

The West Wing Weekly
4.19: "Angel Maintenance"
Guest: Fmr. Acting Secretary of the Air Force Eric Fanning

[Intro Music]

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

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Today we're talking about Angel Maintenance. It's episode 19 from Season 4.

JOSH: The story's by Eli Attie and Kevin Falls, our dear, dear, friends. The teleplay is by Eli Attie and Aaron Sorkin. This episode was directed by Jessica Yu, Oscar winner, and it first aired on April 2nd, 2003.

HRISHI: It's the return of Jessica Yu, who also directed "Somebody's Going to Emergency, Somebody's Going to Jail."

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: In this episode, the President's on his way home from Manila aboard Air Force One along with some of the staff and the White House press corps when a light for the landing gear fails to go off, which could mean that the light doesn't work or it could mean something worse. And C.J. has to keep the reporters in the dark so they don't create a national security risk by reporting it. Back in the White House, Josh is working on a bill to clean up the Chesapeake with a moderate Republican congressman. And Congressman Mark Richardson returns and Toby has to deal with him because a Congressional Black Caucus is threatening to vote against a Kundu peacekeeping bill.

JOSH: No mention in that synopsis of Manila's being a... [cross talk] an anagram...

HRISHI: [cross talk] An anagram?

JOSH: ...for Malina. (laughs) Oh thank you, you're on it. As is... animal.

HRISHI: Mmhm, mmhm.

JOSH: I want to be your spirit Malina, people.

HRISHI: There's an episode of This American Life where David Sedaris reads his essay The Youth In Asia, where he talks about, all about, pets? And he talks about his parents having a dog named Malina.

JOSH: Really?

HRISHI: Do you know that essay? It's in Me Talk Pretty One Day.

JOSH: No... I'll look for it.

HRISHI: I'll send you the link. Coming up we're going to be joined by Eric Fanning, he's going to make his return to the podcast. When Eric was first a guest back when we were on Season 2, he was Secretary of the Army under President Obama. Before he held that post, he served as the undersecretary of the Air Force as well as the Air Force's Chief Management Officer before becoming its Acting Secretary. So we're going to ask him about some of the Air Force One stuff in this episode.

JOSH: I like in the "previously on The West Wing," they always used that to just, in case you're jumping in, this is your first episode, or you didn't watch the last one, here's what you need to know. Except, for this episode, you need to know that the President has a plane.

HRISHI: (laughs)

JOSH: The "previously" is just kind of a clip of Air Force One from another episode.

HRISHI: And we get the information, that, you know, the White House Press Corps rides on the plane with the President.

JOSH: True.

HRISHI: Before we get into this episode, I just want to acknowledge a couple of goofs on my part in the last episode. I mentioned penmanship, and how it seems Sam's handwriting, in relation to Toby's handwriting, on the note. But, of course, somehow I forgot two of the most famous instances of handwriting in the show, from Leo, "Let Bartlet Be Bartlet" and the napkin that says "Bartlet for America."

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: That was dumb. And then, also, we talked a little bit about why Amy said "We aren't in the dorms anymore," and many people have reminded me that Amy dated Josh's roommate in college.

JOSH: Somebody also got a shoutout on Twitter, or a correct-out, saying that, often, graduate law students live in dorms.

HRISHI: Well... often? I-- I don't-- I'm not sure about often.

JOSH: No, I'm sure that that's what the person said.

HRISHI: Oh, oh, oh.

JOSH: I'm not speaking to the accuracy of it, I'm just telling you what someone said.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah. [cross talk] We could do a whole second...

HRISHI: [cross talk] Well maybe sometimes it happens.

HRISHI: But. Anyways. But yeah. I buy the theory that they're talking about, when... she dated his roommate, Chris, and I forgot.

JOSH: There are a lot of people also seemed to be, were obsessed, with our discussion of Abby's having said that she babysat for Amy and people believing that they didn't literally mean babysitting, that it meant like, taking care of her in the halls of...

HRISHI: Hrm?

JOSH: ... of the White House. I don't know, it's weird. It's weird! ... Watching what people get up to on the boards.

HRISHI: Well, I... mea culpa, on these two. Anyway.

JOSH: Yeah. I notice people correcting goofs that we've made but I always feel like, you know, we could do like twenty minutes on every podcast correcting what we said on the one before.

HRISHI: True

JOSH: Look, we're just two guys, people. Just sit there in your rightness.

HRISHI: (Laughs) We do a bonus episode every week, here's some things we screwed up.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Alright some backstory on Angel Maintenance. We reached out to Kevin Falls and Eli Attie, who co-wrote the story here. And they gave us a lot of great insight.

JOSH: Fantastic stuff.

HRISHI: Starting with the fact that this was Kevin Falls's last script, because he was going off to write his own pilot and leaving the West Wing and this was originally Eli's first solo screenplay. You know, as you mentioned, Josh, the teleplay is Aaron and Eli but originally Eli wrote the whole thing and then Aaron did his version.

JOSH: I like this tidbit, I believe Eli told us that, Aaron was so upset at the impending departure of Kevin that they were ginger about mentioning the pilot Kevin was working on and they would just say he was in the other room, weaving baskets.

HRISHI: (laughs) Weaving baskets...

JOSH: So they started to refer to his pilot as "Wicker."

HRISHI: That's great.

JOSH: Which I thought was very funny.

HRISHI: So, some background on the plot here, or the main part of the story. Kevin told us that NBC started to worry a little bit about West Wing's ratings, that they were slipping a little bit from the first three seasons.

JOSH: This where you start to get the argument, that I make in my twitter bio, that I ruined the West Wing.

HRISHI: (laughs) Right, right.

JOSH: The ratings are starting to decline.

HRISHI: So Jeff Zucker, from NBC, pitched the idea that, um, maybe Air Force One could crash on the runway with the President on board. And then Kevin wrote, "it became a running joke in the room, but I kept thinking about it, and came up with the landing gear light coming on, and them having to scramble a jet to see if the wheel was down." So that was cool. And then, Eli pointed out, though, that's a great transformation, to take this kind of, over the top Con Air meets Air Force -- whatever...

JOSH: It's kind of a ludicrous note to give to this series.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's true.

JOSH: Have you seen this show?

HRISHI: But yeah, they, it's a great digestion of that suggestion and then turn it into this.

JOSH: Yeah I actually love this episode. And one of the elements that surprised me is how suspenseful, in a way, it is. I mean, you know, not only having seen it before, but the fact that the star of the show and other very important characters are on it, that nothing too bad is going to happen, yet I still found it suspenseful. It was interesting both to see how a crisis like this, or a potential crisis, would be dealt with, vis-a-vis the press, and somehow there's still to me a tension that runs throughout.

HRISHI: Yeah. Alright, let's get into the actual episode. About half of the episode, or maybe more, is on Air Force One, and everybody's in this episode, but I think because of that specific location, and how much happens there, this episode almost feels like a bottle episode. It's not, but it kind of feels like one.

JOSH: Yeah, that's pretty self-contained, much of it, on that, and it is a little almost claustrophobic working in the tube of Air Force One that they've built on a soundstage. It's closed-quarters and a lotta time spent together with the same group of people as you shoot.

HRISHI: Oh yeah, tell me about the set. Is it to scale? Does it look and feel like a 747?

JOSH: Yeah. It does. You know, I couldn't tell you, I guess, how accurate it is. But it's essentially a big long tube, maybe it's a little bit bigger to accommodate cameras. I'm not sure. I think that's how the Oval Office set worked. You know, they sort of pulled it out, made it a little bit larger to accommodate the necessity of filming. But, yeah, it's essentially a tube sitting on this stage, I've done this a lot. It's funny, also, watching this, it made me laugh; in a recent Scandal episode, spoiler alert, if you haven't watched, if you're not up to date, my character and Jeff Perry's character - just spoke to Jeff - Cyrus Beene and David Rosen, are on Air Force Two, the Vice President's plane, and there is trouble afoot. And it appears that the plane, in fact, might crash.

HRISHI: (chuckles)

JOSH: So this was my... I realize Angel Maintenance was my dry run for pretending to see green-screened F-16s out the window...

HRISHI: (laughs)

JOSH: ... of a 747, because it happens in both series.

HRISHI: Wow. Good timing.

JOSH: Yeah. Watching this, I had very strong memories. I worked a lot with Martin. We had a couple of scenes together and worked in the section that is the President's personal cabin. I don't remember exactly when this was filmed, but it first aired, we said, April, and I remember that it was close on the heels...it may have been while we were filming this episode, I want to say that it was...that the Shock and Awe campaign, in Iraq (that's the US and the UK and allies) began. And I remember it was very much weighing on everyone's minds, and certainly on Martin's, and I remember having a lot of serious and somber discussions with him when we were working.

HRISHI: Ugh. Making a show about politics while something like that is just beginning...

JOSH: Yes, it was pretty intense. And Martin, being who he is, and his politics, and I have to say - he was right on, in terms of his reservations for what would ensue, what might follow, and how this would perhaps not be the brief, immediate success that some people predicted. I think also, some of my response to the seriousness of what was happening in the real world, was to play the prank that we talked about last week (laughs) on Allison. This is the episode where she answers the phone on Air Force One --

HRISHI: Mmhm.

JOSH: -- and, I think when we were talking to A.J. I was reminiscing about having put Vaseline on the phone on Air Force One and it ended up getting on her wig and while it was briefly funny, I did get lightly chided for (laughs) for causing a delay.

HRISHI: Delay Hill.

JOSH: Delay Hill.

HRISHI: The specter of the Iraq war manifests in other ways, too. The whole subplot with Mark Richardson and the Congressional Black Caucus, is also directly inspired by real world events. Eli told us that he was inspired for this subplot by Congressman Charles Rangel. He's a congressman from New York and he introduced a bill to bring back the draft. At the end of 2002, he wrote an Op-Ed in the New York Times outlining it and then the following week introduced the actual legislation in Congress. And like Mark Richardson, he did it to try and bring a little more equality to the people who are doing the fighting. There's the part that Mark Richardson talks about, which is that, minorities serve in an outsized capacity in the military. And Charles Rangel also talked about the idea that if more lawmakers had children being sent to war, then they might not be so reckless when it came time to authorizing wars, or authorizing military action, because they'd have more at stake personally.

JOSH: Yeah. I love that scene and I really like that subplot and Thom Barry as Richardson is very, very good. I also had in my head, I was playing my own cool Sorkin jams game as I watched it, I feel like: the Creedence Clearwater Revival song "Fortunate Son," was like playing in my head as I watched.

[Music: Creedence Clearwater Revival, "Fortunate Son"]

HRISHI: Thom Barry's so great. I love the Mark Richardson character every time he shows up. This is the third time he's appeared, and I think he's great. You know, we learn some new things about him this time. Previous episodes when he's appeared, we didn't know what his district was, and I really liked this detail that they've introduced, that he's from Brooklyn. And not only is he from Brooklyn, he represents the district that Toby is from. It just gives such so much depth to their relationship.

JOSH: I particularly liked his line...

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

RICHARDSON: Toby, I'm opposing an intervention in Kundu because I'm still waiting for an intervention in Brooklyn.

TOBY: Yeah.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Great line of dialogue. And also, Eli pointed something out that I didn't realize, which is, that Rangel also made a move to reintroduce legislation that would bring back the draft in 2015. So this seems to be a recurring theme of his, and it's a pretty good way to make a trenchant point.

HRISHI: Yeah. But of course, as Leo says, the draft isn't coming back.

JOSH: Yeah, here's a quote from an article about that, this last effort in 2015, Rangel said, "I've long called for reinstating the military draft simply because I believe strongly that a national decision to go to war must also include a broad commitment to share its burdens.

HRISHI: Yeah. Ok, so back into the plot of our episode. I think I really like - it's just a little detail - but I like when the President is letting Will and C.J. know about what is going on with the landing gear light, he asks Charlie to stay in the room too.

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

C.J.: Good evening, Mr. President.

BARTLET: Charlie, stay in here, would you?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's come up before, that Charlie is a person who carries sensitive information all the time, stuff that not even the rest of the staff knows, because he needs to be able to do his job with the President. I like seeing that, where the President explicitly lets him in on top secret info.

JOSH: Yeah, well, it's nice to see the development, even if it's in the small increments of the characters and the trust being given to them by their quote-unquote superiors. We see Josh, at Donna's request, entrust her with a little more responsibility in this episode. It's good character development without being an enormous amount...an incredible leap and it's done credibly. I was also struck by how sort of quickly and cavalierly they decide to lie to the Press Corps.

HRISHI: Yeah! I was thinking about that line when Oliver Babish is questioning C.J., you know, way back in *The Fall's Gonna Kill You*, and he asked her...

[West Wing Episode 2.20 excerpt]

OLIVER: Have you ever lied to about the President's health? What is your answer?

C.J.: Many, many times.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: The show really makes clear how often C.J.'s job is to mislead or obfuscate or straight-up lie to the press.

JOSH: Yeah. She even admits it later in the episode and doesn't expect to get much pushback from them. She basically says...

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

C.J.: Come on, the maintenance truck was an honest effort to avoid panic. Of course you were gonna know the truth at the end of the incident.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Now it is the Press Corps and the President, and the Press Corps and Sarah Sanders are so adversarial. Here they're almost, there's more of a symbiotic relationship. C.J. even gets a tip from one of the reporters, that she's heard from one of her stringers that there's been a friendly fire mishap, there'd been friendly fire deaths early on in the episode. It's a different relationship than what I imagine today.

HRISHI: You don't imagine the press thanking Sarah Huckabee Sanders at the end, just like a chorus of, "Thanks Sarah, Thanks Sarah..."

JOSH: No, no I don't. Well, although, the flipside to that, also is that I think in this episode the Press Corps could have been understandably miffed at having been lied to as they were going through this event and I think there would be some follow up pieces about how cavalierly C.J. lied to them.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: She sort of has it coming. I don't know if she should really be allowed to get off quite so easily.

HRISHI: But everyone's like, "Whoa, but she's so charming..."

JOSH: That's right. She is. And look at that cute wig.

HRISHI: (laughs) I'm still blown away by the wig part of it.

JOSH: That's funny. I was, you know...I knew. But it was for her to share.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And it is the case on many, many things, I think. Start looking through wig goggles now at other TV and you'll see I think many, many, many, many, many, many of the women are wigged. It's just a much more reasonable way to get a woman camera ready.

HRISHI: I mean I definitely notice wigs often on shows but it's usually because they aren't well done. Like it's not believable.

JOSH: Right. Yeah. No, when they're expensive pieces and applied and fit by professionals who are very good at what they do, they look fantastic. And there's action going on with the men, too. I didn't have it during the West Wing, but I think I've talked about it before, on Scandal, they spend a fair amount of time drawing in and blowing stuff on to my bald spot. (laughs) You know. We get a lot of help, too, the men do.

HRISHI: (laughs) Quick shout out to my favorite wig show, The Americans.

JOSH: Mmm, yes. That's a multi-, multi-wigs per episode.

HRISHI: (laughs) I like right after that scene, with the President and C.J. and Charlie and Will, C.J. says...this is so stupid, I'm sorry, but C.J. says...

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

C.J.: Can you give me some tarmac jargon? What would be happening on the ground that the plane can't land?

WILL: We shouldn't give them too many details. Let's say, you know, a runway incursion...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And all I could think of was a mid-90's rock band called Tarmac Jargon and their first album, Runway Incursion.

JOSH: Runway Incursion! I like it.

HRISHI: (laughs)

JOSH: But is there a tee shirt in it?

HRISHI: Oh! They fell off after... their first album was their best album.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: And they never got to a tee shirt stage.

JOSH: While we're still talking about hair, I have weird hair bump in this episode. There's something going on. If you look at the left lobe of my skull, there's a weird hair bump going on. But it kinda worked for me, because Will is not at his best and he's slightly off and he's nervous and he's scared and I don't know, I was moved by my misshapen head.

HRISHI: (laughs) I thought when you said that, I thought you meant like you bumped on something related to hair in this episode.

JOSH: I see. Well I did but it was a bump.

HRISHI: It was a bump. That's great. I think your performance in this episode was great.

JOSH: Thanks, Hrishi.

HRISHI: Watching the episode the second time through, I started to notice Will's dread of flying, even though it's revealed later on in the episode now, going through, just as you're walking

down the hallway. You can see this baseline level of stress tugging at him. Your performance is richer on rewatching because now you can go back and see what's actually underneath what was motivating some of that strain.

JOSH: Yeah, I appreciate that, actually, because I watched it with the same eye. Once this episode started, I remembered which one it was and what the story was and I wanted to see whether...you know, one of those things you never want to do is play results. Will is scared, so like, layer that in. He may not talk about it yet, but it's there. So I wanted to see whether I played it in a way that I felt was credible rather than trying to broadcast and...I was pleased with... there's a great...we go down the aisle and we catch a little bit of Will as we then curve in and hear the President talking to somebody else and I felt there was a subtle little touch of something seems slightly...Will doesn't seem like he's having a great time. But it felt like it wasn't painted too heavily.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. There's this part I was thinking of early on when Will's walking down the hallway to deliver some news and you just see in your face a little...there's more going on there than just the piece of news he has to deliver. Also, the overall story about Will's fear of flying and your depiction of it, reminded me a little bit of that episode in Sports Night season one, where you go on the hunting trip. In "The Hungry and the Hunted," Jeremy has to go and do this story about hunting and he does it and he has this adverse reaction and then it comes out that he's actually, that he collapsed because he's really against hunting. And Isaac asks him...

[Sports Night Episode 1.03 The Hungry and the Hunted excerpt]

ISAAC: What the hell happened out there?

JEREMY: It was nothing.

DANA: It was not nothing.

JEREMY: I got sick, I threw up.

DANA: They took you to the hospital. You passed out.

JEREMY: I told them they didn't have to take me-

DANA: Bob Shoemaker said you were sweating and hyperventilating.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He's just trying to get his job done, and it felt similar here. There's this sort of like, this duty overcomes personal fears or personal feelings.

JOSH: Well, they're all about duty.

HRISHI: (laughs) They're all about duty. Not only are you duty bound here - Will, it turns out, is part of the Air Force Reserve.

JOSH: Right? What a great little nugget.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: He's Air Force Reserve and not a huge fan of flying. And Eli gave us a little insight into why he cooked that up.

HRISHI: That's right! He cribbed that from Stanley Kubrick. Stanley Kubrick was afraid of flying, and he sent us this quote, from Stanley Kubrick, "Call it enlightened cowardice, if you like. I'm afraid of airplanes. I've been able to avoid flying for some time, but I suppose if I had to, I would. Perhaps it's a case of a little knowledge being a dangerous thing. At one time, I had a pilot's license, and 160 hours of solo time on a single-engine light aircraft. Unfortunately, all that seemed to do was make me mistrust large airplanes."

JOSH: Hm, interesting. It's worth noting, also, this ongoing group email that we have going among you, Eli, Kevin, and I, includes a tremendous amount of Kevin and Eli saying how great the other one is. It's very cute.

HRISHI: (laughs) It's really cute.

JOSH: They're constantly saying nice things about each other. "Well, no, it really was all Eli"; "Well, Kevin taught me everything I know." It is so sweet, there is a ...West Wing is infused, even in subtle ways, with this kind of incredible workplace appreciation among colleagues.

HRISHI: And then you get to be like Toby.

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

JOSH: You don't have to be guilty about it.

TOBY: No I meant thank god that I sent Will in my place.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I love that little... (Laughs) That was really funny. Don't feel guilty.

HRISHI: Toby, on the show, does remind me of you in real life sometimes.

JOSH: Ah, me as well. I like to take the piss outta people. And I'm the... yeah... I can be the fly in the ointment? Is that it? Something like that.

HRISHI: There was a time when Will in this episode reminded me of you, which I guess is not that big of a stretch. But the part where Will has to fake some enthusiasm for the flowers and lights on the side of the plane?

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

WILL: Hey, listen everybody! The Colonel just told us we're about to go by something incredible. And you hardly ever get to see this....

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I remember I had a frequent experience of reading a scene, and one of those was, that third episode of Sports Night, reading Hungry and the Hunted. But it was always a delight to get a new Sports Night script or West Wing script and see what ... I get to say this on TV! I get to shoot this scene! And that was one of those things that's just a gift to an actor. Like, I loved that scene where I'm trying to herd the Press Corps over and distract them from the F16 that's going to come up on the other side of the plane. It's just, that was a gift, that scene.

HRISHI: I think because of this, trying to muster up some enthusiasm, where no enthusiasm actually exists, reminded me so much of you - I started to think about what it would take to perform that. You know, you'd have to sell someone trying to sell enthusiasm, but not doing it well.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: But you have to do it well. It's a tricky needle to thread.

JOSH: Well you have to do it, Will, anyway.

HRISHI: (laughs)

JOSH: Anyway. I really liked the moment, too, where C.J. and Will wish each other luck simultaneously.

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

C.J.: Ok, it's time, it's a minute away.

WILL: (same time) Good luck.

C.J.: (same time) Good luck.

WILL: Did you say good luck to me?

C.J.: Yeah!

WILL: You're doing it.

C.J.: No, you have to!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah, and then, "look at my face."

JOSH: Yeah, I had a lot of fun working with Allison and with Martin on this episode.

HRISHI: I think the scenes with the President, between the President and Will, are really nice. Like I feel like they've...this is a great episode to show how Will has kind of settled in, has found his own place on the staff. You know, and his own dynamic with everyone, including the President. Ever since the conversation about "why is an American life worth more to me than a Kundunese life?" things have changed and developed between the two of them. And this kind of like one on one scene really shows that. The fact that Will is able to get the President to laugh out loud despite all of his frustrations, and the fact that he has the chutzpah to be sarcastic in the face of the President's frustration is great.

JOSH: Right, it shows where their relationship has come. Yeah, I loved the way Martin played that sweet, genuine laugh.

HRISHI: Yeah the laugh was great. And also, one of the things that I believe Eli mentioned in our email correspondence was the desire to have this ongoing crisis on Air Force One, and to have the President be the coolest guy on board. I thought that was great. Before I read that Eli had even said that, I had written down how impressed I was when...is it the pilot that he keeps talking to?

HRISHI: Uh huh.

JOSH: Who keeps coming in to brief him? When the pilot keeps coming in to brief him, in that first moment where he tells him that something's up, he's telling the President, you know, "this indicator light is on but it might just be the indicator light," and as he continues to brief him, the President just keeps saying, "and then what happens?"

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

COLONEL: They pull up alongside, try to get a visual read.

BARTLET: And then what happens.

COLONEL: If we don't have our wheels?

BARTLET: Yeah.

COLONEL: There are a number of options at that point.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I can't imagine not saying, what would those options be? The President at a certain point just says, "oh, you'll continue to brief me, right?" He is a cool cat.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I like how he's depicted in this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah, there's a time to say, "What's next?" and this wasn't it yet.

JOSH: That's right. We'll get to that when we get to it.

HRISHI: Alright, let's go to the White House now...

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: ...where Josh is trying to clean up the Chesapeake with this moderate Republican.

JOSH: Congressman Tom Landis, played by Matt McCoy.

HRISHI: And first of all, Chesapeake does not mean Great Shellfish Bay, it turns out.

JOSH: Oh, is that right? (Laughs) I trusted him!

HRISHI: So, Terrence Malick made that movie, The New World, did you see that? Colin Farrell...

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: ...and Jamestown, and stuff...and Terrence Malick is so exacting, and wanted things to be so authentic, that he brought in a linguist to help with the language that the Native Americans in Jamestown...what they would actually be saying, what they would be speaking. And it was a language that had mostly been forgotten or changed over the years. It was a language that had mostly been forgotten, they call it now Virginian Algonquin, and he did all this research and reconstructed 17th century translations and put the language back together. According to this linguist, whose name is Blair Rudes, Chesapeake means Great Water or it might have been the name of a village by the mouth of the Chesapeake. I found this in a Washington Post article from 2006 by Pulitzer Prize winner David Fahrenthold.

JOSH: How about that. It's funny than Aaron and Eli would tee that up and then not bother having the correct answer.

HRISHI: Well, I think - so, we didn't find this out until this research didn't happen until after this episode was filmed.

JOSH: Oh, I see what you're saying. Right. It wouldn't have been accessible to them.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: So never mind.

HRISHI: Anyway, so, Josh is working on this pollution bill, trying to clean things up with the Republican, which almost seems astonishing to begin with, that there would be...

JOSH: ...common ground to be found here.

HRISHI: Yeah. And that you would find a Republican on the side of environmental clean up at all, you know. In an era, especially now, of Donald Trump dismantling the EPA, it's hard to look back and think, oh yeah...

JOSH: But well, now, yeah, completely unthinkable that this scene would be taking place.

HRISHI: Yeah. But this whole story has a tragic tone because nobody wants to see Landis come out ahead on this. Neither the Democrats nor Republicans. Republicans, because they're against the legislation, and Democrats, because he's someone in a vulnerable district and he could be targeted for defeat.

JOSH: Right, we can't hand this guy a win even though it's also a win for us.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: On one level. I do like that scene with George Wyner, I wanna give him a shoutout. George Wyner, as Congressman Simmel. Gregory Jbara as Congressman Segal. Gregory Jbara, very well known musical actor, in addition to the other stuff he's done. He was in *Billy Elliot*, the musical *Dirty Rotten Scoundrels*, *Chicago*, *Victor/Victoria*, *Damn Yankees*. Very well known musical performer.

HRISHI: That's why I'm not as familiar with his work.

JOSH: Correct.

HRISHI: Ok. (laughs)

JOSH: And George Wyner is - they're both terrific actors - George Wyner in particular, one of those faces that you've just, you've seen a million times. You look at his IMDB page, he has 190 credits and he was in the movie *Fletch Lives*. Which was the sequel to *Fletch*, the Chevy Chase movie, my first job on a real movie. I was a PA, a production assistant, and I remember him being particularly nice to me. It's the kind of thing you just remember for the rest of your life.

HRISHI: I remember him most from *Spaceballs*.

[Spaceballs: The Excerpt]

PREPARE SHIP! Prepare ship for Ludicrous Speed. Fasten all seat belts, seal all ...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Ah, yes. Sure.

HRISHI: And these two congressmen, Simmel and Segal, are dead set against it. And they refer to the President's reelection as a lonely landslide. Because the rest of the party wasn't able to benefit from his victory. That term, lonely landslide, is a real one. Eli mentioned it was used for the Clinton reelection in 1996, but the lonely landslide was also a term used for Nixon's reelection back in 1972.

JOSH: '72.

HRISHI: Where he just crushed, I mean, he had, he won 520 electoral votes that year. But, despite that, Democrats actually gained seats in the Senate.

JOSH: Mmhm.

HRISHI: Ed and Larry are great in this episode.

JOSH: Yes, and Ed gets some. No? Yeah, Ed. Ed gets a big old kiss.

HRISHI: The President gets Larry's name right. So, you know, I almost feel like it's as good as a kiss from C.J.

JOSH: Win win. It's a big episode for both of them, yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah. Without any confusion or jokes, he says, "Larry, will you go tell them?" I feel like so often their job is to looking things up and then throwing out terrible ideas.

JOSH: (laughs) Right. I do like the C.J. kisses Ed moment. With both the beaming smile from Peter James Smith, and Duffy's reaction.

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

LARRY: I was the one who said it first.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: They're very funny. It's a great moment.

HRISHI: I want those two to be stunt casted in more things together.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. The world needs more of both of those actors. Together.

HRISHI: You mentioned the Donna stuff with Josh. That might be my favorite part of this whole episode. It's a little thing, but I love the idea that Donna wants to take on more responsibility and then is immediately given the chance, and then she does it.

JOSH: Mmhm.

HRISHI: I mean, if the West Wing is an idealistic show, that, to me, is sort of the best form of its idealism. And it also just, in terms of character development - that's a really great moment for that character. You know? And it just spells the potential future Donna could have.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree, and I also like that Eli and Aaron choose not to put too fine a point on it. In most other series, Josh would say, "Remember, you asked, you wanted more responsibility, now I'm giving it to you."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: There's a spoon fed nature to most TV writing. And here they just let the moment happen.

HRISHI: Yeah. Another thing that they don't spoon feed to us is how devastating the friendly fire deaths are. After having had the two part episode, you know, with Red Haven's On Fire and The California 47th, where all this military action goes wrong and they have to deal with those consequences - the friendly fire deaths, to me, especially at a political level, seems like an even bigger threat to the political situation. You know, back in The California 47th, earlier in this season, there was this level of bluff-calling from the Kundunese, saying...

[West Wing Episode 4.16 excerpt]

THOMAS: He's betting the first dead American soldier on television and he'll lose.

LEO: Our stomach for it?

THOMAS: Yes!

LEO: Thomas, Robbie. You've gotta find a way of getting word to Nzele that in 23 hours, he's going to lose that bet.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: This part of the episode, that it's friendly fire, just seems so much more catastrophic. You know, before, it was terrorists who drove trucks into the base and blew them up. There is an enemy that you can point to and you can even say, you know, these are the people who are fighting. But here these are just casualties of war.

JOSH: As Leo says at one point: "It was a computer error, Toby."

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: It's just this little glitch. There are two little technical glitches in the show. One threatens the Air Force One, and ends with everybody hugging and kissing, and the other results in five deaths by friendly fire.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And the one thing that really hit me in this episode emotionally was...I was touched by Toby's request to stay in the room as the congressman called the family of one of the dead.

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

RICHARDSON: I'm going to call Sergeant Doakes's family now.

TOBY: I'd like to stay, if you don't mind.

RICHARDSON: No. But stay standing.

TOBY: Yeah.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It immediately brought tears to my eyes.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I wrote down four words. Knock out...“emotional knock out punch.” Really, really gave me chills and made me tear up.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's a beautiful moment.

HRISHI: Yeah, I felt like that was the theme of the episode. How some small piece can screw up the whole machine. You know? What might seem like an inconsequential detail can have these catastrophic results. Another one is, the recertification, you know, this idea of re-certifying Colombia or not, ends up being completely derailed just by the fact of the deadline. You know, there's this glitch in the system in terms of paperwork. It doesn't even matter what the President decides to do because the deadline ran out while they were in the air and, alright, the decision is out of his hands. And I also felt like Richardson and the Black Caucus kind of recognize the dynamics of these things, and leverage it. And other times, the Black Caucus might be overlooked or their votes might not count as much, but here, in a moment where the President is relying on them for the Kundunese peacekeeping bill, they can intentionally stick a monkey wrench in the gears and say “no, you have to listen to us first. I'm going to, you know, Richardson's gonna bring up this draft debate and until it gets addressed, everything has to wait for him.”

JOSH: Right, that's, I think, one of the other themes, is these shifting alliances and the differing amounts of leverage that people have on each other and this attempt to reach across the aisle and get something positive done. But then people on your own side are trying to nix it because they've got other motives. And then this relationship, with Colombia, and recertifying them as an ally in the war on drugs when they're complicit. It was all making me think, too, I read - it's a little bit of a tangent, but I just finished a great book called “Legacy of Ashes: A History of the CIA,”

written by Tim Weiner. Incredible book. Not uncontroversial, but incredibly great read. And one of the things it focuses on through the CIA is the shifting alliances of the United States and how we went from allying with communists to defeat fascism, and then quickly as the Cold War revved up, allying at times with *fascists* to go after...

HRISHI: Undermine -

JOSH: ...Communism, yeah. It's mind boggling how all this stuff operates. How it works.

HRISHI: In one of Eli's emails, he mentioned that he thought the decertification story might have been inspired by something he found in his notes. And he sent a bit from this article about President Clinton giving Mexico full certification despite, sort of, rampant corruption there. It was almost inevitable that he was going to re-certify them. In that same article, though, it talked about how President Clinton didn't re-certify Colombia. And the Vice President of Colombia said that it was arbitrary and unjust. This is from CNN. It said - he called it arbitrary and unjust and said the annual US drug test known as certification had lost all credibility. In a thinly veiled swipe at Mexico and its certification, he said the entire certification process appeared to be based more on quote "political and commercial considerations than on objective evidence."

JOSH: Hm.

HRISHI: And Eli said that, to him, the theme of the episode was the maddening but necessary compromises that you have to make in government; the things that you have to accept even though you know that they're wrong.

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

RICHARDSON: And you're one of my constituents too, Toby. So I shouldn't have to tell you that.

TOBY: You don't, Congressman. I was just on the job tonight.

RICHARDSON: Hm.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Here's a real world political thing I didn't understand. The President at one point, while on the phone with Leo, he compares the Black Caucus to Smoot and Hawley. And I do not get that comparison.

JOSH: I didn't get that either. I thought that's the Tariff Act, right?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That's all I know of Smoot and Hawley.

HRISHI: Whatever the connection, if there is one, whatever it is, it seems like it would be a stretch, to get from protectionist tariffs to reinstating the draft for the sake of, racial, you know...

JOSH: I did not make the connection.

HRISHI: Ok. Good.

JOSH: That said, shout out to Canadian clowns Mump and Smoot, of whom I am a huge fan. And there's actually an Aaron tie-in there. There are these, you can look them up, I'm sure you can find something online. They're these, I think brilliant, Canadian clowns that perform as Mump and Smoot.

HRISHI: Mmhm.

JOSH: Michael Kennard and John Turner: Mump and Smoot. Brilliant. Dark. They have their own language, and they have this incredible piece, I guess a play, performed downtown in New York back in the late 80s called Mump and Smoot in *Caged with Wog*, and I went to it and I'm not show how, or what initially drew me to it - actually I do, it's a dark clown piece, and that's the kinda thing I like.

HRISHI: (laughs)

JOSH: And I loved it so much that I insisted that a whole group of my friends go, including Aaron. I had sort of forgotten that there's the threat of audience participation at moments during this and that's Aaron's, and actually to be truth be told, one of my greatest fears. I don't want to be dragged on stage and do anything. Anyway, I think I saw them two more times after this. I loved it. Aaron thought I had pranked him.

HRISHI: Ha!

JOSH: By taking him to the worst thing he'd ever seen. There's no accounting for taste. Aaron and I...I say, if you have a chance, for the love of God, go see Mump and Smoot. They are two of my favorite performers.

HRISHI: I love that we've had clown-related information two episodes in a row.

JOSH: Oh! I have yet more. Apropos of having mentioned the brilliant Mary Tyler Moore episode about the funeral of Chuckles the Clown, today we must memorialize and say rest in peace to Frank Avruch, who was the original Bozo the Clown. And just passed away. So that's a lot of clown mentions over the course of two episodes.

HRISHI: There you go. I'm going to take this moment of clown-related information to give a shout out to Willy Whistle, who was the clown that I grew up with on TV, on WSPK TV 38. And I also want to take this opportunity to apologize for another mistake that I made, when I mixed up WLVI Channel 56, with WSPK, TV 38, the other day, in an episode in the past. And you know, my childhood memory was failing me.

JOSH: It gives our listeners something to do after they're done listening: hope online and correct us.

HRISHI: But Willy Whistle, he was our daytime clown.

JOSH: I am unaware of his work. I'll have to look into it.

HRISHI: I'll put a link up.

JOSH: Shout out to Leo for acknowledging that gerunds take the possessive when he says...

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

JOSH: He didn't storm the gate.

LEO: Well, they would have preferred he had, to your opening it for them.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I was very pleased. Go Leo.

HRISHI: In the end, the light just works. Because they gave it another shot.

JOSH: They did, they...reset it.

[The IT Crowd excerpt]

ROY: Hello, IT. Have you tried turning it off and on again?

JEN: Hello, IT. Yeah. Have you tried turning it off and on again?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah, they did the IT crowd.

JOSH: Yeah, exactly. That's exactly right.

HRISHI: Before we got to that part, I'd actually written down, "Oh I guess the IT Crowd suggestion won't work, the line 'did you try turning it off and turning it back on again,' when it's a plane that's in midair." But then ultimately it is what worked.

JOSH: Turns out there's a very long cord somewhere.

HRISHI: (laughs) They need a paperclip. Need to stick the paperclip in the little...

JOSH: (laughs)

HRISHI: ...Reboot socket. I was thinking about Donna's line.

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

DONNA: If anything ever happened to me, chances are it's gonna be when I'm sitting next to you, and I'm gonna be an 'also-dead.' "Senior Bartlet Advisor Joshua Lyman killed by a pack of wild dogs. Also dead, Diane Moss."

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I felt the same way. I thought if something were to happen to us, God forbid, it would be beloved *West Wing* and *Scandal* actor Joshua Malina died. Also dead, Richard Hirway.

JOSH: (laughs) I do play that game. I mean whenever I fly. I do think through, well, am I gonna get the headline? Oh no, *that* person is far more famous.

HRISHI: Oh God. Oh good, I'm glad we're taking seven flights together coming up very soon.

JOSH: Yeah I wonder whether we're doomed, if we're being irresponsible and we should fly separately...

HRISHI: Poo poo! Poo poo, Josh!

JOSH: Poo poo. So that one of us can take over the podcast...

HRISHI: Oh, we need a designated podcast host.

JOSH: Right, exactly. So, to whom should we will the podcast to? Maybe to Eli Attie and Lauren Hissrich?

HRISHI: Yeah, sure, yeah. Eli and Lauren, you are the godparents to this podcast.

JOSH: Mhm. Wow. That's serious.

HRISHI: You're the podparents.

JOSH: But that said, you're right: poo poo, we'll be fine.

HRISHI: Poo poo.

JOSH: On that dark note...

HRISHI: On that note, let's take a quick break, and when we come back, we'll speak to Eric Fanning.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: Joining us now is Eric Fanning. He served as the 22nd Secretary of the Army under President Obama. Before that, he was the Undersecretary of the Air Force for two years and he was also Acting Secretary of the Air Force.

JOSH: Also Chief of Staff to the Secretary of Defense back in 2015.

HRISHI: And he's now the CEO and President of the Aerospace Industries Association. Eric, thanks so much for coming back on the podcast.

ERIC: Yeah, absolutely. I'm thrilled to be back, actually.

HRISHI: Do you remember this episode? Have you seen it recently?

ERIC: I watched it last night.

HRISHI: Thank you. Good man.

ERIC: I remember all the episodes. But I rewatched...it gave me an excuse to rewatch it.

HRISHI: As a former Acting Secretary of the Air Force, does this one have any special significance to you?

ERIC: Well I think anybody whose done anything with Air Force One falls in love with that plane. Of course, Air Force One's a call sign, but, so, any episode that involves that plane, for me, is particularly fun to watch.

HRISHI: What do you mean by the designation part? Because I feel like you're correcting me but I don't know what I said wrong.

ERIC: So, Air Force One is any plane that the president is in, and it's only called Air Force One when the president is in it. So it's a call sign associated to the president and the plane that he's on.

HRISHI: Ah.

ERIC: There are other designations for that plane and in fact a number of Air Force planes that the president might fly on.

HRISHI: And how many planes are like that? You know, that are specially fitted to handle the president being on board.

ERIC: Well there's two 747s, which are the main planes. They're very old planes, though. They're 747-200s. There really aren't many of those still flying anymore. Just some that are cargo planes in the far reaches of the world. So one is almost always in maintenance, so there's one ready to fly with him. There's other planes as well that he might use. The exact number is classified. Sometimes, the runway might not be big enough for a 747. Sometimes, the one 747 that's available might have a mechanical issue and he has to fly on a backup plane. But there

are a series of planes available to him - helicopters, of course, as well - whenever he might fly someplace.

HRISHI: But the helicopter is Marines, right? Then it becomes Marine One?

ERIC: Exactly, any helicopter he's one is Marine One.

HRISHI: Is there an Army One?

ERIC: There's not an Army One. If you were on an Army helicopter, I suppose they'd called it Army One. But the rough way the services divide supporting the president, very simplistically: the Navy is hospitality - they run Camp David, they run the White House mess. The Army does ground transportation. The Marines do the helicopters. And the Air Force does the airplanes. There are other things they do, of course. Communications, security, all sorts of things that they do. But that's kind of the rough way the four services divide their support.

HRISHI: When you watch an episode like this, how do you feel about, you know, the relative accuracy...or maybe lack of accuracy?

ERIC: I always joke that I'm the worst person to watch anything that involves Washington, because I'm always correcting little, even slight, things. What's remarkable to me about *The West Wing* is how much they get really accurately and then how much is very different. For example, in *The West Wing*, where C.J. is, where Josh is, that's not a particularly accurate part of what the West Wing looks like. But the Oval, the Cabinet Room, those are very accurate. The Air Force One, with one exception, which is where the press sits, is a really accurate depiction of what the plane looks like.

HRISHI: Have you ever been on a set where they've reconstructed Air Force one like that?

ERIC: I never have. Haven't seen it.

HRISHI: Yeah, I was so curious about how much, you know, has to be changed practically for just the filming. Or like, the dramatic effect. You know, you need to have the press that close to the President so that the walk back and forth isn't as long.

ERIC: Well it's not so much how far away the press is from the President. The press section is actually a lot smaller than its depicted on the West Wing. It's not as open, luxurious, and I suspect that makes it harder to film, but the other sort of tight compartments in the hallways are pretty accurately scaled.

JOSH: How credible do you find the plot line of this mid-air crisis and how it's handled on this episode?

ERIC: Well it's hard for me to tell how it would have been handled by the Press Secretary in terms of dealing with the press. These are really old aircraft but they're probably the best-maintained 747s in the world. The Air Force does a remarkable job. Obviously, it's such an important mission. Knows that plane really well because it's been in the inventory so long. But if

there's any type of issue like that, and planes have those issues, there are lots of different factors that will come into play to make sure the plane's safe.

HRISHI: Is what Donna says accurate?

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

DONNA: Every 154 days, plane's completely taken apart and put back together again.

ERIC: I don't know that it's - I don't think it's 154 days, but like I said, one of the two planes is always in rehaul and it's a pretty extensive process that the Air Force puts it through. Obviously, a very important mission for those planes. You know, we talk about how old that plane is, but that really refers to when it was purchased. It's had multiple continual upgrades and really is sort of taken apart and put back together regularly by the Air Force.

JOSH: And is there no reason to start with a newer aircraft? Is it just too expensive to outfit a new aircraft to the specifications needed?

ERIC: It's a very expensive airplane. Not just, what you get from Boeing, the green airplane, but all the things that are done to it - for communications, for security countermeasures, to make it an appropriate plane for the President of the United States. Midair refueling. And it wouldn't make sense to upgrade the actual plane with any regularity, because most of the expense is what you do to the plane after you get it. It doesn't fly as regularly as commercial planes. It doesn't have as many miles on it. The maintenance crews, the flight crews, they know that plane really well, which helps with the mission. They don't have to learn a new plane. But, as you know, now the Air Force has purchased two new Boeings, both 747s, the dash 800s, to replace these.

HRISHI: And that was for 3.9 billion, I think, right?

ERIC: Yeah, that's an all-in cost, though. I think that people don't realize, you know, you can't just put the president on any old plane. These current ones are refuelable midair, like I said, they have all the countermeasures for security, which are constantly evolving over time as the threat evolves and technology evolves. And then, of course, communications. The president's got to be able to touch, reach out, 24/7, based on his responsibilities.

HRISHI: When you were Chief Management Officer, what part of your job description, and in what capacity, did you have to deal with Air Force One?

ERIC: So, when I was Acting Secretary of the Air Force, I was out there once, and the colonel, I thanked him, and the colonel said, "Well, it's your plane." Which is a funny way to think about it. What that really means is - it's my plane if something goes wrong with it. I don't get to take it out for a joy ride or fly it on a trip, or what have you. And we were having some issues with the plane that the Secretary of Defense flies on. And that's when I was spending most time out there with that unit that's responsible. Not only for Air Force One but all VIP travel.

HRISHI: So, along the lines of how state-of-the-art the plane has to be, and, you know, a long running question, since the first episode of *The West Wing*, maybe you can clear this up. In this episode, C.J. says...

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

C.J.: The story's embargoed. If a cell phone appears in violation of FAA regulations, the cell phone will be confiscated by a steward.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's true? Even on Air Force One, you can't use cell phones while flying?

ERIC: Cell phones are complicated, not just because of what the effect might be on the electronics on a plane. But also, if you're in a secure environment, cell phones aren't typically very secure. Which is why if you're in the Pentagon, for example, most offices have little wooden stands outside where you have to put your cell phone before you can go into the office. Because you don't have to have a classified or sensitive conversation with a cell phone around. So it really depends on, I suppose, the part of the plane and the mission. You know, where they're flying, what's going on.

HRISHI: That's because, like a phone, like StingRay? FBI's StingRay. They can just listen in on somebody's cell phone.

ERIC: Yeah, phones are not very secure. If you think about, if you can use it to reach out to someone else, smart people can figure out how to use it to listen in on you.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Well that's gonna haunt me. You know, back in the first episode of *The West Wing*... now you're just our aviation expert.

ERIC: That's great, yeah.

HRISHI: Toby says...

TOBY: We're flying in a Lockheed Eagle Series L10-11, came off the line 20 months ago, carries a SIM-5 transponder tracking system. Are you telling me I can still flummox this thing with something I bought at Radio Shack?

ERIC: Air Force One is very secure. We have smarter people on our side who figure out the countermeasures necessary on how to protect those types of things. It's a very secure aircraft.

JOSH: I think the question is: why, on commercial flights, do they tell us to turn off our cell phones?

ERIC: Honestly? I don't know.

HRISHI: [Laughs]

JOSH: [Laughs]

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh my god you've sparked a revolution.

JOSH: [cross talk] Thank you for your candor.

ERIC: I do it! I did it today when I flew back from Indianapolis. I suspect part of it is not to be distracted from safety briefings. You know, you think about all the electronics on a plane, significantly more now than even when that Air Force One was purchased.

JOSH: Indeed.

ERIC: If you look at the new planes from Boeing, versus the one that's flying now, it's a remarkable advancement in technology. So there's a lot of electronics and they don't want any more interference than necessary. But I'm not aware of a cell phone taking down an aircraft.

HRISHI: Wait, did you say you did it today? You used your phone on a plane today?

ERIC: No, I turned it off as instructed.

HRISHI: Oh you did. (laughs)

ERIC: I made sure everything was in aircraft mode. But you gotta, you have to know, first of all, I think I had an iPad and two iPhones with me today, you know, multiply that by the number of passengers, how many are left on accidentally, or without thought, or with thought.

HRISHI: Yeah.

ERIC: Like I said, I'm not aware of a commercial airline coming down now. But if they ask you to do it, there's usually some reason that they want you to do that. And it's best to listen to them rather than not to.

HRISHI: Oh, that's great.

ERIC: I'm going to get in trouble with all the airlines now!

HRISHI: I know!

JOSH: No, you're a rule follower.

ERIC: Listen to the flight attendants! Turn off your phones!

HRISHI: This is Eric Fanning, President and CEO of the Aerospace Industries Association. This is, of course, your new private sector job.

ERIC: That's right.

JOSH: How's it going?

ERIC: It's going great. For me, it's fun because aerospace and defense is a very broad industry. In the Air Force I did work with NASA and FAA and the Army not so much. And this takes me back to that. We primarily focus on DOD, FAA, and NASA. And it's exciting what's happening across all those industries. It's fun to get involved in it from a different perspective.

HRISHI: On a different note, now that you are a private citizen. You know, when we spoke to you last time, there were certain things that you could not say, even if you might have wanted to, because of your title and your position. Now that you are a private citizen and you are unfettered by those things, are there thoughts that you have as a former Secretary of the Army? Things that you might wanna say to our audience? Or just get off your chest?

ERIC: It's probably not anything different than I said when I was Secretary of the Army, which is just the sort of political instability in Washington makes it even harder to get things done. They passed a two-year - thankfully - the House just passed a two year budget agreement. But we're half of the way into one of the years. And so it's 24 months of spending, and 18 months to spend it. But that's not a unique claim for me to make. Everybody in Washington is frustrated. I know a number of members of the House and of the Senate who themselves are frustrated that they can't come together and get things done. And they're trying to figure out how do we change what's going on so that we can actually get some work done.

HRISHI: What about Trump's ban in the military on transgendered individuals?

ERIC: Well, there's a number of ways to approach this. First is, I don't think a ban will pass muster with the courts. Anytime that the military or society, on behalf of the military, has tried to exclude people from serving, the courts have always ruled in favor of opening up service. For me, there's a couple things. First of all, we've had transgender Americans serving in the military probably since the dawn of time, and they're serving right now. They're meeting the standards. The idea of telling someone who is in uniform, gone through the expensive training, is contributing, they gotta leave doesn't make a whole lotta sense. And studies show that only, I think, the last one out? From the Heritage Foundation. 29% of 18 to 23 year olds are eligible for service. And that's just based on criminal records, physical fitness, and education. Why would you then take that 29% and apply it to only 50% of the country? You want your baseline for recruiting to be as big as possible. Particularly today, as we're growing the military. President Trump wants to grow the military. And as the unemployment goes down, that is a bad environment to try and recruit into the military. So I would want to reach out to as many possible people as I could who could meet the standards.

HRISHI: And that's another thing that ties into this episode, where Congressman Richardson is trying to reinstate the draft.

[West Wing Episode 4.19 excerpt]

RICHARDSON: I think the kids in my district are going to live longer if their fortunes are tied a little more closely to the fortunes of the kids in Josh Lyman's district.

[end excerpt]

ERIC: Yeah, I think that's a terrible idea. I take it the other direction. I don't even know why we have selective service anymore. I can't imagine us fighting in a way where we would need to draft Americans. And the military is not set up to have everybody serve. It would overwhelm our training capabilities if every 18 year old came into the military. Particularly as I said, you've got that 71% who don't meet physical requirements. Don't meet educational requirements. And that's a very hard 18 year old to get through training.

HRISHI: Right.

ERIC: So when people talk about the draft, I think they talk about it in terms of exposing more Americans to the risk of serving. Spreading that out over all of America. And probably diversifying the military. Which, in my view, is a very good thing. But we're 45 years into the all volunteer force, and it is as lethal and professional as it has ever been. A draft would be very problematic for that.

HRISHI: Eric, thank you so much for taking time to talk to us again.

ERIC: Yeah, my pleasure, it's always fun to talk to you guys.

JOSH: And that's it Hrish. Another, I think, successful show.

HRISHI: It's true. And not only that, it's our last show before we leave for tour.

JOSH: That's right. I'm very excited about our tour. Dublin. London. DC, Boston, New York.

HRISHI: Actually this date is auspicious for another reason. Because today, March 22, 2018, the day that we're recording this, is the two year anniversary of the launch of our first episode of the West Wing Weekly ever.

JOSH: Is it really? The first time we put one out?

HRISHI: Yep.

JOSH: How about that.

HRISHI: Episode 101. We're going to take a little bit of time off as we get ready for the shows, as I mentioned before. But next week we have a very special episode.

LIN-MANUEL: I'm Lin Manuel Miranda, I'm the writer of Hamilton.

THOMAS: My name is Thomas Kail, I directed Hamilton.

HRISHI: We're going to discuss Hamilton and the West Wing and how the two intertwine.

JOSH: Let's be honest. You're going to be joined by them.

HRISHI: (Laughs) It's true.

JOSH: That one hurt. That was a tough moment for me, to miss that one.

HRISHI: Mhmm.

JOSH: But as it turned out, I was out of town. We finally found a window when they were available, and they didn't care at all about my not being there.

HRISHI: (laughs)

JOSH: So. You just went ahead and did it.

HRISHI: Until then, let us know what you think of this episode. Go to [The West Wing Weekly dot com slash 419](http://TheWestWingWeekly.com/419) to find this episode and leave us a comment there. Or on our Facebook page or Instagram or Twitter.

JOSH: You can follow the two of us on Twitter and on Instagram. I don't know if you know but Hrish's dog Watson has his own Instagram account now. How can you find that?

HRISHI: He's [@watson_the_grey](https://www.instagram.com/watson_the_grey).

JOSH: Well I gotta go work something out with my cats.

HRISHI: [@cat_fountain_Malina](https://www.instagram.com/cat_fountain_Malina)?

JOSH: You can buy my cats a new fountain at the following GoFundMe page.

HRISHI: (laughs)

JOSH: No. Not reduced to that yet. Check back in a few months. Hey, here's something new. While we're off, we thought it would be a good time to launch a new way for us to keep in touch with you, our dear, dear listeners.

HRISHI: Especially in light of how many people found out about our live shows well after they'd all sold out.

JOSH: We'll do it better next time. There was some sort of...we were supposed to announce that tickets would go on sale two days later, and somehow we just announced and tickets were immediately on sale, and then they sold out in about a half an hour. Which was very satisfying, but we need, we realize, a better method of communication directly to the fans.

HRISHI: To that end, rather than rely on posts on these different social media channels that you may or may not see, depending on whether or not you were logged in at that time or whatever, we thought the best way would be to start a mailing list slash newsletter.

JOSH: That's right. We're still building it out. I like how that implies I'm involved in the process. We're still building it out but you should sign up right now.

HRISHI: Josh is hard at work on it!

JOSH: But sign up now so we can let you know about future live shows, new merch, other special tidbits, and also so we can start collecting a saleable database of your private information. Just kidding!

HRISHI: That's right. All you need to do is enter your email address, your social security number, first names of your children...

JOSH: That's right, height and weight is entirely optional!

HRISHI: Seriously, just go thewestwingweekly.com/newsletter and give us your email address. We promise we'll only send you C.J. memes a couple times a day. Three times maybe. Tops. It's thewestwingweekly.com/newsletter.

JOSH: The West Wing Weekly remains a proud participant in the world of Radiotopia. Radiotopia being a collection of the finest podcasts in all the land. You can find out more about the other podcasts at radiotopia.fm.

HRISHI: We're gonna have some new merch very soon at the thewestwingweekly.com/merch.

JOSH: Oh! It's good! It's really good.

HRISHI: But in answer to some people's questions, we are gonna have some brand new merch for tour. We're gonna bring it with us to London and Dublin. People were wondering if we'd have some stuff there. We will. And then we'll also have it for our US dates, too. I'm excited for you to see it. It's pretty cool.

JOSH: If you're coming to see us in Dublin, we'll be joined by Richard Schiff. If you're coming to see us in London, we'll be joined by Richard Schiff and Eli Attie. Of course, understand, if you're not coming to these, we'll also be joined by these people.

HRISHI: And you'll eventually get it hear it because these will be released as episodes of this podcast.

JOSH: That's right. Breaking story! If you're coming to our Boston event, you'll see us in discussion with Tommy Schlamme!

HRISHI: Woo!

JOSH: And if you're coming to our New York event, we will honor Aaron Sorkin.

HRISHI: You've heard of him.

JOSH: That's right. DC - still up in the air, but good things coming.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

ERIC: What's next?

[Outro music]