

The West Wing Weekly  
4.23: "Twenty Five"  
Guest: Tommy Schlamme

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: Live from Boston, it's the West Wing Weekly. (Applause). Thank you so much for being here. I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina. (Applause). We are excited to be here.

HRISHI: Thank you so much for coming. I'm from Massachusetts originally so it's nice to be here.

JOSH: So am I (laughter).

HRISHI: I'm very excited because my family is here: my mom, my dad, my sister are here.

JOSH: My uncle and aunt-in-law are here too.

HRISHI: You may remember my dad from his appearance on the podcast for "Indians in the Lobby" - if you see them after the show, you might experience some real Indians in the lobby (laughter).

JOSH: Oh that is good. That was good.

HRISHI: I want to especially acknowledge my sister because she introduced me to Aaron Sorkin's work, so without her, none of this would be happening.

JOSH: It was exciting to meet a bunch of you in the lobby- particularly happy to meet Ryan, with whom I got into a Twitter scrap earlier. He tweeted, "Looking forward to meeting Josh Malina, I hope he's nicer in person than his persona is on Twitter," so I responded, "Cute! BLOCKED."

HRISHI: And he blocked him!

JOSH: If you are good for the next two hours I will unblock you, Ryan.

HRISHI: So today we are here to talk about the season finale of Season Four of *The West Wing*. It's also the last episode with the involvement of Aaron Sorkin and Tommy Schlamme.

JOSH: For those listening at home - I've frowned (laughter).

HRISHI: One exciting note, though, this marks the 100th episode of The West Wing Weekly. (applause)

JOSH: L'chaim.

HRISHI: This episode is called "Twenty Five".

JOSH: It was written by Aaron Sorkin, it was directed by Christopher Misiano, and it first aired on May 14, 2003.

HRISHI: So, this is the season four finale. The entire episode takes place over a matter of just a few hours. Zoey's been abducted from a nightclub and chaos unfurls in the capitol and in the West Wing as law enforcement, the military, the senior staff, and the president all

try and figure out what to do. Zoey's fate is the subject of speculation both in the press briefing room and in the situation room. Toby announces the birth of his children to his coworkers but questions his own capacity for love, and the President questions his own capacity to lead.

JOSH: That was a unique hynopsis (applause) crafted for this evening's event.

HRISHI: We're joined tonight to discuss this episode by a very special guest. He is the president of the DGA. He [cross talk] put the walk in the walk-n-talk. It's Tommy Schlamme.

JOSH: [cross talk] President President.

[applause]

HRISHI: Thank you so much for being here.

TOMMY: I'm glad I'm here with the two of you that I get this kind of ovation.

HRISHI: Thanks for making this trip, especially to Boston, just for this. We really appreciate you being here.

TOMMY: It's my pleasure, my pleasure to be in Boston, I was sorry Fenway was not operating today, but...

JOSH: Hey you sent me a picture of it, that was cute.

TOMMY: I did. I walked right by it.

HRISHI: Before we get in to the actual episode, we were hoping that you might be able to relay to us, what was going to leading up to this, and really how you approached this decision to leave the show.

TOMMY: Hmm...

JOSH: You really had to start with a softball.

TOMMY: I was about to say, umm, well, you know I was thinking when you guys asked me to do this, trying to remember exactly the sort of chronology of when Aaron and I made the decision, how we told everyone that we had made the decision. Where that was, you know, there had been a lot of conversations before the moment that we made the decision, and those conversations were really focused around this idea that we were in the fourth year of the show, that it's the collision of capitalism and art, came flying to a head because we had already made our deals—they had picked up the show for two more years. Warner Brothers was very concerned about how much more money they could make – not could they make money – how much more money could they make, and I think that's a really important thing to sort of, throughout this whole process, what we were aware of, because, they were going to make money, we made an incredible deal for the show to be picked back up again.

HRISH: And the show was very profitable in the first seasons.

TOMMY: The show, well, no, the show was, all shows are deficit financed, the idea is what they actually pay you to do the show at the beginning is less than what any show costs, and this show even more less because of me (laughter). I was like not great at not spending money because I felt like if I spent your money you'd make more money, especially on this show. So we had, I had, to be quite honest, I had already thought about the possibility of

separating myself from the show, not permanently, but at least the ability to go and possibly shoot something else or pilot so I didn't have total exclusivity...

JOSH: For a creative refresher kind of thing?

TOMMY: Yeah, I mean I had put out a lot of fires, and uh, it was sort of four years of that. I loved the show, I loved working on it, I would've never left the show and just, and the reason for bringing Chris and Alex onto the show was always with the idea that eventually I would leave the show...

JOSH: Succession is important.

TOMMY: It is, and we might let the democratic party know that...(laughter)

HRISHI: Chris and Alex of course are Chris Misiano and Alex Graves who became -

TOMMY: Co-EPs and directors who were always there who were able to do more episodes at the end than I was doing. But anyway, it because, you know, really important to Warner Brothers to figure out the most financially sound way to do the show the next couple of years. And they thought in their really short-sightedness that that would be by having Aaron not write all the episodes. That would be the way that they could solve the problem. Now, Aaron was late on the episodes, that's for sure. But the episodes were so [expletive deleted] good (applause) that I can tell you as a director – everything made sense the minute I read it. It's like, why words can come to you.

JOSH: People always say is it hard acting when you get the material at the last moment and I always say – Not when it's THAT MATERIAL -

JOSH AND TOMMY: No.

TOMMY: And the material is so clean and makes so much sense so as a director, your quick to be able to do it, now, did it cost us a little bit more because production would have to build sets at a later date with overtime? Yeah, of course it did. But that's a small price to have paid to keep us there and I think that was the deal they sort of came down at the very end near the end of the season and basically said, either Aaron writes ten less episodes, I think it was, I don't know- it was six or ten, and if not, we are dropping the gauntlet, that's what we're sorta doing. I had been having lots of conversations with Warner Brothers without Aaron in the room, for the whole season, and I can't say they were on their best behavior. I want to be a little guarded about what I say but um...

JOSH: We won't tell anyone...it's just us and ultimately when we release the podcast...for free.

TOMMY: Yeah, and I'm pretty sure Peter Roth doesn't listen so...

JOSH: I saw him recently and got a big hug from him.

TOMMY: He's a very busy man and he's a wonderful human being and has later said maybe that wasn't the wisest decision- business decision.

JOSH: I saw him at a table read for *The Big Bang Theory* which will be on next week (applause) and uh I asked him if he'd do the podcast and he said yes, so...

TOMMY: And he'd be great on it and I think he'd be very honest. Anyway, so that was the situation and then it was really I think during this episode, I'm pretty sure it wasn't, I think you

had mentioned on one of the podcasts [cross talk] it was maybe before that, it was, you know, I think Aaron got a phone call, really did trust that they were serious about this, and then, we were in his office together and he said, "Let's leave. I think that's what we have to do. I think what we have to do is write a press release." And this happened all within 24 hours. "We have to write a press release, have the press release in our hand, go and talk to the cast and the crew. Let everybody know, release the press release, and that would be it." And it wouldn't be, you know, I'm almost sure it was...I looked today online, it said the press release was released May 1. This episode was on May 14. We told them on April 30 that we were leaving the show, that means we were still shooting the show, so that means how quickly this show got on television. And that was sort of the backdrop. We were already racing to get this episode done and finished to get it on the air in two weeks, which is a really short period of time from the time you wrap to the time you put it on the air. I think it was like three days before the end of the season because part of what we both had decided was we needed to do this not on hiatus. We need to do this and be able to tell the people that we so loved and so admired and so respected that we were gonna leave the show.

JOSH: [cross talk] I wasn't sure, we had been debating the chronology on the podcast.

HRISHI: Right and if you did it on hiatus you wouldn't be able to say it to their faces.

TOMMY: That's right.

HRISHI: Your desire to do other things, potentially, maybe not to put out fires so much, is that also related to the fact that you only directed one episode in this season?

TOMMY: Yeah, I think so.

JOSH: I was shocked by the way – I went to IMDB to see how many you directed, and to my astonishment, you directed me in a single episode of *The West Wing*.

TOMMY: That's right, but that was why (laughter).

JOSH: Oh that's why you left (laughter) - One and out. No, that was surprising to me because you loom so large in my consciousness, and obviously you had directed me in probably 30% of *Sports Night*, and my memory was that, well if someone had said, "Guess." I would say I think he directed four or five in that first season I was on and it was only a single one and it's just where you stand in my life and my career, I've learned a lot about acting in front of a camera from you, I was shocked that we only had one *West Wing* together.

TOMMY: Well, probably I was around a lot.

JOSH: Oh yes, also a testament of how involved you were with the show. Maybe you can tell us a little more of what it is to be involved as an executive producer and less frequent director in that last year.

TOMMY: Well certainly in that last year it was because scripts were late, and because, you know, we were trying to sort of deal with Warner Brothers, it was just a lot, and that was the other thing, it was a lot of other hats I was wearing and the hat of wanting to create and direct was not being worn as much. And I also wanted Alex and Chris to take more control of the show, to be there more often, to get more episodes to do.

JOSH: Directors come with hats.

TOMMY: They do.

HRISHI: Do you know what else comes with hats? Joshies come with hats.

(Applause)

JOSH: As do babies...I'm sorry, It was not a clean segue, but this is making my brain hurt. Whoever brought this, thank you.

HRISHI: It's high quality audio entertainment.

JOSH: You'll never know at home. Sorry guys at home, you were \$35 short to get that joke.

HRISHI: You were talking about why you ended up only directing only one episode this season.

TOMMY: Right. Yeah, so what I sort of longed for was to direct more and to create more stuff, not just direct another episode but the sort of enormous fun of doing the pilot of this show, doing the pilot of *Sports Night*, doing the pilot of *Studio 60*, working with Aaron that was is the greatest high for me creatively, but running the show and being a part of that show and making sure that everybody feels empowered to do their best work, it's also a very gratifying thing. But that runs thinner for me than does the ability to direct.

HRISHI: Someone said to me that they differentiated different kinds of creative people and they said I was the kind of person who liked to build ships as opposed to someone who likes to sail ships, and it sort of feels like that is what you are saying that you like to build the ship.

TOMMY: Yeah, I liked to build the ship but I do want to be on it's voyage for awhile – I do, I mean, that is very important to me, I mean, I've shot a lot of pilots, and the most gratifying are the ones that I stay after the pilot to sort of make sure that show has the parts that were so important to me when we were building it to begin with.

JOSH: I like to stow away in the cargo hold...(laughter) so that you are in the middle of the ocean before you realize I'm on board. (Laughter). Just my creative thing.

TOMMY: You have been on board.

JOSH: Let me ask you this, so I also noticed on the IMDB that you are listed as a consulting producer for the first two episodes of season five. Were you? Were you involved in the transition?

(Laughter)

TOMMY: You know I've known John for a very long time, I did ER with John, and now, in my life, John is somebody that I am very close to, certainly, in the position being President of the DGA, he's been President of the WGA, I use him a lot as an ally.

HRISHI: This is John Wells

TOMMY: John Wells, who then went on and ran he show. You know, what happened was, at first, I said, "Sure John, if you want to send me cuts, I'll take a look at them." I was busy doing other stuff at that point, but my offices were still at Warner Brothers, and I was like, yeah, that would seem to be okay to do. And I remember looking at a cut, and it was The State of the Union, and this is not to badmouth season five in any way, but it was the State of the Union episode, but the President was busy, and Dulé was in the office, in Mrs.

Landingham's office, and apparently had had a date the night before or something, I'm not quite sure what it was, but the date showed up, and slapped him as the President opened the door, and the President went "Ooh," and the closed the door and went back in, and I thought, I don't think I can watch the show. And not because I thought, honestly not because I thought there was anything wrong with the scene, but it was so against the grain of the sort of Bible that was only in our own heads, not a Bible that was ever published. But that the work that you were doing, while you were doing it on *The West Wing*, was the most important work you could do. And if you did get the personal life coming bombarding in, someone had to sort of go, "Excuse me, there's a more important thing that you need to do right now than worry about your date last night." And so for the President not to call him on it, the President go, "Ooh, Dulé's having some emotional problems," on the day of the State of the Union just felt like, whatever my notes are, they are going to be contrary to what your trying to do here, so you should go try to do it.

JOSH: Interesting, so Aaron famously claims not to have watched anything passed his tenure, so same for you? Have you occasionally?

TOMMY: No, no I did not have the same feeling that Aaron had, I just didn't watch for awhile I had to pull away, and then I watched a lot of the last season. Thought it was kind of extraordinary, I thought it was really wonderful, and you know, I would go to the set all the time cause I was at Warner Brothers so I would go to the set to see you guys because I missed everybody so much. But, it was okay having sort of pulled away from the show at that point.

HRISHI: I'm really interested in the idea of the show Bible that was only in your head because it's not like you and Aaron were the only people who worked on this show, it was this huge production and there were other writers and these co-executive producers and guest directors. What was it that you were able to foster in the years that you were there that the things that were only written in your head were able to be carried out by all these people who weren't also living in your head?

TOMMY: And those are lucky people (laughter). You know, I think it was the same thing that happened between Aaron and myself. He didn't say, "Here, let me explain my script to you." It was something that I just understood it, and when I didn't I was able to ask him about it and it became clear. But I understood it, because I understood what the bigger thing that he was going for. And it just seemed as we just kept bringing people in, it was quite obvious to me, just in conversations with people, that they understood the show we were trying to do. And if they didn't, the probably didn't last very long. Not because they were fired, they would just get lost in the shuffle of it all. And, I think the show had such a clarity because of Aaron's voice, and then the way that we ended up putting the show together, and this group of actors who really were a troupe. It wasn't, okay, they're working over there, they're working over there, they're kinda working in different styles – they certainly play different instruments, but it felt like community theatre, it really did feel like the players, they were the Aaron Sorkin players. Not because they kept going from show to show to show even though many do, it was just because that group of people they just see- and it's a little bit sorry to, but it's a needle in the haystack to say we knew what we were doing, it's a needle in a haystack – that moment that happened, the fact that we were all able to come together and have this mindset that created a certain energy was our very very good luck.

HRISHI: Wanted to ask you about how the stories got shaped under the part of the show that was under your umbrella, because I know from the last time you were on the show how you helped shape what we saw on the screen in terms of the narrative, partly with the editing

and how things might move or things might have to be cut for time and figuring out that. But I was wondering – those were all story decisions that happened after the script is written and maybe while it's being shot, but what about before the next episode would be written. Of course there is a room of writers who are contributing ideas for Aaron, but for something like this, for "Twenty Five" and this last arc of episodes, would you have conversations with Aaron about what was to come?

TOMMY: Yeah, certainly in the first couple years, quite a few - Mrs. Landingham's death, that was early on, we were sitting in a room together that was something that he sorta went, "Do you think we could do this? What do you think?" And then certain ideas for shows too, we would do. And any time he would write something he would give it to me first, that I could read, and it wasn't about "I'm your editor" it was simply about "If I believe there is something in that script that Tommy doesn't get, then I don't think the audience is gonna get it." So he used me a lot as that voice to sort of go, "I'm not sure this is making sense to me." And then he would go work on that. But this last episode, definitely was something that we had talked about, because we weren't, we had discussed the idea that this might be the end, but it wasn't a guarantee. Really, when Aaron said, "Let's leave the show," That was the first time I had heard Aaron clearly say this is what we were going to do. You know, where this was going and I think he's talked about this before and it wasn't even a guarantee, but, I had been fascinated by rapturists, you know, and by the idea that they were building nuclear bombs in El Paso and all the employees were these evangelical rapturists because why wouldn't it be great to end the world and also that we're living in a time where we quickly went to war on misinformation, but misinformation that we understood why people who were frightened and scared would make. So if you really look at that episode and you think about – he's laying all these tracks to get them to believe this must be some Middle Eastern problem that's happening – but what if Anna Deavere Smith is right, what if it really was a very low tech you know, two rapturists that were going, "This could end the world." That's the perfect scenario for us. And then they were white. They were Christian. And they weren't what we all perceived the show to be. That wasn't a guarantee, but that was a lot of conversations that we had.

JOSH: That was the intention?

TOMMY: It certainly was my intention with him, we had talked a lot about it, and I think he had set up enough in that episode to so clearly go this is what ended up happening that the low tech who rented the car. We had just read about those two people that rented a car and left their names, you know, such low tech, cause it really is, if you think about it, who was in that bathroom? Did they know she would have ecstasy? Did Jean Paul have anything to do with it? And it could have just been two guys at the club going, "God I think we could just grab her and get the [expletive deleted] out of here and end the world."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I'm intrigued to also to learn the final chronology cause I could have sworn that you guys had decided to leave earlier and I was convincing myself as I watched the last couple episodes and specifically "Twenty Five," Aaron pretty famously tends to draw often on his own life, and so you have *Sports Night* in the waning days of the final season, we start getting a storyline about a network that doesn't value the show that they have on their hands, and if you can't make money with *Sports Night* you have to get out of the money-making business – I'm paraphrasing. So I'm convincing myself, he's starting to write about a wise and just man handing power over to an adversary – I convinced myself – like, "Oohhh, this is classic Aaron."

TOMMY: Well hey look, I think it is classic Aaron. I can tell you the decision wasn't made, but the cloud was there, the cloud was absolutely there much like *Sports Night*, we would have done the third season of *Sports Night* if ABC had decided, yeah we can keep going, but, that didn't happen, so he was, you know, saying, if you're gonna cancel my show, I'm gonna write the ending that I want to write and incriminate you guys.

JOSH: It's kinda delicious.

TOMMY: I think he's doing the same thing there, and if you really watch the pilot of *Studio 60*, there is a "Oh, that's what happened"...possibly...

HRISHI: Knowing now what you said that this idea that Nancy McNally, is right this part:

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

*NANCY: Is there anyone here who thinks this sounds like a typical kidnapping so far? Could it have been any more low tech? A plan based on knowing when someone's going to need to use the bathroom?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Changes my reading of the entire episode, because in the previous episode, and in our discussion of it, I kept thinking about the prediction of this scenario that in "Mr Willis of Ohio" the President tells Zoey this exact same thing:

[West Wing Episode 1.6 excerpt]

*BARTLETT: The nightmare scenario, sweetheart, is you getting kidnapped. You go out to a bar or a party in some club and you get up and go to the restroom, somebody comes up from behind, puts a 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...*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought, why would a show actually enact this fictional scenario, it didn't seem to make sense. In the fictional scenario, the idea is that Zoey's kidnapped and she's in a shack in Uganda, now it makes so much more sense to me that actually, it's all these seeds for that, but in fact, none of those pieces of evidence actually lead there and in fact, she's in a muffler shop down the street.

JOSH: And we always hear, Aaron doesn't really play long ball, so was that just a happy accident, did somebody go, wait a minute...

TOMMY: No he definitely was not playing long ball but he went, "That guy can write (applause and laughter) so I'm stealing whoever wrote that little paragraph." And it worked on her, and you got it as an audience member. I remember shooting that scene thinking, and there was no, there was never a concept, first of all, we're not going to do a show about the kidnapping of the – that was not what the show was about. We didn't think about that...

JOSH: That's one of the ironic thing I find, I went back to look at those May 1, 2003 stories and a lot of them ran along the lines of NBC wanted more action and this and that so ironically, Aaron's a little bit giving them the type of storyline they would have wanted more of at the very end.



TOMMY:: And Aaron didn't see a lot of the information that they gave me.

JOSH: I'll be that's true – I believe you.

TOMMY: Like, what if the plane went down with the First Lady in it and then he could date? (laughter) I decided to spare him that so it might be if he listens to this podcast – “Who said that?”

JOSH: But you know, one of the things that I love about the show is that it's not that kind of show, but it's so not that kind of show, that when you do go to this kind of area more, you've earned it, and it's executed in a way that's head and shoulders above other shows that tread this kind of territory.

TOMMY: You just make sure Alex Graves directs the episode where she is kidnapped.

HRISHI: I do wish that you all had stayed on, even just for season five episode one so we could have had that reveal, that would have been cool.

TOMMY: I was not set pitching a story that they didn't do for reasons that they should have done, but it was truly what we were thinking about. I also think it's such an incredible moment right now to be thinking of that too, you know, what information do we pour into our heads, forgetting about fake news or anything, just how quickly you can create a scenario that makes you feel that this truth and then later you find out that was not the truth, I just put all that together. I mean there's that great book on Columbine and, everything that the news sort of took off and we all started to believe.

JOSH: And it became self-perpetuating.

TOMMY: Completely. Which is sort of what happens in that room when John Amos is sort of saying look one thing is happening then someone else says something else is happening also, you start to put things together that actually if you look at those dots, they don't really fit together.

HRISHI: Right, they don't have to be correlated, they're just inventing correlation...

TOMMY: They're just more of the elements that makes the amygdala fire off much faster.

JOSH: It's great also having this sort of confrontation or head to head between Nancy McNally and Fitzwallace the NSA and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of staff, we've come to trust them both so much, so to see them in the midst of a crisis so diametrically opposed based on so little information is unsettling, so you get sort of, why Bartlet is, President Bartlet, is even more unsettled when his two main sort of military advisors...

TOMMY: And how refreshing is it to hear these two very intelligent people...ummm

JOSH: Free to speak their minds in front of...

TOMMY: Yeah...

JOSH: Well said.

HRISHI: I wanted to ask you about all the stylistic rules that got broken in this episode – this episode and the last episode – I guess maybe it feels like a minor detail in the context of all the things that are happening, but it struck me as significant -the fade to white for these last two episodes - can you talk about that decision?

TOMMY: Well I think the fade to white was really in “Commencement”, that was Alex, I mean he really had this idea, especially for the run, at the end, and I think that’s..

HRISHI: Yes, and the cuts.

TOMMY: Now there’s two reasons for that, one is, emotionally, the pillars, the white pillars, the idea that there is really an empty slate here we don’t know, we have no idea so that was, you know, it also was the way Alex works, it was really quite brilliant, but, it was also a really great device because as much as I love John Spencer, as much as I miss John Spencer, as much as I might think he was one of the really great actors that I got to work with, the guy couldn’t run.

Josh: (Laughter) We did discuss that.

TOMMY: He had the worse day I have ever seen as a runner. So I think Alex realized that and went “What if we fade to white each time he goes by a pillar, a that’s what we’ll be thinking about there so,” there was a little bit of...

HRISHI: Then you kept it also for this episode, this is how you go out, I mean, after four years of establishing that fade to black and the flentl which we love...

TOMMY: You mean the very end of the show.

HRISHI: The very end of this episode yeah, also goes to black text on a white screen.

TOMMY: Right, I think that was simply about a tribute to, it’s a new *West Wing*.

JOSH: Bye now!

TOMMY: Yeah

JOSH: Can we go back to the cold open?

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: I’m curious about how, I think this is a great cold open. It’s the Bartlets having their little party and post-graduation [cross talk], right. The men are looking over old pictures and the women are having fun having a drink and we get our sort of cool Sorkin jams, light jazz playing in this sort of sonically, I don’t know how to articulate it but seems to sonically kind of morph into these suspenseful and foreboding chords as we see Leo come and in silence tell the President what we know he’s telling him about Zoey, then it moves into slow mo, and we see Abbey slowly catch the President’s eye, he drops in slow mo the pictures of Zoey as a kid and his glass and then it goes into the, the, main title theme. How much of that is figured out in editing, and how much of it is, this is how we are going to shoot it?

HRISHI: [cross walk] Post-graduation empty nest.

TOMMY: I think that, I think I remember having a conversation with Chris that he was like, “What if the picture fell in slow motion, you know, if we really want to read this and understand that Bartlet is now going to be operating in slow.” I mean that was really the idea is that his brain now cannot operate the way we’re used to his brain operating so therefore it became a device that seemed like it would work right at the beginning to let us know that it’s slowing down. I think once he decided to do that, it just became will that look too heavy handed unless it’s all on a string? And then it became that but all that was shot over cranked, which is, you shoot more frames per second which therefore makes the film slower.

JOSH: What happens if you don't do that and still want to use slow mo?

TOMMY: It's fine to do that now. That used to be much more difficult when there wasn't digital, now it's just [cross talk]. It doesn't look the same, well it doesn't look exactly the same. You can feel a little bit of a different kind of motion to it than if it actually is done in the camera.

JOSH: [cross talk] Now-a-days you just hit that button...kind of disappointing...

HRISHI: I think what's so...

TOMMY: We were shooting on film at that time so,

JOSH: Yes the old fashioned way.

HRISHI: What I love about that teaser too, is that you never hear anything except for the sort of light party dialogue, none of the news that's delivered actually makes it to our ears, all of that is in silence.

JOSH: Well I have a question there. Are the actors ad libbing in silence? Would Aaron write something for them to have said to each other or, as John Spencer is telling...

TOMMY: They're not moving in slow motion.

JOSH: No I know they are speaking normally (said slowly) I just mean when we have people in the background talking or in the sit room...

TOMMY: You know I don't think he wrote anything I think it was, again, these were such gifted people it was, I think they were giving him the information and just doing an improv back there.

HRISHI: The only improv ever on an Aaron Sorkin (laughter).

TOMMY: Not one which was recorded.

JOSH: It was at least conceivable in my mind that he would write stuff that was spoken off camera.

TOMMY: Here's another thing about that teaser which is, if I was staging that today, I would never put the women and the men separated. I mean it's just one of those, it made perfect sense at that point, but I think I would be sensitive to the idea.

JOSH: That's what all my parties are like (laughter).

TOMMY: But it was what all my parents' parties were like. It was very much what my parents' parties were like.

JOSH: Yeah, it feels old fashioned.

TOMMY: Yeah it does, it does, so, it works for that.

HRISHI: I think that there's an interesting gender stereotype to pick apart there about the idea of how mothers might react to children leaving and going off into the world versus fathers, I mean, sometimes stereotypes are useful.

TOMMY: Right, I'm not saying by the way I didn't think it was wrong, I'm just saying I would be sensitive to that right now, I'd be thinking about that. Were it that point, I would not have thought about it, and I think it's a good thing that I'd be thinking about it.

HRISHI: This episode has all this high tension – the action of the episode. Even though we aren't chasing people you know we don't have car chases and things like that, suspense is so tight throughout the whole episode, but then, I think maybe the most tenderness that's ever been on the *West Wing* also comes in the middle of it which is these incredible scenes with Richard Schiff and the birth of his children.

JOSH: His funny funny children (audience laughter). I don't know why your laughter. They're so little.

HRISHI: They come with hats.

JOSH: They do. Well that's another thing where it felt like long ball to me, it's brilliant how in this episode, these plots, you know one lays over the other and that while the President is obviously wound up in knots as is the First Lady, and the entire nation about Zoey's whereabouts, Toby's having, you know, ushering new life into the world and it just works, perfectly.

TOMMY: There was, I mean, he was not writing each episode separately, this was thought about for six episodes before the end which was why the Vice President, by the way, had to, you know Hoynes had to leave the show. That was very important so that that would work for the last episode that there could not be a Vice President so you would pass your leadership to someone of the opposing party.

JOSH: How did Tim Matheson take that? Not to put you on the spot but how'd that conversation go?

TOMMY: It went better than some of the others.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: I wanted to play a couple of clips around the stuff with the babies and how it relates to the rest of the episode. There's this beautiful moment where Toby tells the rest of the staff, but Richard's performance in this, it actually made me get choked up, it's this little sound that he makes and move that he does after he tells them that their born, he gets a little bit choked up at the announcement of the birth in the middle of everything, it just, pierced my heart.

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

*TOBY: By the way, this is the, the babies were born.*

*C.J.: What babies?*

*TOBY: The twins. Andy had the babies. Ummm.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That little Umm...

TOMMY: Can I say something about that? So I think I've said it on the podcast before and you know, I have such a fondness for Richard, I think that he, I think that river runs

extraordinarily deep. Very very deep. That scene gets me more than just a little choked up. Every time I watch that scene and there are very few scenes – Gregory Peck in *To Kill a Mockingbird* when the guy says, “Stand up your daddy’s walking by,” makes me cry. That makes me cry every time and it’s Richard and I think I might have mentioned it in the last podcast – Richard in “Excelsis Deo” – when he has to tell the homeless man that he’s an important man.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: How ‘bout Will and the interns? Nothing?

TOMMY: And? Yeah...Let me keep going about the oboe here.

JOSH: Fair enough, we’ll do triangle later.

TOMMY: As opposed to the triangle. We’ll get back to – and what it is and I think you would be so appreciative to this for an actor, to have to play a moment that is so inappropriate, to have to say something or do something when you know this is not what you should do, you know, this horrible moment, that the President might never see his daughter again. Everyone is thinking what the President’s thinking – is she in a trunk somewhere? Has she been cut up? Is she brutally being murdered? Has her neck been sliced? And he has to say the greatest thing that has ever happened to me just happened. That’s a really hard thing to play. That’s a really hard thing to play and he did it brilliantly.

(Applause)

JOSH: There’s another moment that I like from Martin when Martin and Toby are in the oval towards the end and Martin kind of pulls him over in the midst of this utter crisis and says, “So what have you learned that you didn’t know?” and they talk a little bit and then Martin says, “Not only do they come with hats, they come with a lo-jack and don’t ever let them out of your sight.” But Martin delivers it in a way as President Bartlet that is purely joyous. It is not about his sorrow and his tension about what is going to happen to his daughter, he’s got the generosity of spirit to just, he’s beaming.

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

*BARTLET: Huck?*

*TOBY: And Molly.*

*BARTLET: Nice. So what do you know now that you never knew before?*

*TOBY: Babies come with hats*

*BARTLET: Yeah, they also come with those little theft protection devices, those little lo-jacks on their ankles so they can’t be boosted from the hospital. Man, don’t ever let em take it off.*

[end excerpt]

TOMMY: And I will also say back to the Huck scene, also, the real Jew said Mazel Tov the right way, that was you in that scene, you did it brilliantly, just want to make sure.

HRISHI: What I love about this part of the episode and it’s really entirely encapsulated in this, that one exchange, later when we do see Toby with the babies or we find out about the babies, and then soon after that, I think the next scene Charlie tells the president that Molly’s

parents are on the phone – there’s this brilliant tying together, of these stories really of three children and three parents I guess and here in this one little exchange, they all get interwoven. You have Molly who’s dead, and then Zoey and we don’t know what’s happening to her, and then Huck and Molly and I think, it’s incredible to me that you were able to imagine these three different parental scenarios and have them all interact in the middle of everything else that is going on.

TOMMY: Well we serve at the pleasure of the President, I mean, that’s Aaron, that was, that’s a kind of masterful piece of writing as well as, in the middle of this episode, which is simply about a father and his longing for his child and what he would give up for that and the birth of another child.

HRISHI: Yeah so let’s talk about the scene with Richard and these two babies.

JOSH: You can give Richard anything – you can be like - Here’s a lollipop, good scene. Here are two babies – fantastic scene. Richard interacting with anything is at least interesting, if not heart-breaking.

HRISHI: And how difficult was it to shoot that scene with Richard and two babies?

TOMMY: You mean the three babies?

(Laughter)

HRISHI: Wow.

TOMMY: It was a day that my presence wasn’t around as much. I’m very wise that way. But there was like 12 sets of babies. There were because you can only work for I think it’s something like 15 minutes at a time with a newborn, and I mean, it’s...then they’re gone for three hours or something. You usually always work with twins, that’s what you do, but you’re not thinking there are twins.

JOSH: We need quadruplets.

TOMMY: We now need, well, we now needed twin girls and twin boys so they then could interchange these babies. It was a very long day and I wrote Chris about it yesterday because I was asking him and he just said, “Yeah, there were multiple babies that have to keep coming in, the babies kept crying.” But a really good actor – you deal with what is in front of you. If you try to avoid that, people in life don’t do that. So he embraced it. He stopped in the middle of that. I think he might even improv’d, which maybe...

JOSH: [cross talk] I thought so too.

TOMMY: Which maybe, yeah, maybe doesn’t, you know, might be the only time on this show because he did grab his finger. That can’t be scripted I don’t think. I don’t remember, to go make sure the baby...

JOSH: Just a little electrical shock...on the baby’s foot...

TOMMY: Ugh your giving all our secrets away.

JOSH: I’m not the president of the DGA, I’ll tell you how it is. Electrical shock.

HRISHI: Christopher Misiano did win an Emmy for this episode and now we know why.

JOSH: Some babies were harmed in the making of this episode...just some, not all.

HRISHI: Babies come with shock therapy.

JOSH: I felt the same way - I watched it, there would have been something stale or not quite right about that scene if he weren't, if his antennae weren't as charged as they are in that scene and he is taking in what the babies are doing and feels like a dad for the first time talking to his kid, it's a brilliant piece of acting.

HRISHI: I'm going to re-do this joke and we cut it in earlier and I'm going to say [cross talk] what I should have said was "Babies come with electrodes."

JOSH: [Cross talk] Ha, this is how we reverse engineer the podcast for you.

JOSH: Perfect.

HRISHI: Thank You.

TOMMY: Now I know the secret of this podcast.

JOSH: That's how the sausage is made people.

HRISHI: It's actually just me speaking in monologue and I have Josh record a bunch of responses and we cut them in. It's just him saying, "That is funny."

(Applause)

HRISHI: But you didn't really have to get twin babies to play these twins, right? That seems like a level of verisimilitude? That seems excessive. I mean their fraternal twins so they didn't really need to be identical...

TOMMY: No, they were boy girl twins, so I'm saying you had girl twins and boy twins.

HRISHI: Oh for each...?

JOSH: Let us explain to you how twins work, Hrishi.

TOMMY: Many times we would have, I had boy/girl twins and people would go, "Identical?" and I would say, "I don't think so..."

JOSH: That is funny.

(Applause)

HRISHI: What you don't know is I just pressed a little button to shock Josh to say that.

TOMMY: By the way at hospitals, talent agents will drop off – if you have twins – they'll – in case you're interested in working in the movie business, they will...

JOSH: I will say whenever I see a baby, especially when its like newly and when it was just supposedly was born, what kind of parents...I judge the parents, that's all I'm saying.

(laughter)

JOSH: Let your kid get to its first birthday before you start, you know, pimping it out for work. Just kidding if anyone here or anyone listening has done that.

HRISHI: Apologies to all the babies listening to this podcast.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: I want to talk about another piece of terrific acting in this episode which is uh...

JOSH: Finally getting to me...yes Hrishi?

TOMMY: Wait it's finally getting to you because they're not talking about it?

JOSH: He's been getting to me from day one...

HRISHI: You were great in this scene Josh, you were way way off-screen, but you were great in it, I can tell.

JOSH: I was doing one of those off screen Aaron monologues that they gave me.

HRISHI: It's this moment.

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

*BARTLET: Very quietly, I want you to assemble the Cabinet. I want you to call the Speaker of the House.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: This is the scene where the President and Leo are sitting on the stairs, they're sitting while the President says this, and John Spencer doesn't react to this huge devastating piece of news that the President is, I mean, it isn't spelled out explicitly at this point, but Leo knows what it means that he's gonna be stepping down and invoking the 25th Amendment. And the second time you watch this episode, knowing that, you can really appreciate John Spencer's performance here. He is taking it in and how still he is ends up being this incredible performance.

TOMMY: It's also what you read is the enormous love between this two men. In other words, I know what you're going through, there's no reason- my love for you tells me, I'm not gonna stop you now, I understand what your saying. I know that I don't believe this. We're right here, we're not gonna let you fall. But if that's your decision, I'll honor that decision, and that's what he does in that moment, it's really beautiful.

JOSH: I play that clip every time I come home from IKEA – "I want you to assemble the cabinet". It's how I pump myself up, like I can do this, I can do this. Live dad jokes, live dad jokes.

HRISHI: And then they say you can no longer be the speaker of this house.

TOMMY: My face is exactly what John Spencer was doing in that scene.

HRISHI: And it is an incredible performance, I know you are laughter really hard on the inside and it's amazing how well you're able to keep it contained.

JOSH: Remarkable control.

HRISHI: One thing I discovered when researching this episode, I thought that was interesting – you know we were just in London and saw *Hamilton* while we were there and (applause).



JOSH: Yeah they needed one more round of applause...I'll let Lin know...They clapped – You're a hit.

HRISHI: This episode is actually a great tie in with *Hamilton* because the reason why we even get this conflict that is set up where the Speaker of the House is going to assume the Presidency is because in the line of succession, presidential succession, you know it goes the President, the Vice President, then the Speaker of the House. But in 1792, the original idea was that the Secretary of State was gonna be the third in line, but the Federalists, Alexander Hamilton's party, hated Thomas Jefferson so much, they didn't want him anywhere near the Presidency and he was Secretary of State and so they changed the order so he would be that much further and they made it, the President pro tempore, the President of the Senate would be next, and then the Speaker of the House, and then that got switched by Harry Truman because he liked the Speaker better. But still, because of Alexander Hamilton, we get to have Glen Allen Walken in as President here.

(Hamilton music)

JOSH: How does a...I could do the entire show but it wouldn't probably be as good as the original, it'd be different.

HRISHI: One way to find out! There is a little bit of a fudge though, with the line of succession, the way that the President invokes the 25th Amendment here.

JOSH: That is true. I had written down, 'in this scene, President Bartlet invokes the 25th citing section three of the 25th Amendment, which in fact allows the President to tell Congress that the Vice President can become the acting President until he's able to resume work again, but President Bartlett cites the 3rd section suggesting that he can have the Speaker or the next in line of succession, which is not in fact how it's written.

HRISHI: Yeah, that is true, but it works for this because there is no Vice President.

TOMMY: And I'm not sure though, because the 25th is so vague in so many ways, that that wouldn't be true, even though it's written as the Vice President – if there was no Vice President, what would happen – 'cause it's still section three, it's not section four, it's not section one or two.

HRISHI: We had Ronald Klain on stage with us the other day and as a Harvard educated lawyer and a Chief of Staff to a Vice President, he said one thing you pay attention to very much is how the succession works, when you work for the Vice President,

JOSH: Since maybe your guy will finally get to do something.

HRISHI: And in a very lawyerly way, he was arguing that no, that doesn't mean that you know, that...

JOSH: In his way he said, "Josh is right." That's what you are trying to say.

HRISHI: More or less, more on the less.

TOMMY: So was he saying you would have had to appoint first a Vice President?

HRISHI: He was saying the 25th Amendment would not be applicable or appropriate in this situation because it's only about passing the power from the President to the Vice President, and since there is no Vice President, there would have to be something else. The

Presidential Succession Act is what would be more appropriate but it doesn't, even in that, there are no mechanics for this exact situation, so it would be a unique situation with no precedent so, there would have to be something.

JOSH: With no President...I go for the low hanging fruit always.

HRISHI: President low hanging fruit.

JOSH: I have a good little random thing to through out. There are certain hunks of dialogue that Aaron writes where I think obviously I could never write like that he is so articulate with the wording, and then there are some times where he just writes a simple little thing and you think, well, anyone could come up with that line, but somehow, it's just the use of it, I think number one, this is Taye Diggs as, Wesley Davis:

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

*WESLEY: What's your dealer's name, huh? Who gave this to you? Give me a name. Listen to me, you're gonna be fine. You are the key witness to the end of the world.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I love that line of dialogue, he is questioning with his little pen flashlight, questioning, what's his name, Jean Paul, who looks drugged whether or not he is anyway. There is something I love about that line, "You are the key witness to the end of the world."

TOMMY: But it's interesting, in "Commencement", 'cause I was aware of this watching this on the plane coming here back to back, doesn't Dulé say, "It's that club that looks like it's the end of the world."

[West Wing Episode 4.22 excerpt]

*CHARLIE: You know the people at the party that radio station is throwing, at that techno place that looks like the end of the world.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oooh you're good. I did not remember that.

HRISHI: Wow.

TOMMY: And I just thought, that's strange, 'cause Aaron doesn't often repeat the same thing unless it's intentional, and I don't know if it was or not because.

JOSH: You're the key witness at the end of the world club.

TOMMY: Yeah, beautiful.

JOSH: Taye Diggs just forgot the last word.

TOMMY: That's when the helicopter went over.

HRISHI: Actually, I just wanted to go back for one second. I know everyone loves the Presidential succession stuff, so I wanted to go back to that.

TOMMY: But you can edit this podcast...

HRISHI: I can, but for my sake. No there's actually a really wonderful call back here. This moment happens when he's speaking to the cabinet.

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

*TRIBBEY: Mr President, my concern is this. If you and the acting President were to give contradictory orders, Leo McGarry would be put in to an impossible situation which would lead to extraordinary chaos.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Okay so ignoring a little bit what he is saying here, the thing I wanted to point to is who is saying it – It's Roger Tribbey – and I don't know if you remember him but in season one, he is the designated survivor who is supposed to ascend to the presidency if all of the cabinet is wiped out and the president and the vice president and everyone else- he's the person who stays behind, the Secretary of Agriculture, he's the recipient of this fantastic moment

[West Wing Episode 1.12 excerpt]

*BARTLET: You got a best friend?*

*TRIBBEY: Yes sir.*

*BARTLET: Is he smarter than you?*

*TRIBBEY: Yes sir.*

*BARTLET: Would you trust him with your life?*

*TRIBBEY: Yes sir.*

*BARTLETT: That's your chief of staff.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's Roger Tribbey, and in terms of long ball, I mean, to me I'd like to think that that exchange about Chief of Staff, you know, this beautiful tender moment where the president prepares him for what might happen if the unthinkable happens, it cements his loyalty to this President so strongly that he can then come back three and a half seasons later and say, "if you give an order, we're going to follow you and then we have two governments" – it's great. It's the only two times that this character shows up and it's a wonderful use of him again...

TOMMY: He's a wonderful actor and he was also able to lean forward at exactly the right time during that line (laughter) because I actually had to shoot that scene because Chris was not available so it was really a structural thing of "you've got to lean forward so I can get over to the President at the same time." I will say one thing about this episode and as President of the DGA, it's a very difficult thing for me to talk about [cross talk] but, because of scheduling and because of Chris's availability, there is stuff that Alex shot in this show, very, I mean, it's Chris's show, clearly, there's stuff that I shot, and stuff - 90% of what Chris shot, but it was kind of great that on this last episode, we all were able to sort of help out, in sort of getting this show on the air.

JOSH: [cross talk] President President

JOSH: And did Chris win an Emmy for this episode?

TOMMY: Um, he won 90% of an Emmy (laughter)

JOSH: That's what I was getting at. Do you get it, you know, for a week a year?

TOMMY: No, he deserved that Emmy very much.

JOSH: It's funny that you mention the actor's ability to lean in just when he needs to, there is a moment that I noticed for it's oddness although I like it and I'm pretty sure it's another one of those timing things:

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

*BUTTERFIELD: We're going to begin questioning...*

*BARTLET: Do you have my other daughters, do you have Ellie and Elizabeth?*

*BUTTERFIELD: (Pause) Yes sir.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I kept thinking, you know, Michael O'Neal, that's a really long pause when the President is asking you 'Do you have my older daughters' and then I kept looking and I realized there's this steadicam that's going around and Michael's kind of waiting for it to get to him (laughter).

TOMMY: It might be, I have to say, I was so moved by that pause because it was like, stop this, your just talking about one thing, I have my whole family, and he had to actually – I thought he was processing 'have we been checking on them right away' cause there is so much out of control of everything, so [cross talk] it may be well,

JOSH: [Cross talk] Well it may be...

JOSH: Yeah, it may be a happy accident or it maybe in choice, but I do love that moment.

HRISHI: Yeah, it feels like a very specific choice that Michael O'Neal makes. Speaking of the guest cast, can we talk about how you ended up casting John Goodman as Glen Allen Walken.

TOMMY: I had done a movie with John – I did a cable film on Huey Long – *Kingfish*. So, I was very clear that we should have John Goodman – any way we can make this schedule work. I can call John, we were friends, and Aaron who realized we need someone a little larger than life, somebody who could take control of a room, who we should really dislike but there is something inherently likeable about John Goodman.

JOSH: Charming.

TOMMY: Yeah, there's that great story of Joel and Ethan Cohn in *Raising Arizona* cast John Goodman and Bill Forsythe I think is his name – the two kidnappers – because they wanted the kidnappers to actually look like babies. (Laughter). So if you look at both their faces they have these like baby faces. But I also knew that John, in playing Huey Long, could be enormously powerful – really powerful, and political. And fortunately he was available to us and really worked his schedule, and we had to get him to Washington to shoot this stuff in Washington then bring him back to LA.

JOSH: He's got an incredible presence, obviously he's also big, he uses his body and his physicality and he's one of those people just in the room affects your own performance.

TOMMY: Chris, actually – cause I said, “Chris, are there things you remember that you want me to talk about?” and he said, “Well I'm not sure you should talk about this,” but in that scene about the archduke, I mean, the ummm about World War I.

JOSH: [cross talk] discourse on World War I beginning.

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

*WALKEN: Franz Ferdinand, who was the nephew of the Austro-Hungarian emperor, was killed by a group called the Black Hand. And because they were a Serbian nationalist society, the empire declared war on Serbia. Then Russia, which was bound by a treaty, was forced to mobilize, which meant that Germany had to declare war on Russia. Then France declared war on Germany, and that was World War I. Because the emperor's nephew was killed.*

[end excerpt]

TOMMY: He really struggled with that, and Chris knew he had it, but it wasn't ever all together so it was like it was okay, then all of a sudden he heard this smash, this bang, and it was John in the back just smashing the wall cause he was so pissed he didn't get it right, and he was terribly concerned. I'd seen that many times in doing the Huey Long thing and it was just this way that he gets himself focused and sort of going, came back out and he just nailed it perfectly.

HRISHI: Were you trying to cast specifically with the idea of trying to find someone who would be physically the opposite of President Bartlet? Somebody big and tall?

TOMMY: Yeah (laughter). I don't think that is what it was so much as somebody you could of-for instance, there was one point I thought, it was either going to be President Goodman played by Christopher Walken, or President Walken played by John Goodman. But it needed to be somebody who had a very different rhythm, that's for sure, and I knew John had that – wasn't as much about if we had found a smaller actor who still was completely different than Martin.

JOSH: And he's another one of those actors who comes in, and comes into that specific Sorkin universe, but with his own rhythm and his own energy and just owns it and kills it.

TOMMY: That's exactly right.

HRISHI: This is what he first says:

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

*WALKEN: Relax everybody...breathe regular.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I love that line because he is huffing and puffing.

TOMMY: Well that was a whole other thing in the Washington DC shoot of all the walking it was like, “Take a rest here John first”.

JOSH: Well I love it he walks and tells everyone else to breathe regular.

HRISHI: He's Glen Allen Walken and talkin'.

JOSH: Very nice.

HRISHI: I like that in just these four lines, four words rather, he's able to separate himself from the sound and the rhythm of what we expected. Each character, each of these actors has their own take on how Aaron writes, but the words Aaron's given him so different – Breathe Regular is not something that anyone in this administration would say, so right away before you've gone more than two sentences, you already feel his outsider quality.

TOMMY: Right, by the way, right before that moment, there's a great piece of acting which is Josh Malina.

(applause)

TOMMY: Really, I mean that moment of going around in the portico and asking everybody, and the line which is such a beautiful line about an act of patriotism and a you know, being a father, but what Josh does in that, that's a really easy Aaron Sorkin line to put a lot of syrup on. If you just allow it to be very real and truthful which is exactly what Josh did, it will land the way it did.

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

*LEO: Where did everyone come down?*

*C.J.: Josh and I were on the fence, we don't know what Will thinks,*

*WILL: Of the President temporarily handing over power to his political enemy – I think it's a fairly stunning act of patriotism, and a fairly ordinary act of fatherhood.*

*LEO: Yeah, I do too.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Well thank you very much Tommy, I wrote down (applause) I just wrote down – one of the great lines I've ever uttered on screen. And I think one of the things I did learn under your tutelage was to get out of the way of great dialogue, in other words, deliver it, let the line be great, don't worry about..

TOMMY: Right, but I will say, people have said that often you know just get out of the way. You can get out of the way and still deliver it terribly (laughter) because you're just monochromatic or you're just trying to say the words – those words were filled with meaning. That pause that you took before you talked about being a father, it was very powerful piece.

JOSH: Well you're kind. Thank you.

HRISHI: Usually when Josh is very moved, he just says, "That is moving." (Laughter)

JOSH: Just deliver the line, right!

HRISHI: Get out of the way.

JOSH: That is funny. That is moving. I'm on fire. Whatever you have to get across. I've another brief little thing – I like any time that our band of heroes is either less than honest or

less than ethical because sometimes I'll complain about sort of the characters being too deified, but I like when they are just realistically politically, and we have two clips here, number two first – C.J. talking to the press.

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

*REPORTER: Is there a concern this could exacerbate his MS?*

*C.J.: No. Thank you, I'll brief again in an hour.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: No question, an unequivocal no. Clip three:

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

*TOBY: What about Abby?*

*C.J.: Someone's looking in on her and they want a doctor to see the president too.*

*TOBY: He's not gonna allow himself to be sedated right now it's a waste of time, and I don't want that story leaked.*

*C.J.: It's not for a sedative.*

*TOBY: MS?*

*C.J.: Yeah.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I love that, she just absolutely lied to the press, because sometimes you either have to or, whatever your take on it is, I think that's realistic politics, you know.

TOMMY: Wow, but like the amount that we do it which is once out of the 500 as opposed to the other way around.

(Applause)

JOSH: Ratios are important. You're not wrong.

HRISHI: Here's a small thing that I wanted to mention about that scene when Toby tells the staff about the birth of his children, C.J. does this thing afterwards when she finally figures out which babies he's talking about, she touches her stomach in a way that again I like this, how it echoes to previous episodes. To me it feels like a long echo in response to what Toby did in "The Women of Qumar" when he thanks her by, he puts his hand on his chest and does that little lift with his fingers, it felt like sort of a response to that.

JOSH: Another gesture I know we both like from this episode and I think it's when Toby is leaving the hospital having spoken to his kids for the first time, he jumps up and whacks that exit sign.

TOMMY: I was there when he did that, and he just, that was just an impulsive moment.

JOSH: It feels like it, it was great.

TOMMY: It's such a sports moment too you know, when you are coming out of the locker room, you hit something when you are about to go play so, such a beautiful thing.

HRISHI: Yes, I loved, I think it's the most overt sign of joy we've ever seen from Toby. And I love the way that it's shot because I think the camera is moving in sync with him as he's walking out the door so we just sort of are carried along with his walk and then he hits it.

JOSH: Speaking of the way things are shot, there's this scene at the bottom of the stairs between Leo and President Bartlet when President Bartlet finally makes it clear that in fact he is finally going to hand over authority, and it looks different.

TOMMY: Martin Sheen – it is different – that is actually another thing that Chris had said, that Martin who had had a pretty extensive body of work – they're about to shoot that thing and he looked at Chris and went, "A camera has never been this close to my face," because it was a wide element that he really wanted this sort of powerful image of this, you know, we're in there with them, and then this looming figure right behind him. So, it was shot, we usually don't come that close with a wider element, so it's not, it's just enough so that not distorted. If you go too wide with an element, and you get close, it's not fish eye, but it does start to distort a little bit.

JOSH: And did he cover it another way as well or do you just know it was going to work or do you see it on the monitors and say...

TOMMY: I think he saw it on the monitors and knew it was going to work and I think it did work. Puts you right in the scene.

JOSH: Absolutely, very effective, yeah. It's intimate and right in there.

TOMMY: And that's the whole thing of wider lenses close – you are more intimate than long lenses further away, even though Leo was out of focus there, it's because of the angle of that more than anything but, longer lenses further away, you're not as in the scene you know so.

HRISHI: And I felt like even before that close up, there's a wide angle lens used to show when they walk to sit down on the stairs, there's a wider angle and the camera sort of turns as they get to it which is a kind of camera move that we don't see too often, you know, just staying in one place but just to pan.

TOMMY: Just to pan yeah.

HRISHI: And I think there's another wide angle with C.J. in the press room. The uses of wide angle here I think really help make the episode feel more unsettled and you feel like you're in President Bartlet's head a little bit more as a result of that. There's a moment when they're in the situation room and I think in the director's commentary or in the commentary for this episode on the DVD, Chris talked about trying to block that scene so that you can feel how much he's off his game cause usually we know what the situation room looks like, we've seen it so many times, and we know where he stands or sits at the head of the table and almost immediately in that first time as they're in there, he just starts pacing it, it feels strange like he doesn't know where he's supposed to go, which I think is a beautiful way to set up him realizing that he doesn't know where he's supposed to go and he needs to get out of the...

TOMMY: All the reasons why Chris deserved an Emmy for this episode



HRISHI: Yea.

JOSH: I have a moment that I liked, a Stockard Channing moment, which by the way my iPhone invariably corrects to 'Stock Yard Channing' – which I think is her roller derby name, but, so there is a moment after Abby's aborted attempt to kind of crash the press room which is very moving, she is saying, "Why haven't I thought of this before, why did I wait this long, I'm going to make a direct appeal, I've seen other parents do it." She gets there and in the glare of the press room and people are wildly yelling questions at her and pictures are being taken and Amy and C.J. kind of usher her out and Abby admits that was a mistake, "I shouldn't have gotten in there," and they decide they'll just put her in a room to rest a little bit and we'll get the doctor to see you and she says:

[West Wing Episode 4.23 excerpt]

ABBY: *Tell them I want whatever Zoey got.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I thought that was a very sweet moment, a little bit sounds like *When Harry Met Sally* – 'I'll have what she's having.' But there's a very real maternal moment, it's almost like, I don't need a sedative, I want to know what my daughters experiencing cause she knows that she's been drugged and it reminded me of a family story which is my sister in law – Jenny – when her baby was born, she had her on a couch once and she rolled off and hit the floor. She was fine, but Jenny became so obsessed with knowing what did my daughter experience, that she kept lying on the couch and rolling off it. (Laughter). Falling on the floor and like 'no that wasn't hard enough' and boomp boomp do it again.' She had to know what did I just put my baby through. I connect that story to this moment. Tell them I want whatever Zoey got.

HRISHI: Good thing she didn't have twins, she'd make the other baby roll off the couch too.

JOSH: Good point.

HRISHI: There's another little gesture that I loved back in the situation room when they're about to potentially shoot down the prop plane. When they finally hear from the plane and they all kind of, they have a collective sigh of relief, John Amos does this thing where he takes off his glasses and just wipes his face and, I don't know why, that little move felt so poignant to me. I thought it was a really beautiful gesture. I'm not sure what it was that captured so much to me – I think it's because- throughout this episode and the last episode we see Fitzwallace having to come up against hard decisions and advise the President, kind of unflinchingly to go forward with them and it's not that he seems cavalier but you know, he's on the other side of Nancy McNally and so often he's like, 'we have to do, we have to make these moves' and even in these one act of –maybe of war- he can feel the tension so deeply.

TOMMY: It's just a very human moment too that you get – it's not about anything other than a man in a room having to make a decision that could impact all of our lives.

JOSH: I also like how that story – very minor little subplot about the twin prop plane in the air to me echos also what Will was talking about in the poker game a couple episodes earlier where these two guys are in a missile silo trying to figure out whether what they're tracking on radar is coming from North Korea towards Connecticut which doesn't make sense to them but are they going to respond – it's sort of a kind of similar tension in a similar situation.

HRISHI: Right. Accounting for human error and averting nuclear disaster potentially.

TOMMY: There was also kind of, again, Aaron, ability to call back which is at the end when President Walken comes in that he asks about that and it's so clear – I have a different agenda here than you guys have.

JOSH: And the way he says – 'I don't care if it's my mother going to visit her mother, shoot it down after one warning.'

TOMMY: And you believe it, absolutely believe it.

HRISHI: And then a point of order because I know if we don't mention it some will get mad at us for not mentioning it. Leo says 'if you lose your radio' there's a discussion of is their transponder set to 70 you know what frequency is the transponder set to. And he explains to the President –If you lose your radio you set your transponder to 7700, 7500 means you've been hijacked. But in fact, the squawk codes are a little bit different. 7500 is the highjack code, 7600 means your radio is broken, 7700 is a distressed call. There's a little morbid mnemonic device which is '75 taken alive, 76 technical glitch, 77 going to Heaven.'

TOMMY: We were thinking about leaving the show so...

(Laughter)

JOSH: I wonder how many air disasters have taken place because of the misinformation put out in this episode- we may never know.

HRISHI: As you may remember – David Rosen – the character that Josh plays David Rosen is named after the would be communications director – person who is maybe gonna have Toby's job – that was David Rosen. Shonda Rimes named Josh's character after that person who we never met.

JOSH: Also one of the main characters is named Huck which I suspect is another tip of the hat from Shonda to Aaron.

HRISHI: That's what I was wondering.

JOSH: I suspect – Huckelberry.

HRISHI: Even Molly – there's a Molly in *Molly You in Danger Girl* in *Scandal* too.

JOSH: Yeah that's true. What about, can we talk about, you got anything cooking? You got anything for me? You can answer just generally and we can talk specifically later or umm...

TOMMY: Yeah I do actually, and in fact here tonight is Julie DeJoie, she's somewhere – she runs my company.

HRISHI: And your company by the way is called...

TOMMY: Shoe Money Productions

HRISHI: Yeah ....

TOMMY: And there's a *Sports Night* episode called "Shoe Money Tonight" and what I wanted to say about Julie is, she was an assistant on *West Wing*, and she's now a producer on this

show we do for FX called *Snowfall*. She really does run my company and now we have these three great projects at FX.

JOSH: I've heard of career advancement. I've never experienced it but I'm happy for Julie.

TOMMY: And she's a Boston native so.

(Applause)

HRISHI: One thing I've noticed though you know, Julie is credited for all of Season 4 except this episode. She's credited as Assistant to Mr. Schlamme but not on "Twenty-Five." Julie?

JOSH: Julie wanna come up? If there's a story there, please come up!

TOMMY: You sure it's on every episode cause there was a thing that we had to do I remember – there's only so much bandwidth for assistants, so Lauren and Julie alternated on episodes. Lauren being Aaron's assistant at the time. I don't know if that was true in Season 4 but it was true at one point so maybe that's why.

HRISHI: Yeah I saw she was credited for "Commencement" but not for "Twenty Five" I didn't – I'm not sure if it was every episode.

JOSH: What we're saying is you owe her money (laughter).

TOMMY: And in fact we have these three projects at FX right now that are all being written by various really wonderful writers, very big political shows actually one from a podcast, I was telling you about - Malcolm Gladwell that we bought the rights to and we're developing that.

JOSH: *Revisionist History* it's called if you listen it's a great...

TOMMY: And there's a great episode called *Road to Damascus* and that is being developed with Michelle Ashford who created *Masters of Sex*. We have another – just very quickly – we have a project that is in the process – the pilot is almost done now – written – so we would probably go to shoot the pilot which is, and it's the wonderful thing about FX who, they're really an incredible group of people. They allow us to sort of – we pitched a four year series and it takes place over 100 years, and the end of the series is election night 2016 and the beginning is 100 years before and it's three families in one town that jumps 35 years in between and gets us to election night.

JOSH: Wow that sounds good.

TOMMY: And then we do *Snowfall* which is a show that's on the air right now that I just Executive Produce - I'm not directing at all that's also a great premise which is, the CIA bringing cocaine into California which then turned into crack which was in South Central and they were funding the Contras and so we're positing that and that's the story of the sort of genocide of that neighborhood.

HRISHI: And you have a great staple of directors on that show. Is that one of the things that you enjoy doing? Picking the directors?

TOMMY: Well that show, specifically, part of something that I'm championing at the DGA which is opening up a much bigger playing field for diverse, for women and people of color (applause) and that show I would do it on any show now but that show so screams for it because it is a show that takes place in South Central and East LA so there is a cube of

hispanic sort of vent and then the CIA so I have been able to shepherd quite a few people who have not directed television before and give them their first opportunities because I am there and FX is very supportive of that so that's been great. But very quickly I want to go back to Shoe Money, just in how I got the name of Shoe Money Productions. So my dad owned an office supply business he had an office supply business and he had a guy named Chico Hernandez who worked for him. He's a Mexican guy, amazing guy and in fact ended up becoming part owner of two of his stores, and in that time in Houston for a Mexican to own one of the stores was a really big thing and he was an extraordinary guy but he would come to work in the mornings, he would open up the hood of his car, and in the top of the carburetor was a wrapped piece of tin foil and he would open it up and it was a chicken cause he would cook the chicken on the hood, on the inside of the engine – just a colorful character – but he'd get his paycheck on Friday and when he got his paycheck he'd go "Shoe Money tonight". And what it was was there was a shoe store that was open till midnight in Houston which was mostly catering to Mexican men who were buying those pointed shoes that they loved and he just thought – you know, he had seven kids, he supported them all, I worked really hard and maybe I have a little bit left over for some shoe money. And so it became a poker term because I was playing – you know we played poker a lot and we'd go 'Shoe Money' and then Aaron started picking it up and he wrote the episode *Shoe Money* and so then it was to sort of name a company and I thought "it's a fun word to say, Shoe Money Productions" and it's a great tribute to Chico.

HRISHI: That is great

JOSH: That's fantastic.

HRISHI: I wanted to ask about one detail in this episode that is so rich – we talked about the scene with Richard and the babies in the hospital, but there's also this television playing old footage of President Bartlet with Zoey, I guess at the time he's Congressman Bartlet and – can you tell us who is actually playing the President in that?

TOMMY: It's Emilio – it's his son and it was like, I mean they separated at birth which it actually is – and he was so game and he was so sweet about it and we were like 'we just need you for this home footage' and it was great, it really looks exactly like Martin.

JOSH: It sure does.

HRISHI: It does. Renee Estevez was also on the show – Martin's daughter – but I don't think Emilio Estevez is credited in this for playing that part. Does he get the credit in it?

JOSH: What we're saying is, do you owe him money?

TOMMY: No Julie owes him money

HRISHI: Did you want to keep it a secret that?

TOMMY: I think he probably said, I don't really want credit for this. I think he was paid, he was paid. But that's probably it.

HRISHI: But I love that even in that moment there's that attention to detail on that kind of depth to it that you would actually bring in, I mean, Emilio Estevez is a star on his own right and that he would get to do this little cameo.

TOMMY: I actually love that scene the nurse seeing it and being reminded and 'please give the President my best' you know – it's a very tender moment.

HRISHI: Tommy thank you so much for joining us tonight

TOMMY: It was a pleasure. (Applause). I just want to say something else which is – you know I know this podcast works because of the work we all did, but this podcast works because of the two of you, it really does (applause). Somehow you've created Dean and Jerry or Abbott and Costello...

JOSH: I know which one I am.

TOMMY: But I really want to thank you guys for both keeping the spirit of the show alive but also doing a really great podcast.

HRISHI: That is very nice of you to say, thanks Tommy. I told Josh earlier we were talking about how the last episode that you did with us is my favorite episode of the podcast possibly, and I am, one of the things it's hard to think about as we move on into seasons five, six, and seven is that, I don't know, we won't get to have you on as a guest.

JOSH: You can be a consulting producer, right?

TOMMY: For two episodes.

JL Yeah we'll take two.

HRISHI: But if there is ever anything you want to discuss with us, please come back, come talk to us about the *West Wing* again, it's such a pleasure to have you and thanks so much. Before we wrap up, we have a couple of house keeping items we need to get to. We want to thank PRX, located here in Cambridge Massachusetts. PRX is the home of Radiotopia and the *West Wing Weekly* is a proud member of Radiotopia.

JOSH: Woo. Radiotopia is essentially a charcuterie board of delicious podcast morsels if you'd like to sample the other podcasts you can go to radiotopia.fm and we encourage you to do that.

HRISHI: We'd also like to thank Zach McNees who as I mentioned is here tonight, and also our editor Margaret Miller who isn't here tonight but her stunt twin baby is.

JOSH: Everybody here at the center, thank you for welcoming us and helping us out.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

CROWD: What's next?

HRISHI: Thank you so much.

[Outro Music]