

The West Wing Weekly
4.22: "Commencement"

Guests: Bradley Whitford, Ronald Klain, and Melissa Fitzgerald

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: Live from Lincoln Theatre this is The West Wing Weekly. [Audience cheers] I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina. [Audience cheers] We're excited to be here in DC. [Audience cheers] If you've been following us on social media you know that we've been on tour for about a week and a half. I can't speak for Hrishikesh but I'm wearing not a single article of clean clothing. [Audience laughs] Also it was nice to meet literally each and every one of you before the show. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: Today we're talking about episode 22 from season 4. It's called "Commencement."

JOSH: It was written by Aaron Sorkin, it was directed by Alex Graves and it first aired on May 7th, 2003.

HRISHI: Before we get into the details of the episode here's a little overview. So the first time we are introduced to Zoey Bartlet back in season 1, episode 5 she was about to start school at Georgetown and in this, the penultimate episode of season 4, Zoey is graduating. President Bartlet is the commencement speaker and his angst over Zoey's impending 3-month trip to France with Jean-Paul is spilling into his approach to the speech and Will has to help him sort through it. The staff finds out the truth about Abdul Sharif and it turns out the world's about to as well thanks to Danny Concannon who has discovered it on his own. C.J. keeps him at bay with the news that 5 terrorists are on the loose and revealing the news to the public would be a threat to national security. Charlie tries to send Zoey off with a bottle of champagne and a sense of closure. And Toby, sweet Toby, proposes to Andy...

JOSH: This can't be the NBC synopsis...[Audience laughs and cheers]

HRISHI: I'm sorry it's so long there's a lot that happened in this episode. [Audience laughs] Toby proposes to Andy with her dream house just before she goes into labor. But the night ends in horror when Zoey goes to a party at a club, gets drugged by Jean-Paul and disappears, leaving behind her panic button, a dead secret service agent and lots of questions.

JOSH: What a delightful hynopsis. [Audience laughs and cheers] Also, before we start, there's good news and there's bad news. The good news is that Ron Klain is here with us tonight. [Audience cheers] But the bad news is that Brad Whitford is also here with us tonight. [Audience cheers]

HRISHI: Ronald Klain, as you may know, he's been on the podcast before, he was a senior advisor to President Clinton and he was the chief of staff to Vice Presidents Gore and Biden. And Bradley Whitford, you may know, he played Josh Lyman. [Audience laughs] Let's please give a big round of applause to both of them. [Audience cheers]

JOSH: That was all Klain applause.

BRAD: Yes.

HRISHI: Thank you so much for joining us.

BRAD: Oh it's good to be here. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: Wow. Can we do a second take where you mean it... [Brad and audience laugh]
We're delighted to have you guys. [Audience laughs]. I actually meant it!

BRAD: I didn't believe it.

JOSH: I can't do sincere.

BRAD: No.

HRISHI: So, one of the reasons we're so excited to have Ron here on stage with us is because this episode deals so much with the possibility of finding a new vice president and as chief of staff to 2 vice presidents and having served on the committee to look for a vice president he's going to help us fill in some of the details about the accuracy or inaccuracy in this episode. And really, in general, we're going to ask him a lot of questions about how things work in real life.

JOSH: So, Ron, how do things work in real life? [Audience laughs]

RON: The one thing I know for sure this is the closest I'm getting to the actual West Wing until 2021. So... [Audience cheers]

BRAD: Is Biden going to run?

RON: I think that comes in like the 2nd 30 minutes of this podcast. [Audience laughs]

BRAD: Very special guest. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: So, in this episode, things start off in a place that we're used to, more or less. A day in the life of the president and senior staff dealing with the day to day issues of running the country from behind the scenes. A mix of politics, an off screen geopolitical situation, a little bit of office romance and family relationships, but then it ends in place where we have never been before. This episode is kind of shocking to watch for all of the 4 years leading up to it. Brad, when you first read the script for this one did you feel as surprised as I think the audience ends up feeling?

BRAD: I remember, yeah, there's like ecstasy and drugs and it got weird at the end. I do remember that.

HRISHI: Alright, well, before it gets weird let's start at the beginning. The last episode, the episode prior to this, ends with the line "we're going to need a new vice president", and that's right where this episode picks up. We see Josh pulling out dossiers. He's got a list of names which interestingly enough has actual real world politicians on the list. I'm talking about this very quick montage that happens in the teaser. There's a shot, you know, where Josh writes "not ready" on the side of a piece of paper. It seems to be a list of artwork located in government buildings and I would agree that none of those paintings are ready to be vice president. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: Hrishi watches the West Wing like it's the Zapruder film. [Audience laughs] He stops it and goes frame-by-frame.

BRAD: Oh my God.

HRISHI: Well, because I want to see stuff like this. So two of the names that you do see on the list are Tom Harkin who was a contender for VP in 2000. [Audience member woops]

JOSH: You're not wooing for Tom Harkin. [Audience laughs] That's just a cry for attention. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: He was the Iowa junior senator. But the other name on the list that's from the real world is Iowa senator Chuck Grassley which is an odd choice since he's a Republican. [Awkward silence]

JOSH: We haven't gotten a reaction like that since I mentioned Brad's name in Dublin. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: [Laughing] It's true. [Louder laughter] Josh said...

BRAD: Really?

JOSH: It surprised me.

HRISHI: I said that "this episode was submitted as part of Bradley Whitford's nomination for outstanding supporting actor." And the crowd booed. [Audience laughs and cheers]

JOSH: I think it was just a way of expressing love for me. [Audience laughs]

BRAD: Wow. Ok. [Audience laughs] Ok, Ireland. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: Josh also has another, this is also a fraction of a second long but I paused it. He has a seating plan of the senate and if you look closely at the seating plan you can see that in the *West Wing* universe Washington DC actually has two seats in the senate. [Audience cheers]. Congratulations. Except in the real world where you still don't.

JOSH: Don't your license plates say taxation without representation.

HRISHI: Yes. The most bad-ass license plates.

JOSH: It is bad-ass and accurate.

BRAD: Trump will fix it. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: Ha. Ha. You know how notice if how somebody says Bartlet we always jump in and say *President* Bartlet but with Trump [Audience laughs] Not an issue. [Audience cheers]

HRISHI: Funny, I thought the reaction in this room might be more mixed than that. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: We love you all though.

HRISHI: So, Ron, Tom Harkin was an actual, you know I saw, on Wikipedia it shows that Tom Harkin was [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] Wow you dug deep. [Audience laughs]

RON: It's on Wikipedia? Really?

JOSH: No stone left unturned for old Hrishikesh [Audience laughs]

BRAD: It's the old 15-minute podcast prep.

RON: Yeah.

HRISHI: On Wikipedia in the list of contenders for the vice presidential nomination Tom Harkin is listed along with the... you know... it says here are the top 6, here are the others. Eventually, of course, it was actually Joe Lieberman. I thought it was interesting that even on a place like Wikipedia you can see who was on the short list. That's not private. Is that common that everybody knows who's up for the job?

RON: Yeah, I mean after the fact in 1992, 2000, 2004, 2008 the list has come out. The campaigns have put out the list to show who's under consideration. Sometimes that gives someone a political boost their name was on the list. Shows the diversity of the list. Not really sure why Tom Harkin was on there but you know, generally it's part of the politics of it but after the fact. What's interesting to me about the scene where Josh is sorting this out is just how wide open it is. He's got pictures tacked to a bulletin board. Anyone who walked by his office would know who they were looking at and yeah whenever I worked on this it's been super-duper top secret, you know, spy, cloak and dagger stuff as you're searching for a vice president. And not like faces up on the bulletin board that's definitely not the way it's done.

HRISHI: But then afterwards someone from the search committee leaks the list of names.

RON: Then afterwards they put out the full list and says here's whoever was considered.

BRAD: They put it on Facebook.

RON: Yeah, exactly.

HRISHI: And all the senators and governors can say it was an honor just to be considered [cross talk]

RON: [cross talk] Just to be considered. You bet. An honor. No-one really wanted it they just wanted to be considered. [Audience laughs]

BRAD: Did Lieberman want it?

ROB: Lieberman wanted it. You know it's funny in 2000.

JOSH: It's the only name that's gotten literally no reaction.

RON: Yeah exactly.

JOSH: Come on, he's Jewish. I'll clap. Got something going for him. [Audience laughs]

RON: Yeah, in 1992 in fact when we did the search everyone involved in the search, while the search was going on had like codenames associated with them.

BRAD: Was his Jew? [Audience laughs]

RON: Well he was in 2000... it was definitely not Jew...

JOSH: [cross talk] The oldest codename of them all [Audience laughs]

RON: Al Gore wound up being the pick in '92 and his secret service codename ultimately became Sundance. You *know Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* and he used to joke that, he used to say "Al Gore is so boring that his secret service codename is Al Gore." And, but you know, we assigned them all codename to try to keep it really hush hush.

HRISHI: Actually so here's a question I had about code-names because early on in this episode Josh Lyman asks Taye Diggs who's introduced as Wesley Davis. [Audience cheers]

JOSH: He's great. Let's bring him out. [Audience: aww] Yeah. I've got a whole list of disappointments for you over the next hour, hour and a half.

HRISHI: So, Josh asks Wesley what's going on and he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.22 excerpt]

WESLEY: I go to France tomorrow morning. I'm leading Book Bag's paparazzi patrol for three months.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And so, I know he's talking to Josh, so Josh knows the codenames, but you have to wonder if everybody knows everyone's codenames what the point of a codename? It's not much of a code.

RON: No, the secret service codenames for these people are well known and publicized once they get selected and in fact in the show, obviously Zoey's codename is book bag. Al Gore's oldest daughter, Karenn... so they ask these people to pick their codename as soon as their designated. So they pick Gore to be vice president and they go to the daughters: What do you want your code name to be. She was 18 or 19 at the time and the names have to begin with the same letter so Gore's Sundance, Tipper's Skylark... they say pick any word that begins with 'S'. She picks Smurfette as her codename. [Audience laughs]. 8 years later she's 30. She's a mom. [Audience laughs]. My codename's still Smurfette you know, like, how do I get out of this so [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] You gotta worry about those early tattoos [Audience laughs]

RON: That's right. Yeah, exactly. It's a bummer, it's a real bummer.

HRISHI: Was there a favorite code name that you've heard?

RON: Ah, Vice President Biden was Celtic, ah which, you know was kind of resonant. Yeah and our current vice president is Hoosier, so... yeah [audience reaction] exactly.

JOSH: As in, who's your boss and how'd he get his job? [Audience cheers]

RON: Exactly, there you go. I'll just be here serving up the softballs for the rest of the night. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: I appreciate it.

HRISHI: You didn't get a codename did you?

RON: No, when you're chief of staff to the vice president you do not rate a codename. Let me assure you of that. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: Ron, it's your special night. You can pick one now. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: Smurfette, though, is taken.

JOSH: It'll only last for the next hour or so but what would you like?

RON: [cross talk] Uh, uh

JOSH: [cross talk] Come on.

RON: Papa Smurf... I don't know. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: Alright you got an hour and a half of regret coming up.

HRISHI: Are there people who get selected for vice president who don't want the job?

RON: No, quite the contrary people campaign very hard for it. They do what they can to try to get the job. It's obviously pretty significant and important job both in the government and sets up someone potentially to be the next president. Indeed, the episode before this when Hoynes resigns one thing they're struggling with is that they really expected him to be Bartlet's successor and you see the president and Leo trying to talk him out of quitting and saying "look, you're going to be the next president." So people want the job because they think it's a path to the next job.

JOSH: Well here's my question. The teaser or the cold open ends just before the credits we get Josh, inexpertly played by Brad Whitford, asking Charlie: what would you think of this guy? And then it's a little newspaper clipping of Leo with the president. Would it be a demotion to go from being chief of staff where you have maybe more to do to becoming the vice president?

RON: I don't know about a demotion it would definitely be a big change. I also do love that scene, right, because it's like if Josh doesn't pin Leo's picture to the board no-one will know who he is. [Audience laughs] Seems kind of like, dramatic. But look [cross talk]

BRAD: [cross talk] I haven't criticized your politics at all.

RON: Yeah. [Audience laughs] You know, Dick Cheney, was chief of staff to President Ford and went on to become vice president, obviously, under President Bush. And when Rahm Emanuel became White House chief of staff he brought in all his predecessors for some advice and he goes around the table and he says: what's your best piece of advice? And Cheney was there as a former chief of staff and goes around the table and Cheney says to Rahm: Beware the vice president. So um... so yeah...

BRAD: [cross talk] Wow

RON: [cross talk] So yeah, it's a tricky switch from chief of staff to vice president for sure.

BRAD: How do you ask Rahm Emanuel what time is it?

RON: How?

BRAD: Rahm, what time is it or should I just go [expletive deleted] myself? [Audience laughs]

BRAD: It's a Rahm Emanuel joke.

HRISHI: I'd heard that Josh was based, somewhat, in part, on Rahm Emanuel and have you had much interaction with him? Did you ever meet him and draw any inspiration from either the things you'd read about him or [cross talk] learned in person?

BRAD: [cross talk] Yeah, I read about him. I think there was Begala [Paul Begala, former advisor to President Clinton] in there. I actually pushed, because Rahm danced. He was a dancer and took ballet. Did you know that?

JOSH: I did not know that.

HRISHI: And you can do a split.

BRAD: I sure can. [Audience laughs] I remember talking about that and there was the sending of the fish which I believe was Rahm.

RON: Yes.

HRISHI: What's the sending of the fish?

RON: To one of his political opponents he sends a dead fish head. You know, kind of like the horse head in *The Godfather*.

JOSH: The live fish heads are so much messier. [Audience laughs]

RON: Yeah. But smaller and easier to mail.

JOSH: Yeah that's true

BRAD: I think he got kicked out of his office and had a card table in the hallway.

RON: Yeah, no, that happened. It was a lot of fun to work with Rahm, that's for sure. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: Well how much do you see of Rahm Emanuel in Josh Lyman?

RON: Some. I mean I think obviously, as Brad alluded to, Paul Begala who was counselor to the president, there were a lot of people who had that role and I think the character of Josh is a kind of composite of all that, but you know, has a leadership role that none of the counselors had. So you know [cross talk]

BRAD: [cross talk] a simmering sexuality...

RON: [cross talk] ...and a simmering sexuality.

JOSH: With just a hint of elephant man. [Audience laughs]

BRAD: If we were on HBO you would have seen a lot more Rahm. [Audience laughs]

RON: But, you know, when Josh in that scene pins Leo's photo to the board, as he does it he says: "not that I'm looking for this promotion." And says, you know, maybe Leo should be vice president. So there's a hint of ambition in Josh, too.

HRISHI: There is another time when Leo's name is floated as a possible vice presidential running mate, or candidate, well running mate really, when back in season 3 there's one

episode, "Stirred", where the staff talk about the electoral math, really, of potentially dropping Hoynes from the ticket and who they might get to run in his place because Bruno points out that it's not so much that Hoynes hurts the ticket but there's a possibility of someone else helping the ticket more and that's Fitzwallace.

BRAD: Nobody knows what you're talking about.

JOSH: No, they do [Audience cheers]

RON: This audience knows. I promise you these folks do. [Audience cheers]

[West Wing Episode 3.17 excerpt]

ED: And he thinks Hoynes hurts us there?

[end excerpt]

BRAD: You know; I actually think it's interesting because Hoynes is a dismissible, he clearly is not a partner and it sort of mirrors the time... it was really with Gore that the vice president became kind of a counselor, right?

RON: Yeah, it really started with Mondale who was the first modern vice president. First vice president to have an office in the White House. Before Walter Mondale no vice president even had an office in the White House and then the role kind of grew and grew and grew and Gore, I think, took it one step farther, and really was a true partner. Hoynes is interesting that way because in the first season it's pretty clear Bartlet doesn't like him. He basically says I was forced to take you for political reasons. Don't really like you. And he's not included. I mean it's hard to think of a picture of the Clinton-Gore years when a significant thing happened and Gore isn't standing there right next to Clinton. And of course that's not the relationship between Bartlet and Hoynes at all. In fact, I went and looked. Hoynes only makes one other appearance in all of season 4 other than the episode in which he quits. So he clearly is not at the president's side and involved in all the meetings in the way that Vice President Gore was or Vice President Biden was later after that.

JOSH: I read somewhere there's an old joke about a mother who had 2 sons that were never heard from again: one was lost at sea and the other became vice president.

RON: Yeah. [Audience laughs] Yeah, it definitely is a job that historically has gotten no respect. John Nance Garner who was FDR's vice president said: "it was a job that wasn't worth a warm bucket of spit" and spit was not the word he used. But I think in recent years it's gotten more prominence, more importance and played a larger role.

JOSH: And, constitutionally, the job is...

RON: ...wait for the president to die. That is the job [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] ...and preside over the Senate if there's a tie

RON: And vote if there's a tie

JOSH: And am I wrong or the vice president presides over the Senate but unless there's a tie he can't even weigh in? He can't speak as part of the debate.

RON: Only gets to vote if there's a tie. Joe Biden was vice president for 8 years, never voted once. 0 votes, 8 years. So, yeah

JOSH: I would love that job! [Audience laughs] Everyone always disparages it, sounds great to me.

HRISHI: There's one little part at the beginning in this teaser that I love where Josh is digging through all these dossiers and he's working through all these files and then Charlie comes in and says:

[West Wing Episode 4.22 excerpt]

CHARLIE: The president wants to know if we still have the vetting files from 5 years ago.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Josh says:

[West Wing Episode 4.22 excerpt]

JOSH: For vice president you mean?

CHARLIE: Yeah

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Like, as if it's coming out of the blue. Alright, that was it. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: Well we decided in conversations with Eli Attie in London that Aaron puts in lots of little places where the audience can catch up in case they're behind. It's one of the reasons why half the time someone says something and the other person says, "I'm sorry" and they repeat the first thing they said. [laughter] The audience can catch its breath.

HRISHI: Yeah.

BRAD: Rationalized. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: One of the other things that happens in this episode that I didn't talk about in the synopsis, the paragraphs long synopsis, is the dynamic between Amy and Donna. [Audience cheers] It's all about an interaction that we never actually see where Amy has offended Josh and she's trying to get Donna to be an intermediary, to get back into Josh's good graces and Donna is not having it. [Audience cheers]

JOSH: What I like is that, essentially, they have three attempts at the same scene. It's written very similarly, they have the same information basically passing back and forth...

BRAD: Yes, it's not a lot of headway.

JOSH: Right. So it's in terrific performances that we see that we see that there's a whole other conversation taking place beneath the same dialogue they keep rattling at each other.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's true and the Amy/Donna scene. I mean, the text basically stays the same but, you know, you get a little more of an elevation of the tension in the subtext. The subtext is so thick between the two of them. I love that, you know there's one part where, in the second go round, when Amy tries again she comes up and she gives a little compliment to Donna. They give each other these little compliments in this exchange.

[West Wing Episode 4.22 excerpt]

AMY: Donna, I was just coming to see you. I love what you're wearing!

DONNA: You too!

[end excerpt]

[Audience laughs]

JOSH: [cross talk] Eek

HRISHI: And this is [cross talk] the most loaded, just lies [laughter], just lying to each other. And it reminded me of this, there's a great line in *The Importance of Being Earnest*, that it reminded me of. From the movie version.

[The Importance of Being Earnest, 2002 film, excerpt]

JACK [Colin Firth]: I bet you anything you like that half an hour after they've met they'll be calling each other sisters.

ALGY [Rupert Everett]: [chuckling] Women only do that when they've called each other a lot of other things first.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: They're being so nice to each other "I love what you're wearing" but then as the episode gets deeper and deeper the sort of layers of subtext build up and then fall away eventually until...

JOSH: Amy just says it

HRISHI: Yeah, Donna tells her "you have to get Josh". You know like there's a dividing line and she puts herself in it and she puts Amy on the other side of it.

JOSH: And then she even does the passive-aggressive thing of saying "I'm not saying you don't get him". [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: Right

JOSH: Even though just implied it pretty strongly. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: There's been this kind of unwritten rule for 4 years of how we kind of witness and interact with the Donna/Josh relationship, you know.

BRAD: Oh Jesus. Go ahead. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: No, I'm saying... you know it's just below, it's very rarely put on the surface as much as it's clear to everyone what's happening, it's rarely actually the thing that's being discussed. And it's kind of lived like that for a long but here Amy really, at that point, she breaks the rules. So first Donna says this:

[West Wing Episode 4.22 excerpt]

DONNA: No, I understood what you were saying. Josh worked for Hoynes for a long time. There was a reason.

AMY: He left him.

DONNA: And if you think that was easy you're crazy. Josh doesn't leave people.

AMY: I get that he was close to Hoynes. What I don't get is...

DONNA: You have to get Josh.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think Donna is doing this really subtle passive/aggressive, the thing of using Hoynes, when she says he doesn't leave people, she's reminding Amy that the reason why they are no longer together is that it was Amy's choice and if she hadn't done that they would still be together. And now that they're not Donna has no obligations to her whatsoever except for professional courtesy. And then finally, yeah, Amy just drops the bombshell.

[West Wing Episode 4.22 excerpt]

DONNA: I didn't mean to say that you don't... get him.

AMY: Are you in love with Josh?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And there it is

JOSH: The techno vibe out of context [referring to the background music by Massive Attack in the excerpt] a little weird. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: Okay, we're in a montage there right.

BRAD: Yeah, it's very explicit. It was surprising for me to see it again.

HRISHI: Yeah, I think it goes along with a lot of what happens in this episode which is that rules are broken left and right. So many of the sort of conventions that we know about *The West Wing* are thrown out of the window in this episode.

BRAD: Well, and Aaron is... I don't think we knew it then but Aaron was running for the stable and so I think that he... there was a certainly recklessness to the writing that maybe you know you wouldn't see first or second years. Just like ahh [expletive deleted] it. [Audiences laughs]

JOSH: Yeah, this will be someone else's problem soon.

BRAD: Yeah, yeah.

HRISHI: But I think it even manifested in ways like the end title cards, you know, the very familiar fade to black and then the executive producers listed. Instead of going to black, in this episode, it goes to white. Never seen that before. And it's, I don't know... [cross talk]

BRAD: [cross talk] Are you okay? [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: I'm not, honestly. This episode is like...this episode...you know...

BRAD: [laughing] It unnerves you!

HRISHI: It does.

JOSH: This episode is an anomaly in many ways. I mean it's very different from ...

BRAD: Yeah it is.

HRISHI: Yeah and the last 10 minutes, you've got the "Massive Attack" song playing to just make you feel incredibly uncomfortable the whole time. And it works on me.

BRAD: Well, I can see how especially for you. Who is so deeply immersed in every episode [audience laughs] this is a really disturbing, you know, sort of loss of gravity in the world you're familiar with.

HRISHI: It's true. It's true.

BRAD: No, it's unnerving. I understand it now.

HRISHI: Now we're jumping way ahead, but at the very end of the episode, you know, we have Leo running. First of all, Leo running – that's weird! [Audience laughs]

JOSH: There's something heart-breaking about the John Spencer run, too.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: It's like, you know, something *big* is up if he's running.

HRISHI: And then to make it even more weirder, they put it in slow motion. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: They might've had to. They're were like this doesn't like right. [Audience laughs] Slow it down and see how that looks... better.

HRISHI: And it's also intercut with these crazy black and white shots of, you know, extreme close up of Luis Buñuel style of Zoey's eye. The whole thing is really unsettling and weird and it starts to feel like, you know, 'are you watching *The West Wing*, in fact?'

JOSH: See, I love this kind of ... I like the how things run, small stakes, quotidian episodes but because there are so many it's also fun when there's something like that is ... I feel like it's been earned by the rest of the series that occasionally you can have suspense and you can have surprise. There are much more personal, many more personal stories in this episode than you would normally find maybe in a season of *The West Wing* ... Ah so ...

BRAD: [cross talk] I do remember, Alex, who's extraordinary ...

HRISHI: Alex Graves?

BRAD: Yeah. The director on this. [Applause] Yes! And he was always, you know, he would get very excited about what we was doing and he was thrilled, you know, to be able to play around in ways that you couldn't if you're...[cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] And I think he killed it [cross talk] I think he did a great job. This episode, visually is pretty stunning.

BRAD: [cross talk] Yeah. So do I.[Applause]

JOSH: Yes, I think they're clapping for me, just for saying that.

HRISHI: What about Taye Diggs. Did you know that he was going to be coming on before ... was there any kind of discussion about who might play that role or were you surprised?

BRAD: Nahh, I just remember being really happy it was him, and he was great, and he was nice and just fantastic.

HRISHI: Did you know him before? Had you ever worked with him on anything?

BRAD: Uhhh, no.

RON: Me neither. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: Thank you, Papa Smurf. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: I felt like it was, they were finally, kind of, making up for the departure of Rob Lowe a little bit. [Audience groans]

JOSH: Was that an insult to me? [Audience laughs] You mean by bringing someone else handsome on the show? [Audience laughs] Oh you do mean that.

HRISHI: [laughing] It was what I meant, [cross talk] but I didn't mean it as an insult, I'm sorry.

BRAD: [cross talk] It's pretty clear what he's saying. Yeah. I love how we're totally ignoring Ron Klain like he's chief of staff to the vice president or something. [Audience laughs]

RON: Totally fair.

BRAD: Lot of meetings like this, right? [Audience laughs and groans]

HRISHI: Actually, I do have question for you, Ron. If Al Gore had won in 2000.

JOSH: And he did. [Audience cheers]

RON: Yeah, exactly.

HRISHI: Would you have had Leo's job?

RON: No way to know but, you know, and then if Hillary Clinton had won in 2016, which she did, yeah, no way to know. So uh, no way to know. Sad.

HRISHI: You don't have the uh... you don't preprint the business cards.

RON: You don't preprint the business cards, no, definitely not.

JOSH: Is there a superstition against discussing possible staffing before the job's won.

RON: Yeah, I mean that would seem to be both really bad form and super bad luck to count your chickens before they hatch.

JOSH: Right

RON: And particularly, you know, in 2000 where, you know, I spent 36 days in Florida as general counsel of the recount and kind of fighting that out every single day.

JOSH: My grandparents spent 36 years in Florida.

RON: Yeah, well.

JOSH: Just as an aside.

RON: Yeah. You know, would have been better if they'd learned how to punch those ballots accurately but... [Audience groans]

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: Oh sure, it was *my* grandparents' fault.

RON: Let me put it this way: it was somebody's grandparents' fault, [cross talk] that's for sure.

JOSH: [cross talk] Oh, that I'm comfortable with.

BRAD: Stop blaming the Jews. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: That's a codename. For Jews.

RON: Yeah. It was rough. No question.

HRISHI: Back to Taye Diggs. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: We'll add the segues later.

HRISH: When we meet ...[cross talk]

BRAD: [cross talk] What are you doing? Like a Billy Joel imitation? Be like [audience laughs]

JOSH: [singing] Sing us a song, you're the piano man.

JOSH: Now, I'm going to take my hat off... bald spot. [audience cheers]

BRAD: That's pre-emptive.

HRISHI: Okay here we go... speaking of bald spots when we meet Taye Diggs...

BRAD: Yes... that's by choice. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: Who wore it better.

[Brad laughs]

JOSH: Taye Diggs.

HRISHI: The secret service agents put on a little show for the president, you know about, he's really concerned with overwhelming force and they do a weird little routine. That whole scene is kind of strange.

BRAD: Oh yeah, the little demonstration.

HRISHI: Yeah, they ask Wesley to attack and then Molly comes and flips him. And then Zoey comes out and she says "get off of Wesley". It's a little weird. Zoey feels almost like a princess ordering her like royal guard around there.

JOSH: Ha. Yeah. I think you're right. [Audience laughs]. Also wasn't Molly on Ellie's detail, we find out.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: But he walks in and he's like are you friends of Zoey's.

HRISHI: Yeah. Well he's not so good with names and faces.

JOSH: Right. Neither was Martin. [Audience laughs] He called Allison "the tall one" for 7 years. [Audience laughs]

[ad break]

HRISHI: Josh, you had something about the insert shot when they were showing their badges.

JOSH: Each of the three shows his or her badge and then there's a weird... the camera lingers on the last female secret service agent's badge.

HRISHI: I think it's actually supposed to be lingering on the holster and the gun to show...

RON: Yeah.

JOSH: Ooooh. [Audience laughs]. Ok.

HRISHI: To show that...

JOSH: [cross talk] That's why he's in charge ... I watched it like 9 times. I am not getting this. [Audience laughs]. It's a badge! Ok. You just set me up, by the way. [Audience laughs] Like didn't you have an incredibly dumb question? That I'm then going to answer and make you look really dumb by answering. I can't believe I just fell for that.

HRISHI: We'll cut it in post.

JOSH: No we won't. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: We won't. But then we get this father/daughter moment between the President and Zoey where it's very sweet and incredibly patriarchal. Where he says that "all daughters should just stay at home playing Yahtzee, if he had his way."

[West Wing Episode 4.22 excerpt]

ZOEY [laughing]: A candy striper?

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Or surfing. You could spend the summer working in a pet shop. We could play Yahtzee and watch movies at night.

ZOEY: Dad, what fantasy is it that's going through your head right now?

PRESIDENT BARTLET: What daughters would do their whole lives if I had my way.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's one of those ones where you're like aww and then you kind of shrug and...

RON: Yeah, I think that's especially creepy with Donald Trump and Ivanka in the White House right now. [audience laughs/groans]

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: Papa Smurf kills again. [Audience laughs] Actually, during this clip I also love the way that it's staged acted and the way that Alex shoots it because Taye Diggs is talking to the president and he's involved in this scene and then when they have this moment together he's kind of in the background and you see him in profile. He actually just turns away in order to give privacy for that moment to the extent that he can. I like that little shot.

HRISHI: Yeah.

BRAD: They give the space for the patriarchal condescension. They're trained. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: This episode is actually not one that I have watched many, many times. It's a hard episode for me to watch. Umm, I think mainly because... [audience laughs] it is!

JOSH: You just put it in front of you and you look at it. [Audience laughs] Same difficulty level for all episodes.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Uh. I'm getting... this is...

JOSH: [cross talk] So tell us why

BRAD: [cross talk] [imitating Hrishii] I only got 10 minutes in and then I had stop. [Audience laughs]

BRAD: How many times have you seen this episode? [cross talk] In your life?

HRISHI: [cross talk] I think I've seen, well now ... I think 3.

JOSH: How many times have you seen "Two Cathedrals"?

HRISHI: A lot more [Audience laughs]

JOSH: So let's dig into this a little bit.

HRISHI: So I think, part of the reason why this episode is so hard for me to watch is because the Toby storyline is just brutal. [Audience sighs] This moment where he doesn't want to tell the rest of the staff that he's got this house thing going on but then they find out. It just makes the moment when she says no even ... it would be painful on its own. But when he

proposes you start to remember that everybody is going to be asking him eventually “how did it go? How did it go?” But in the scene itself I appreciate how quickly Andy lets him down.

BRAD: She’s wonderful in this.

HRISHI: She’s great. Yeah. [Audience cheers] Bird York.

JOSH: Bird York!

HRISHI: But it’s just brutal. I feel like this is maybe the most brutal thing that Aaron has ever written. Like I think this is much more brutal than the actual death of Simon Donovan in Season 3 because. [audience boos]

JOSH: What a romantic! What a romantic guy! Actual death... meh.

HRISHI: Ok. Here’s my reasons. Simon Donovan we’d only gotten to know him for a few episodes. This is one of our heroes who we’ve had for 4 seasons, we’ve been watching him and the love story between him or what was apparently a one-sided love story between him and Andy. It was this sweet thing for so long and the other thing is that the Simon Donovan assassination is something that happens with actions. You know, it’s stage direction, it’s wordless. And Aaron, of course, is at his most deadly when he’s writing. And so he’s using the full extent of his powers here to make us watch someone just get their heart torn apart.

BRAD: I agree with you and I’m not being ironic. Richard is ... it’s a perfect use of, sort of exploitation of Richard, who is complicated and can seem, you know, sort of defensive emotionally but is truly this dilated sweet heart in there.

JOSH: Vulnerable.

BRAD: Yeah. Not like you. No, I’m sorry. [Audience laughs] It’s so awful I can’t even get through a sentence. [Audience laughs] No, but Richard is extraordinary in this and to see that character take that emotional risk and get swatted down.

JOSH: To me it’s already heartbreaking when he gets out of the car. Just seeing Toby in the suburbs is... [audience laughs] somehow ...

BRAD: Feels wrong.

JOSH: My God he’ll do anything for this woman. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: Let’s listen to that roughest moment [audience groans]. I know.

BRAD: We’re here.

[West Wing Episode 4.22 excerpt]

TOBY: Why?

ANDY: You’re just too sad for me, Toby. [audience sighs] You’re too sad for me. You’re just sad. You bring the sadness home with you and you’re... sad.

TOBY: I’m not sad.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I'm just going to play a little something here from *The Simpsons*.

[The Simpsons Episode 4.15 "I Love Lisa" excerpt]

BART: You can actually pinpoint the second when his heart rips in half.

[end excerpt]

[Audience laughs]

HRISHI: And it's a testament to Richard Schiff that you can, you see that moment. And then he doesn't even get to really mourn it because then her water breaks and she has what's the most miraculously quick and easy pregnancy in history, or labor.

JOSH: Do we have the second, the last little bit that he says?

[West Wing Episode 4.22 excerpt]

TOBY: Did you feel like way when we were married?

ANDY: Come on I-

TOBY: I mean it's not just now?

ANDY: Come on. I mean ... I'm sorry about all that. I'm really pregnant. Please. I take it all back.

TOBY: Really? Come on. Did you feel this way when we were married. That I was "sad".

ANDY: No. I'm going to go sit in the car. My ankles are starting ...

TOBY: Did my friends feel like that?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's the part I find super heart-breaking: "Did my friends feel like that?"

HRISHI: Why's that?

JOSH: [hamming it up] That's just because I have no friends [audience laughs]. Because he's now internalized what she had to say and he's experiencing it mentally in the rest of his life. In other words is this how everybody pictures me and the way Aaron writes, your work people and your friends and your colleagues have such a bond just that would be the utter destruction of his world. Okay, this marriage is not going to happen, the second marriage, but is that how my friends feel. I just find it very touching.

BRAD: It's the kinda nightmare reduction of that character to a sort of one dimensional perception which would be very upsetting to Toby.

HRISHI: Yeah. [Sighs – audience laughs]

JOSH: How do we get back now?

BRAD: I know.

RON: This is so sad.

BRAD: I know. Is this worse than Florida? [Audience laughs]

RON: It's getting there ... it's getting there.

HRISHI: The thing that makes this episode so crazy is that that isn't even the emotional climax of this episode.

BRAD: It's a Dante poem [audience laughs]. You think you're at the bottom, but you're not.

HRISHI: It's true.

JOSH: I think I can get us back with a really light, inconsequential nitpick which is there's a little... well there's a subplot about Charlie's having buried a cheap bottle of champagne at the National Arboretum.

BRAD: Yeah, what am I doing walking around there?

JOSH: Yeah ... it's buried, he remembers near a specific kind of plant.

HRISHI: Oh that's right

JOSH: We have a clip

[West Wing Episode 4.22 excerpt]

CHARLIE: A note fell out of my wallet yesterday and I couldn't remember what it. 5/7 10pm Peonia Japonica bamboo.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Haponica? [audience laughs] Is that a Jewish holiday? [audience laughs louder] It's Japonica as in of or pertaining to Japan. Why did Dulé say haponica?

BRAD: Because he's anti-Semitic. [audience laughs / groans]

JOSH: Just to be sure, I think we have [cross talk] I pulled this clip

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh yeah

[Excerpt from talking dictionary]

Jap-on-i-ca

[end except]

JOSH: Okay

HRISHI: Some diction problems from Dulé Jill. [audience laughs]

JOSH: That's good. Do you guys remember where you filmed that? That was not in DC, that was not in fact at the National Arboretum.

BRAD: It was at the Huntington Gardens, [speaking with accent] near my home in Pasadena.

JOSH: Which has a beautiful Hapanese Garden. [audience laughs]

BRAD: It has. Yeah. It's the Hapanese part of town.

JOSH: It's very picturesque.

HRISHI: There's that beautiful bridge that's in the shot and that's how I could tell that it was the, ah, Huntington because that thing is so distinctive. It's called the Moon Bridge.

BRAD: Big carp. Lotta carp. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: You know, we talked in the last episode about Richard's attempt to try and win Andy over in part by eating salad. He talks a little bit about the salad in this episode, too. And I feel like there's a little echo of it here when Zoey says to Charlie, they're in the Hapanese Garden and she says:

[West Wing Episode 4.22 excerpt]

ZOEY: You're such a good guy. You were raised in horror what was it along the way that made you a good guy?

CHARLIE: I try to eat right.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's the power of the salad. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: Speaking, as we weren't, of ... I said we add the segues later ... of Elisabeth Moss.

BRAD: Yes! [Audience cheers]

JOSH: Oh yeah, that's how I did it ... garden ... moss ... Elisabeth. [audience groans]

JOSH: Ergh yourselves. You've been working with her again, have you not?

BRAD: It made me really jappy to work with her again. [Audience laughs]. That could be bad. That could be bad. Context!

JOSH: You are working, are you not, on *The Handmaid's Tale* season 2.

BRAD: I am, I am, I am, I am [crescendo]. [Audience cheers]. I was working with her a couple nights ago, and she's lovely and I'm incredibly proud of her. What was she? 17 when? Yeah, she didn't ask about you. [Audience laughs] But she is amazing and she's really like a producer on that show.

JOSH: Are you able to give us any inside info, a little tease, a little something, little taste? No, no, no, no – no spoilers but ...

BRAD: I'm a commander [negative audience reaction].

JOSH: They're like you remember Joseph Fiennes? And let's go even creepier season 2. [Audience laughs]

BRAD: And I hope you think it's a little less sexist than Josh. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: I was wondering if after *Get Out* are you now going to be typecast as a racist? [Audience laughs]. Because that's a rough turn.

BRAD: My entire career is the wrong side of history. [Audience laughs] Actually Jordan at a thing said that... they asked why he cast me in that movie and he said "I just thought it would be really funny to see Josh Lyman remove the top of someone's head". [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: And it was. Ron, when ... [Audience laughs]

RON: Oh yeah, it comes to me now, sure ...

HRISHI: Exactly yeah ... speaking of racists, Ron.

JOSH: All bets are off here people

RON: Speaking of removing people's heads – I thought that's where you were headed.

HRISHI: That would have been the more obvious one. I like to go more subtle. [Audience laughs]. There's this moment when we start to get into this plot about the missing container ship and the missing Bahji operatives. [audience laughs]

JOSH: For those listening at home Brad just assaulted me. [Audience laughs]

RON: It's kind of a good thing I'm a lawyer because I think Brad is going to need one by the end of this podcast. [all laugh]. I'm like right for you, so it's good.

HRISHI: Leo... [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] Anonymous client #2. [Audience laughs] 4!!

BRAD: Where were we?

HRISHI: We were in the Situation Room Leo asks what the rules are in questioning foreign nationals and he sort of asks the room, generally. Because Nancy asks, she tells him that they have a well-lit room for the inquiries and he asks why they might need that and then he hears that it's for sleep deprivation. He kind of looks away for a second and says "alright". And I feel like that moment, that alright, is a really loaded one. Especially for somebody like Leo who was in Vietnam and knew what the consequences were if he were to get shot down. You know, now they're talking about what are the legal rules of being able to question foreign nationals. And she says they can hold them up to 7 days and deprive them of sleep. Is this kind of ethical shaky ground the kind of place that you... were you ever in conversations like this where these are rules, that are... you know, they're following rules. He asks what the rules are and she says this is allowed, where it's allowed but it's still wrong.

RON: Yeah, I mean, it's hard to remember but the ... [Audience laughs] no, no, not that point ... You know *The West Wing* feels like a story about, largely, the Clinton presidency in some ways but it's filmed, this part of it, during the Bush years. And this is really the Bush era kinda coming into the show and questions about interrogation and things like that, that were litigated under President Bush and in some ways we're still dealing with today and you know, what I found interesting about that is, there's no way that conversation happens for the first time on the spot in the Situation Room in the middle of crisis. They've been dealing with this terrorist threat for virtually the entire season and, you know, this would have been

the subject of a lot of conversation, a lot of meetings, a lot of working out the details before they got in the middle of this particular situation.

HRISHI: And, so, the situation, just to cover everything: there's a container ship that's missing 1 container and there are also these five missing Bahji operatives and there's this chatter, there's increased chatter, and so there are all these reasons why they're nervous and keeping a more vigilant eye, but there's also the possibility, you know, the FBI is all over it, the ship is in Portland, they're all over it in Oregon and they are trying to contain the situation so to speak. But it might all be over a typo, it turns out. And they still don't know where the missing terrorists are. And Leo asks for a quick around the room and we actually hear him say "What kind of day has it been?"

JOSH: Which is usually the finale of any Aaron Sorkin show. Right?

HRISHI: Yeah, or at least the first season.

JOSH: I don't know. I don't watch this stuff that closely. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: And part of what the pressure on this whole situation comes from Danny because he has the truth about Shareef and he's being pressured in return by the White House not to publish it because of the security concerns. I asked Zeke Miller, the White House reporter for AP and he's been a friend of the podcast. I was hoping that he might be able to join us for a little bit tonight but he's part of the White House press corps so he's on a plane right now to Florida with Donald Trump. [Audience reaction]. But he did send me some insights into the sort of Danny side of this episode. I don't know if you remember when Zeke was on this show before, he kind of expressed how unbelievable the C.J./Danny romance stuff was and how just unethical it was and not cool it was for a White House press secretary or a reporter to have that kind of relationship. And so I kind of pegged him, I thought, as a bit of a C.J./Danny hater but he says that in this episode – this is actually his favorite moment between the two of them. Here's what he said. He said that:

"it normally violates every rule in the journalism handbook but this one provides a really accurate window into the relationship between a White House press corps and the administration. Notwithstanding the sleeping on the press secretary's couch. The relationship we see here is adversarial but also professional with both sides believing that they're acting in the public's best interests. It may be the White House's job to keep sensitive things concealed and the press's jobs to uncover them but it's both their jobs to consider the fallout. Effective White Houses and reporters tend to navigate these issues without it becoming personal - which is another theme here."

HRISHI: And then he gave a recent example of how this plays out in real life:

"When the US, France and the UK considered and ultimately bombed Syria last week every press outlet was deploying reporters to try and figure out when that might happen and what exactly might happen and some parts of this work are conveyed off the record. Like there was guidance from the White House last Thursday that was no need to cancel dinner plans because of some imminent action but on Friday they were told very unofficially to stick around. No one went out and reported it but they hung around and started working on their stories. And then later press secretary Sarah Sanders told reporters what was happening, stressing that it couldn't be reported until the president began speaking, for security reasons. And that baseline of trusts which is always there with this or any White House is critical for both sides to do their jobs. When it comes to trading up on a story for another exclusive, which is what Danny does that's also a hallmark of good reporting, especially at the White House."

HRISHI: And so for all these reasons this is his favorite Danny/C.J. interaction of the series. It's perfectly spot on. [Audience applauds]

JOSH: Thank you, Zeke Miller. I have another small thing. There's a mention over and over of threat condition bravo.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: A phrase that apparently literally everybody is familiar with and it made me ... anybody else a fan of the American version of *The Office*? [Audience cheers] So threat condition bravo made me think of Michael Scott's pet film project. [Audience laughs]

[The Office Episode 7.16 "Threat Level Midnight" excerpt]

MICHAEL: After three years of writing, one year of shooting, four years of re-shooting, and two years of editing, I have finally completed my movie...Threat Level Midnight.

[end excerpt]

[Audience laughs]

JOSH: It's a great episode. Also you mentioned Danny's falling asleep on C.J.'s couch. Who's fault was that?

HRISHI: Carol's.

JOSH: Carol?

[Audience cheers] [Melissa Fitzgerald enters]

JOSH: Oh Carol, why'd you let him in the office?

MELISSA: I think I want them to be together.

JOSH: Oh, cute. It's a romantic thing. There is, by the way, I noticed, I don't even know what it is but as C.J. leaves the office at the end of that scene she gives you some sort of little interaction between the two of you. There's life still going on there which I love. You guys have a real relationship.

HRISHI: Melissa, thank you so much for joining us.

MELISSA: Well, thank you for having me. [Audience cheers] And I'm so excited that you're all here in my new town. [Audience cheers]

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: That's right, you went from L.A. ... how soon after *The West Wing* ended did you move to D.C.?

MELISSA: Uh, you're asking me to do math now? [laughs] I came here about 4 years ago now.

HRISHI: Wow.

MELISSA: Which I can't believe. It's flown by, but I came here to work at Justice for Vets and um [Audience cheers] and I'm still here.

HRISHI: It's been awesome, learning about Justice for Vets to begin with and then sort of hearing about all the great work that's been done and then how things have been developing even over just the two years since we started this show. What's going on now?

MELISSA: I'm really excited and this whole community; The West Wing Weekly podcast community and you guys have been so incredibly supportive and everyone at *The West Wing* has been so supportive of Justice for Vets. I'm so excited that we've expanded the courts – there are now over 350 Veteran's Treatment Courts across the country. [Audience cheers]

JOSH: That's awesome.

MELISSA: There are hundreds more in different stages of planning and implementation. And I'm excited because I am now heading up a new initiative called "Advancing Justice." And I'm not leaving Justice for Vets, I'm just expanding my profile. So, in addition to fighting for Veteran's Treatment Courts I'm now going to be fighting for treatment courts for everyone. So every person in need. [Audience cheers] And we're also going to be taking on larger criminal justice reform issues. I'm excited we have... [Audience cheers] ...I'm really excited because we have a report coming out this summer that will tackle racial and ethnic disparities in the courts and I think that's a needed report. [Audience cheers] And I think I had mentioned to you a story about a woman that is a graduate of a Drug Court...

HRISHI: Yeah

MELISSA: That I wanted to share because she also sent me a text that I wanted to read to you all. But she gave me permission to use her name but it's Chelsea and she's from Boone County, West Virginia which is the epicenter of the opioid crisis. And she took her first pill in high school, at a party, and within months she was using every day and stealing to support her habit, and she was arrested many times. Her last arrest she was facing 20 years in jail. A young woman. Facing 20 years. And luckily for Chelsea there was a Drug Treatment Court where she lived in Boone County and she was able to get into that Court program where she received, just like Veterans' Treatment Courts, she received treatment and accountability through the courts system, she met regularly with her case manager and she met all her obligations to the court. And she graduated from that program, she enrolled in college, she got her degree in psychology. She went and got a master's degree in social work and she is now a treatment provider in the very same Drug Court that saved her life. [audience applauds]

MELISSA: Ok, that's Allison Janney calling me. I was about to read it.

HRISHI and JOSH: Answer it! [repeated, audience cheers wildly]

MELISSA: Ok, you're on speaker phone and there's a lot of people here. Don't say anything you don't want people to hear.

ALLISON: What the [expletive deleted] [audience laughs]

BRAD: Hey, it's Brad. And Malina. How are you? Did the Oscar change you? [Audience laughs]

ALLISON: Wait a minute, what the f... What's going ... Wait a minute [Audience laughs] What's happening ... it sounds like ...

BRAD: Don't hang up! [Audience laughs]

ALLISON: [bewildered] What is happening? [In background] I'm calling you back

HRISHI: Surprise guest, Allison Janney, everyone. [audience cheers wildly]. It was a surprise even to her.

BRAD: Yes. What are you ... what are you wearing? [Audience laughs]

ALLISON: Well, right now I have a one piece on but I can't decide ... [audience laughs]

JOSH: Did she say a one piece?

BRAD: Yeah, it's a one piece... Here's Melissa.

MELISSA: Hey. I will call you later. [Audience laughs and cheers]

HRISHI: That was the best.

JOSH: They really are friends.

BRAD: They really are.

JOSH: That's adorable.

MELISSA: Seriously, we are here at the West Wing Weekly podcast live, there are 1200 people here... and you are still on speakerphone.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: We love you Allison. [Audience cheers]

MELISSA: Ok, she's done. She says goodbye. [Audience laugh] Alright, so getting back to the serious stuff... [Audience laughs]

BRAD: Not that we have distorted our values with celebrity but go ahead.

MELISSA: [Laughs] Well, I have to say that I really did get some of the best people in my life through this show and I'm very grateful. [Audience applauds]. And new ones too! But I did want to read what Chelsea had sent because I told her I would. And I think it's really valuable because Chelsea went through a lot in her life and this Drug Court saved her life and she said:

Since being 9 years clean, I don't believe I ever would have made it here if my judge wouldn't have given me a second chance and entered me in the Drug Court program. Since then, my life has been completely different, and I just want to say to anyone out there still suffering from this horrible disease called addiction that there is hope and don't give up. Even if you can't see the light at the end of the tunnel know that your life is worth fighting for and someone out there is cheering you on to get help. You just have to take the first step.

[Audience applause]

HRISHI: And if people want to learn more about Justice for Vets and what you do they can go to justiceforvets.org.

MELISSA: Thank you, Hrishi. And you can find out about Advancing Justice on the justiceforvets.org website.

HRISHI: Great. it's called Advancing Justice is the new initiative.

MELISSA: And we call it AJinitiative.org.

HRISHI: Ok.

BRAD: And you just wrapped *Scandal*, right? [Audience laughs]

JOSH: I also have some exciting things going on. I'm on Instagram now ... shut up.

MELISSA: But you're the Attorney General!

JOSH: Yeah, that's right. I only got 4 more days but I'm the Attorney General of the United States. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: There are a couple of things I want to make sure we talk about we wrap things up. One things that's crazy about watching this episode and seeing how the ends plays out. So we have this Massive Attack song that's playing for most of the end of the episode [Massive Attack's "Angel" starts to play]. And this feels so different to the rest of the show. It's so rare that's there's a song, like an actual song, being used in the show, like score. I mean there are times, of course there's plenty of moments when Snuffy Walden's score helps dramatize the moments. But it's very rare that you hear a song. But then when you do, as you all know, usually it's like a cool dad jam. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: Yeah, this will not be added to *Cool Sorkin Jams* on Spotify. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: Yeah there's nothing like, fun and laid back and dad rocky about this. And it's just ratcheting up the tension and it comes in and starts playing so early that even before the actual scene of the kidnapping takes place or the discovery of the kidnapping occurs you're just like filled with this sense of dread.

BRAD: I remember Alex being very excited about using this song

HRISHI: Really?

BRAD: Yep.

JOSH: I works. I think it's great.

HRISHI: And again, I think it goes along with all the rule breaking that's happening to make you feel like this is not normal. This is not a regular episode of *The West Wing*.

JOSH: Also, for all the concern, the sort of comic dad concern that President Bartlet has about Zoey's security detail this is a pretty catastrophic performance on their part, right? I mean under their very eyes her boyfriend drugs her, doses her, one of the agents is killed and they abduct the president's daughter.

BRAD: Yeah, tough day.

JOSH: Papa Smurf? [Audience laughs]

RON: Yeah, no, I don't think you need to a big expert to know that if the first daughter gets kidnapped someone has screwed up. [Audience laughs] But, you know, it actually goes back to that scene were talking about a while ago. The idea that you would send her overseas or

somewhere like that with just 3 agents is way under man-power protection. There's no one on the back door. She floats off into the restroom kind of unprotected, they miss her for a while...

BRAD: This all sounds like euphemisms but...

RON: Yeah, no I know. [Audience laughs] So I think it's definitely kind of a bit of a set up for what happens.

JOSH: But do you have a sense of would she even be allowed into a techno club? Is that even a viable situation for somebody with that kind of security detail to be under? Is there a way? I love the way it's shot, and there's the steady cam, and every now and then there's just somebody talking into their wrist.

RON: Yes, the answer's yes. The children of both the vice president and the president live normal, social lives. They do things. They go to graduation parties. But you know...

BRAD: Take ecstasy. [Audience laughs]

RON: I don't know about the ecstasy part.

JOSH: One of the agents is named Molly. [Audience laughs] I thought that was just a little... a little wink wink.

RON: Yeah, but what's weird here is the weird mix of security and non-security. So Molly says she's counted every single car in the parking lot. There are 189 cars. But they have no idea who's going in and out of this party.

JOSH: [cross talk] And I don't know where Zoey is.

BRAD: [cross talk] Or where Zoey is.

RON: Or where Zoey is. So it just seems like this kind of weird mix of like hyper-specific security and then like no-one watching her at all as she disappears. [Audience laughter]. It's a kind of odd scenario.

BRAD: How old is Zoey at this point?

HRISHI: 22, I think.

RON: She graduated from college that day so she's a college graduate and so, ...it's kind of a weird set-up that way, no question about it.

HRISHI: I think the other thing that's so strange about the set-up is that this set-up has been set up for us, word for word, back in season one. I'm just going to play this whole thing.

JOSH: All of season one? [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah

JOSH: You guys up for it? [Audience cheers]

HRISHI: Not the whole thing. I'm just going to play. This is from "Mr. Willis of Ohio" and to go back to this moment from season one after having just watched this episode it's ... a little odd. The president basically dictates the whole scene. Here it is.

[West Wing Episode 1.06 excerpt]

ZOEY: *The Secret Service should worry about you getting shot!*

PRESIDENT BARTLET: *They are worried about me getting shot. I'm worried about me getting shot! But that is nothing compared to how terrified we are of you. You scare the hell out of the Secret Service, Zoey, and you scare the hell out of me, too. My getting killed would be bad enough, but that is not the nightmare scenario. The nightmare scenario, sweetheart, is you getting kidnapped. You go out to a bar or a party in some club and you get up to go to the restroom. Somebody comes up from behind, puts their hand across your mouth and whisks you out the back door. You're so petrified you don't even notice the bodies of the two Secret Service agents lying on the ground with bullet holes in their heads. Then you're whisked away in a car. It's a big party with lots of noise and lots of people coming and going and it's a half hour before someone says, "Hey, where's Zoey?"*

[end excerpt]

BRAD: I don't see the connection. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: There's 183 cars in the parking lot. That song from what's it called is playing.

BRAD: The futuristic throbbing song ... That's pretty dead on.

HRISHI: It is. I mean it's ... I don't know if it's brilliant how it was foreshadowed so specifically and clearly three years later or if it's ...

BRAD: Or if you've wasted your life. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: That I know for sure... Look, I made the people who I was watching on TV come and sit up next to me. [Audience cheers] You're here, you're doing my bidding.

JOSH: So, who's the puppet master here?

BRAD: Who's in charge ... You know one thing about this episode, in all seriousness, is, it is Aaron's, when his skill is infused with something he feels deeply. And I always felt like this is, the writing of this, is fueled by his worry for his daughter.

HRISHI: I think that the story of what happens in this episode also adds so much to the title. It completely transforms the title for me. We know Zoey is graduating before the episode starts and so calling it "Commencement" seems like a matter of fact, just a run of the mill, even unremarkable choice but then by the end when we have no idea what's happened to Zoey, where she is, who did it or why. We don't even get to see Leo give the president the news by the end. Suddenly the title commencement becomes this ominous word. That this is just the beginning.

JOSH: Oh, I think Hrishu won that last round. [Audience laughs] Knock out.

BRAD: I think it's interesting choice to not to show Leo telling ... because it, I think, often in situations like that the more pedestrian instinct is to show this horrible scene and it's much more horrific if the audience can imagine it.

JOSH: We talked about the incongruity of seeing John Spencer run. There's another image that we've just never seen before and that's Michael O'Neill as Ron Butterfield. He's huffing and puffing and ruddy and looks like he's about to cry. And just ...

BRAD: Michael O'Neill is so wonderful. [Audience applauds]

JOSH: Yeah. He's a fantastic actor and I like that, just in that image we can see through President Bartlet's eyes he knows there's some very, very, very bad news.

BRAD: It's a big cardio episode.

HRISHI: That's about our time. Unless anyone has anything else they wanna ...

AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Splits, do the splits!

[Brad does a split] [Audience cheers wildly]

HRISHI: Amazing.

JOSH: Holy moly.

HRISHI: Thank you.

JOSH: I can't even get close to that and I'm still in my 50's.

HRISHI: Well that just about wraps it up for this episode. [Audience laughs]

JOSH: Yeah, where do you go from there?

HRISHI: We say, The West Wing Weekly is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a curated collection of fiercely independent podcasts.

JOSH: If you want to check out the other podcasts you can go to radiotopia.fm

BRAD: I don't believe you. [Audience laughs]

HRISHI: We want to thank, as always, Margaret Miller who helps us make this episode and Zach McNees, who's here tonight. [Audience cheers]

JOSH: Zach McNees is in the house.

HRISHI: Thanks to everyone here at the Lincoln Theatre. Thanks to all of you for coming. And thanks so much to our amazing trio of guests: Melissa Fitzgerald, Ronald Klain and Bradley Whitford. [Audience cheers]. We're so happy to be here. We're so happy that you all came.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

AUDIENCE: What's next?

[Audience cheers]

[Outro music]

[Melissa Fitzgerald's voicemail excerpt]

Beep.

ALLISON: Melissa, seriously?? Seriously?? I can't, I don't even understand what just happened to me this evening. You better call me [expletive deleted] and I can't believe I was on a podcast and had no idea. And swore like a truck driver. Oh [expletive deleted]. Alright, well, call me. Call me.

[End Excerpt]