

The West Wing Weekly
4.09: "Swiss Diplomacy"
Guests: Kevin Falls and Eli Attie

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Today, we're talking about the episode "*Swiss Diplomacy*." It's episode 9 from season 4.

JOSH: It was written by Kevin Falls and Eli Attie. It was directed by Christopher Misiano, and it first aired on November 20th, 2002.

HRISHI: And today, we're joined by the writers, Kevin Falls and Eli Attie.

JOSH: [cross talk] Hooray!

ELI: [cross talk] A joy...

JOSH: [cross talk] Good to have you...

ELI: [cross talk] a joyous occasion....

JOSH: Thanks for being here.

KEVIN: So great to be here.

HRISHI: Normally, at this point, I would give a synopsis of the episode, but with the writers here in the room, I feel like really I have to turn it over to you...

JOSH: Make them do it?

HRISHI: Yeah, can you synopsise...give us the three sentences that describe this episode?

ELI: First of all, this is the first episode after Bartlet's re-election and he's exulting in his re-election, but then hit with a lot of problems. One of them is that the Ayatollah's son needs a heart and lung transplant and this is the only country where it can be done. So the president has to allow him to enter the country, even though the Ayatollah ends up publicly attacking him for it. At the same time, since it's right after Bartlet's re-election, there's concern among a number of Democrats who want to run for President in the next election that Hoynes, the incumbent vice president...

JOSH: (incredulously) Hoynes?!

ELI: ...Is already looking to lock up the field, and as anybody ... lock up the nomination rather, and to sort of sign up precinct captains in Iowa and New Hampshire to support his campaign, and that's good politics for him, but then there's so many Democrats who want to run for an open seat that it actually makes things very difficult for a president who wants to govern, with senators and congressmen just upset that he's, you know, that the White House is maybe helping their vice president. Toby is trying to help a defeated congresswoman get a job as Director of the National Park Service, and it's because she took a very difficult, unpopular vote for the White House, and...so it's essentially the White House's fault that she lost her seat, and there's really no job she can get, and she's not really Senate-confirmable, so that's Toby's story in the episode.

KEVIN: That was an hour of drama on television in 2002, when you think about those stories.

ELI: It's crazy. It's actually crazy. What else is there? There's a little runner ...

KEVIN: [cross talk] There's that runner ...

JOSH: [cross talk] ...that sounds sexy!

ELI: [cross talk] with Donna....

KEVIN: Don't ... change the channel!

ELI: But wait Kevin, there's the story about ...

KEVIN: There is the runner. Yeah, there's a runner about somebody was invited to.... The Vietnamese ambassador invited somebody to dinner...and I watched that episode twice, and I cannot figure out what the hell that runner was.

ELI: [cross talk] Well, here's what it is...

JOSH: [cross talk] Define for us "runner." Actor talk. What's a runner?

KEVIN: A runner's like... there's "A" story, "B" story, "C" story, which by the way you never would say in front of Aaron, but most people would look at three different stories. And then a runner is a thin story that uh...

JOSH: [cross talk] That years later you can't even recount...

KEVIN: [cross talk] For comic value, that are usually forgettable.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah.

ELI: A recurring few things that happen and recur throughout the scenes, and usually it's a way to feed a character who may be sort of anemic in that particular episode.

JOSH: I would think *The West Wing*, among television shows, would stand out as in constant need of runners. I mean you're always ...

ELI: [cross talk] Absolutely.

JOSH: ... moving around,

ELI: [cross talk] Absolutely.

JOSH: [cross talk] there's so much going on in the White House,

ELI: [cross talk] Absolutely.

JOSH: ...I'm not even sure what's going to be focused on, that's kind of part of the fun of seeing how an episode develops.

ELI: Even the main stories on *The West Wing* tend to run, let's put it that way.

KEVIN: [Laughs] But we burned through so much story. I was looking at that episode and thinking about doing TV now, maybe three stories and maybe a fourth or a runner. But we burned through like five or six stories about government and governing, and coming up with ways to dramatize that. And it gives me a headache thinking about it but it was...it was worthwhile.

ELI: But the runner -- I think what you're talking about is a story about a congressman who was on an overseas trip with his wife, a CODEL -- congressional delegation -- and the wife was essentially borrowing money from the ambassadors to buy things, just to buy gifts and knick-knacks, I guess it was in Vietnam, and just never paid anybody back.

KEVIN: Yeah.

ELI: And it turned out she had a history of doing this. This was based on a true story, this may be the only reason why I'm able to decipher that story.

KEVIN: [laughs]

ELI: And I feel like there's one we're missing. We're obviously missing Josh's story line ...[cross talk]

KEVIN: [cross talk] Oh, Josh's, right, of course ...

ELI: Where Rob is... I don't even know really what happens in that story. Yeah, a few scenes...

KEVIN: He has to downsize staff and, Sam Seaborn wants to keep Will Bailey, and Will Bailey's just saying he wants to take a step back. And we ... that wasn't in the original script --

JOSH: I remember...

KEVIN: But we had dropped that in later because this guy has to eat.

JOSH: Well, yeah, exactly. And I experienced it as your guys' teeing up, helping to keep teeing up, my...Will Bailey's fabulousness [laughs].

KEVIN: Yeah.

JOSH: It helps that Rob Lowe, whom we know is on his way out, keeps sort of teeing up ideas.

[West Wing Episode 4.09 excerpt]

SAM: There's a good guy out there named Will Bailey, if he should come across your radar.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I like that. It's I've got....a staff of writers doing my work.

KEVIN: Committed to you.

[cross talk]

JOSH: I appreciate it!

ELI: There's one thing I remember about this script is that it was actually issued to the cast before the Sam-and-Will scenes had been written and put into the script because that story--this script was written a little bit early, and that storyline was still taking shape from the earlier episodes--so the cast got it and there was a little bit of a flap over..."Are they in this episode?" Just, nobody had explained ahead of time to certain people in the cast and crew that there are gonna be scenes that are gonna be added to this.

JOSH: Interesting. Before we get too...I wanna back up a little bit, because we've talked to you, Eli, but we haven't talked to you, Kevin, about your Sorkin origin story.

KEVIN: Yes.

JOSH: How you got involved, I know, goes further back.

[cross talk]

KEVIN: Yes, yeah. I was one of the original Josh Malina writers...-

JOSH: [cross talk] We've talked a little bit about it but not with you.

HRISHI: We've talked about you, but we haven't talked, spoken, to you.

KEVIN: Yes.

JOSH: What's your take on you? Pro? Con?

KEVIN: [laughs] Not really. Just walk around with me for a while.

ELI: I can do the "con" later.

KEVIN: [cross talk] You do the con.

ELI: [cross talk] If he handles the pro.

KEVIN: I loved being me, and I loved, listen, working on *Sports Night* was the break of my life, you know?

HRISHI: How did you get that gig?

KEVIN: Well, I cut my teeth on... I was a half-hour guy, and I worked on *Arliss* which was about sports, and I came in on the second year of *Sports Night* and the second year of *West Wing*. And I was the third choice for the *Sports Night* job; they wanted a conduit to run the writer's room so that Aaron could talk to one person about the stories that we were breaking. And so I went in for my first meeting, and I was just happy to get in the door, 'cause the first time I saw *Sports Night* I just loved the show, I had never seen writing or listened to writing like this. And I went in, I was excited to get the meeting, and I had never seen so many people in one room, it was like 12 people. Just imagine, remember all those guys?

JOSH: Yeah.

KEVIN: And I walked in, and Aaron had read a script of mine called *Summer Catch* and said something nice, and the only person who spoke in the meeting was Tommy Schlamme, who said, "Where did you get that shirt?" [laughs] And that was the end. And I ...

JOSH: [interrupting] What shirt were you wearing?

KEVIN: It was from Banana Republic, actually. And I remember like thinking, "Oh I'm not going to get this job."

JOSH: [laughs]

KEVIN: I'm just...I'm just filler. And, I left, and I was just happy to get the meeting. And then about three weeks later, I get this call from my agent whose name was Rick Leffitz – still is his name – and he says, "You're in this thing. The first two choices, they can't." One guy had a deal at Columbia he couldn't get out of, and the other passed on not only the *Sports Night* job to run the room, but later passed on the *West Wing* job to run the room.

JOSH: Wow.

KEVIN: Wonderful writer, I won't mention his name because—

JOSH: Oh yeah you will.

KEVIN: No, because he regrets it, but he had a fabulous career anyway. Anyway, so this time it's like, I go in to meet Aaron and Tommy and...and right away they rush me in and they said, "alright, so can you start today?" And I go, "Well, I have to quit my job...". And I go, "Well, I'll come for the lunch." And I came for the lunch and stayed for *Sports Night* that year. I met you for the first time playing poker...upstairs at Stage...

JOSH: That sounds right, I was going to say most of...*all* of my free time that wasn't actually shooting or rehearsing, I was up in the little green room trying to pad my salary.

KEVIN: Yes, it was great. You were nice, those guys were nice, it was a great show. So, once that show folded, Aaron said, "Hey do you wanna do the same thing at *West Wing*?" Which was its own version of intimidation.

HRISHI: Where you were the conduit? Was the idea...?

KEVIN: It was the same thing, I kind of knew the drill. I knew...People had said, well you're not going to write much. And it depends how you define writing; I consider breaking stories and learning under Aaron, Tommy and John Wells as kind of like graduate school. So it's like hitting from the blue tees in golf. And so I knew what the gig was, especially going to *West Wing*. But the problem is, I always tell Eli, I was a sports page first, front page second. And suddenly my whole life turned around where it was front page first, and sports page second. Which reminds me of the story when...my first week in the room, one of the guys says, "Well, I was referring to a story in the *Times*," and I said, I said, "Well, which *Times*?" Because I took the *LA Times* and *New York Times*, and Lawrence O'Donnell turns to me and goes, "Lad, there is only one *Times*. [cross talk] That's the *New York Times*."

JOSH: [cross talk, laughing] "Lad"

KEVIN: And um, that started off a long, beautiful friendship.

ELI: I should, let me say something about Kevin's role at the show that he probably won't say on his own, which is, in those early Aaron years, I guess not the first year – neither of us were there that year – but you know, he ran the writing staff *for* Aaron, which essentially meant coming up with story ideas, making sure that as Aaron was focused on whatever current script he was trying to get out that we were thinking ahead, at least one episode, maybe two or three. And Kevin has the best reputation of anybody in Hollywood...

KEVIN: aw, that's nice...

ELI: Everybody on the show loved him, Aaron loved him. Totally indispensable guy, and it's hard to explain what a hard job that is, actually. That you have to kind of anticipate what Aaron's

gonna want, and work with a rag-tag team of writers who can sometimes be competitive and sometimes not get along. And everybody on that staff always loved Kevin and he was the greatest--

KEVIN: [cross talk] Very kind...

ELI: ...boss and the greatest runner of that room. And so deeply responsible for the shape and tone of everything in those three seasons.

KEVIN: [cross talk] that's very kind...couldn't have done it without you.

JOSH: [cross talk] So, I'm intrigued, so Aaron finally finishes whatever he's currently got in front of him, peels off to see what you guys, or you, under your guidance, you guys have to present to him for the next one or two, and does he instantly just start saying, "that sounds good, that's no good" and you're just instantly back to....

KEVIN: That happens a lot. First of all, we were never two episodes ahead. It was always like... you know...

JOSH: ...the next one.

ELI: [cross talk] We tried...sometimes we tried...

KEVIN: We tried to get it...we always...There was a couple times where he knew where he was going, at the end of the season, but beyond that, he would think about the next episode and have some ideas that he wanted to do. But we would go in and we would brainstorm. But the success rate...I gotta think we probably batted like 200, 300 for the amount of stories...

JOSH: [cross talk] oh, ok...

KEVIN: ...that we got through. Because, you know, he, Aaron was a tough man to please, for good reason. That's why the show's great! You know, you don't have mediocre ideas; you'd have a mediocre show. So he pushed us and was a tough man to please. He would come in in the mornings, and most of the time the last thing he would wanna do was talk about the show. He loved to just unwind, talk about sports, talk about anything that was on his mind, and then he'd kind of ease into it. Or he might just go, "Alright, well I'll talk to you guys later." But he had a process that we had to learn, and learn his rhythm.

JOSH: And did these make for long days deep into the night?

KEVIN: Not really. The first year, I think, it seemed like the days were longer. And no, they weren't crazy. We were on call a lot. I remember you know, conference calls, where the writers would be all over the country and we'd have a conference call ... sometimes on Christmas Eve.

JOSH: And talk story?

KEVIN: Talk story or something wasn't working and he wanted us to work on something, and we did that.

ELI: I mean, I remember much more weekend work than evening work. And it would be routine to be, you know, every weekend I was certainly talking to Kevin, and sometimes Aaron, and sometimes the other writers just because something would come up. Or that would be time away from shooting and production meetings where, for Aaron, it would be more focused writing time. And he didn't really take weekends off.

HRISHI: Where was the writers' room? Was it on the Warner Brothers...

KEVIN: Warner Brothers, yeah, that first year, yeah.

ELI: Building 146, for you history buffs.

HRISHI: So I feel like you described the way that things usually worked, but part of the reason that we brought you in for this episode is because this one is *unusual*. Can you talk about why this one was so different?

KEVIN: Yes, well because, you know, Aaron played it close because he really wanted each episode to be great. And it was why, you know, after four seasons he wanted to step away, because I think it felt like he would only do it to his standards, which are so high. And I think because of that—deadlines—scripts would come to you late in the process because he was waiting for that last lightning bolt of inspiration if the staff wasn't delivering it to him sometimes he was looking for that high-note he could get. So what happened was sometimes we'd be behind, and so John wanted other scripts written just in case.

JOSH: John Wells.

KEVIN: John Wells, excuse me, so we would have them. And of course, once we'd have them, then we would give them to Aaron because nothing was going to be written with – go on the air —without going through Aaron's typewriter.

JOSH: So this was a break-in-case-of-emergency, behind this plate of glass all the time...

ELI: I remember, so this script in particular, this was the first of those, as I recall. And there were a few more, and they were this season...

JOSH: I think there's one episode prior to this that doesn't have Aaron's name on it.

ELI: Yes, that's from the first season, and it has these guys, "Reno" and "Osborne," right? It has their names on it. And I don't know why that is, because I think Aaron did a ton of writing on that. But I'm not sure what the process was.

JOSH: At what point did it become clear that this was going to happen?

ELI: I have a memory of it. Kevin....

KEVIN: Well, yours is probably accurate then.

ELI: Well no, mine starts a little later in the process, which is that John Wells had said to Kevin, and I'm sure Aaron was in this conversation too, "Look, we just want a backup script, we're just doing this very close to the vest and let's just have something in reserve," and you know, Kevin was experienced and was the most senior person below Aaron, and so John just said to Kevin, "You write one." And, Kevin I think you were working on a pilot at the time also ...

KEVIN: Yeah...

ELI: And you know, I had, as you guys know and as any regular viewer of this podcast probably knows, I had come to the show from real politics and had never written an entire script myself, I was starting to write scenes in my office and the material that I would give to Kevin and Aaron, but Kevin called me in to his office and he said "Look, John wants me to write this script and I don't really have time to do it alone, why don't you do it with me?" which was kind of a huge break for me because it was a chance to collaborate with Kevin, to learn from Kevin, and otherwise nobody was gonna ... I didn't know how to write a script by myself, really. And this was a huge break for me. Just as a writer, just to get to do it. And I didn't even know at that point, we didn't even know if it would be shot.

KEVIN: We didn't even know if it would be shot. Yeah, and I remember Aaron reading it, because we were...you know, Aaron had his name on most of the scripts for good reason, he just elevates it to a whole new level. So when he read the script and he did his rewrite, I remember he called us in and said, "You guys did a great job, it's just going to be written by you two." And that was one of the most rewarding moments that I've ever had in the business to come from him and say, you know "I'm not gonna put my name on this."

ELI: And it's not that he didn't touch it....

KEVIN: Maybe because it sucked!

[laughter]

ELI: Now, now...now, now...

KEVIN: I doubt that he would have let it get on the air.

JOSH: He didn't take a "created by" credit in this episode.

HRISHI: So it's not that this episode doesn't have his fingerprints on it...

ELI: It does, it does.

HRISHI: He just chose not to take the credit.

ELI: But I will say this... [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] But he was saying essentially that your script stood on its merits.

ELI: Basically what Aaron did on this script is he did a pass at the dialogue, he polished the dialogue. But as I recall, he didn't do it at once, he did it as the script shot. So...

KEVIN: Ohhh, that's right. Yeah.

ELI: So, the script was done and I think went into pre-production and maybe even gone to the cast, and then, you know, our original draft of it, and then a night or two before a handful of scenes would shoot, he would look at those scenes and change some of the dialogue and then issue those new pages. So it was kind of...in some ways it was even a nicer compliment because even though he certainly put it through his Sorkin filter, it didn't change structurally, like, at all. Because you can't, if you've already shot three scenes, and then you're...

KEVIN: You know what he did that was fun? And he didn't give notes, he just did the rewrite. But he actually gives a note in the script in that when they go to the Situation Room to talk about the Ayatollah.

[West Wing Episode 4.09 excerpt]

BARTLET: This meeting doesn't go in the Sit Room any more ok? I don't know why the hell it's here, this isn't a military operation.

LEO: It's a secure room.

BARTLET: My office is a secure room too, isn't it? Please, somebody tell me it is, or I gotta go pack some stuff.

[end excerpt]

[laughter]

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I wondered about that when I watched it!

KEVIN: I put the Situation Room. That was like, my story, and I remember putting it there and he makes fun of it the whole time like, "Or we could just do it in the Oval Office?"

JOSH: [interrupting] Oh my God, that's hilarious!

KEVIN: I love that moment. So it was a teaching moment, but it actually ended up being really entertaining.

ELI: Some of Aaron's best material always on the show was somebody in the writer's room or somebody on the set would say something he thought was goofy or funny or dumb, and then he

would then have somebody say it in the script and mock it endlessly, and not to leap ahead but there's an episode later in this season, "Evidence of Things Not Seen" that began with me in the writer's room insisting that you really could stand an egg on end on the vernal equinox, because my mother probably still thinks that. And then, you know, people looked it up online and it was apparently not at all true, and it became a thing.

JOSH: This is a storyline that is celebrated every year on Twitter and on the internet.

ELI: Is that true?

JOSH: Oh, absolutely, are you kidding? You'll see pictures of eggs...

[cross talk]

KEVIN: Thanks to your mom.

ELI: Oh my mother and my mother's longtime partner, they went to a party where people did this on the vernal equinox. And there was a little photograph that was like on her desk for years of all these eggs standing on....anyway.

HRISHI: What's amazing about that part is, it is a funny comic moment, but it also really serves the plot as well. It reinforces the idea that the president sees this not as a military mission in any way. There's this State Department kind of approach to it, and he's seeing it really as more of a humanitarian effort.

JOSH: Yeah, that's a very good point. I was thinking throughout the whole through-line in the entire episode, Bartlet just sees him as a kid...

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: ...refuses to leverage the situation in the way that Leo would like him to politically...

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: ...there's something touching about that.

HRISHI: Yeah, and so he takes this little kernel of a joke but it actually, it does feed the rest of the story.

JOSH: [cross talk] feeds the element

KEVIN: I also put ...I remember in that Situation Room, talk about, back to teaching moments. My line was "What's his name?" like, to humanize him, and he said "How old is he?" And that was the fresh...it's always fresher by about ten degrees sometimes, what Aaron does.

ELI: Interesting.

KEVIN: Which is something I aspire to do. I think you—I remember once you told me once that he's allergic to clichés, but he can make up his own clichés that sound so fresh and inspired.

JOSH: Yeah, we've talked about that.

ELI: This storyline, I think, Kevin, was your storyline.

KEVIN: It was, it was one he preached more than anything, and if you get to see his Masterclass tapes, it's always about "intention obstacle." And this was simply...like we were sitting around going "What would be something that would be intention obstacle? What happens if the Ayatollah wanted...had a kid and wanted to have an operation in the United States?" And we started researching...

ELI: [cross talk] That's wonderfully specific.

KEVIN: [cross talk] We thought about the Swiss. But we knew that was gonna be a hard thing to do, given the relationship between the two countries. And then you were the one who said "Well, it has to go through the Swiss" and then that became fun. And that was born out of Aaron saying, "Okay, give me an obstacle and let's get around it."

HRISHI: Well that's one thing that I was trying to figure out is, how do you have a break-in-case-of-emergency script that also still fits within the sequential timeline of the series? Is it only two-thirds of a script and then the last third is built around where and when it was applied?

ELI: It was seven-eighths of a script or it was six-sevenths of a script, because the only things that were kept...well, actually that's a good question. Did we know when we started working on it that it was going to be right after Bartlet's election?

KEVIN: We did.

ELI: We must have.

KEVIN: We did know that.

ELI: So we probably did have a slot in mind.

KEVIN: We did, we just didn't have any serialized elements except for Josh's with Will Bailey was the only thing we had to drop in.

ELI: Yeah, that was added at the very last second, I think just entirely by Aaron.

HRISHI: In my mind, it's already so cemented as this happens in this moment in the order of episodes, that I can't imagine it even sliding, you know, one episode forward or anything like that.

ELI: *West Wing* is so subtly serialized in my mind.

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah...

ELI: Like, there are little things, but ... and they may have been some of the things Aaron adjusted as he went through.

KEVIN: Do you remember the day after it aired? Because the message boards...

ELI: Yes I do, actually.

KEVIN: Message boards were relatively new, right? *Television without Pity*. Aaron, Aaron certainly was – I wouldn't say he was obsessed –

JOSH: Benjamin.

KEVIN: But he followed. Yes, Benjamin. So it was with great amusement that this episode dare air without his name on it. And the first comment of maybe about 500 that day were, "WTF was THAT?" And that was the first thing anybody said.

ELI: And there definitely were comments. He came into the writer's room and he was very nice. That morning, I mean he always came in the morning. [cross talk] And he read a lot of the comments to us and to the whole staff, and there were, and I don't remember if *he* read these or we saw these later, but there definitely were people who cited specific lines Aaron had put in the script and said "Aaron Sorkin would *never* have written it like this."

JOSH: That's fantastic

ELI: And that just happens...

JOSH: That's fantastic.

ELI: ...if you give anybody an excuse to say something is different in some way, they'll attack it mercilessly.

JOSH: And I think it's a terrific episode of *The West Wing* and I don't think it stands out in any negative way...

ELI: There wasn't anything...there wasn't an aberration really, at the end of the day.

HRISHI: So, can you tell me who is to blame or, how do you wanna put it, for the line...

JOSH: Ha!

ELI: Oh, I know that line.

HRISHI: You know what's coming...

JOSH: Oh, I know what's coming now...

KEVIN: We know this is coming...

[West Wing Episode 4.09 excerpt]

C.J.: Growth is strong.

BARTLET: You bet your ass it is, which by the way, I can pat any time I want now. The voters have spoken...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: You wanna buy that back, fellas?

KEVIN: Let's just say that it wouldn't be in a script today, which means...

JOSH: Fair enough

KEVIN: ...it shouldn't have been in a script back then.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Look, this is all on Bartlet.

KEVIN: Eli?

ELI: How would I address this? The actors tended to improvise most of their lines on this show...

[laughter]

[cross talk]

JOSH: This is a breaking story over here!

ELI: It was a little bit like *Curb Your Enthusiasm* – there'd be a very rough outline of the story, and then the actors would really take it from there. So you'd have to ask Martin.

JOSH: [cross talk] That's the kind of thing Martin...it's on him...

HRISHI: So you all—everyone washes their hands [laughing].

ELI: That's the best we can give you.

HRISHI: I'm curious how, when you go back to watch the episode and that line comes up, what is your reaction?

KEVIN: I think we were both looking at the recent, the last couple of days going “Oh my God!” But shows – those types of lines were in every television show. I shouldn’t say every show, that’s not fair.

ELI: I mean, if you look at the Playboy channel....

[cross talk]

JOSH: Cinemax.... Anything on Cinemax after like, 11:30.

ELI: Cinemax after midnight...

KEVIN: You’re right, it wasn’t on every show, certainly. But I notice it, I’m on this show now called *The Resident*, and it was about sexual harassment before it was happening with Weinstein. [cross talk] And the development of that script changed based on the current events hourly. I mean, based on cuts we were changing, things were moving so quickly, in the last few years let alone in the last few weeks. So, there’s no excuse for it.

JOSH: And you’re making him apologize on the podcast?

KEVIN: And I apologize on behalf of Eli. And Martin.

[laughter]

JOSH: On behalf of America, we accept. What were you gonna say?

ELI: Well I was just going to talk about something about one of the other storylines that was kind of an inside joke between Kevin and I.

JOSH: Oh, yes! We love this stuff!

ELI: So when I started working on the show at the beginning of the third season, one of my best friends in New York, a journalist, starting watching the show – hadn’t really watched it before I worked on it. And he called me one day and he said, “You know, I’ve noticed something about the *West Wing* – I may have said this on this podcast before – that you only ever see on *The Brady Bunch*, other than *The West Wing*. Which is that characters go around each others’ backs to do nice things for each other. And so I mentioned that to Kevin, and it became kind of a thing in the writers’ room like “a *Brady Bunch* moment”. And Aaron had done a ton of them and I don’t think I ever said this in front of him or Kevin probably never did, he probably would have rolled over and died. So the Hoynes-Bartlet story in this episode, which is essentially Bartlet --

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right. The main conflict.

ELI: [cross talk] -- is going behind Hoynes’ back to help Hoynes politically...

HRISHI: Right...

ELI: to kind of both so that they could end some of the politicking and to help him, that was like the ultimate *Brady Bunch* moment.

JOSH: Oh, that's good.

ELI: That was the motivation for that storyline.

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: I like that reveal. I love that story.

KEVIN: Oh the pen, the autopen was actually more of a runner too. It was more story I think, in earlier drafts too.

ELI: That's true.

JOSH: Oh, it felt like that was going to pay off or that there was more to that.

KEVIN: Well, the Will Bailey story knocked it out, so....

[laughter]

KEVIN: Dammit.

JOSH: Sorry.

ELI: I mean, the Epcot Center – what were you thinking?

JOSH: Yeah, that's right...

[laughter]

ELI: Why did you improvise that line?

[cross talk]

JOSH: I'm sorry! I was encouraged to say anything that came to ...

ELI: I mean it just, once you said it ... we were powerless to stop it at that point.

KEVIN: We were very excited when you joined the show.

JOSH: Is that true?

KEVIN: Yeah.

JOSH: I'm curious, actually...

KEVIN: Yeah, 'cause we were lobbying for that, a lot of us really wanted that, for a long time.

JOSH: I'm curious, I wrote to John Wells today – we haven't had him on yet – I said to him something I'd never said before, I'm also curious to ask him whether I was foisted on him. Which I kind of always wondered. I never... Nobody ever treated me that way, and certainly not John. But I always wondered, you know, if I was Aaron's boy that he kind of brought in and whether there was any feeling like why didn't we get someone better or why didn't we...

KEVIN: No.

ELI: I will say this, that I had never seen *Sports Night* when I ... 'cause it wasn't out on DVD and I just wasn't really watching TV in the late '90s when I was working in Washington, but I had seen the movie *Bulworth*, and maybe I mentioned this before on this podcast, I can't remember. But one of the really incredibly fortuitous moments in my job interview with Aaron for *The West Wing* was just I was talking about political movies that I liked and political movies that I hated. And I said, you know, I just have to feel like people are responding the way people in politics would. And I said, an example is *Bulworth*, which just has a ridiculous plot but everybody responds exactly as they would and I loved that movie. But that was the only time I had seen your work before I started working at *The West Wing*. And I loved that movie and I loved *you* in that movie. So, I know that – I mean, Kevin was a huge advocate of yours, I was also a huge advocate of yours.

JOSH: I appreciate that.

ELI: But it was just because of that movie...

JOSH: I didn't mean to force you to say nice things about me. I wanted to open the floor to say mean things if you wanted to. But I appreciate that.

ELI: I mean, we were wrong. We were wrong, is our point.

[laughter]

ELI: No, no, I mean...

JOSH: I'm more comfortable with that.

ELI: But Aaron loved you so much. And loved your acting, and I think probably just missed you.

JOSH: It was quite a lifeline he threw to me.

HRISHI: Well, Kevin, as a co-executive producer on the show, this is a huge decision that they're gonna bring in a new actor for six episodes. Is that... I'm curious, I can imagine in the

writers' room it might be sort of a decision that's delivered, "Hey, this is happening, now you have to work with it." But your role is different. Did you have – was it a conversation that you were involved in, or did it come to you just sort of decreed?

KEVIN: You mean as far as the creation of Will Bailey?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Josh's casting, yeah.

KEVIN: Well, Josh's casting, like I said, we always—and Aaron too—was looking for the right moment to drop Josh in. But as far as the characters, Aaron was thinking about the character a lot and he just told us this was going to be the character, his name is gonna be Will Bailey, we're gonna run with that. And then we just ran with that. Eli was on staff then, so it was perfect for somebody like Eli who'd been involved with all these campaigns, so it worked out great. And that's usually how it's done.

HRISHI: Yeah.

KEVIN: You know, he doesn't consult me. He'll talk about actors sometimes. But if I would have said I didn't like somebody and he loved them, my opinion wouldn't have mattered at all.

HRISHI: What about in an episode like this, where you two have co-written somebody like, for Karen Croft, the casting of Lucinda Jenny. Is that something that you were involved in?

ELI: No, I didn't go to any casting sessions for this episode. I didn't start doing that until the next season. But, I happened to know ... my guess is it was probably Tommy Schlamme who picked Lucinda Jenny for this episode. And it turned out that she was a close contender for the part played by Kathleen York, of Toby's ex-wife.

KEVIN: Oh, makes sense.

ELI: And I can say that Richard Schiff just *loved* acting with her. And this episode in particular...

KEVIN: I can tell.

ELI: Well you can tell on the screen, but I remember also at the time, they had this whole chemistry that was not on the page at all.

[West Wing Episode 4.09 excerpt]

TOBY: Oh, we'll find something, I don't know what.

KAREN: Oh, you don't have to do that.

TOBY: Can't be Museum Studies. God forbid this Senate falls out of the mix on that.

KAREN: I made a lot of enemies on the Hill. You don't owe me.

TOBY: *We asked you to fight a losing...yes, we owe you.*

[end excerpt]

KEVIN: Just the way it looked, for sure.

HRISHI: I felt like Toby had a crush on Karen Croft. Little crush.

KEVIN: Yeah, yeah, I took that too.

JOSH: She also seemed to want him to come to the game. I think it might've been mutual.

ELI: Well, it's interesting because, and again it just sounds like we're gushing over everything. But this cast was so good, *so good*, that really at the end of the day, this was a pretty dry storyline about how a job wasn't Senate confirmable. I mean, there's a little more to it than that and there's a little bit of blood in it, but Richard and Lucinda Jenny, they just made it into something. And the other actors, you know, John Spencer of course, they just put blood in it where there wasn't really blood on the page. And that's an incredible thing. It doesn't happen often.

HRISHI: I had a stray observation that is completely off-topic.

JOSH: Bring it!

HRISHI: Um—

JOSH: We do that.

HRISHI: Just thinking about people who are in this episode, this is an episode that has Stockard Channing in it, so this is one of the examples where the opening titles are different.

HRISHI: Because her...

ELI: Right.

HRISHI: ...opening credit is there. I've always meant to check out how the timing works of that, you know, because the theme is obviously the same length, but there's an extra person in there. But one thing I noticed this time around is that the typography on her name is different than everyone else's.

JOSH: [laughing] Are you serious?!

HRISHI: Yeah, and it's not just that the letters are a little less letter-spaced and a little more compressed.

JOSH: Tell them what you majored in...

HRISHI: Art.

KEVIN: Oh, okay.

JOSH: Didn't you have a design...

HRISHI: Yeah, graphic design.

JOSH: I just wanna say, this is why you would notice this kind of thing...

HRISHI: Right. But even on Netflix where I watched the episode, the titles ... there's a crispness to all the other names, as if the names have been superimposed on the image, except for Stockard Channing's where the type is actually part of the image. It's just something to look out for the next time you see it.

JOSH: I'm going to go back and look at it.

HRISHI: Like they pulled in the whole frame that had her name in it and so, as opposed to, it's a raw frame and then the titles were added later.

ELI: Huh. Very interesting.

KEVIN: That is. Boy, you're good. [laughter]

ELI: You caught us. You caught our little typographical gag.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: As this episode was shooting, what were you guys doing?

KEVIN: Probably...

JOSH: Working the next one?

KEVIN: I was probably off working on my pilot. 'Cause I left ... 'cause "*Angel Maintenance*" we were going to write together. We broke the story and then you ended up writing it with Aaron.

ELI: Right, that's right.

KEVIN: Because I went off to write and produce my first pilot.

JOSH: What was it?

KEVIN: It was called "*Better Days*." And as a pilot, it saw better days [laughs] because it never aired.

[laughter]

ELI: Very good script.

KEVIN: Thank you. And my music supervisor was Eli Attie. He actually dropped all the music in. It was actually a really good show. I'm very proud of it.

JOSH: That's awesome. 'Cause I was curious. The cold open in this episode has a...it's almost... at first I didn't even notice because I've become so used to it ... it has a *monster* walk-and-talk.

ELI: Yeah.

KEVIN: Trivia question! Who directed that teaser? Tommy Schlamme.

ELI: Really?

KEVIN: Because a director dropped out and Tommy directed the teaser. And then he got busy or they were just scrambling...

JOSH: So Chris Misiano took over.

KEVIN: And Chris took over.

ELI: I did not remember that.

JOSH: I'm glad you said that, because I was going to give Chris a shout-out. So I guess it's a Tommy shout-out. It's *unbelievable*!

ELI: It's pretty great, it's pretty great.

JOSH: I had to go back and watch it two more times to make sure I was seeing what I thought I was seeing. Because it starts in the portico, it kind of – I don't even understand. I was like, how'd he get in!? It kind of sneaks back inside not through...I don't even know how he gets back in the building, then he's out there, everywhere. The amount of movement, and...

ELI: It's funny because another thing, and I was saying this to Kevin, I think yesterday, another thing I noticed watching the episode again after all these years is that – and especially it's true in the opening but it's true throughout – there's a kind of a real goofy, jocular tone, especially to Bartlet.

JOSH: Throughout. He's very funny in this episode.

ELI: He's very funny and he's very buoyant, and he's giving everybody a bit of a hard time.

JOSH: He's feeling good.

ELI: And I think some of that is Aaron doing a dialogue polish. Because he had our dialogue and he sort of riffed on our dialogue. So I think it just gave it a quality that for me feels a little different than a normal episode, just tonally. Like, if he saw a line of ours, he would have fun with that line and do something else with it maybe, you know what I mean? So it's almost like a riff on a melody.

HRISHI: Right. As opposed to just letting the melody play straight.

ELI: Right. [cross talk] And it works well...

HRISHI: And because he's getting in there, everything has a little more oomph or flourish to it than it might otherwise.

ELI: Yeah. And I think it plays as that kind of post-victory jubilation...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Absolutely.

JOSH: [cross talk] Oh, yeah, it does. He just feels good. But I'm curious in that cold open, or in the teaser, did you guys conceptualize that as a big walk-and-talk or is that something...

KEVIN: I think so, yeah, it was on the page.

JOSH: It seems like it's written very, very well to that.

ELI: And I think there's a thing about, you know, we were writing this script and working on the show and writers on the show but such fans of the show. And it was our chance to write one of these big walk-and-talks! How could we pass that up?

KEVIN: Yeah, we get to drive his car.

ELI: Exactly right. Exactly right. Right down the driveway.

HRISHI: My wife when we were watching this episode, she asked about the president's jocular tone in the Situation Room. She said, "How is it that he's cracking jokes while they're trying to figure out the situation with the Ayatollah's son?" And for me, I didn't find it at all jarring, his tone, because I thought, well that's because before the meeting in the Situation Room has even started, he already knows what the outcome is.

JOSH: Right. That's how I took it.

HRISHI: He's already ...

JOSH: [cross talk] I can joke because I've already made my decision; I'm going to let you all have your say, but obviously, this kid's going to get his operation.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah.

ELI: I love though, and I don't know where this came from, and I did go to the set a few times here and there while this was filming just for fun, though we were, I'm sure, just in the office working on the next episodes. But I loved the moment where Bartlet slams the book down.

KEVIN: Yeah.

ELI: Because that hasn't been his tone in the episode, and one of the great things about that character to me over time was the anger...that you didn't see that often, and it's obviously right there.

JOSH: Yeah, it's usually right underneath, it doesn't usually bubble over.

ELI: Yeah. And that wasn't on the page. I mean, it may have been a suggestion by a director, it may have been Martin's instinct...but it was just such a surprise... and he has to go outside, take a moment.

KEVIN: [cross talk] Cool off, yeah, it's great.

ELI: Now if you're interested, a couple of the political storylines, I can tell you what they're based on...

HRISHI: Yeah...

JOSH: Yeah, I'm curious about the whole, and this episode posits essentially a 48-month campaign cycle. Which I found interesting, and the whole thing of locking up precinct captains, that's a credible...people start to maneuver...

ELI: Absolutely it is. Absolutely it is. In fact, I think people used to say that the sort of myth is that running for president is a one-and-a-half/two-year job, it's really a four-year job. I think now you'd say it's a six-year job. So you've gotta be ready to hit the ground running when the dust settles...even before the dust settles on the previous election. But...so...that Hoynes storyline is very faintly autobiographical to me in this sense: When I first got to Washington and started working in Washington politics, I worked for Dick Gephardt, who was a congressman from St. Louis. He was leader of the House Democrats.

JOSH: I remember that Aaron supported him because I got a phone call at one point, and I covered the thing and I said to my wife, [whispering] "I have to donate \$2,000 to Dick Gephardt."

[laughter]

ELI: Well it's funny because, because, Aaron – this is one of the things I really love about him – he really liked Dick Gephardt, and I was involved in that campaign, I actually wrote some speeches. I wrote his announcement speech that year for that campaign and some other speeches. And Aaron, who has no interest in dialing for dollars and is the last person you could imagine calling people on the phone and asking them for money...he would rather write all those checks himself and land himself in federal prison...

[laughter]

JOSH: [cross talk] That's actually so true. It is amazing that he did that...

ELI: He would just say, I'll write 80 \$2,000 checks, just tell me how many. It was a crazy thing. He probably got a hundred percent response rate because people were so shocked. Right after I worked for Gephardt for two years and then I ended up in the Clinton White House when Clinton ran for re-election. And immediately after Clinton won re-election, the jockeying for 2000 started.

JOSH: So what shape did that take? What were the first moves?

ELI: [cross talk] I'll give you one example...

HRISHI: You were not speechwriting for Al Gore yet, at that time?

ELI: No. That's right, that's right. I had met Al Gore a couple times, I was on the White House staff, on Clinton's staff, and I was a communications aide. I wrote some speeches and radio addresses, but I wasn't even a full-time speechwriter. But I'd been Gephardt's speechwriter. And a bunch of people were looking at running in 2000. John Kerry, maybe even Bob Kerry at that point, Howard Dean, I think was looking at it. So, the Gore people approached me about a job to be Gore's chief speechwriter...

HRISHI: With the 2000 run in mind.

ELI: Absolutely. And the Gephardt staff got wind of it somehow. And I got a call from Dick Gephardt and he said, "Would you come to my office and have coffee with me?" And I went down...and I really wanted the Gore job, because I thought to myself, "If Gore's the nominee, it means the party will essentially have united behind the incumbent vice president." And if anybody else is the nominee, they'll only get there by attacking Clinton and Gore. So it would be very divisive of the party, and I was already in the White House! And even though I loved Gephardt and I was closer to him ideologically than I felt I was to Gore at that moment, I just thought this is the way it's gonna go. This is the way it has to go.

JOSH: Hmmm. I can see how this might have informed things further down the line on our show.

ELI: For sure. There's a lot of this in Season 5 and a lot of it in your storyline...

JOSH: Spoiler alert! The audience still likes me!

ELI: So, I sat down with Gephardt, and I kept expecting him to say, "I know you're talking to Al Gore..." Or I don't know, he called me down maybe like the day after my job interview with Al Gore. And it was just coffee and a chat, and at the end of the conversation he said, "You know I think I'm gonna run in 2000, and I want you to be with me. It's not because you're good at what you do, it's because of your beliefs." And it just killed me, because it was such a soft sell. And then I went and I took the Gore job, and was actually pretty estranged from a lot ... not from

Gephardt himself, he was always delightful any time I saw him ... but the staff kind of froze me out for awhile. It was a press story that a Gephardt guy had gone to work for Gore...it wasn't about me, I was unknown but...

JOSH: And was that a painful time for you?

ELI: Very much so. Very much so. So, it's just funny because it's a line that went into this script verbatim and survived. And it's a real line that was said to me and had a lot of emotional impact on me. And when I watched it yesterday in the show I thought it was so stale and stilted.

[West Wing Episode 4.09 Excerpt]

TRIPLEHORN: I'd like you to be for me Josh. Not because you're good at what you do. Because of your beliefs.

[end excerpt]

ELI: Didn't sound like something a real person would say.

[Josh laughs]

JOSH: Oh. I did not feel that way watching that.

JOSH/HRISHI: [cross talk] That's interesting.

ELI: But this idea of just being torn and trying to do the honorable thing and that messy aspect of it. That was a bit personal.

HRISHI: Was there any parallel between this plot line of locking up the precinct captains? I got the sense a little bit that Gore felt like he had to run away a little bit from Clinton because of his scandals.

ELI: Yeah. That came later.

HRISHI: So after the '96 election, was there a sense that Bill Clinton was already jockeying for Al Gore in four years?

ELI: Yes. And there already were complaints. For example, Gore would have all his pet projects heavily funded in the federal budget. He would get to use Air Force 2 to fly around the country. And there's references that no audience member would get to "budget roll-outs."

[West Wing Episode 4.09 Excerpt]

JOSH: And the DPC sent me this list of his budget rollouts, and it's for last year. I need all four.

[end excerpt]

ELI: That was just, you know, what we used to call “chuffah.” But the idea is...

HRISHI: What would you call it?

ELI: Chuffah. Just things to go into the scenes that would give it sort of verisimilitude.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah, as a viewer I spent a lot of time going, “Do I have to know what that means?”

HRISHI: That’s how I felt about “CODEL.”

JOSH: Do I need to pause and Google?

HRISHI: CODEL was, I think is borderline. Because I think it was intended as chuffah, but it also felt like, I was like, I need to know what that means. Otherwise, I don’t understand this part of the plot. Like, I think that was part of what made that runner a little bit hard to follow, because I had to go look up what a CODEL was.

ELI: Yeah.

KEVIN: Yes.

ELI: Yes. There’s a couple things in there that are hard to follow. I think Kevin always rightly thought the Hawaii thing was very confusing.

KEVIN: Yeah. But, you know what, so many times – I think one of the lessons we learned from him—from Aaron was--that he never wanted the characters to slow down for the audience. He just wanted them to be smart.

JOSH: Right. It’s one of the refreshing things about *The West Wing*.

KEVIN: Exactly. And he just goes, those guys know what they’re talking about, and we can emotionally and instinctively follow them 80 to 90 percent of the time. There’s just certain things we just don’t know ...

JOSH: And there’s something exhilarating about that. It’s exhilarating to feel half a step behind rather than three steps ahead of most TV.

KEVIN: Exactly.

ELI: Yeah, that’s true. In any other TV show, Donna in her fifth year of working in the White House would say, “What’s a CODEL?” Well, Donna....

[laughter]

ELI: But in answer to that other question, Clinton got those accusations.

KEVIN: He did.

ELI: Because in an open field, when there's no incumbent, half the Democratic Senate at least was thinking, in the beginning, "maybe I'll run, I'm the greatest person on the face of the Earth. Why wouldn't I run?" And the idea that Gore would just have it handed to him or have all these institutional advantages, which of course he's gonna have, upset a lot of people. And antagonized them when Clinton still needed their votes. But anyway.

HRISHI: How about the line...

[West Wing Episode 4.09 excerpt]

JOSH: It's just -- we got him on the ticket by convincing him it wasn't his turn.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I was curious about that line because, you know, from what we'd seen in Season 2, there was a hostility even about the idea of approaching Hoynes to be on the ticket, you know. Hoynes had said, "That should be me accepting the nomination." Was that part of the Clinton-Gore story as well?

ELI: Absolutely, in this sense: So in 1988, Al Gore won a bunch of states and was 38 years old, 39 years old. Dick Gephardt was probably 39 years old and won a bunch of states, including Iowa. And these guys looked at George H.W. Bush's soaring popularity after the first Gulf War, and decided, this is not the year, I'm gonna sit this one out.

HRISHI: Let Dukakis be the sacrificial lamb?

ELI: Well, let Bill Clinton be the sacrificial lamb.

HRISHI: Oh, this is ...

ELI: This is in '92. And it became a truism in politics, I think, that you should never calculate what your year is gonna be. You should always run. So anybody, that's kind of what Toby says, although it comes across differently.

JOSH: Right.

ELI: You know, just that if you think you wanna be president, run. You don't know what's gonna happen. Somebody could have a heart attack. The mood of the country could change. There could be a financial collapse. You know, and then if you wait, someone else will get in there for eight years. So I think there were a lot of people in that time who didn't run at different points, Bill Bradley was another one in '92, because they just thought, well four years from now. So it's always a bad idea to wait. And there's also arguments about seniority sometimes, you know, like this isn't your time.

HRISHI: Right, like Andrew Cuomo not running when Hillary Clinton was gonna run.

ELI: Right, sure.

HRISHI: I didn't realize this, but since the Civil War, there haven't been two successive Democratic presidential election winners. The only time we've had two Democratic presidents back-to-back has been when one has died in office.

ELI: Really?

HRISHI: That idea of an incumbent Democratic vice president...

ELI: Well, it's funny. I didn't know *that* statistic, but having worked for an incumbent vice president who ran for president, I was very aware that I think before H.W. Bush, the last incumbent vice president to be elected president was, I think, Martin van Buren. And you know there's so much I could say about the vice presidency, that's for a later season, but we always used to refer to Gore as vice president as "famous but unknown." You know, you're sort of there clapping behind the president, but you really...

JOSH: You're a bit of a cypher...

ELI: Yeah, you're not an Alpha. You're just the guy in the corner.

HRISHI: I always love that line from this episode.

[West Wing Episode 4.09 excerpt]

HOYNES: Last time I checked, my constitutional obligation was to have a pulse.

[end excerpt]

ELI: It's true.

JOSH: Such a great line.

KEVIN: Eli had so many great vice president lines. Like, the job is as exciting as a bucket of warm spit? That was one of them...

ELI: Well, yes, there's some former vice president from the 1800s who said it wasn't worth...Gore used to recite this list of those kind of anecdotes and one was "It's not worth a bucket of warm spit." And then Gore would...and these were for very mainstream audiences...he'd say "historians believe that quote was cleaned up quite a bit." And that would be a big laugh.

[BREAK]

KEVIN: Did you ever tell them the story about Election Night when you had to run up and tap on Gore's window when he was getting ready to concede?

ELI: I dunno...

KEVIN: But he was on the way to give his speech.

ELI: Yeah. Basically on Election Night in 2000, I was with Gore...but not always in the room with him but around him...in the Loew's Hotel in Nashville, which was our headquarters hotel. And obviously we were awarded the state of Florida by the networks, then it was pulled back, then it was given to Bush. And at that moment, we lost the presidency. And I had a concession speech that I had drafted, and I hadn't shown it to Gore ... that's kind of a superstition that you just have one in your back pocket. I went upstairs, I saw a little door open at one point, and an aide handed Gore a little scrap of paper and he said, "Is this the number?" And they nodded, and the door closed. It was obviously Bush's number. He called at some point and conceded. We took a long vice presidential motorcade to the War Memorial, which was where our sort of big event was, win or lose. And there's a huge crowd, it's outdoors, I think it was even raining. I'm in a van with a guy named Carter Eskew, who was kind of the David Axelrod of that campaign, the main strategist. In the front passenger seat is Bill Daley, whose brother was the mayor of Chicago, and who was our kind of gruff, no-nonsense campaign chairman. And he seemed like he had his head in his hands and he was crying. And suddenly...it turned out he was on his cell phone and he was cupping it really close to his head. And suddenly his head snapped around and he's looking at Carter, he's not looking at me, and he says, "With 99.9% of the vote counted in Florida, we're only 600 votes behind. What do we do?" And Carter Eskew is really like a message and communications guy, he doesn't know. But he sort of half-looks to me and he says, "I guess we change the language in the concession speech so it's not legally binding?" Which means *nothing*. And just at that very moment, the motorcade stops. We're at the War Memorial. But we're like a hundred cars back from Gore. And so the door springs open, and I've got what at the time was a portable laptop, which would be like carrying a safe. This giant thing. So I run as fast as I can run, past the beginning of the motorcade into the holding room at the War Memorial. And Al Gore's just standing there totally by himself. I mean there's a couple of Secret Service, but he's just in the middle of this room getting his thoughts together. Bill Daley and Carter Eskew, they're running too, and they catch up and they pull him into a little back room. Within a few minutes, I guess they learn there's an automatic recount the next day in Florida, and the election's not over.

JOSH: Ain't over.

ELI: So Gore comes back out, and at that point there's maybe ten of us standing around this table. And he calls Bush back from that table and withdraws his concession. And it was the weirdest...I only heard that side of the conversation.

JOSH: And that was a person-to-person thing. What *do* you say?

ELI: Well, I only heard one side of the conversation and I don't remember all of it, and it's been in books. But, I remember two lines as if it were yesterday. One was Gore saying after a bit of a pause, Bush saying something to him, "Your little brother doesn't get to make that decision."

And I imagine Bush had said to him, “Well, Jeb says I’m fine in Florida” or something like that. And then he said to Bush, “You don’t have to be snippy about it.” So I just remember those two things.

JOSH: It’s just the presidency.

ELI: And then, Gore hangs up the phone, and we’re all standing around this table, and we all just burst into hysteric laughter. Because it’s basically like you’re being told “the patient’s dead...oh, no, the patient’s still alive!”

JOSH: I’ve got a heartbeat!

ELI: We just couldn’t believe it. It was just this crazy night. And while that was happening...

KEVIN: So, 3,000 miles

ELI: Across the country in Burbank, in Building 146...

KEVIN: We’re watching the returns, and Aaron’s writing the episode and we’re watching, probably like 6 o’clock our time, something like that. And Tommy bursts in, and they’d just called Florida for Gore. And Tommy walks in, and I’ll never forget it, he bursts in to Aaron’s office and he goes, “It’s a mandate!”

JOSH: [laughter]

KEVIN: And that’s what the mindset was. Great night. And then you just watched it slip away, not unlike last November, a year ago November, when Trump...as you start to feel it slip away. And that was all happening. And who knew that a year later you’d be sitting in the same office in show business.

ELI: Writing the line “It’s a mandate!”

[laughter]

JOSH: Oh, electoral politics.

HRISHI: I got sweaty ... I already knew how that story turned out and I got sweaty listening to it.

KEVIN: It’s a great story.

ELI: It’s crazy. I mean I will say that the other interesting aspect of that was that Gore was going to still go out on stage and say something himself. And we had to convince him that maybe he shouldn’t be the person to do that. We didn’t even know what he was gonna say! The other weird thing about that Election Night for me was that, so I had written a victory speech, and had lots of policy people weigh in, because it’s kind of a governing document. When you say “we’re gonna reform...we’re gonna turn around public education!”, you know, those little sentences are parsed very carefully and that was a real important speech. I did a concession speech that I

showed to nobody and just kept in my back pocket. And then I was passing through our headquarters in Nashville maybe five or six days before Election Day, one of the main strategists for the campaign pulled me aside and said, “Hey, we’re looking at polling and there’s a scenario here where we actually win the Electoral College but lose the popular vote. Do a version of a speech, don’t show it to me, don’t show it to anybody. Just do a version where we’ve won the election but lost the popular vote. Just keep it in your back pocket, don’t tell anybody, just have it. Just in case.” So I did that, I didn’t show it to anybody. A different strategist pulled me aside the next day and said, “There’s a scenario here where it’s actually, basically an electoral tie, and it comes down to absentee ballots in a single state. Just do a speech, don’t show it to anybody, where it’s just too close to call on election night...”

JOSH: How many back pockets do you have, Eli?!

ELI: Yeah, I was wearing overalls, so it was great. Cargo pants and a cargo shirt. And a cargo hat.

JOSH: No, vest.

ELI: Exactly right. Adorable outfit. No, but Election Day itself, after--or maybe before--working on the victory speech with Gore. Gore pulled me aside and said, “I think we might lose Tennessee. Win the election but lose Tennessee. Do a different, special version of the speech...”

JOSH: Don’t tell anyone...

ELI: “That just reaches out to Tennessee and how I wanna reach out, and win them back” because it was his home state and he’d been the Senator. And the great irony is that I had five speeches and we didn’t get to use any of them. And then I had to write a sixth one, literally with ten people standing over me like two seconds before.

JOSH: Here’s the scenario *nobody* anticipated.

ELI: Yeah. It was crazy. It was crazy.

KEVIN: You should do like a *Letters* where you just have five actors read the different concessions.

ELI: I have them. No one’s ever seen them.

JOSH: *The Gore Monologues*.

HRISHI: That’s gnarly. That’s a Gore-y story.

JOSH: Yeah it is.

KEVIN: Did you say “Gore-y story?”

HRISHI: I did.

KEVIN: That's great.

JOSH: We don't back off puns on this show.

KEVIN: Should we tell a Johnnie Walker Blue story?

JOSH: Now you have to!

ELI: Oh my God. It's one of my favorites!

KEVIN: I don't know where this fits in, but it may just be ...

JOSH: [cross talk] That's good stuff, Johnnie Walker Blue...Expensive!

KEVIN: Johnnie Walker Blue is great...

HRISHI: Is this a *Bartlet For America*?

KEVIN: *Bartlet for America*. So when I was on *Arli\$\$*, and it was HBO, and there was always vendors saying, "Hey, mention our product online." You probably know where this is going. So when I went to *The West Wing*, the same vendor, he goes "Hey I have all this stuff, I have the great scotch," because you could mention booze on HBO, but network TV you couldn't. And I would say to the guy, you know, I can't do it, it's network television.

HRISHI: You can't *mention* booze?!

KEVIN: You can't mention...

JOSH: First moment of the Pilot *West Wing*.

KEVIN: Do you mention...is it Dewar's?

HRISHI: It's Dewar's.

[West Wing Episode 1.01 excerpt]

Bartender: Two Absolut martinis up, another Dewar's, rocks.

[end excerpt]

KEVIN: But Aaron liked specifics. And it made it real, right? And he could always win because the show was a hit, he'd win those arguments whenever the network said, you shouldn't put this in, he'd go, well I need it for the character. And it never came back. So, he writes *Bartlet for America*, and he writes the speech about waxing poetic about scotch. And I go, "Damn."

ELI: By the way, listeners, Johnnie Walker Blue is about \$300 a bottle.

[laughter]

KEVIN: When I was on HBO, they would just send the product afterwards and people would just share, we'd share it with all the departments. So I go into Aaron's office and I said, Aaron, you did this speech and you're usually pretty specific, but if you mention Johnnie Walker Blue, there's a chance that we can get it ...

JOSH: [cross talk] and have a hell of a party

KEVIN:...like Eli said, \$300 a bottle. And Aaron did not drink hard liquor. And he said, fine, we'll put it in. And sure enough he puts it in, but I said, "Before you do that, let me check with the vendor to make sure that's okay." So I call the guy up – his name is Kevin – and I say, "Kevin, good news, there's a way to mention Johnnie Walker Blue on *The West Wing*." Probably the biggest show on network television at the time. I said, "But before you talk to the Johnnie Walker people, the character, John Spencer's character, he's gonna drink so much he's gonna black out." And he goes, "Aww damn, really?" And I go, "I'm sorry, but you know, he talks, he waxes, you read this speech...it's the most beautiful speech about scotch that's ever been written. And it's Aaron Sorkin." So he hangs up. Fifteen minutes later the phone rings, he goes "Do it!" [laughter] So, it gets in.

JOSH: I love that they had that conversation and they were like, yeah.

KEVIN: They were smart! They knew it was a really great ad. So a couple weeks later, we get this truck comes over. And these cases of Johnnie Walker Blue are rolled in.

HRISHI: Cases, plural.

KEVIN: Cases ... there were a couple of cases, right?

ELI: Yeah, I think it was two.

KEVIN: It was two. Plural. But close enough. And, of course, Aaron was like, "This is great! Thank you." And we gave it to all the department heads, shared the bounty. And the cast of course. So about a week later, a letter goes out from Warner Brothers to every television show, saying if you ever mention a product and then get something else...the product...in return, you'll be fired off the show. And we changed the policy at Warner Brothers based on that one in particular.

JOSH: Interesting. That's a great story. That's wild.

HRISHI: Is that because Warner Brothers...

JOSH: No, Warner Brothers is happy to mention [expletive] if they've got money coming in...

KEVIN: [laughs] Exactly.

JOSH: They just don't want anybody getting free booze for it.

KEVIN: Exactly.

ELI: I do have a memory, though, of being in Kevin's office, with...maybe with Allison Janney and maybe another actor ...

KEVIN: Yes, it was Allison

ELI: ... and we were drinking this stuff like it was cheap white wine.

JOSH: It's so good too.

ELI: It was like those gallon jugs of wine at an art opening. We had so much Johnnie Walker Blue, I mean, we could have taken a bath in it. And this is, like, very expensive scotch.

KEVIN: [cross talk] People would drop in...

ELI: And I was getting tired of it. It was really obscene.

KEVIN: It was like a tent in *M*A*S*H*. People would just come over... "What did you guys get?"

HRISHI: For Josh's sake, now that we've discussed it this much on this podcast, can you call Kevin back up again and have him send a case to Josh?

KEVIN: I will, um ...

JOSH: The only time I've had Johnnie Walker Blue is one of those gifting suites, where I didn't even get to take it home with me. It was like you could drink it there. And I remember I came home and I was like, in a bathrobe and drunk. And my wife was like, "What happened at that gifting suite?!" "They drove me there, they gave me things, they put me in a bathrobe, they gave me Johnnie Walker Blue."

ELI: It's funny because, you know, *The West Wing* was a busy place and a stressful place at times and even though we all loved being there, it was a hard job at times. One of my great ... I kind of became a whiskey drinker at *The West Wing*. I'd had some before, but Kevin really introduced me to sort of finer scotch. And Kevin and I, and another writer...

KEVIN: ...Paul Redford

ELI: Paul Redford. We would have a little bit of scotch, kind of almost daily.

JOSH: Really?!

ELI: I mean I know this sounds like we worked on a TV show in 1937, it's like, "Yeah we would write about, you know..."

JOSH: ...this explains the ass-slapping lines.

ELI: Yeah, I was just going to refer back to that, and then I almost stopped myself because it's so inappropriate. You know, and drinking in the office, but we would have a little drink in the office at the end of the day.

KEVIN: That was a hard year. That was a very...

ELI: Yeah, the third season was a very complicated year. I was just going to say, I was saying to Kevin earlier today, we should almost have done this podcast while sipping whiskey.

KEVIN: That's what we should have done.

ELI: But I have an unopened bottle of Johnnie Walker Blue at home, so next time I think we should all – we should try the drinking version...

JOSH: Well you'll certainly both be invited back.

KEVIN: *Drunk West Wing History.*

ELI: No, I'll bring it back. We'll do a drunk version.

JOSH: That will be nice!

HRISHI: Well I'm a tee-totaler, so I'd be no fun.

KEVIN: Designated driver!

ELI: More for us!

JOSH: We'll bring you Yoo-Hoo or Schweppes Bitter Lemon.

[laughter]

KEVIN: I think the last time I drank Johnnie Walker Blue, a bottle went down.

HRISHI: One of my favorite parts of this episode is a little blip: the Margaret Museum.

[West Wing Episode 4.09 excerpt]

LEO: It's the little note Margaret just passed me.

BARTLET: The Iranians, they've taken to the streets.

LEO: Perfect.

BARTLET: That goes in the Margaret museum.

[end excerpt]

ELI: Oh, yeah.

KEVIN: That wasn't, was that...

ELI: I think that must have been Aaron, that doesn't ring a bell.

KEVIN: He may have a Margaret Museum that we don't know about.

HRISHI: I feel like we've been keeping one on the podcast.

JOSH: That's true, we've got to get her on the show.

HRISHI: She has such great ...

ELI: I was thinking also when I watched it, and I don't remember whose line it was, I bet it was Kevin's line, the moment where Ginger says, "My job's not Senate-confirmable."

HRISHI: ...Is too close.

ELI: Right she's too close...

JOSH: Oh, I love that...

ELI: ...and then she says "My job's not Senate-confirmable."

[West Wing Episode 4.09 excerpt]

TOBY: Would you... I need a list of sub-cabinet vacancies that aren't Senate-confirmable.

GINGER: Mine's not....

[end excerpt]

ELI: It's something you don't see on too many TV shows, where the sort of tertiary characters get good lines. [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] That's so true. That's so true.

ELI: They don't have a lot of screen time, but they get moments. Margaret got a lot of them.

HRISHI: Yes.

KEVIN: I'll bet dollars to donuts it was Aaron's line.

HRISHI: Yeah. And then it gets a call-back.

KEVIN: Yes.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Ginger beat you to that joke.

ELI: He's so...Richard is so good in that storyline, I think.

[West Wing Episode 4.09 excerpt]

TOBY: Inspector General of the Railroad Retirement Board. Director of the Institute of Museum Studies.

LEO: My job's not.

TOBY: Ginger beat you to that joke, and Karen lost her seat because...

[end excerpt]

ELI: Looking at it, he's reciting lists of Senate-confirmable positions, but there's a lot of emotion in it. He's feeling the emotion.

JOSH: I think you guys wrote well *for* everybody. And is that when you're writing it, did you feel pressure to write in the mold of Aaron, or just the show was what it was and the characters you knew so well by then that you were writing for the...

KEVIN: I think on *Sports Night*, the biggest mistake you could make was to try to imitate Aaron's voice. And it was so new, everyone wanted to write like that, and we learned very early. I wrote a spec, it was called "*Jujubees*," that Bill Wrubel and Matt Tarses still make fun of to this day. And that was the last time that I ever tried to ape anything that Aaron did. But with a drama, you really ... the smartest thing we could do, and John would say this to me, don't try to be like Aaron, just try to write a strong, dramatic story.

JOSH: Mmhmm.

KEVIN: And if you find the moments, it was great to have characters—excuse me, actors like you guys—the characters, because then you do hear their voices in your head, but I learned very early on not to do it because you would fail. But, I learned so much about dialogue from him. Never in a million years would I suggest that I was anywhere in his zip code. But there's just tricks that you would learn, just in exposition and how you would start a scene, all that stuff. But beware, don't try to be like him.

HRISHI: Can you tell us what maybe one example of one of those tricks that you learned in terms of exposition or something like that?

KEVIN: I knew you were gonna ask that. Certainly we talked about “allergic to clichés”...

HRISHI: Yeah.

KEVIN: So if you look at or watch a *West Wing*, you'll see Aaron's own clichés. There was one I love about “we can't walk and chew waffles at the same time” or something like that. I know it had to do with waffles, which is just a great word. Aaron just finds certain words like “waffles.”

[West Wing Episode 2.11 Excerpt]

LEO: We can't put a forkful of waffles in our mouth without coughing up the ball.

[end excerpt]

KEVIN: Exposition on its feet is certainly everything that Tommy and Aaron talked about. Starting scenes late, which is something you should do anyway when writing. But he always did those things where he didn't...he ended up with a walking start to his scenes, so the first four lines would be about nothing, but it was really just kind of ramping up to what ... it was almost like he was jogging and then he was gonna run, which was kinda fun and just kind of set the tone.

HRISHI: I definitely noticed that in this episode, we have lines before we ever get to the AP reporter in the teaser. There's a preceding question from C.J., and it almost feels...and while watching I was like, oh we're getting warmed up. And then she gets to the question about what's going to be the legislative priority.

KEVIN: Yes, exactly.

ELI: Meanwhile, I was just trying to copy him.

[laughter]

ELI: I definitely was! 'Cause I didn't have anywhere near the level of craft or experience that Kevin had, so I was just trying to copy him.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: But you also had expertise in that very thing, in trying to ape the voice of your boss.

ELI: That's true, that's perhaps true. And a lot of acronyms and that kind of stuff that I could throw around and sound clever.

HRISHI: Eli, you had mentioned that there were a lot of different titles, working titles. I think you shared a few with me before it ever got to “*Swiss Diplomacy*.”

ELI: Yes, in fact, hold on a sec, one of them, which was very close, was "*The Swiss Diplomatic Mission*." And another one, hang on a second ...

KEVIN: "*Mrs. Wiberforce*."

[laughter]

ELI: Oh here we go. The other title here, so one is "*The Swiss Diplomatic Mission*," and then another, which I don't understand at all and it's handwritten onto this draft is "*Flight Plans*." What does that mean? And it's absolutely ... because the next line is C.J. saying, "Mr. President, what's your first legislative priority for your second term?" So it's absolutely this script...

HRISHI: Flight plan maybe for the kid coming to...

KEVIN: ...for "*Angel Maintenance*"?

ELI: Ohhh, flight plans for the kid coming from ... that's exactly what it is. That's exactly what it is.

KEVIN: "*Swiss Diplomacy*" is a great title. I always liked that title.

JOSH: Certainly the winner out of these three.

KEVIN: Yeah.

[laughter]

KEVIN: You know, Eli and I only wrote that one script together.

ELI: Actually, we wrote a second *West Wing* script together...

KEVIN: ...Oh we did, that's right.

ELI: "*Guns, Not Butter*."

KEVIN: That's right.

ELI: Which is another one this season that Aaron rewrote and...yeah.

HRISHI: One thing I noticed in this episode is that Toby and I have the same view of camping. Which is that...

JOSH: --he's not a big fan.

[West Wing Episode 4.09 excerpt]

TOBY: I like hotels. I like a good concierge.

[end excerpt]

KEVIN: I'm with you and Toby.

HRISHI: He likes a concierge.

ELI: I think we know the person involved with this script who likes a nice hotel. It's not Kevin and it's not myself. Well, we do too, but, you know.

JOSH: Aaron likes to live in a nice hotel.

ELI: It's true.

HRISHI: I also noticed that in this episode, Dulé Hill's hair is shorter than it's ever been.

JOSH: I noticed that too!

HRISHI: Did you? Yeah. Sometimes there are haircuts and things that might change subtly, but this felt like a new, a new low.

JOSH: And along with it, I thought, a new intimacy. The way he sits in the Oval Office as the President is signing and writing his thank-you notes. There's kind of a more casual...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Well the fact that he's sitting at all in the Oval Office.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yes. Yeah. It surprised me. Mmmhmm.

HRISHI: I don't know that we've seen him sit in the Oval Office at all.

JOSH: It suggested more casual relationship and a closer relationship between the two, which I like.

HRISHI: Then one of the Sam-Will scenes, Will says:

[West Wing Episode 4.09 excerpt]

WILL: The Republicans are starting their starter, so you've gotta match up.

[end excerpt]

KEVIN: That is a good line.

JOSH: There's a good golf line too.

[West Wing Episode 4.09 excerpt]

LEO: Are we sure about Japan? I mean one of these days they're gonna find the fairway, right?

[end excerpt]

KEVIN: He used a lot of sports ... you know he loved sports, he watched ESPN all the time, but he used a lot of sports metaphors. Which was great for me.

[laughter]

HRISHI: I was going to say...: I assumed that was you. This episode especially spoke to me too because in that scene when Charlie's sitting next to the Resolute Desk, the President calls him "Watson," and then in the next scene they talk about pet names...

JOSH: [cross talk] His dog's name!

HRISHI: They talk about pets with human names! My dog is named Watson.

JOSH: Oh that's right. Mrs. Wilberforce's moment is actually kind of sad when we realize later that it was the housekeeper.

HRISHI: That it is a human?

JOSH: Well, yeah, well that he was feeling good about his memory and not losing it, we know this has been an ongoing thing that he's concerned about, and then he finds out from Abby that in fact it was a human being.

ELI: Yeah, it was a very...that scene, which I certainly didn't write, was really interesting between him and his wife. I think Kevin wrote that scene.

JOSH: That's a good scene.

KEVIN: I did, yeah, with some great burnishing by Mr. Sorkin, yeah.

ELI: But it was complicated and he's kind of half-listening to her and half not.

KEVIN: Yeah, it came down to her, which was great, and she was wonderful. I like that scene.

HRISHI: Going back to the runner, Donna, in the final version of this, Donna gets called "Gracie" and "Ethel Mertz."

JOSH: And Lulu.

HRISHI: And "Lulu." She gets three references to 50s television.

ELI: [cross talk] Someone in this episode is called "Arnold," is that by the president? Doesn't he call C.J. "Arnold?"

HRISHI: Yes, in reference to the AP reporter that she is voicing...

ELI: Ohhh, I didn't even get that.

JOSH: You wrote it!: "That went right over my head the minute I wrote it."

ELI: Right over my head.

[laughter]

ELI: Another thing I realized watching it is that Toby's storyline about the woman who loses her seat and can't get a job at the National Park Service ... running the National Park Service ... was actually inspired by two different things I read in the New York Times. One of them was a staggeringly great profile of a guy named Harold Ickes, who worked in the Clinton White House and was the Deputy Chief of Staff in Clinton's first term. He had raised a ton of money, he was deeply involved in the Clinton's fundraising effort in '96, even though he worked in the White House. And when Clinton got in trouble for campaign finance abuses, Harold was really kind of in trouble, even though he ended up later testifying in front of Congress and really facing them down...he was a really badass guy. But he took a lot of bullets for Clinton, and then he learned on the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*...he really wanted to be Clinton's second-term Chief of Staff...and he learned that Erskine Bowles was gonna be Chief of Staff and that he had been told he could pick his own deputies. So he learned from the newspaper that he was fired...

JOSH: Out of a job.

ELI: and then he decided that the job he wanted was Director of the National Park Service. And he went to Bill Clinton in the Oval Office and said, "This is what I want." And Clinton said to him I just signed the new Parks bill and it's Senate-confirmable, and you're not Senate-confirmable.

JOSH: Because of the scandal...

ELI: Because of all the bullets he took for Clinton. And they ended up becoming friends again later, but it was this very heartbreaking story about a guy who just gave everything and then didn't really get what he should've gotten. That was the inspiration for that. But the Christ analogy at the end are pretty much verbatim the words of Mario Cuomo when he lost the governorship. The current Cuomo's father, when he was Governor of New York. He lost re-election, and in some obscure *New York Times* piece that I just happened to read and was really struck by, basically said, you know, "The whole symbol of my religion ended in crucifixion and condemnation, and that wasn't a measure of the experience, it's just how it ended."

[laughter]

JOSH: That's incredible.

ELI: It's in living, it's in campaigning that you make your mark. I mean that was literally a quote of his, and I just never forgot it.

HRISHI: The Karen Croft storyline is so inspiring because of how little bitter—there's no bitterness there.

JOSH: How graceful she is.

HRISHI: Yeah, how gracious she is in defeat. That she calls it “educational,” but doesn't hold a grudge about the experience, doesn't hold a grudge against Toby or the administration, it's really a wonderful character that we get a glimpse of. I understand why she might have been in the running for a larger part, because she

ELI: She was great.

HRISHI: ...That plot is great and she really delivers it great.

ELI: It was an interesting thing because I was so new to...brand new, really, to screenwriting. And one of the things I learned from Kevin and from Aaron was there's so many ways to tell a story, right? You can tell a story with sequential events, you know, like first he gets the gun, then he goes to shoot the guy. But the way that story was designed, which you see in a lot of things, but was very much a revelation to me at the time is that pretty much it's Leo, Toby, and Karen Croft...they all pretty much knew all the information at the beginning of the story, and the story is just telling bits of it to the audience slowly. That he wants her to get this job, she walked a plank for us, actually, Toby's the one who asked her to walk the plank. What's interesting about it are all things they already know.

HRISHI: Right.

ELI: And as a rookie, I found that really fun that you could tell stories so many different ways.

KEVIN: I liked seeing Toby get it wrong ... it wasn't through any fault of his, but actually feeling bad. Because usually stuff rolls off his back and is part of the job. But he really took that one hard.

JOSH: Yeah.

KEVIN: And I just liked “The Schiff's” performance there and seeing that color from his character which I hadn't really seen.

JOSH: That was fantastic.

HRISHI: Thank you so much.

JOSH: Thank you for joining us.

ELI: Very fun, a great pleasure.

KEVIN: We're so honored to be here. Seriously.

JOSH: You wanna talk briefly at all, you can touch a little bit on what you're working on now.

ELI: Kevin and I, after working for two years together on *The West Wing* and staying good friends ever since...

KEVIN: ...Good friends.

ELI: And always talked and always hung out, we finally got to work together again last year on a wonderful one-season, one short season TV show on Fox called *Pitched* that's about the first female Major League baseball player. Kevin ran the show, he was insane to hire me because I don't know anything about baseball or sports at all. And it was total role-reversal from our *West Wing* days...

KEVIN: It was really different.

ELI: ...-Where I knew the content and he was just trying to tell a story.

KEVIN: We wanted him on the show I'm working on now which is *The Resident*, with everything he brings to a television show, he just elevates it. And I love being on *The Resident* now, and Eli you're doing your own...

JOSH: What are you working on?

ELI: A show called *For the People* which is a legal show...

JOSH: Shondaland!

ELI: Exactly, produced by Shonda Rhimes.

JOSH: We work in the same land!

ELI: We work in the same land.

JOSH: In the same realm.

HRISHI: Anna Deveare Smith.

ELI: Anna Deveare Smith.

HRISHI: You can follow our guests. Eli is @EliAttie, Kevin is @KevinFalls.

KEVIN: There's nothing to follow. Just keep moving.

[laughter]

ELI: Lead us, don't follow us.

JOSH: You know, I got an email from Aaron last night asking, since I have access to Twitter and he does not, that I respond to an actor about some...

ELI: I saw that! Sterling Brown!

JOSH: I'm like his cyber secretary.

ELI: Aaron said in an interview that he wants to reboot *The West Wing* with Sterling Brown as the president. Which I think would be a great idea.

JOSH: Sterling Brown tweeted out ... it's so cute, Aaron's Luddite tendencies. He said, "I don't even know how he tweeted at me, I'm not on Twitter!" I said, "No, he just wrote something publicly with your name in it."

ELI: Well I'm sure you guys know and talked about this, or maybe not but I'd be surprised, that I think the very initial offer of the role of the president which was only supposed to be six episodes a year...

HRISHI: Sidney Poitier.

ELI: Sidney Poitier. Yeah. So...

JOSH: He wants to write for an African-American president.

ELI: I mean, we've had one but it still now, again, it feels so ahead of the culture.

KEVIN: Yeah.

HRISHI: If you'd like to discuss this episode with us or your fellow *West Wing Weekly* listeners, you can leave a comment for us on our website, thewestwingweekly.com or on our Facebook page. You can find us on Twitter or on Instagram. Josh is @JoshMalina, I'm @HrishiHirway, and the show's @WestWingWeekly.

JOSH: The *West Wing Weekly* is a proud member of Radiotopia, a luscious carnival of story-driven podcasts that you can access at Radiotopia.FM.

HRISHI: It's a project of PRX.

JOSH: Yes it is.

HRISHI: And it's made possible by listeners like you. This episode was produced by Josh and myself, with help from Margaret Miller and Zach McNees.

JOSH: This will be the last sober recording of *The West Wing Weekly*. Thanks for joining us.

[laughter]

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

ELI and KEVIN: What's next?

[Outro Music]