

HRISHI: [laughing] Thank you. On that note, let's take a quick break. And when we come back we'll have a little more on "H.Con 172".

[ad insert]

JOSH: We haven't done, uh, fun with close-captioning in a while, but Amy says in the telephone call, "can you have a late drink tonight?" And the closed-captioning person apparently not approving changed it to "can you have a late dinner tonight?".

HRISHI: Oh...hmmm...okay.

JOSH: Yeah. I guess not wanting to, uh, I guess endorse drinking on an empty stomach or something like that.

HRISHI: Ah. He was stepping things up from that. He was making more a proper date.

JOSH: Oh...

HRISHI: ...or she. Who knows.

JOSH: I see. I guess I saw the late night drink as a little saucier, so to speak.

HRISHI: Drinks are more casual. Dinner is more serious.

JOSH: I also wrote down, "Josh's attitude towards ballet very similar to Hrishu's take on musical theater." [Hrishu laughing] Harsh and negative conclusion based on very little data.

HRISHI: Here's one difference...

JOSH: Sure...

HRISHI: When I was a little boy, I didn't go around saying that I wanted to be a musical theater actor. And Josh, if you remember, said he wanted to be a ballerina.

JOSH: Oh, that's right! I completely forgot about that. Look at you.

HRISHI: But similar to Josh, I know a few things about musical theater and Josh apparently can bust out a Nijinsky reference.

JOSH: This is true.

HRISHI: There were two moments of "Sorkinisms," I thought, in this episode.

JOSH: Yes.

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

DONNA: It's not fit for a man nor a beast out there.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Donna says that about the weather, even though it hasn't started snowing yet. And, uh, there's an episode in the first season of *Sports Night* where Danny says that a couple times.

[Sports Night Episode 1.09 excerpt]

DANNY: I would, but it's not fit for man nor beast out there.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It sounded familiar to me.

HRISHI: Yeah. And then also, Amy calls Josh...

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

AMY: You're hit and run, Josh.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Danny in Season 2 of, uh, "Sports Night" is referred to as,

[Sports Night Season 2 excerpt]

UNKNOWN CHARACTER: Are you being hit and run Danny right now?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Because he would do two or three minutes with his friends at the lunch table and then he would go off, because he would have like, anxiety attacks.

JOSH: I wrote down there is a wonderful example of Bradley Whitford and his dyspeptic burp-acting.

HRISHI: Oh! In the scene with Amy!

JOSH: Yes! When he says to her...

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

JOSH: [burping and talking] Who's the date?

[end excerpt]

[both laughing]

JOSH: I'm just like, oh my God. What in God's name are you doing? How do you make that work?

HRISHI: It's an extended burp...

JOSH: Yes, it is! I mean literally....

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: It's like, I just, uh, vomited in my mouth a little moment...

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: What on earth are you doing? Now we know.

HRISHI: You know a little dynamic that I really enjoyed. I don't know if I'm misreading it, but I thought the scene between Carol and Donna was great.

JOSH: I liked it too.

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

DONNA: Do you know if it's started snowing yet?

CAROL: It hasn't.

DONNA: How's it supposed to be 18 inches by the morning if it hasn't started yet?

CAROL: It accumulates by a magnitude thing. I don't know.

DONNA: Okay.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Carol isn't *that* friendly to Donna and I really like that. Like it almost seemed like, she's like "yeah, whatever. It's fine. I don't have time for it." But as opposed to the love-fest the show can, you know, exhibit between the characters. It was just kind of....there's something a little terse about it and I really liked it. It felt realistic.

JOSH: I agree with you. And Melissa Fitz and Janel are, in reality, real good friends.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: But I, I agree with you. There is some level of friction there. Although she gave Donna something she would then use with Josh, which I thought was funny.

HRISHI: Yes. [laughing]

JOSH: She quotes the "magnitudes" line.

HRISHI: I haven't seen *West Side Story* since watching it in music class in 7th grade, but I know that that line, because of this episode, because I've seen that so many times. And another part of this episode that I sing along to is "An old map. An old map!". I can say that right along with the screen when the president says that when he's talking to C.J. about the map of the Holy Land.

JOSH: Right. But what is the reference?

HRISHI: Oh no, just the...

JOSH:...the musicality of the line?

HRISHI: The line, yeah. It's so great and so specific they way that he says it. It's a small moment that I just - I love it so much. [Josh laughing] Every time it comes on I can't help myself. He says,

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: That's the key! An old map! An old map!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] You're so cute, Hrishi.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I thought that there was something that was a reference to a musical that just went right over my head.

HRISHI: [singing to the underscore of "West Side Story"] "Old map, old map, stay folded map"

JOSH: You just made me think of something. Even though I was wrong, there's a line very early on – in the cold open Leo says something about,

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

LEO: I'm not that easily intimidated.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And speaking of more Bernstein, there is a song in Bernstein's *Candide* that goes,

[Bernstein's *Candide* Overture Excerpt – Song, "I Am Easily Assimilated"]

[singing]...I am easily assimilated

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And Leo's line reminded me of that musical line for some reason.

HRISHI: Hah! Uh huh.

JOSH: So, let's talk about the map.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: So, what do you make of that? I liked it. You know, I take it as a, for the most part, a sort of comical jab at touchy Jews. [laughing] I mean, it's a – I thought it was funny. I mean they're all phrasing it the same way, which is weird. I mean really what their objecting to is you can't make any argument that a map from 1709 is offensive because it doesn't recognize Israel. I think what they're saying is, we gotta be careful about the message you're putting out by hanging a 1709 map of Palestine. It's offensive that this map that predates the establishment of the state of Israel is offensive. It doesn't mean anything, even though they're all seemingly independent of each other; phrasing it that way.

HRISHI: Uh huh.

JOSH: So, it's a little weird.

HRISHI: I love that sub plot, because to me, it struck me as very realistic.

JOSH: Well, I think so too. I just wish they would say, "do you really want to put this in your outer office?" But then nobody quite wants to say it, so instead they act like there's something about the map. [laughing]

HRISHI: I think it's funnier and also more ridiculous to make it about the map. Like I think it's more comically effective to make it about the map because I like the idea that someone would get mad with a historical object that reflects the accuracy of the history by saying, "but that's not what it is now."

JOSH: Well, I mean, I like his, I like his speech about the map of Mexico...

HRISHI: ...right...

JOSH: ...and the Louisiana Territory and that didn't show a single state. I'm the President of the United States; I'm not offended by this map.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: That said, if he were to hang that map in his outer office, there would be some patriots who would say, "this is the map you choose to hang?"

HRISHI: The Senator of California would be like, "what about the great state of California?"

JOSH: Exactly. Pardon? So, I get that it's, you know, somebody – I think it would still be too sensitive and would say "or is that what you, is that what you wish that area of the world were like now..."

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: ...there were no Israel. Are you happy that it's not on that map?"

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: So, I get, in it's way it's just kind of light, brief, funny subplot, but it also speaks to that maps are political.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Geography is political. So, I mean, it's...

HRISHI: What you're coming around to say is that you love that part.

JOSH: I didn't dislike it.

HRISHI: Oh! I thought you were saying you thought it was silly.

JOSH: Oh no, no, I liked it.

HRISHI: Okay.

JOSH: No, no, I liked it. To me, it was funny also in a way where I can kind of laugh at myself. I get bent out of shape about all sorts of things and offended and like all sorts of groups of minorities, Jews are very good at getting offended and jumping. I do it a lot myself. So, it's a sort of – it made me laugh; because it's the kind of thing that I recognize some truth in. Yeah, there's going to be, "you hang that map up". You know, the way they're phrasing it is kind of funny to me. The map doesn't recognize Israel. Really, what they're saying is "there are going to be some Jews that get offended because you chose to hang up a map of Palestine from 1709 rather than something from 1948 and on that would show the state of Israel.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I actually like that subplot.

HRISHI: I feel like the most realistic scenario would be even that, uh, right-wing goys would point to the map and say, "look! This President is no friend of Israel the way that we are".

JOSH: You're absolutely...can you imagine if President Obama had hung that map in the outer office of the Oval Office, it wouldn't have been nothing. There would have been people in an uproar. And, like you say, including right-wingers.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Nah! Not a friend of Israel.

HRISHI: It is funny to me, the competition to show who is a better friend to Israel between the right and the left, that happens you know. They say, "Look at this policy. We're the better friend to Israel". There's a bus bench ad outside of my house that's like a pro-Trump bus bench saying how the US is, uh, great supporters of Israel. It's got the, um, flag of the US and the flag of Israel and they're merging and you know, it's like, it's a ridiculous piece of property.

JOSH: Usually the, I, you know, the discussion of who's a better friend of Israel boils down to what you're looking for in a friend.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Do you want that friend who just says “everything you do is great”, or do you want the friend like, uh, who’s one of the people on the Bartlet White House staff who sometime say, “Hey look, I gotta talk to you.” [laughing] “There’s some stuff we need to discuss...”

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: One other thing that I thought was interesting – back in the map discussion – uh, at one point Bartlet says, “Charlie, they won’t let us hang our maps. They’re Philistines against freedom.” I say Philisteens [phonetic] and he says Philistines, but I went and looked because I thought, and it seems to be the case, that Philisteen [phonetic] or the Hebrew word that it comes from, Pelesheth – Pelishtim, is the word from which Palestine, the name, was derived. I thought that was interesting.

HRISHI: Straight from the jawbone of the donkey.

JOSH: Nice. [both laughing]

HRISHI: I’m just kidding.

JOSH: So, he might have, uh, but that might be a Bartlet scholarly swirl happening. That’s why the word comes to him.

HRISHI: Yeah. I like that. Speaking of Donald Trump.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: I mean, this whole episode, I was just thinking about oh, like the words,

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

SAM: ‘cause I don’t think it’s such a good idea to be casual about the truth.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I mean, makes me sad.

JOSH: Ai yi yi.

HRISHI: Ai yi yi.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: The principle even of words matter – even before we get to that line – Leo talks about the statement that would be put out by Congress where even though the joint resolution doesn’t actually have real, like, weight. There are no legal consequences. He was saying it matters because the words matter. They’re going to get up there and they’re going to say “He lied” and we’re going to say they’re right. And even just that, the general theme that words matter gives me a sense of “ai yi yi” because, uh, I miss an idea – I miss a time when that might actually have been the case.

JOSH: I'm with you brother. [both laughing]

HRISHI: And it also goes to the book, when Sam brings it up. Really, what, this is like a nascent version of, um, having to fight fake news.

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

C.J.: Of course we'll get in the game. I'll talk to the editors and the major papers, but we're not gonna publicly refute every bogus charge. First of all, there are too many of them. Second of all, I'm not going to give this guy and his book the weight of the White House.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Just the effort that it takes to sort through disinformation is really, I think, on display here. And I think as anachronistic as it is to talk about fake news in the context of this episode, it really made me sad to think about how much legitimate fact-based reporting has gotten destroyed by things like the mass proliferation of things like this book being out there in the world and then it what it ends up doing is delegitimizing the entire foundation [cross talk] of fact, so it's like, "Hey, he said that. You said that. Well, you don't think that's true. Maybe this isn't true either."

JOSH: [cross talk] everything, right.

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: So we come to occupy a moral safe house where everyone is to blame, so no one's guilty.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Great line.

HRISHI: Yeah. Everybody's got their own version of the truth, so truth is therefore relative and that makes me sad every day.

JOSH: Here's another thing I didn't understand. In the, uh, Cliff Calley, that bastard [both laughing], Cliff Calley sets up this secret meet-up with Donna and he's like "meet me in the Georgetown law library." It's just uh, [both laughing] I don't know, the worst Deep Throat strategy in the world ever. "Meet me in the middle of Times Square at noon". Why don't they meet – isn't that a weird place to meet if they don't want to be observed or secret. Isn't there a corner somewhere? Deep Throat had his subterranean parking structure.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: The Georgetown law library?

HRISHI: Nobody reads anymore, Josh. It was completely abandoned.

JOSH: I guess that's what it is. By the way, I did a little look and apparently this year the, uh, the office in Rosslyn, Virginia where Deep Throat and Woodward met, uh was demolished.

HRISHI: Including the parking garage.

JOSH: I believe so. I think it's apartments now and uh, I think it's all gone but there's some sort of plaque commemorating that's where Mark Felt and Bob Woodward met.

HRISHI: Hmm. I loved the scene between Leo and Jordan, where Jordan is trying to convince Leo, in very practical terms, why he should take the deal, as his lawyer. And as she's giving him her reasons, and, um, you know, really making a lot of sense, and Leo says:

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

JORDAN: This is not your thing.

LEO: It is my thing and I'm sorry but I cannot allow you to talk like that in here.

JORDAN: I wasn't seeking your permission. You need to get...

Leo: YOU need to get that I am the White House Chief of Staff.

JORDAN: And how much longer do you think you're going to be able to keep that job if you tell the story they're going to make you tell? Play the tape through to the end, Leo.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love that part because they are both doing their jobs so well. I love Leo's commitment to propriety; that the office is so sacred to him that he's even stopping his lawyer from doing her job because he's saying, "I can't have you say things like that in here". It's not even necessarily what she's saying is wrong, but the setting is wrong because they're in the West Wing.

JOSH: I like it too.

HRISHI: I like her reading all the uh, the examples of uh, of joint resolutions.

JOSH: I said, Aaron loves lists of kind of wacky things. [Hrishi laughing] It's really something.

HRISHI: The Congressional resolution to destroy your stuff outside of Starbucks.

[both laughing]

JOSH: Exactly. There you go. But you know what's interesting, as you were just making your point there, it's kind of a greater conversation about who should take the fall for the things they've done.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Leo did what he did and yes, he's an addict and whatever, a portion to blame or not, but he did what he did. What Gibson's gonna talk about may be irrelevant to the matter at hand, but it happened. And the President did what he did.

HRISHI: Well, was there anything wrong with what Leo did? I don't really, in some ways, I understand that the appearance of it is bad; that he's an alcoholic and he had a relapse. It's

because the ideas that, oh maybe, that he could have a relapse while he's on the job. But there's nothing illegal about what he did.

JOSH: Right. He got drunk and he missed the debate – which again goes back to propriety; I think people are gonna - whether he can do the job as well as he might – do you want somebody...but hasn't he also, perhaps also lied about when he last had a drink?

HRISHI: That's funny. There is some, yeah, inconsistency. Either the story has changed now with the subplot or he was lying before when he says how long it's been since he's had a drink.

JOSH: Right. I don't...that crossed my mind...

HRISHI: ...I think it's probably more of a lack of consistency than it is him lying.

JOSH: Probably. But I thought maybe that's part of the problem that's coming out too. He's not being honest.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Which almost, in a way, mirrors Bartlet and it's not, I don't know, maybe technically medical information, but they are both dealing with...

HRISHI: ...diseases

JOSH: Disease. Yeah. And not being fully honest or revealing of their situations vis-à-vis their diseases.

HRISHI: Yeah. I feel like you should bust into a musical right now; rhyming vis-à-vis with diseases.

JOSH: [laughing] See! You like musical theater.

HRISHI: [laughing] I like it because you get to do silly things like that – vis-à-vis their diseases. Josh you wanna know some real H-Con resolutions from our current 115th Congress?

JOSH: Yeah, I do.

HRISHI: H-Con Resolution 13: Supporting the Local Radio Freedom Act. H-Con 12: Supporting the designation of the week of September 11th through 17th as "Patriot Week".

JOSH: Hmm...

HRISHI: This one, I thought, was quite relevant to our episode. H-Con Resolution 11: Expressing the sense of Congress that Jerusalem is the capital of Israel and therefore, consistent with the location of other United States embassies, the United States embassy in Israel should be located in Jerusalem.

JOSH: Shew! That is not a neutral H-Con. and a very good example, I must say, you can get into quite a debate about whether that view makes you a friend of Israel or not.

HRISHI: That one is no resolution remembering the life of George Washington.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: But they did have some more innocuous ones, like “directing the Joint Committee on Library to accept a statue commemorating the Hungarian revolution of 1996 for placement in the US Capitol.”

JOSH: Wow.

HRISHI: “Authorizing the use of the Rotunda for a ceremony for the presentation of the statue and directing the architect of the Capitol to place the statue in a suitable permanent location in the Capitol.”

JOSH: Alright. Yeah.

HRISHI: Another part that made me laugh, really hard. That whole scene – the first scene where they’re going through the book, I thought was really funny.

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

SAM: What we’re doing is making note of anything big or small that’s wrong; anything that I can use to attack credibility.

ED: Well, right away I see one.

LARRY: I’m Larry. He’s Ed.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Ahhh..yes. Is that the first explicit “I can’t tell Ed from Larry” joke?

HRISHI: No, I think it’s the 2nd.

JOSH: I liked it.

HRISHI: I liked it too. But the combination of the joke, you know where C.J.’s saying – I can’t make the joke funnier, but I just wanna talk about why the joke is so funny – when Larry says,

[West Wing Episode 3.10 excerpt]

LARRY: Bartlet was playing a round of golf with Toby Ziegler, the prickly, mumbly Communications Director whose inner, bitter darkness spelled the breakup of the one marriage we know about.

C.J.: It was miniature golf, wasn’t it?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I was going to give Vincent a pat on the back for that one. Yeah. I do like, very much, how he did the little peaks around the table lamp.

HRISHI: Yeah. That's great. And then, like, like a little Russian nesting doll of jokes, just the idea even within that. That the President and Toby went to play miniature golf. That they went to play golf is funny, but you know, it sure fits in with the idea of what presidents might do.

JOSH: So, you're actually taking it at face value. [laughing] I took it as a joke.

[both laughing hard]

JOSH: God you are cute. You think they actually went...

HRISHI: ...Oh, I'm so dumb. [laughing] I'm so dumb...

JOSH: Oh. We'll see. We'll throw this out to people as well. I could be wrong in this too.

HRISHI: No. You're right. You're right. You're right.

JOSH: I think she's making a joke. And he's playing along.

HRISHI: She's playing a joke, and he's just a good sport and goes with it.

JOSH: But now I like the image.

HRISHI: Oh, my God, I'm so dumb. [laughing]

[West Wing Episode 4.05 excerpt]

DONNA: I'm too stupid to live!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Charlie's caddying, carrying a bag with a single putter in it. "Mr. President".

HRISHI: [laughing] Wow. I'm a dummy.

JOSH: Oh, Hrishi. [laughing]

HRISHI: I bit real hard into it.

JOSH: Look, I guarantee you, you won't be the only person. Somebody will back up your argument.

HRISHI: No, I, I, I, disavow...

JOSH: At the very least, somebody Photoshop such a picture.

HRISHI: Ahh...it's so good.

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: And on that note, thank you for listening. And we'll hope you'll join us next time. In the meantime, you can find our web site, thewestwingweekly.com, has a comments section that I

don't read, but Josh does. We're on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. Follow us on there for some extra tidbits and uh, screen shots and behind the scenes things.

JOSH: You probably know that we're part of PRX, or specifically a subset of fabulous podcasts they call Radiotopia.

HRISHI: Radiotopia is made possible thanks to a grant from the Knight Foundation and donations from listeners like you. The West Wing Weekly is also made possible with help from Zach McNees, Margaret Miller, and Izzy Malina.

JOSH: Wooo! I know her.

HRISHI: Okay.

JOSH: Okay.

HRISHI: [singing to *West Side Story* & snapping] *What's next*, [Josh joins] *what's next....what's next?*

JOSH: Alright.

[Outro Music]