

The West Wing Weekly
3.16: The U.S. Poet Laureate
Guests: Tara Ariano, Sarah D. Bunting, and David Wade

[Intro Music]

JOSH: Hi friends. You're listening to the West Wing Weekly. I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Today we're talking about "The U.S. Poet Laureate". It's Season 3, Episode 16.

JOSH: The teleplay is by Aaron Sorkin. The story by Laura Glasser. And this episode was directed by Christopher Misiano. It first aired on March 27th, 2002.

HRISHI: I wanted to read the synopsis from Warner Brothers because there is a puzzling thing in it.

JOSH: A Warnopsis, ok.

HRISHI: And the Warner Brothers synopsis gets syndicated other places so it's not an isolated thing. Here it is: Bartlet makes a disparaging comment about a potential Republican nominee after a television interview not realizing that he is still being recorded. For days, CJ must control the scandal and Sam recalls Republican White House Legal Counsel, Ainsley Hayes, from vacation, to help formulate the administration's official response. Meanwhile, Toby tries to dissuade the newly named U.S. Poet Laureate, Tabatha Fortis, from publicly objecting to the government's lack of support for a treaty on landmines. Bartlet ponders saving a failing computer company, and Josh is both repulsed and intrigued by the fact that there is a fan-based website devoted to him.

JOSH: The first thing that hit me was just it's a lie. They're protecting the integrity of the episode but they say that Bartlet does not realize that he is still being filmed.

HRISHI: Um hmm. No spoilers.

JOSH: Right, but in the effort not to spoil, they lie.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: But I guess it was the computer company thing you're referring to? [Both laugh]

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: What the hell?

HRISHI: Not this episode.

JOSH: And it is another episode?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah, that's weird. Maybe the synopsisist was just bingeing the show and got mixed up.

HRISHI: Um hmm. One thing I wanted to mention before we get into the episode is a sad note. This is the last episode in which we will see Ainsley Hayes.

JOSH: That is sad!

HRISHI: She'll make an appearance for the episode *Requiem*, but this is the last episode where she, you know, has a significant part.

JOSH: Huh. Oh, I will miss her. I should have, uh, treasured her appearance as I watched.

HRISHI: She walks out with her flip flops and out of our hearts.

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

TOBY: You did good on TV.

AINSLEY: Thanks. I'll be in my office.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: As we've discussed with Emily, she was cast in *CSI*.

HRISHI: That's right. She got cast in *CSI: Miami* and they made her a better deal. And that was that. I think there was a lot of regret on both sides that she ended up leaving.

JOSH: Indeed. That's a big loss to the show.

HRISHI: Yeah. Ok. The episode itself.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: There's a lot to this one.

JOSH: There is a lot going on in this episode. It's a good one.

HRISHI: This episode is famous on the internet because Josh has the line...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

JOSH: The internet people are going crazy.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah. [laughs]

HRISHI: Perennially appropriate and often quoted because of this LemonLyman.com subplot.

JOSH: Right, and later we will talk to two of the three founders of the website that led Aaron to write this episode. Yes?

HRISHI: Yeah. Let's just jump right into this part. So, Josh discovers LemonLyman.com, where they talk about Josh and what he's up to. And at first he's excited. It turns out that they know a lot about what he does and how things work.

JOSH: There's an element of hero worship, I guess. People clearly like him.

HRISHI: But then he decides to engage, and things go very badly from there. But the whole thing seems to have been inspired by real world events where Aaron Sorkin posted under the name Benjamin on the TV Message Board website *Television Without Pity*.

JOSH: Benjamin being Aaron's real middle name.

HRISHI: He was outed. Let's just jump right into our conversation with Tara and Sarah from *Television Without Pity*.

TARA: I'm Tara Ariano.

SARAH: And I'm Sarah D. Bunting.

JOSH: And if like me, you were a fan and participant of *Television Without Pity*, you know them as Wing Chun and Sars respectively.

SARAH: *Television Without Pity* began its life as a *Dawson's Wrap*. It was a recap site with forums that was devoted to *Dawson's Creek*. That did quite well because it was the late 90's and a lot of things did well on the internet [laughs] so we decided to expand in the Fall of 1999. At that time we were called *Mighty Big TV*. After that we were called *Television Without Pity*. Our initial lineup was mostly what we considered guilty pleasure shows like other stuff on the WB pretty much. We also did add *The West Wing* from the beginning because frankly we thought [Tara and Sarah laugh] a politics show starring Rob Lowe was going to be cancelled [Tara and Sarah laugh] three episode at the outside.

JOSH: This is going to suck.

TARA: [laughing] Yeah

SARAH: We were like, who cast this? What?

HRISHI: Was there a sense of like recapping these shows in way that it's-so-bad-it's-good-kind-of-way?

TARA: For sure. Yes. Umm, Sarah and I actually met each other on a *90210* message board, like a year before we started a site together and ran a site together for a year before we met in person.

JOSH: Speaking of which...

SARAH: [cross talk] Yes.

JOSH: James Eckhouse is in this episode.

TARA: [cross talk] Ahh Yeah. I know! [laughing]

SARAH: [cross talk] I saw that.

JOSH: Just wanted to throw that in. Yeah.

SARAH: [cross talk] Yeah. Loved it.

TARA: We also have a podcast where we do something similar to what you guys do but with *Beverly Hills 90210*. We are now up to season 7, which is well past the Jim Welsh (sic) era, but yes, he does pop up. God bless him. [Josh laughs] Anyway, it was a different internet then. People forget how different the world was in 1998 and 9, which is around when we started. Like, there barely were DVDs, never mind, like hardly any shows ever got VHS releases. Recaps served a dual purpose. They were funny on their own, or that was the idea. And also if you didn't see the episode, they would tell you in a lot of very biased detail exactly what had happened, including like dialogue transcriptions and stuff. The way we chose shows, you know guilty pleasure-wise, at first for sure, was because those were the shows that people wanted to get into intense detail about on the internet. Like, people don't have that kind of relationship with shows that they are only ok about. Ya know. So shows that are more divisive are more exciting to discuss and dissect. That was our rationale.

HRISHI: So, when you added *The West Wing*, with this idea that it was maybe going to be a cheeseball show, how quickly did you realize that maybe that wasn't the case?

TARA: [laughing] Immediately?

JOSH: Or have you yet? [laughing]

TARA: No, it was clear as soon as it started, like this is before the phrase "prestige tv" was a glint in John Landgraf's eye, but like that definitely fit the bill. I mean it was like *The American President* of television.

HRISHI: And did it make you reconsider its inclusion on the site?

TARA: No, because everyone loved it. So, there was a huge amount of engagement with it at first. At least that is my recollection of it. Sarah?

SARAH: Yeah, I mean, our mandate slowly expanded to just include anything that people were talking about, and then if they weren't talking about it, we would cut it. We thought *The West Wing* might be extremely ambitious but misguided opposite Rob Lowe. [chuckling]. We didn't know, we didn't know. We're like, you still look pretty, this is going to be garbage. [laughter] I also felt Video iPods were ridiculous. I don't know anything.

TARA: [laughing]

SARAH: I'm William Goldman, ignore anything I say. [laughing]

JOSH: But you guys had your finger on something zeitgeisty because it was a hugely successful website and endeavor and went on for years and ultimately you guys sold it. Yes?

TARA: Yes.

SARAH: Um hmm.

HRISHI: How many people were coming to the site?

TARA: I have no idea We just knew it was a [expletive] ton. It was a lot.

JOSH: *Television Without Pity* was the first place I went when after I joined *The West Wing* to see how I was being received. And it's somewhere in there that I found the comment that referred to me as that horrible little man who replaced Rob Lowe.

SARAH and TARA: [laughter]

TARA: I mean, we covered Sports Night too. I hope people were more charitable about that one. [laughter]

JOSH: Look, you're always going to get a mix if you read. You do it at your own peril.

TARA: So true.

HRISHI: Ok. So how does Aaron Sorkin enter the story from your perspective?

TARA: Well, he started posting like anyone else. I mean lots of sites did similar recaps and there were certainly fansites for *The West Wing* too, but we were like the biggest sort of clearinghouse that covered a whole bunch of shows in a huge amount of detail and had a very engaged usership on the message boards. So I'm sure that's what drew him - that there was a lot of activity. And at first, the first time he came and popped in and said hello, everyone was very excited and complimentary, and you know, I won't say sycophantic, but I guess I just did. And then a few months later he came back and things had changed. And I don't remember exactly what happened over the course of the season to change people's feeling on it, but there had been a thread that was *Misogyny on The West Wing*, that I had just changed to I think sexism, and he was mad that the thread even existed. So there was a lot of like, "You're watching it wrong". - and trying to explain himself, and his portrayal of female characters in

particular, and that was sort of what touched it off, because people argued back and it was not always friendly. The tone had definitely changed. So that's what happened. And a few months later, there was the LemonLymon episode. [laughing].

SARAH: Yeah, in which he had Josh dictating to a female character instead of typing it for himself. Like, hmmm....good comeback on the misogyny there.

JOSH: I was just rewatching that and noting that myself.

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

JOSH: Donna!

DONNA: Yeah.

JOSH: Sit down. We're going to post a response on the site.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: The guy cannot write his own message. [chuckling]

TARA: [laughing]

SARAH: No. We had certain shows, or I did, that like I thought I would like them, but their fans on our boards were sufficiently insane, [laughing] that I was like, "I cannot watch this during the life of the show because y'all are going to ruin it for me."

TARA: [laughing] Yeah. My recollection is that it was way more the way women were written, never with the performances of course, which were always great, but with the writing of female characters as idiotic exposition vehicles. Sometimes, like I don't understand, you know.

JOSH: And so Aaron would respond specifically to people writing that kind of criticism.

TARA: Well, when he came back the second time, yes, that is what he was getting into arguments about.

HRISHI: If you could have advised Aaron,

TARA: [laughing]

SARAH: Oh boy

TARA: Just imagining that parallel universe.

HRISHI: In terms of...what would you have told him to do? I mean, did you enjoy him coming and interacting with people on the site because it gave the site more prestige; or did you feel like this was a bad idea for everyone involved?

TARA: Oh, bad idea for everyone involved. No question. I don't think people who make anything should respond to anything anyone says about it. Just don't read it. If you're secure in your vision, do what you're doing and you don't need the feedback from people that don't have the knowledge about where it's going, or how it was made, or you know, the compromises you had to make as a creator. Like people on the internet don't know anything. That was the part [laughing] that this episode definitely gets right. Which is there are people in this thread who have not taken their meds- for sure- that is true on the internet then and now.

JOSH: See, I'm interested actually. Sarah referred to some of the fans as insane, [laughing], and her quoting the medications line and I was wondering if either of you had been offended by [laughing] the characterization of the type of people who wrote on your site in the episode and I guess the answer is no.

TARA: [laughing] I mean, I was one of the people who wrote on my site too, so I get it. Like I understand [laughing] where he's coming from.

SARAH: First of all, when he's complaining about the forum moderation, Josh that is.

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

JOSH: She does seem to do an awful lot of scolding. You posted in the wrong place. Stay on topic people, don't use capital letters, I don't have time to tell you twice, when clearly she does have time.

[end excerpt]

SARAH: I was like, yeah, that's definitely us. That's what we do. Like there was no question that it was us and I was not offended because I felt like it was our brand and if people wanted to be all caps lock-yelly, there were plenty of other places for them like the IMDB boards [chuckling]

Tara [laughing]

JOSH: Which have been abolished.

TARA: Yeah.

SARAH: Yeah. Probably for that reason. We were known on the discussion board side for being quite strict in order to, as that moderator said in fact, rules help control the fun.

TARA: She stole that from *Friends*, but it applies in both cases.

SARAH: Yes. We were known for insisting that people stay on topic. This is something that people still remember about our discussion boards, you know, decades later. So, I think when Sorkin appeared to defend himself unwisely, because rule number one is to never read the comments. It just wasn't, if this whole thing had been written to sort of like tweak Josh a little

bit, which I think it partly was, that would have been one thing. But I think he thought he was delivering this indictment of internet culture. And this idea of like this fat basement dweller, it still persists. It was a really bad look for somebody whose popularity and prestige, thanks to this show, was really like, had really just crested.

HRISHI: Hmm.

SARAH: And the show is getting a ton of Emmys and it's just like, if we're such trolls, like literal under a bridge trolls, [laughing] what do you give a [expletive] what we think, or what our users think?

JOSH: I was going to say, to me, I love reading all the horrible things people say about me [laughing]. And all the hashtags, whatever, I'll search anything that can give me any nugget, whether positive or negative. And I take the positive stuff about as seriously as I do the negative stuff.

TARA: Sure.

JOSH: And I usually use the negative stuff as a jumping off point to interact just because I like fighting. I do it for sport. [laughing]

TARA: I follow you on Twitter, I'm aware. [laughing].

JOSH: But contrary to me, there is something about this whole experience that you guys are describing that humanizes Aaron for me. It shows that even at the level of achievement that he's reached, he cares if a single person that he doesn't know is saying something critical that he feels was taken wrong. I mean, I agree, probably misguided about his spending time on a forum like *TWOP*, but there is also something sweetly human that he felt the need to, to me.

SARAH: Yes, I guess it humanizes him. But we always just felt for his assistants, honestly.

JOSH: But you must have had a lot of laughs at the characterization in this episode?

HRISHI: Yeah, I'm wondering what was the situation like on the boards the day after this episode aired?

TARA: Yeah, I don't think anyone was mad about it. I mean it was funny. And it's funny to be recognized even in this weird way. And I'm sure the people who specifically had gotten into it with him probably thought it was awesome. It's like, ya know, getting roasted by Don Rickles [laughing]. To get this feedback back from him, like on national television, that millions of people would have watched in 2002, or whatever it was. Like I mean, that would have been pretty great.

SARAH: We've been asked about this many times over the years and I think we may have gotten a call from some press. You know the question was always couched very gently like so you know the muumuu and parliaments line.

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

JOSH: It's a crazy place. It's got this dictatorial leader who I'm sure wears a muumuu and chain smokes Parliaments.

[end excerpt]

SARAH: How do you feel about that? And my standard line was like, well first of all, we prefer the term casual button front shift. [laughter from Josh, Hrishi, and Tara] And second of all, they're Camel Lights, do your research. Because you have to, like it's just such a, he just loaded and emptied both barrels. And it was like, on us? Ok. [laughter].

TARA: Yeah.

HRISHI: But it isn't universally negative. I mean, if Josh Lyman is speaking for Aaron here, you know there's the part where he says - talking about a comment on the site- apparently no one has told Josh that only Congress can ask the GAO to do anything. And Josh's response is first of all, how cool is that they know what the GAO can and can't do.

SARAH: I had forgotten that, and then on rewatch, I was like, aww. It's true.

HRISHI: There is some admiration for the passion and knowledge that the users have on the site.

TARA: Yeah.

HRISHI: I do think it is mostly an indictment of Josh, and you know, therefore maybe Aaron himself. More so than, you know it's like a force of nature and here is a foolhardy person who is trying to battle with this force of nature. He's always going to lose.

SARAH: Yeah. And the fact is nothing really changed either with Josh, the character, or with Sorkin's writing of women, which continued to be as like ornamental repositories for exposition often, despite the positions they were written as holding in the White House. So, I was never really mad about it, but I can't necessarily say that much was learned, so.

JOSH: I'm curious ultimately what actually happened to the site and what you guys are up to now, and how is Glark?

TARA: Oh Glark is fine. He is the third founder. He is my husband. He is outside mowing the lawn I believe right now. We sold the site to Bravo in 2007 and they ran it for awhile, and then they stopped in 2014 I think. But the three of us are working together again and we have a site called Previously.TV and we primarily do podcasts, which I mentioned earlier. One of them is about 90210, and it is similar in format to this, although probably more swears, and definitely dumber. [laughing]. And on a variety of other topics as well.

JOSH: Do you want to tell people where they can find your podcast, your 90210 podcast?

TARA: Sure. You can find all of what we are working on now at previously.tv and the podcasts specifically are at previously.tv/podcasts. And, we also have message boards if you want to mix it up and see who shows up.

JOSH: [cross talk] Hooray! Oh you know I'll be there.

TARA: [laughing] So, you can find those at Previously.TV as well.

JOSH: Great. Thanks for sharing your story and its intersection with our show.

HRISHI: Yeah. Thanks you Sarah. Thanks, Tara.

TARA: Thank you so much.

SARAH: Thank you for having us.

[music]

HRISHI: I said this during the conversation, but I do think this is really an indictment of Josh, not of the message board itself.

JOSH: Yes. I think that is the case overall. There are some little elbows being thrown within the plot at certain people and how they post and how they interact on the internet for sure, but overall I guess it's a shot at Josh Lyman.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think that the people who are right in this episode are not Josh and they aren't the message board users. It's Donna and it's really C.J. at the end.

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

C.J.: I'm assigning an intern from the press office to that website. They're going to check it every night before they go home. If they discover you've been there I'm going to shove a motherboard so far up your ass.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: There's actually something very funny to me in Janel's performance. There's twice, I think when Josh first announces his intention to interact, and then later when he is going to maybe clarify his original post. Both times, she just says no.

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

JOSH: Let him know that I...

DONNA: [cross talk] No

JOSH: Yeah. We gotta post a response to someone

DONNA: It's a bad idea.

[end excerpt]

[Josh and Hrishi laugh.]

JOSH: The way she says no is so funny. It's kind of a deep, uh, no good could come of this. I know how this is going to end up "No." But I know I can't stop you kind of No. And it's a very funny performance.

HRISHI: [laughing] I love how sarcastic she gets just before she hits enter.

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

DONNA: What Josh doesn't know is that some of these people haven't taken their medication. Let's watch what happens now.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You can tell she knows, and she's already anticipating the schadenfreude that she's going to get out of this whole event.

JOSH: Yeah. I think it's also funny when Bonnie, Ginger, Margaret and Donna are looking at the website and laughing. And when they leave, Donna says...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

DONNA: See you at lunch.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Like, we're going to continue this conversation. I think it's funny that they found a lot of raw material that they want to discuss on this website.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I really like that the four of them are friends.

JOSH: Right. Yeah, that's a nice thing. It would be nice to see them interact together more.

HRISHI: Um Hmm. I'd watch that show too.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: One thing that they brought up was the sexism of Josh dictating the messages to Donna. One thing that I liked about that though is the idea that Josh in order to work himself up into the lather that he needs to respond with veracity and vitriol. He can't just type it. That he is

a verbal creature. And I think that we've gotten that a little bit too. The way he said to Amy, "You know the best stuff happens over the phone."

JOSH: Hmm.

HRISHI: That he likes talking. And, Aaron, who likes writing.

JOSH: You're onto something, because I believe he speaks out loud a lot when he writes.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

JOSH: I think he engages in dialogue with himself, plays all the roles. I think he's that kind of guy.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right, because he needs to hear it out loud.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: So I think here too, Josh needs to hear the words out loud and you can see in Brad's performance that he kind of, he starts off at a six and then elevates to seven and eight and he says...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

JOSH: I don't think it falls under the category of outrageous to suggest that I might have friends on the other end of the avenue who had the phone number of GAO. Let me put this more plainly, the White House can get a GAO review of anything it wants without posing a threat to the separation of powers.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He gets on a roll.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I think that he needs to say it out loud in order to get on a roll. And in any case, it's well dramatized to do it that way, as opposed to him typing it. I mean, how is he going to say it out loud and type it? It would seem a little bit awkward, and if you were just to see the words on the screen it's not as exciting. So it's a great solution as well as a great doubling down on this element of Josh's character that we know is in there anyway.

JOSH: Yeah. I think that's a good point.

HRISHI: And it does give the opportunity for Donna to just react, kind of silently, to all of the things that he's making her type. The end of that quote, he says,

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

JOSH: *And I believe I'll use capital, lowercase, or sanskrit, right up until the moment the font police cuff me and read me Miranda.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought, maybe he means Lin Manuel Miranda

JOSH: Oooh. Segue!

HRISHI: [laughing] Later in this episode, when Sam and Ainsley are talking about whether or not Governor Richie is smart; whether or not that is a valid qualification for a president, we get this line...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

SAM: *Because before I look for anything, I look for a mind at work.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That of course being a line in the Schuyler Sisters in *Hamilton*.

[Song: *Schuyler Sisters* excerpt from *Hamilton*]

Skyler Sisters: [singing] Eliza, I'm lookin' for a mind at work work. Work, work! I'm lookin' for a mind at work work. Work, work! I'm lookin' for a mind at work work. Work, work!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: A huge recurring phrase in that song, and it's funny, I watch the episode and I want to see...It's interesting to me what a mind like Lin's picks up on and is inspired by. And the line jumps out at me now as I watch the show. But I wonder, would it otherwise? In other words, what did he see, or how did he hook into that? It really is a great phrase, but it's something that's sort of thrown away. It's not a moment of huge import in the episode, but he picked up on something and it's interesting. It would be interesting to know how it hit him.

HRISHI: This is a line for me I think as a fellow *West Wing* lover. This is a line for me that has always rung out.

JOSH: Ahh. There's my answer. Interesting.

HRISHI: Yeah, and when I was first hearing about *Hamilton*, around the time when Lin won the MacArthur Genius award. Ya know, I had been hearing a little bit about that there was this guy that wrote a kind of musical but it was about American history, the Revolutionary War. It's about Alexander Hamilton, but it's also hip hop and references Biggie. And I couldn't believe that all of my favorite things were being combined in one place. And then I heard about this. That there are also quotes from *The West Wing* and has this line, "I'm looking for a mind at work." And that's when I was like, "Come on!" This really is, it felt like it was tailor made for me. And so I

knew exactly the scene. I knew who was saying it. You know when I heard it in the context of the song, I was like, "This is amazing!"

JOSH: Oh interesting. I totally had to have it pointed out to me. I loved the song, but I didn't know that it was a *West Wing* reference until probably the *Hamiltome*, or maybe someone else just told me about it.

HRISHI: Do you have a copy of *The Hamiltome*?

JOSH: Indeed I do. And we sell it at my wife's store as well.

HRISHI: What did you think about the President's gaffe? I'm wondering, when you were watching this, I'm guessing that you didn't maybe remember what the ultimate reveal was going to be...

JOSH: Good guess.

HRISHI: But did you clock what was going to happen? Did you see...

JOSH: [cross talk] I did, but late in the game.

HRISHI: Ok. You know, this all happens in the cold open, so when the opening credits come up, and Toby's got kind of an oh [expletive] reaction, you were similarly thinking...

JOSH: [cross talk] Right, no, I was not ahead of it, I was not thinking he did this on purpose. I think I was too fixated on whether cameras really have a red and a green light. In my experience they have a red light, sometimes, that shows that they're recording and then it turns off. I think the red light - green light thing was just to make things clearer for the audience, unless I'm just wrong about certain types of production.

HRISHI: Um hmm.

JOSH: And, I was noticing on rewatch, I thought it was clever of Aaron to have the President mistake one of his interviewer's names.

[*West Wing* Episode 3:16 excerpt]

INTERVIEWER: Thank you very much sir.

BARTLET: Thank you very much, Klm.

TERI: Uh, Teri.

BARTLET: Uh Teri, I'm sorry.

TERI: That's alright.

BARTLET: That was my ..[voice fading out]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I think to help convince us that Barlet is then going to make another mistake by forgetting that the camera is recording him and saying this thing about Ritchie. That's just a subtle little good writing there.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Sort of keep us off the scent.

HRISHI: I'd like to think that also pulls from this thing that we know about Martin Sheen, which is that he's always getting people's names wrong.

JOSH: Yes, for sure.

HRISHI: One of my favorite bits in this is when the President mentions exploring versus drilling.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: In between the two broadcasts, Toby says, hey, let's hit this point and make sure you get it right and then he says this...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

President Bartlet: Exploring is what Magellan did, and Balboa and Jacques Cousteau. What you're talking about is drilling, which is the only way you know if there is oil there, and [voice fadeout]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Toby, who is kind of pacing behind the camera, does this little gesture when the President hits the point, his fingers go up like "Ding", like he rang the bell.

JOSH: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: It's really great. Although, I was also distracted by the actual newscaster's questions. I couldn't tell if this was some kind of an, I don't know, if I'm bring some sort of an anachronistic perspective to this, but one of the broadcasters ask, "Why is alternative energy important"? I mean, you can give the President the soft ball, sure.

JOSH: [cross talk]. That's a little broad is what you're saying?

HRISHI: Is that even a question? Is that a real question? In 2002, is that a...I remember my sixth grade science project was on solar energy. I mean, we were talking about alternative energy ages before this.

JOSH: This is true. Well, we're led to believe that "Why do you want to be President?" is something he needs to prep for, so [laughing] is this question worse? Maybe it is. Yeah, no, you're right, I was also thinking they mention when Leo and President Bartlet are speaking they talk about trying to work towards CAFE standards. That's the Corporate Average Fuel Economy Standards of forty miles per gallon. And, we're still not there fifteen years later.

HRISHI: Huh.

JOSH: In 2016, the CAFE Standard was 37.8. My understanding of it which probably is thin is that car companies, in order to hit the CAFE Standard, will put out a certain number of electric cars to compensate for the lesser miles per gallon that their gas guzzlers get. And so...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right

JOSH: For instance, I love electric cars. Right now I drive a Chevy Bolt. I used to have a Fiat 500E. And, Fiat made this fantastic car but the sense was that Chrysler Fiat had made this car just in order to meet standards and that they didn't really care much about it, and at a certain point I think they were taking a loss of \$9,000 per car that they were putting out on the road. So, I guess a little bit of a scam. I don't know why more people don't drive electric cars. Now, in the interest of candor, I have two gas guzzlers. My own personal car that I drive almost all the time is fully electric Chevy Bolt. It's fantastic to drive. It's zippy. That's a big secret that hasn't gotten out yet is that electric cars are tremendously enjoyable to drive. The torque is insane. You don't have the moving pieces of the engine, so you just put your foot down and you vroom...you just zip off from a dead stop.

HRISHI: And, if anyone from Chevy is listening you can email us at sponsor@radiotopia.fm.

JOSH: Indeed. Have you ever driven an electric car?

HRISHI: I've driven a smart car. Are those electric?

JOSH: I don't know. Is that one of those teeny, tiny little ones that has great mileage because it's so teeny, tiny?

HRISHI: Yeah. I drove a smart car on my honeymoon. It was a convertible. I described it as like driving a shoe with wheels. And then Lindsey pointed out that it was a convertible and so it was really like driving a sandal.

JOSH: [laughing] That's good. Back to the show.

HRISHI: I'm still on the cold open. I love this little exchange between C.J. and Toby when she tells him there's an issue with Tabatha Fortis.

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

C.J.: Is it possible you've got a little touch of the poet? Or would like a little touch of the poet?

TOBY: Yes.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh, it's fantastic! Oh lovelorn Toby is the best. Maybe lovelorn isn't quite the word. But yes, I mean, he's smiles.

Josh and Hrishi; [laughter]

JOSH: Yeah. Richard Schiff using some new muscles. He must have been sore after that day of shooting.

HRISHI: And the dynamic between them is really charming and lovely and C.J. gives him a little bit of a hard time. When I watched it most recently last night, my friend, Chelsea Cain, who you've heard me mention as one of my fellow D&D players, who has a character called Pants...

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: She was visiting and she pointed this out about the C.J. / Toby dynamic. When you think about the idea that Richard and Allison used to talk about maybe having some kind of backstory between them. Maybe they dated or something like that. Then suddenly now because of those discussions on this podcast.

JOSH: Sure. You watch it with new eyes.

HRISHI: I'm watching it in a new way that now it's like an ex that you're still friends with revealing that he has this uh...

JOSH: [cross talk] little crush.

HRISHI: [cross talk] He has a little crush, yeah. And getting to tease him, it makes C.J.'s mischievous grin even more satisfying. But so she says to Toby...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

C.J.: Knock 'em dead, de Bergerac.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then, I realized later, the last line of this episode, C.J. once again says knock 'em dead, this time to the President.

JOSH: Ahhh. By the way, I don't like the last two lines of the episode.

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

C.J.: That was old school. Go knock 'em dead.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I found them unnecessary. I loved the scene between C.J. and the President where she's sort of ferreting out that he made the statement intentionally. Bartlet's giving up nothing.

HRISHI: He's inscrutable.

JOSH: Yeah. He looks at her very sternly and is inscrutable. But we're sort of getting the sense from C.J.'s sly smile that she gets it. And for some reason, I just wish that they hadn't dotted that i. I wish they sort of would have left it where it was and he walks out and she kinda knows. I thought it was a shame that they added the two last lines.

HRISHI: I agree with you. Yeah, as soon as she reveals, you know, she says....

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

C.J.: You know, it occurs to me that even your choice of language was interesting. A .22 caliber mind in a .357 magnum world. That's unusual for you - a gun metaphor.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You know that line, you're really like, alright, we get it.

JOSH: Yeah, exactly. And he stares daggers at her in response, so he's not sharing a smile with her. He's not like, yep you got me.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Um hmm.

JOSH: He's just looking at her with that great Martin Sheen, um hmm, kind of look.

HRISHI: Joining us now is David Wade. In 2004, David Wade was the national spokesman for John Kerry's Presidential Campaign. Later on he served as John Kerry's Chief of Staff in the Senate and until 2015 he was his Chief of Staff in the State Department too. David, thanks so much for joining us.

DAVID: Thanks for having me.

HRISHI: So we asked you to come in because in 2004 there was an incident while then Senator Kerry was running for President that reminded us a lot of this moment with the hot mic and the live camera and President Bartlet. Could you tell us what happened?

DAVID: Well, watching President Bartlet gives me campaign PTSD.

HRISHI: [laughing]

DAVID: We were campaigning in Illinois the morning after the Illinois Primary. He had just addressed, via satellite, the AFL-CIO Convention. And then afterwards, as he sort of worked the rope line and was shaking hands with all the workers from I think it was a sheet metal factory who had come out to be a part of the event--one of the workers said, Senator Kerry, I don't trust these Republicans. You gotta keep going at it. And Kerry sort of pulled him close and said...

[excerpt from the Kerry Campaign in Illinois]

SENATOR KERRY: Just beginning to fight here. These guys, these guys are the most crooked and lying group that I've ever seen.

[end excerpt]

DAVID: And then about ninety seconds later, a reporter came up to me and said, by the way, the senator's microphone was on and he had some interesting things to say about President Bush and the Bush Campaign. And just like that, we were off to the races. And a day that we had planned to be about an economic message, we were suddenly faced with decisions about how to handle what was becoming a breaking news story flashing on CNN, Kerry calls Bush and the Republicans crooked and lying.

HRISHI: Wow. [laughing] What was your first move when that first happened?

DAVID: Other than to first have that moment of pause where you think about how am I going to go tell the candidate that we had left his microphone on, which is always a fun moment of realization.

JOSH: [laughing] Like *The West Wing* episode, the immediate first response is whose fault is it?

DAVID: Exactly. And this one, you know again, we were a campaign transitioning to being bigger so I didn't have a whole lot of people to point to other than myself, which is always the situation you don't want to be in on a campaign.

HRISHI: [laughing] Right.

DAVID: But my immediate reaction, and the reaction of my colleagues, was we can do two things here: We can explain that we should have turned off the microphone, or we can explain that he didn't know he was being listened to. Or, instead of having a big cable news discussion about process and whether we were competent at turning microphones off and on, we thought let's make this an opportunity. And I remember I shortly thereafter in a little hold room I went up to Senator Kerry and explained what had happened and I said to him I'm going to tell the press that you knew your microphone was on. And he just winked and then he asked me again exactly what they had picked up. I think he was relieved to hear that it was about as tame as it was. Uh, and I said you basically called them crooked and lying, and he said well that pretty much sums it up.

HRISHI: [laughing] Because I read in an article the result of that you know, the quote on CNN, said “Afterward Kerry Campaign Official, David Wade, told reporters that Kerry did know that his microphone had been on when he was speaking.” And that was always the report that I had always, you know for the past decade, had always assumed was the case. That he knew and that he had done it to invoke another West Wing reference. He threw an elbow on live TV.

DAVID: And our sense was that given the choice between talking about something we didn’t intend to do, or just assuming that we intended to do it all along. Let’s error on the side of looking competent and having a fight that we thought was good for us with the media.

HRISHI: Wow. Has it ever come out that this was a strategy?

DAVID: Certainly, had we won the Presidential Race, we would have made sure that it made sure that it featured prominently in whatever books were written. But I think moments like this happen all the time on campaigns. One rule I learned is that little things always become big things. And the truth is, if somebody has said something true, even if it was inadvertent, and it’s not damaging to their reputation, just lean into it. And voters ultimately kind of like those moments. Instead of reinventing the candidate, they reveal who the candidate really is, and in our case, we were pretty comfortable with the argument he had made.

HRISHI: I thought it was a thrilling moment, because it did feel like here you’re getting the unvarnished truth of what Senator Kerry believes and I felt like there was some long running narrative about that campaign that the Senator was having trouble connecting his personality in his public messaging. But this was a moment where it really felt like it came out and it was genuine.

DAVID: There are those that let the candidate be the candidate moments. I mean, for one thing, I think we are all pretty nostalgic for the days when the most controversial thing a presidential candidate is caught saying on a hot mic is that his opponent’s play pretty tough hardball politics.

JOSH: It’s rather quaint at this point.

DAVID: Right, exactly. You know and looking back some of the case of the vapors and the pearl clutching by the Republican Campaign in response, you read it today and you kinda laugh that their response was, “Well, were told that this would be a positive campaign.” It may have been provocative at the time. It certainly looked prescient about a month later when the Swift Vote Veterans Truth ads were all over the airwaves.

JOSH: Indeed. My understanding is that frequently a candidate will interact with a reporter or journalist and say well this off the record what I’m about to tell you. Is there a, can you ever make the argument that look, he didn’t know the mic was on and so clearly this was an off the record moment? Or is this a one the genie is out of the bottle you know there is no buying it back?

DAVID: My sense was always that you could get away with some of those negotiations. Sometimes in the very early, what I would call the invisible primary stage of a presidential

campaign, you know a year before someone is officially running, when they're out campaigning, but today and even then, I remember very veteran reporters saying to me, you know, hey, before Iowa we could have had this conversation, but look around this guy's surrounded by Secret Service agents. The whole you meant it to be off the record or you didn't know the mic was on, it just doesn't wash when you're going to be the nominee and you're surrounded by armed people that protect you because you are one of two people who might be the next president. So what we try to do is to just condition ourselves to sort of accept that we are all big boys and girls. This comes with the territory. You can't explain it away. You make the best of it and in the future I think we all condition ourselves to make a good extra effort to make sure that the mic was off if we really wanted it to be off.

HRISHI: Had you been watching *The West Wing*? Had you seen the episode where President Bartlet is caught on camera making his comments about Governor Ritchie when this happened?

DAVID: So, I had not seen it at the time. You know, we were all fans of the show before the Presidential Campaign and all of that work and that travel really took off, and then for almost sort of superstitious reasons, we kind of banned ourselves from watching the show during the campaign. Right, because there was almost something presumptive about watching it while you were part of a campaign trying to help somebody win that job. You know, we were a fairly superstitious bunch. We never talked about election day. You never let your guard down to dream about what might come. And in a funny way, the show was the same way.

HRISHI: And when the was the first time that you saw this episode?

DAVID: Ironically enough I think it was in 2005. It was in that kind of recovering period when a whole lot of Democrats in Washington didn't really want to watch the news and there was a fair amount of...then it was on DVD. It was early adaptive binge watching, I guess, where people would come over and have a bunch of beers and indulge a little bit in the kind of Washington that you wish it was.

JOSH: I was just going to ask you...how plausible do you find the plot of this episode that Bartlet's purported hot mic gaffe in fact turns out to be something he intentionally did. He's been advised in an earlier episode to make the upcoming election about smart and not, and so that he actually intentionally makes a comment suggesting that his likely opponent is not so smart.

DAVID: I always thought of it as kind of like when you thumb through US Magazine and there's the section of Celebrities That Are Just Like Us. And then I always just sort of thought of this as President Bartlet and sort of politicians are just like our politicians, they're just better. And it was the how you wish a candidate could be. You know, whereas in reality, I think tired candidates doing this in real life...mistakes happen, hot mic moments happen, they are almost always not calculated. But the question then is just how do you make the most of them.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: May I ask you a question about a second John Kerry hot mic moment.

DAVID: Absolutely.

JOSH: During the most recent conflict in Gaza, I think after an interview had ended, he made a phone call or received a phone call from an aide and was discussing the situation in Gaza...

[excerpt from John Kerry]

SECRETARY OF STATE KERRY: It's a hell of a pinpoint operation. We've got to get over there. I think it's crazy to be sitting around.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Referring to Israel's actions in Gaza. And that was caught both on camera and on mic and then there was kind of a gotcha moment Chris Wallace played it for him on air. Can you tell us about that moment?

DAVID: I remember that well. Typically those are the only windows that people have as staff to update the principal, the candidate, the cabinet secretary on what's happening. And that was a situation where he was literally dealing with obviously a crisis in real time. He had been on the phone all night with counterparts obviously with the government of Israel, and the Palestinians, and the Jordanians and other countries in the region who were trying to help bring pressure to put the situation back in the box and try to resolve it. So he got a news update that was the kind of thing he had to know about. The last thing you would want is for, as a good staffer is for them to be learning from the interviewer or from broadcaster in the next round of questions. But it's one of those moments of diplomacy happening in real time.

JOSH: Yeah, I thought actually what really, what Chris Wallace seemed ethically questionable to me because he played it back without any warning. It just was unkind, but understandable from a news point of view - trying to get the gotcha moment. But he also included in what he shared was Secretary Kerry talking about his travel plans like maybe we're going to go back tonight. It seemed like the kind of information that maybe the public doesn't shouldn't be hearing as it happens.

DAVID: It's definitely a little bit dangerous. Yeah, there's a reason why there's a certain boiler plate language that you often see to how diplomacy is done and talked about that does not necessarily reveal the sensitive discussions behind the scenes. And I also remember John Kerry and I having been through a whole lot of these hot mic experiences that you always encounter. Sometimes he would, he would if he was walking into an interview he would turn to me and say, remember, there is no off the record. [laughing]

JOSH: Hmm.

DAVID: So, you learn those lessons along the way with some bumps and bruises.

HRISHI: David, thank you so much for talking to us.

David. No, thank you. This is fun and thanks for bringing back the memories of a much more innocent time in a world of hot mics.

HRISHI: [laughing] No problem.

JOSH: It's amazing the contrast to today.

HRISHI: Sorry for inspiring any PTSD about this stuff.

DAVID: There are worse flashbacks that we could be having about that campaign. Trust me.

HRISHI: [laughing] I guess that is true. Ok. Thank you so much.

DAVID: Thank you.

[Music Interlude]

HRISHI: While we were recording, Josh, as you heard, my new dog Watson walked into the studio over here.

JOSH: He's a sweet, sweet dog. Now you have to post a picture.

HRISHI: There's a picture of Watson on my Instagram account if you want to check him out. But since getting the dog, I've started taking him on walks around the neighborhood. I live in Eagle Rock, and not too far from me is the Occidental College. And so I've been going there pretty much every day that's a nice spot and...

JOSH: [cross talk] So you walk with purpose to Occidental College

HRISHI: [laughing] I see what you did there. And as I was watching this episode, when Toby goes to talk to Tabatha, outside of her lecture at Georgetown University, I said, Oh, we were there earlier today with Watson.

JOSH: My dog [expletive] there.

HRISHI: [laughter] Yeah. I was so surprised. And it looked so different. Georgetown University in this episode turns out to actually be Occidental College down the street from me. If you are ever there in the morning, or between six and eight, you might very well see me and my dog.

JOSH: You are inviting people to stalk you.

HRISHI: [laughter] In that scene, where Tabatha is speaking to Toby and finally we get the culmination of this battle between the two of them of as to whether or not she should get up and talk about her objection to the administration's position on landmines. She says in response to something Toby said earlier...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

TABATHA: *And I'm sorry, but I tell the truth.*

TOBY: *Not every minute of the damn day, Tabatha.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: What's funny is she herself says, I'm sorry. I tell the truth. But then in this scene she says to Toby, You think I think that an artist's job is to speak the truth. Well, it's like yeah, we do because that's what you said -- that you have to speak the truth. But in any case..,

JOSH: Huh.

HRISHI: Then she says...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

TABATHA: *An artist's job is to captive you for however long we've asked for your attention. If we stumble on the truth, we got lucky.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought, right there, that's just Aaron putting his own words into one of his characters.

JOSH: Absolutely. That's his credo. At least in terms of his television writing. It's funny it's really not the most profound statement one can make as to the power or the responsibility of the artist. It's more the way Aaron would describe working on *The West Wing*. He'll usually disavow any desire to reach hearts and minds, or get deep into an issue. He's just...If I've diverted you for the length of an episode of *The West Wing*, then I've done my job.

HRISHI: Right. He's not necessarily trying to influence you politically or have some kind of profound statement.

JOSH: Yeah. That's better put. Have you ever met a Poet Laureate?

HRISHI: No, I haven't. Wait. Oh, you know what. Actually, hold on. Ahh. Nope. I have not.

JOSH: Well who was close? Talk to me about whom were you considering?

HRISHI: Well, when I was in high school, we had a visit from the Poet Li-Young Lee whose work I really, really loved. Has won an American Book Award and when he spoke I was really captivated and I even had the chance to have a one on one conversation with him. Yeah, just a beautiful writer. Have you met a U.S. Poet Laureate?

JOSH: Oh. Thank you for asking. I have in fact, not, but I worked with an individual who had become briefly the Poet Laureate of New Jersey. Amiri Baraka, who passed away a couple of years ago, may he rest in peace. I worked with him on the Warren Beatty film, *Bulworth*.

HRISHI: Um Hmm.

JOSH: Baraka played a homeless guy character called referred to Rasta Man. This spiritual, truth spouting, homeless guy, and that was '95 and '96. And then I think in 2002, he became the Poet Laureate of New Jersey but got very quickly mired in controversy in part because he read a poem called, I think he read a poem called *Who Blew Up America?* Which included some lines that were taken to be antisemitic including the stanza:

Who knew the World Trade Center was gonna get bombed
Who told 4000 Israeli workers at the Twin Towers
To stay home that day
Why did Sharon stay away?

JOSH: So people did not respond well to this particular poem for a variety of reasons, and they tried to pressure him into stepping down, and he wouldn't, and ultimately they abolished the post, essentially in order to get rid of him. They just said, Let's not have a Poet Laureate.

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: Well it's interesting to me is that in this episode, Aaron decided not to complicate that subplot. And I think it might have been a good complication. But he decided not to do so by not having Tabatha Fortis' art be the issue. You know, I want to read this poem that is anti-landmine.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

JOSH: At the party. It was that she was insisting on making a statement. So for most of this, I was thinking, she really is out of line. It would have been a little more complicated and murkier if it was her art for which she had won the appointment that they were objecting to. You know, you make me be U.S. Poet Laureate, and then you tell me don't read this -read this - kinda thing. Because there it is somewhat questionable. I don't like the stanza that I just read of Baraka's poem, but that's his art. I mean, he's saying what he had to say.

HRISHI: It gets closer to the heart of the national endowment for the arts argument. Where you have this federal platform and what are you using it to elevate?

JOSH: Right. And I still think there's a discussion there. I don't think it's black and white. Oh, she - Tabatha Fortis- should be able to say whatever she wants to say if it's the poem she's reading. But here it almost seemed more clearly defined. In a sense, it plays to me like she realizes her place because at the end she asks for what occurred to me early on which is maybe she can get a few minutes with the President. You know, having reached this lofty position, maybe that buys her a little bit of face time with the president and she can say her peace. Which is ultimately the solution that she comes up with.

Toby: Do you think that between Tabatha Fortis and Andrea Wyatt that Toby has a type?

JOSH: Ha!. He likes tall, thin, wavy haired pretty women.

HRISHI: Willowy ladies.

JOSH: [cross talk] Willowy. Well said. Yeah. Who is the current Poet Laureate?

HRISHI: Her name is Tracy K. Smith. She is a Pulitzer prize winning author.

JOSH: Nice. That was quick. I would have had to google it.

HRISHI: I had thought maybe we would get here but then we already have so many guests on this episode.

JOSH: I did like, speaking on that same plot line, after her poetry reading lecture gone wrong when she Tabitha and Toby are chatting, his taking out his little booklet and striking out meet Tabatha Fortis. Very romantic, very sweet gesture.

HRISHI: Yes. And it also gets to where my heart really is which is I also love making lists and then crossing things off of them.

JOSH: You do, don't you?

HRISHI: I really do.

JOSH: I like making lists and then trying to find them when I need the information on the list.

HRISHI: [laughing] First thing on the list, where's the list?

JOSH: Correct.

HRISHI: That's maybe one of the things I relate to most in this episode how satisfying it is to cross that name off the list. I felt that way about our interview with Prime Minister Trudeau. Like I said, I had been working on that for it turned out to be literally one year from the moment of you know what would be funny...if we could get the Prime Minister to talk to us and do it in the context of the episode of the Canadian National Anthem plays and it felt so good to cross that off the list. To put it on the list and then cross it off

JOSH: Quite an accomplishment on your part. I was delighted that you made it happen. And I certainly doubted you.

HRISHI: [laughing] Also, in this dynamic, can we talk about the moment where Laura Dern is walking out of the office and Tabatha says...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

TABATHA: Yeah, you're cute. And uh...I love the way you write.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then Toby's face, what I actually have written is "Toby's Face!!!!!"

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: You could just knock him over.

JOSH: She gave him the face. [Hrishi laughing] Yes, it's very sweet. I'm guessing we don't ever see Tabatha Fortis again?

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: Sorry, Toby.

HRISHI: More on Toby's crush...the length of time it takes for Toby to adjust his tie to get ready to meet Tabatha is incredible.

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: It's like there's this whole epic moment of physical acting that goes into him putting on the tie, tying the tie, tucking the back part of the tie into his shirt.

JOSH: Oh yes, good catch on that.

HRISHI: He doesn't use a tie pin. If you had a tie bar you could clip tie the back of the tie and everything to the placket on your shirt.

JOSH: Right. He tucks it in

HRISHI: He tucks it in.

We haven't seen a tie tucked into pants since Josh Lyman on that blustery day in season one.

HRISHI: [laughing] He doesn't tuck it into his pants. He tucks the back part in between the buttons on his shirt.

JOSH: Oh, into his shirt. I see what you are saying.

HRISHI: So that part is great. And you know, there's a whole set up of...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

TOBY: Is this tie alright?

JOSH: Sorry?

TOBY: This necktie, does it go with the jacket?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love the idea that Toby is trying to care about his appearance. This is a new move for him. Not only does he not know if the tie goes with the jacket; he doesn't even know how to really ask if this is the right thing.

JOSH: He's completely at sea. I also like that once he's got his hooks into her, so to speak, he's not going to let anybody distract him. Certainly not Rob Lowe.

HRISHI: [laughing] I know, it's great.

JOSH: [laughing] when Sam comes up...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

SAM: Yes, indeed! Poetry, I must tell you...

TOBY: [cross talk]That's fine...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's one of my favorite lines- probably my favorite line in the episode, Poetry, I must tell you...

HRISHI: That's what I was going to say. Yes, indeed. Poetry I must tell you.... The thing I would like to know is what kind of sentence is that? You know he gets hushed by Toby. What's at the other end of that sentence? Poetry, I must tell you...what?

JOSH: Yeah, I would like to see the take where they don't interrupt him and they let him improv the end of that sentence. But also I just laughed to myself that Toby is not going to let her get two minutes alone with Sam Seaborn.

HRISHI:: Yeah. Yeah. [laughing]

JOSH: She's mine! Let's go.

HRISHI: Poetry, I must tell you. It's like a cadence that Sam has never had before.

JOSH: No, you're right. That's a line that was made to be interrupted. [laughing]

HRISHI: Right. But also, I like the idea that he suddenly comports himself differently and he uses language in a different way because he's speaking to a poet.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah. That's true. You're right.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Like he can't just say, Hey, I really love your work

JOSH: [cross talk] He has to do anything more florid with his his speech.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah. Exactly.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah. That's very funny. That's actually a good point. You're right.

HRISHI: He gets extra pretentious. I love that.

JOSH: Yeah. Well said. There's a TV trope moment for me when Ainsley's been called back from vacation, and in order to make the scene a little bit more dramatic and play out at higher stakes, it's as if there's been no discussion. She came all the way back and hasn't asked why yet.

HRISHI and JOSH: [laughing]

JOSH: It makes no sense, logically, and this happens in tv shows a lot. But for me it really sticks out in a show like *The West Wing*. She's like...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

AINSLEY: What?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI and JOSH: [laughing}

JOSH: Like, what am I doing. I mean, you're telling me that she actually came back from vacation and she wasn't saying that on the phone. Like, what? You want me to come back from vacation you better have a good reason.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think in this context it's a little bit better than most because there could be some implication of like this is how serious it is. The White House calls you and you come back. No matter what.

JOSH: [crosstalk} Right. There's an emergency of some sort without any more detail.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Alright. I love that moment.

HRISHI: Sorry. I did like that little duel as well.

JOSH: Very cute. Yeah. They're good together. Sam and Ainsley. They should have had their moment, but CSI had to come in a [expletive] it up for all of us.

HRISHI: Yeah. Thanks, CSI. I'll never watch you.

JOSH: I did an episode of CSI Miami.

HRISHI: Alright. Fine. I'll watch it.

JOSH: Thank you.

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

[Ad Break]

HRISHI: I've gotta go back to that moment of Tabatha saying, I love the way you write. She says, yeah, you're cute and I love the way you write. It's the one-two punch of those comments that really...you know he's already got a crush on her. I mean, what do you want most in a relationship? I think it is to be truly seen and then loved for that quality.

JOSH: Oh. yeah. I mean, knowing Toby you gotta believe this is about as good as it gets for him.

HRISHI: Right. It's a very romantic thing to say.

JOSH: Absolutely. Well, the thing that's interesting is he's going into the scene and we know that he's got a little crush, but immediately, there is a little something between them.

HRISHI: Yeah. We didn't talk this part about CJ's whole controlling of the scandal.

JOSH: She's prickly at the podium.

HRISHI: CJ is prickly at the podium

JOSH: Oh man.

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

JOURNALIST: C.J., could you give it to us unvarnished? Was the President calling Governor Ritchie stupid?

C.J.: Oh my God. Day 3.

JOURNALIST: Was he?

C.J. Well, I think this one may be unspinnable and that's certainly saying something coming from my office. Yeah, he was calling him stupid.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think it's great that the President rightly compliments her performance. She tries really hard to give them an out. Really leave enough room for everyone to save face a little bit, and eventually she's like, I can't do it anymore. Yeah, he called him stupid.

JOSH: I know, I was surprised when I heard that. Was it a strategic decision or does she just give up?

HRISHI: I think it's a little bit of both. We get the return of Dave from Sports Night.

JOSH: Um Hmm. Jeff Mooring. Asking questions.,

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It also just sort of sneaks by in this episode, how fully Bartlet has taken Toby's suggestion to make the campaign about smart and not. I mean he does it. We've talked about how things sometimes have to sink in and he has to process things. He fights back against things that initially feels might be correct. But there is something in him that just has a knee-jerk combative response. And then when it fully I guess sort of landed with him, he realized Toby's right. Or that's the way he wanted to go with it. And then in his own very subtle maverick way, obviously without touching base with anyone else, he sets the whole thing in motion and turns the whole campaign into a question of smart and not.

HRISHI: Um hm. It's funny to me that it takes him a second, even a second to come around to agree, not just jokingly, with Leo's suggestion that they shouldn't send anyone to rebut the comments.

JOSH: Um hmm.

HRISHI: At first, Leo brings it up. He says...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

LEO: You know what we would do if we were smart? We wouldn't send anybody. We'd look so good by not showing up. Let 'em whine by themselves.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And the President's like, hum, yeah. And then later he has his revelation ah, yes, that's exactly what we should do. I wonder why that wasn't the first instinct since he did know. Even at that moment Leo doesn't know that the President did it on purpose. The President's the only person who knows...

JOSH: [crosstalk} Right.

HRISHI: for so long, so I wonder why he didn't say you know...

JOSH: [crosstalk] He didn't realize that part of the plan would be to let it lie. That's a good point.

HRISHI: I was interested in this thing Ainsley says...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

AINSLEY: Does it concern you that the smartest Presidents have been the worst?

SAM: I don't grant your premise, but...

AINSLEY: John Quincy Adams was so full of himself he could hardly build a coalition around having eggs for breakfast. How many grand theories of international relations did Wilson come up with that were dead on arrival at congress?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: The thing that was interesting to me most of all was less even the idea of debating the idea of that the smartest Presidents have been better or worse, but there's a sense of who the smartest Presidents are or aren't. She mentions John Quincy Adams and she mentions Woodrow Wilson...

JOSH: Are those the two that would have sprung to your mind?

HRISHI: I don't know. I mean all I know is that Donald Trump is no intellectual giant.

JOSH: [laughing] Yeah. The other side of the equation is easier to figure out.

HRISHI: I think so, but how do you is there data? Do we have IQ scores?

JOSH: Or is that based on education?

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I know. I wondered too. Is John Quincy Adams know to be brilliant?

HRISHI: I've always thought President Clinton was very smart, but mainly that was based on how quickly he could solve the New York Times' Crossword. I bring a lot of bias to that conclusion.

JOSH: And his memory, I think, right? Wasn't he supposed to have a steel trap of a mind?

HRISHI: Yeah. When we spoke to his former communications director, Don Bayer, and he told us that they had had that problem with the teleprompter- the President was able to rattle off nine or eleven minutes of his state of the union speech without it. You know, but these are anecdotal. I don't know that...

JOSH: [cross talk] I think just the ones that went to Yale are the smartest.

HRISHI: [laughing] And there's no bias in that.

JOSH: No no. As we mentioned in our conversation with Sarah and Tara, we have James Eckhouse...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

WACHTELL: There's a heavy stench of partisanism in the air, Sam.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He's concerned that the Democratic party is going to lose its centrist because of what the President has said. That's a weird little scene.

HRISHI: Yeah. He is a congressman, and I don't know entirely if he's a centrist Republican or a centrist Democrat.

JOSH: Yeah, no, he's a Democrat. He's worried about losing Democrats as a result of what the President has said.

HRISHI: He's basically crying about what the President has said and how it's going to negatively affect the center of the party. And he wants to have a summit on bipartisan cooperation. And Sam makes this point...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

SAM: It's an election year. We want to be partisan. We're trying to beat them.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: The main thing is that it leads to bringing Ainsley back. My favorite part of this scene is Sam saying...

[West Wing Episode 3:16 excerpt]

SAM: Well first of all, it wasn't Toby's fault. It was mine. And it happened quickly and we regret it.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He does this a couple of times where he uh...

JOSH: Takes the blame?

HRISHI: He takes the blame? Yeah.

JOSH: Well that was the spot that made me feel a little bit bad because without too much of a spoiler, later in the series, I will say, "I didn't do it. Toby did it". So, I guess Will Bailey really is no Sam Seaborn.

HRISHI: [laughing] Anyway, it's interesting because it starts off, Josh says, "How did this happen"? And Sam says, "Well, I wasn't there". But then when the congressman shows up in his office, he says, "Yeah, it was my fault". I loved that. I love that moment of standing in front of the bullet.

JOSH: Um hmm. Yeah. He's a good man.

HRISHI: I was wondering, you know, C.J. says, "Knock 'em dead, de Bergerac". I was trying to dig into that particular reference. That, you know, the Cyrano quality of Toby.

JOSH: He's a writer. He puts his words in other people's mouths.

HRISHI: Yeah. Exactly. That hen the President speaks, he's speaking Toby's words. And we even get a little bit of a demonstration of that in the middle of that scene as he holds up the sign that says INNOVATION, and then the President gets to say, you know, what he says about innovation. It was a nice little nod to both poetry, I must tell you, and also what he really was doing.

JOSH: Good catch! Nicely done.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for joining us, and we hope you'll join us next time. Until then, you can leave a comment for us on Facebook or on our website TheWestWingWeekly.com. You can also find us on Twitter.

JOSH: I'm @JoshMalina. HrishI's @HrishIhirway. The show's @WestWingWeekly. Really, just follow all those accounts. Just do it. Please. Pad our numbers.

HRISHI: You can find our guests on twitter as well. David Wade is @DavidEcklesWade. The co founders of *Television Without Pity* are @TaraAriano and @tomatonation.

JOSH: If you have a message for Glark, just send it through Tara. What else was I going to say? It's been awhile since we've hawked you to review the show but why don't you throw us a juicy, five star rating on iTunes. Do they have five stars?

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Then do that. If you like the show less than five, keep it to yourself. I believe the response has been overwhelmingly positive for my idea of creating self congratulatory, pro-podcast, inside jokey, West Wing Weekly merchandise.

HRISHI: That's right. And I think it was no show socks that you were pitching?

JOSH: No show socks, or really more practically, I think a t-shirt with all sorts of West Wing Weekly lingo that the kids love to use.

HRISHI: I could go with no show socks maybe because

JOSH: Branded, no show socks are more of is a oxymoron of a product.

HRISHI: I like it. I think that it's appropriate. Then you're self congratulatory but you're keeping it to yourself.

JOSH: I just have to say, a person comes up to us after a live event and says I want to purchase a pair of your no-show socks. Then I'll take, say, \$15.00 and say you're already wearing them. You just can't see them.

HRISHI: That's terrible. Then you'll reveal your "No Bad Joke Like A Dad Joke" socks.

JOSH: There you go. The West Wing Weekly's a proud member of Radiotopia. A fantastic collection of the best that podcasting has to offer.

HRISHI: [laughing] Sure. And you can learn all about them at radiotopia.fm . Radiotopia made possible by a grant from the Knight Foundation and by the support of listeners like you.

JOSH: That's right. And we want to thank Margaret Miller, Zach McNees, and Izzy Malina for bringing their skills to the production of this episode.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

SARAH, TARA, , and DAVID: What's next?

[Outro Music]