

The West Wing Weekly
5.15: "Full Disclosure"
Guest: Lawrence O'Donnell

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Full disclosure: in this episode we're talking about Episode 15 from Season 5, it's called *Full Disclosure*.

JOSH: And full disclosure: it was written by Lawrence O'Donnell Jr, it was directed by Lesli Linka Glatter, and it aired on 2/25/04.

HRISHI: See, you put the tone in there too, that's why you're a professional actOR.

JOSH: [Laughing] That's right.

HRISHI: I just said the words.

JOSH: And coming up a little bit later in the podcast we'll talk, once again, to Lawrence O'Donnell.

HRISHI: From Warner Bros. here's the synopsis: The Bartlet Administration reels from press leaks that former Vice President Hoynes is preparing a tell-all book that'll embarrass the president and Leo as Hoynes plans to become a candidate for President of the United States. The newflash first stuns C.J. live on the air as she jousts with acerbic pundit Taylor Reid. Josh welcomes the Mayor of Washington, D.C. to the White House to discuss school vouchers and also encounters a political firestorm when intern Ryan proposes closing a military base in a district belonging to a powerful Congressman. Toby parleys with trade union bosses who reach an impasse over import safeguards for brassieres.

JOSH: And Will, the briefly seen, makes no impact.

HRISHI: I don't think that's true I think -

JOSH: [interrupting] Really?!

HRISHI: - In the end, in the final resolution for this episode, we will discover that Will is actually behind the answer, Will's the one who figures it out, he saves the day.

JOSH: Oh, so you're saying he had some great off-screen stuff.

HRISHI: No, on screen even, on screen even. It just happens very quickly.

JOSH: Ok, full disclosure, I don't remember it but...

[Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: Let's start before the beginning of the episode with the 'Previously On'.

JOSH: Oh, do let's.

HRISHI: Because this is an important one I think. There's a lot of portent in this 'Previously On'

JOSH: It's an important scene.

HRISHI: Uh-huh. There's a scene that didn't seem that important at first. C.J. says:

[West Wing Episode 5.05 excerpt]

C.J.: There's a lot you don't know about me.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: When she was talking to Toby about Ben.

JOSH: Extra layer of meaning once we watch this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah, we didn't even know. At that time, it was a little throwaway joke and now, it turns out, there IS a lot you don't know about C.J.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: We will later find out that the thing that you don't know about C.J--jumping all the way ahead--it's revealed at the end of the episode that C.J. and Hoynes, 10 years ago, had a one night stand and we don't find that out until-

JOSH: Are you sure? As I remember it, it was 1 year ago they had a 10 night stand, but I didn't watch that closely.

[Laughter]

HRISHI: Partial disclosure: that's not right.

JOSH: You see the disclosure as half full...sorry...

HRISHI: That'll be the end of that. But, C.J. and the Vice President had this affair, he was married at the time.

JOSH: And she knew.

HRISHI: And she knew it. We find this out at the end of the episode, but, if you watch the episode knowing that, it really colors the entire performance from Allison Janney, which is unbelievable.

JOSH: I agree and, of course, watching this show, possibly for the first time--I'm not even sure I'd ever seen it before, even though I acted in this episode and read it, and knew what happened, I, of course, didn't remember all these many years later--and I kept writing down that there were odd things about her, she seemed off her game in this episode.

HRISHI: C.J., not...not...

JOSH: No, not A.J., C.J. seemed rattled and I kept thinking she's got no poker face, she's not keeping her composure and why is she so rattled by all this and the scene with Leo--I liked that she's being hard on him--but there's a sort of energy there that seemed odd to me. I kept writing down these little notes and then, finally, at the end, I understood the layered, nuanced performance that A.J. was giving.

HRISHI: Yeah, there's one moment in particular that I wanted to mention which is the scene in Leo's office and she's trying to make sure that they have all their facts straight and so she's coming at him, saying, "I need to talk to the president." Toby comes in, C.J. even leaves for 20 seconds and then she comes back in the room as if those 20 seconds haven't elapsed and just continues her thought, saying "Because when everyone in the briefing room has that Hoynes article" but the way that she delivers this torrent is a little manic.

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

C.J.: Because when everyone in the briefing room has that Hoynes article, I'm going to be getting bombarded about what Hoynes says you and the president said and I've got to be sure...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: It's like the energy is a little bit beyond her control and I love the end of it, because she says:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

C.J.: I don't want have to go back out there a second time saying, "Oh yeah, Hoynes was right about this bit, and that bit," that you guys forgot to tell me.

Leo: I understand.

C.J.: We've got to get our stories straight on this today, so.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And it's this last little 'so' thing that she does.

JOSH: Tries to center herself?

HRISHI: Yeah, like she's driving this car and speeding and she can't quite stop it in time and one wheel goes over the edge of the cliff a little bit. I love how vehement she is and the amount of control the actor has to have to show just that the character is just a little bit out of control is really impressive.

JOSH: Well said.

HRISHI: And Leo can tell that there's something wrong, but then Toby covers for her. Throughout the whole episode from when C.J. begins on Taylor Reid's show when she first learns about this stuff and beyond, it seems like Toby kind of knows what's up.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And then he covers for her with Leo, but only kinda sort of, and you can also tell that Leo isn't really buying it. When he asks, "Is she ok?" and he says "Well, she got blindsided" he says, "And that got to her?", "Yeah it did", but then Leo has a look like that doesn't sound right.

JOSH: That doesn't add up.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Speaking of not adding up, C.J. makes a mathematical error in the cold open when she's on Taylor Reid. Did you notice that?

HRISHI: When she's talking about the billion right?

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

C.J.: We will raise 3.4 billion dollars a year, that's 16 billion dollars over 5 years and that would be enough.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: When in fact, 3.4 times 5 is 17. How does that happen?!

HRISHI: It's on live TV.

JOSH: Fair enough, that's right. First of all, why on earth did she go on Taylor Reid again? The episode starts, what, she's back on *that* show?! After *that* experience that she had, so that's odd.

HRISHI: I did kind of feel like maybe she was enjoying it a little bit though.

JOSH: Yeah, I guess ultimately she had some sort of endorphin rush by beating him down the first time and she wanted to do it again so she seems perfectly happy to be there. But she commits, I think there should be a word for a mathematical error... A solecism is a small grammatical error and I feel like there should be a word, I want to create a neologism for making a small math error and I thought it could be "she made a *mathstake*".

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: It's small, but she made one. That was a long way to go for a small payoff.

HRISHI: No, I'll take it, for a smallicism.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Still, let's go back to the 'Previously On'. Because one of the other significant parts of that are scenes from Season 4, Episode 21, "Life on Mars." I think it's worth re-watching that episode, or at least the end of the episode, to see this full exchange that gets highlighted there.

JOSH: Yes. Of course I went back and re-watched that as well.

HRISHI: I didn't watch the whole episode, I just watched that final scene. Did you watch the whole episode?

JOSH: No, of course, I just watched that final scene too. I remembered having watched it, I remember having been...I like that scene very much, particularly because it showed us the flaws and the questionable character elements of our heroes, particularly Leo-

HRISHI: [crosstalk] That's right.

JOSH: [crosstalk] Who, I was going to say essentially, but no, explicitly, suggests that Hoynes cover up the felonious leaking of classified information.

[West Wing Episode 4.21 excerpt]

LEO: Are you in a position to deny it?

HOYNES: No.

LEO: She's made a seven figure book deal. She's not gonna have a lot of credibility.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: On the re-watch, President Bartlet has some more plausible deniability. He does suggest maybe he can weather the storm, the way President Bartlet himself weathered the MS crisis, but Leo flat-out just suggests that they cover up. That they cover up illegal activity.

HRISHI: It's funny, you know, I remember when we discussed that episode, you brought that up as a comment and I didn't think that that was going to be a seed that was gonna come to fruit later, but here it really does. Although I think not in that way, I think a lot of the sort of more dire aspects of "Life on Mars" get swept aside. You know, this whole thing that you're alluding to, the leaking of information to Helen Baldwin, the really serious part is kind of more or less forgotten. They're really, I think, they're talking just about the affair, and then I think here, that's really all they're concerned about, they've completely forgotten about the leak part.

JOSH: Yeah, which to me is a little bit of a missing element in this episode because to me the super high stakes nature of what happened with Hoynes is that he, in fact, committed a felony, there was a suggestion of a cover-up, he decided to resign and now we're left not even really knowing what happened. I guess they did cover up the felonies!

HRISHI: Or it never came out.

JOSH: I guess maybe you could argue that if it never came out, it never came out and nobody covered it up, nobody asked but I suspect that knowledge of a felony and not reporting it is probably some sort of legal no-no, no?

HRISHI: Yeah, I think that would be a landmine that would probably, if they decided to step on, would take over the entire season probably of the show, and instead, focusing on just the sex scandal part of it, the affair, you know that Hoynes cheated on his wife with this woman, had all these phone calls with her, that ended up being, the thing, that was the part of it that lived on.

JOSH: Well riddle me this, let me see if I can blow up this episode, that I actually really liked-

HRISHI: [crosstalk] I really liked too.

JOSH: [crosstalk] With one comment. They're curating a list of Hoynes' biggest [expletive deleted]-ups during his time as the Vice-President and how about starting the list with "You committed multiple felonies and we know it, so I don't think you should publish this book, because we'll tell the Justice Department about the felonies."

HRISHI: I mean that is a good point. Maybe it's on the list and it just didn't get highlighted. It's in there somewhere behind the "Embarrassing the Heads of State."

JOSH: It's funny, it didn't even really occur to me until we're just getting there now in this discussion that it undercuts almost the whole *raison d'etre* of this episode which is that Hoynes has something. I mean they are trying to parse, and they're trying to recall, exactly what they said and how they said it because there are some questions here, there are some things that could cast them in a very bad light. C.J. doesn't know, she wasn't there, so she's trying to find out how much of this is true that he's saying. There are certain things that Leo claims are counterfactual--I didn't call the woman a cheap whore, I may have said she was a cheap person --he doesn't recall exactly what he said but it's like the elephant that's *not* in the room.

HRISHI: Yeah, that's good. There's one part that I like when C.J.'s in the Oval Office grilling Leo and the President and she says:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

C.J.: Leo, did you say the woman was a cheap whore and did you suggest she had other customers?

LEO: No, I said she was a cheap person because she sold her story. What kind of person does something like that?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But one of the things that gets left off is he really did say the word 'customers'. It's great how some of the bits of truth are in there.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: This is one of the nice things I think from re-watching "Life on Mars." What Leo says to the Vice President is:

[West Wing Episode 4.21 excerpt]

LEO: You're a giant John. You're a U.S. Senator, the Vice President of the United States and presumptive nominee of your party. You cannot be taken down by this cheap person and her customers huddled around Macy's window waiting for someone to turn themselves inside out. It's cause for divorce. Not resignation.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: See this is why I also think he's not talking about the leak, he's just saying it's cause for divorce, that's really what Leo is focusing on.

JOSH: Leo's gone through a couple of different phases in this scene. By that point, he's moved off of his 'Can you just deny it?' I think prior to that, the word felony is said out loud. Hoynes says 'I committed a felony' and Leo's immediate response is 'Are you in a position to deny it?' And that couplet includes very damning information about both characters. Hoynes is admitting he committed a felony and Leo is saying maybe we can cover it up and you can stay in office.

HRISHI: But you're right, that is not in the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* article, as far as we can tell. Nobody's saying and the Vice President isn't volunteering oh, and, yes, let's all return to the time when I committed a felony.

JOSH: Right, so help me understand. Hoynes' rehabilitation process, as he envisions it, is to give this interview, expand further on it in the book, and make President Bartlet and Leo look bad for having suggested that he could lie his way out of the sex scandal and remain in office and what he's saying is despite that bad, immoral advice, I decided to do the right thing and step down.

HRISHI: Yes. The person he's really going to be running against, if and when he runs, is Bob Russell.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And now Bob Russell is part of Team Bartlet, so by association if he can say everybody, you know I stepped down, I did the right thing after I acknowledged that I did the wrong thing. I acknowledged that I did the wrong thing and these guys wanted me to keep doing the wrong thing, but I, whatever, at the moment when I decided that I had a conscience, which is, when he got discovered-

JOSH: Right, that's usually when it kicks in.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's funny how that works.

JOSH: Just after getting caught.

HRISHI: But he said, I did the right thing, I resigned, and these guys are a bunch of liars. Or at least you know he's gonna make them look bad and I think, that that ultimately, does play to his benefit because the selection for the Presidential nominee is a zero sum game, so if you can make everyone else look worse then it does make you look better.

JOSH: Makes sense. How weird though, and we've talked about this again and again with the timing of our podcast and real events and the events of *The West Wing* that on the heels of this Woodward book coming out...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: With all these controversial revelations, we're now talking about this episode. As we record this, it's a day after all the Woodward book revelations.

HRISHI: Yeah, oh my god.

JOSH: It's crazy the way things seem to synch up with our podcast and the show.

HRISHI: Full disclosure Josh: I did steal some papers off of your desk.

JOSH: [Laughter] And one of the things that struck me was the difference between C.J. and Sarah Huckabee Sanders in their--even the stressed, concerned C.J.-- responds very differently from how Sarah Sanders... C.J. is attempting to be as nuanced and as truthful as she can be, and she's trying to nail Leo down on everything he recalls with precision. Sarah Sanders, I heard on CNN, I think today, her response to the Woodward book:

[Excerpt from CNN, September 5, 2018]

SARAH HUCKABEE SANDERS: Look he may have hundreds of hours of tapes but I think most of those probably come from some disgruntled former employees, it's a lot of anonymous sources. What I can tell you is that I've worked alongside the president, under the president, for the last three years. I was part of his campaign, I've been part of the Administration since day one, and I can tell you that the president, everything so far that I've seen out of this book, doesn't depict what's going on in the building behind me.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's just amazing, just you know, if C.J. took a page out of Sarah Sanders' book, she would have just come out and said, everything in Hoynes' article is horse [expletive deleted], there's nothing to it, it's all made up, it's all pure fiction. She's a bit more sophisticated and concerned with truth, I think, than Sarah Sanders.

HRISHI: The specificity that she's looking for is pretty remarkable.

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Weather. I think you said we could weather this.

C.J.: How is that different from beat the rap?

PRESIDENT BARTLET: It's completely different.

C.J.: It's not different enough for me to go out there and fight about it. Did you tell him he shouldn't have used White House phones?

LEO: No. I said, "Didn't you know the White House keeps records of phone calls?"

C.J.: Oh great...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I was reading about, the sort of, mock depositions that John Dowd was running Trump through in preparation for potential testimony and he just kept on getting him tripped up into lies and contradictions and the ability to remember what you said. I was just thinking what did we say in the last podcast, I certainly couldn't remember word for word.

JOSH: Yes, I think when deposed, and when testifying, "I do not recall" is a frequent go-to.

HRISHI: And probably accurate.

JOSH: Yes, I'm afraid I do not recall.

HRISHI: Hm-hmm. It's really impressive when the President says, 'I think you said weather' and it's true, he did say weather.

JOSH: Yeah, and not to harp on the same point again and again, but I've gotta believe that Leo remembers that he suggested covering up a felony.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean if he remembers the thing about the phone calls.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Ok, let's talk about some of the other stuff that goes on in this episode a little bit. So, another thing I wanted to talk about, it's not just C.J.'s performance that's great in this episode, I think Richard Schiff also turns in a fantastic performance, both on the dramatic side and on the funny side. So Toby has C.J.'s back throughout all of this. There's one part that I really like:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

TOBY: Are you sure you wanna handle this?

C.J.: Yeah.

TOBY: *Ok.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But even then, he's not sure about it and he's leaving the office, and he just gives her another look back over his shoulder. Just the concern for Toby, and his friendship with C.J., is really, I thought, really wonderfully shown in this episode.

JOSH: Full disclosure: I agree.

HRISHI: There's this one part at the end, and I'm jumping way ahead, but at the end when, after C.J. has gone to visit the Vice President, she comes back to her office, it's dark, and I thought, Toby's going to be there for her, he loves her, he knows that she needs a friend at this moment and sure enough, he's there. And I think he does something that I really appreciated, and I just thought was really some good friend work. C.J. says she's fine, he's leaving and then she just says:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

C.J.: Toby?

Toby: Yeah?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And he just waits. He doesn't say anything, and then he comes back into the room, and he sits, and he still doesn't say anything. And it's just good intuition on his part not to interrupt or anything, he just keeps his mouth shut, stays in the room and waits for her to then continue.

JOSH: Yeah, there's a sweetness to the way he treats her.

HRISHI: Yeah, I thought that was so lovely just that he was that patient and kept his mouth shut. It's a good move.

JOSH: Mm-hmm.

HRISHI: If we can stay with the end of the episode, just for a second, there are a couple of *Sports Night* things that it reminded me of.

JOSH: What?

HRISHI: Yeah, C.J. says a couple of things that reminded me of Dan Rydell. Just a couple of lines, she says:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

C.J.: I'm sorry.

TOBY: You don't have to apologize to me.

C.J.: I don't have anyone else I can apologize to.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which I loved, because of how just overwhelmed she is by all of these feelings and to some extent she just needs to get it out there and say, express her regret publicly in a way she hasn't been able to ever before, but it also made me think of Dan in the episode 'The Apology' from *Sports Night*, do you remember that?

JOSH: Episode 2.

HRISHI: Yeah, episode 2, God that show came out of the gates, just blazing.

JOSH: Aaron Sorkin.

HRISHI: In *The Apology*, you know, Dan has to apologize because he said something that sounded like he condoned marijuana use in a magazine article and he has this conversation with Isaac and Dan says, "I don't know what I'm supposed to say", and Isaac says:

[Sports Night Episode 1.02 excerpt]

ISAAC: Apologize.

DAN: To who?

ISAAC: Who cares?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But then it leads to this really beautiful moment at the end of the episode where Dan apologizes.

JOSH: Yeah, that is a great episode. Great performance by Josh Charles and Robert Guillaume. And I do like the idea that it's almost like Toby's her confessor; she's got no-one else she needs to say it out loud and I also like it goes right from that to the phone call with Ben and now she just needs to talk about something else.

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

C.J.: Ben, could you do me a favor? Would you mind talking to me for a while and letting me just listen?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: This also reminded me of Dan in *Sports Night*. I don't know if you remember, this is in the episode 'Shane'.

JOSH: Episode 9. Just kidding.

HRISHI: It's the hit and run Danny episode. At the end, Dan is really discombobulated and at the end Casey says, "Do you wanna find someplace and talk about it", and Dan says:

[Sports Night Episode 2.06 excerpt]

DAN: Hey do you think it would be ok if I, um, just sat down, just sat down for a while?

CASEY: 'Course it's ok, what's going on?

DAN: There may be periods of time in the conversation where I don't say anything funny and maybe long periods when I don't say any-

CASEY: Danny.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's also a really nice moment and I know the era of Sorkin is over, but as Lawrence is a cross-over, I thought both of those.

JOSH: Yeah, he did a very good job of, it's interesting that he touched on similar emotions.

HRISHI: Yeah. I mean I think this would have reminded me of Dan regardless of what show I was watching, but the fact that it's *The West Wing* made it feel more poignant. Let's talk about the rest of Toby's storyline in here.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: He has to deal with the reps from the AFL-CIO and I like, even at the very beginning of that part of the story, the way that he greets them in the lobby, you know that he is friends and familiar with these folks. He's friendly to everybody, he's saying hello and he's starting to talk and he sees somebody else and he says 'oh' and shakes their hand, I loved all of that. These are his friends, really, I mean like there are so many times when Toby has meetings where they're going to be contentious and he knows going into it, he's ready for a fight. It was nice to see the other way.

JOSH: But I also figure, Toby Ziegler's a labor guy.

HRISHI: Yeah of course, it was a nice way of bringing that across without having to say 'Toby Ziegler's a labor guy'

JOSH: Yeah, exactly right, you see it, you feel it, that these are his people.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I thought Ron Dean was good as the sort of Hoffa-esque spokesperson for the AFL-CIO group.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Alright. The “Full Disclosure” page on IMDB features a still of me for some reason.

HRISHI: I’m telling you, because Will plays the pivotal role-

JOSH: I know, I know, I wanna get to it, we’ve gotta build up to it. I’m excited to find out how.

HRISHI: While Toby is trying to go into the meeting with the Union guys, Ed and Larry meet him and they want to give Toby this info on China and the trade deficit, but he dismisses them. He has a kind of TV ‘nyuk nyuk’ of:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

TOBY: No, this meeting’s about politics, facts won’t help.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right yes, I wrote that line down too.

HRISHI: Did you write ‘nyuk nyuk’?

JOSH: No, but that’s what I was thinking. I was disappointed that at no point there was a lame joke made about artificially supporting a sagging bra market. I felt the whole storyline was leading to something along those lines and it never happened.

HRISHI: [Laughing]

JOSH: There was a funny line, though, about Ed and Larry being the right guys to bring in to discuss bras, which is just weird. It made me laugh.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Yeah. They’re the experts. First of all, Richard’s performance of just the word:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

TOBY: Bras?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Is great. So Ed and Larry then go to the other meeting and the other plot, they go from one B story line to the other. They get into the base closure meeting that Josh is running and that Ryan keeps trying to sort of insert himself into. But there is a great part when the bra stuff comes up, it turns out he does need them, and so then Josh comes in and says, ‘Toby needs to talk to you about China’ and as soon as he says ‘China’ William Duffy aka Larry looks at Ed and gives him a grin like ‘See? We told that guy to take our memo’.

JOSH: [Laughing] He’s right.

HRISHI: He’s vindicated.

JOSH: Speaking of which, not Josh's finest moment when he inexplicably says:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

JOSH: Do the Chinese even need bras?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: What the [expletive deleted] Josh?!

JOSH: That was when I went [Josh makes needle scratch noise]. That was more than bumping on, that was the needle scratches the vinyl record [needle scratch noise effect] sound effect for me.

HRISHI: I wrote 'just stop talking'.

JOSH: Why? Why? How, how did that make it out of committee?

HRISHI: Oh, I know why I wrote 'just stop talking' because he had also said previously:

[West Wing episode 5.15 excerpt]

JOSH: ...because reviewing a cost benefit analysis for every military base in the country is as mind-numbing as a Radiohead concert.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh, yeah, I forgot.

HRISHI: I was like, come on Josh, I mean.

JOSH: How dare you?

HRISHI: I think it is consistent, but man, that is a dude who I would not enjoy hanging out with. Yeah, Josh thinks Radiohead is mind-numbing. If you remember, 'In the Shadow of Two Gunmen', he says:

[West Wing Episode 2.02 excerpt]

JOSH: We gotta replace this music, we gotta replace it with some Doobie Brothers.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh dear. I like the Doobie Brothers though. I'm gonna take back that 'Oh dear'.

[Laughter]

JOSH: Oh Blackwater.

HRISHI: I'd be open to his Doobie Brothers recommendation if he didn't also say Radiohead was mind-numbing.

JOSH: I hear you.

HRISHI: Ok, full disclosure.

JOSH: Full disclosure. The Greg Brock/C.J. scene, why did they play it out the way they do? That whole... First of all, love Sam Robards, haven't seen him in years, but I know him, he's a great guy and a wonderful actor and the scion of Jason Robards and Lauren Bacall.

HRISHI: Is he really? Oh wow.

JOSH: Yes, that is quite a talented family there.

HRISHI: That's a pretty good "bring your parents to school day."

JOSH: [Laughing] And Sam's great here as Greg Brock, but I don't understand the coyness about, basically they just make a deal, but the whole thing they play it as if C.J.'s office may be bugged.

HRISHI: I think the idea is that in the future... so, ok, so he comes into C.J.'s office and she asks him for an advance copy of his article. He says, 'I cannot give it to you, I have a policy, you cannot have it' and then, as he's leaving, he drops a disk which I thought at first was, oh, subtle move, but then both of them just carry the conversation on while staring at the disk, looking at it.

JOSH: I know, it's not concealed at all, it's in the middle of the floor.

HRISHI: And it's a disk that says 'Hoynes' on it. It really couldn't be more obvious. But I think it's so that, if one were to testify, you could say 'What was the content of your conversation?' She could say 'I asked him for an advance copy and he said he wouldn't give it to me'.

JOSH: But testify to what?

HRISHI: I don't know!

JOSH: That's what I'm saying, what's the, I mean, there's no...this White House doesn't even care about felonies!

[Laughing]

JOSH: 'She asked for an advance copy and I gave it to her.' That's the one thing I don't understand, it's like this huge spy thing, like one of these scenes where he's going to write down a figure on a piece of paper, 'I'll need that much money.' Why don't they just say, 'Oh yeah, I'll give you an advance copy but this is what I'm going to need in return.' I guess because it would be less exciting to watch but I ended up watching it going, what the hell are they doing with this thing on the floor and the 'wink wink'.

HRISHI: I'm even thinking about what's I've just said too, as if in some kind of deposition, the questioning would only stop there. 'But did you get an advance copy?' 'Dammit!'

JOSH: Dammit, the whole floor thing didn't work!

HRISHI: 'And how did you get it?' 'From a disk.' 'And where did you get the disk?' Well, maybe it's ok-

JOSH: 'He dropped it.'

HRISHI: 'He dropped it. It was an accident, he didn't intentionally give it to me.'

JOSH: I get all that, it's just, I kept thinking, but why do they have to do this secretly, what's the plausible deniability for? What are the stakes?

HRISHI: Who are they going to deny it to? The thing I would like to ask them under oath is, how does C.J. have a zip drive attached to her computer?

JOSH: Also a fair question. What do you call those, I remember I just to have a big, blue drive.

HRISHI: That's a zip drive, yeah, it's a zip disc and a zip drive.

JOSH: A zip disk, yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah, they were a big deal because I think they could hold a hundred megabytes.

JOSH: And they were big.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: They were physically big.

HRISHI: Well you need a lot of real estate so that you can write 'Hoynes' on the label in huge letters.

JOSH [as if reading] 'Hoynes Top Secret. Please return to Greg Brock.'

HRISHI: [as if reading] 'Not for C.J., parentheses for C.J.' Ok, let's go to Josh's meeting with the folks in charge of closing bases in order to increase military efficiency. Ryan Pierce is being an obnoxious little snot throughout the whole thing but then, in the end, it turns out, he was right, he did the right thing, he was smart.

JOSH: Yeah, he did.

HRISHI: Did you fall for it, did you get tricked by his-

JOSH: I did, and I was in the episode. [laughter] Yeah, I did, I didn't catch it and I really liked it.

HRISHI: I did too.

JOSH: And I thought Jesse Bradford was particularly good, and of course, Brad as well. I liked the way that whole thing played out, I liked the way Lawrence wrote the scene and that Ryan would clue in Josh knowing that they're being watched and doing it, and he's actually trying to fire him.

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

JOSH: You planned this?

RYAN: Do you want me to look like I'm crying? I can do that. I can look like I'm crying.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: The whole way that played out it was very funny, and clever, and a great reversal that I did not see coming.

HRISHI: Yeah, Ryan totally jiu-jitsu'd the entire meeting, pulled one over on everybody, including his boss, and it is really wonderful and kind of generous that at the end he's still acting like, of course Josh knew what he was doing the whole time.

JOSH: Right. That was great. That whole piece was wonderful.

HRISHI: Yeah. Josh asks him 'you planned this?' And I was like, be cool dude, now that you've figured that out, try and act at least like-

JOSH: Yeah. Well, actually, they're both very, very good in the scene because Brad has to go through a complex series of emotions and realizations, because he's incredibly pissed at him, and then he's confused and pissed, and then he's confused and starting to get it, and then he's starting to get it and admiring him but still a little pissed. It was just a lot going on and it's very, very funny and a joy to watch.

HRISHI: I think this is a long play that has paid off, you know. They've really built this character up as someone who I was going to find annoying and I did for a very long time, and snotty and you know self-important and entitled and he plays into all of that stuff in this episode when he gets up and he's going to call the congressman, Congressman Finn, anyway, and I was like, what is this guy doing? He's going to blow it for everyone. And I thought it was more of this, I thought it was going to be more outrageous, oh, this character is so annoying, he's gonna, I can't believe this and then they totally turned it around on me.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree, Lawrence did a neat trick there.

HRISHI: You know what was another turn around I had? I had originally written Carol keeps asking C.J. again about phone calls from Ranger Ben:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

CAROL: Oh and I've got Ben holding on line one.

C.J.: I cannot talk to Ben right now.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I had originally written: TAKE A HINT CAROL in all caps.

JOSH: I couldn't even write it down because I love Melissa Fitz too much, but I thought Carol, come on, this is enough. I wouldn't write it down out of respect for Melissa Fitz, you obviously don't feel the same way about her.

HRISHI: But then the episode ended, and C.J. calls Ben and really has this wonderful interaction with him that is really meaningful and she really needs and so I had to write down, after that 'It turns out Carol was right, Hrishi.'

JOSH: [laughing] Carol knew. Another neat little reversal.

HRISHI: It was, and I'd written down 'Ben needs to learn how to send an email instead of calling incessantly'. Anyway, it ended up being the right thing.

JOSH: And how great is Allison even just into that last scene, yea, even unto the flentl, when she's no longer on camera and you just hear--we don't know what Ben is saying--but we hear that it's giving C.J. a little laugh and she sounds like she's decompressing a little bit? Just Allison's performance is spectacular to the last moment.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm. ok, so that's the end of the episode as C.J.'s returned from her visit to Hoynes, but let's go to the moment where she decides to go see Hoynes and this is where I think, very briefly, it's revealed Will is actually the winner of this episode.

JOSH: Bring it.

HRISHI: So again, Will is right there with everyone else about the stuff, not only as a former comrade of theirs, but in his capacity as Chief Advisor to the Vice President.

JOSH: This is a threat to his bread and butter, and we see Will's pure, practical, political side even in his quick aside to Josh:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

WILL: The Vice President would like to urge you not to close bases in any state with more than one electoral vote.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Exactly. Yeah. Finally, Will says:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

WILL: We gotta take a shot at Hoynes. We gotta let him know we have ways of fighting back.

JOSH: What ways?

WILL: We need a list.

TOBY: Of what?

WILL: A list of all of his private on-the-job screw-ups. Every time Hoynes gave the president bad advice, every mistake he ever made, big and small.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And that inspires Leo, and Josh, and Toby, to start thinking of all those moments that do, in fact, exist, proving that Will is right. Will then says 'oh we can start leaking it to the press' but then C.J. says "No give it to me. I'll fire a warning shot." And this to me felt to me like she's taking Will's strategy but then she steps it up. In a scene that's previously been referenced on *The West Wing*, it reminded me of Michael Corleone volunteering to shoot Sollozzo in *Godfather I*.

[*The Godfather Part 1* excerpt]

Michael: It's not personal Sonny, it's strictly business.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Episode 2. [laughter] To do it himself,

HRISHI: That he'll shoot-

JOSH: With the gun in the toilet-

HRISHI: Exactly with the gun in the toilet. And then C.J. goes in and she drops the list on the Vice President and he's like, ok I got it, he's like this is effective. But it turns out that's not even the most lethal weapon that she has, she asks him about the thing, that leads to the revelation about the two of them. She says:

[*West Wing* Episode 5.15 excerpt]

HOYNES: Sorry-

C.J.: When you run for president, the press is going to find some of those women, and if you try to attack them, if you get your opposition research team working on them, if you try to destroy them, if you try to say they're all bimbos and liars, then I'll be standing right there with them and I'll be ready to take anything you or your people throw at me. Anything. So don't make me tell the truth about you because it will be the whole truth.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Leave the gun C.J., take the cannoli.

JOSH: Take the cannoli. Yeah, it's not the prettiest side of politics we're seeing in terms of Will's plan and their collation, if that's the word, of this list. They're putting this list together of everything, every screw up that Hoynes has made. Even Toby can see it's 'I hope they never make a list for me.'

HRISHI: Yeah, Toby says, 'There wouldn't be enough paper'.

JOSH: Yeah they really are fighting dirty rather than just denying what this guy has to say, the aspects of it that they believe are counterfactual. They're getting right in the gutter.

HRISHI: Yeah, he went low and they are going low.

JOSH: Exactly, which is always my approach, I go lower. On Twitter anyway.

HRISHI: Let's talk about this part of the episode that we haven't touched on yet, which is school vouchers for Washington D.C. First of all, James Pickens, Jr. plays the Mayor of D.C. and he is so good.

JOSH: He IS good.

HRISHI: It's a shame that he's not just always on the show. He's so good. James Pickens, Jr. has been on many, many things though. He was on *Grey's Anatomy* for a million episodes.

JOSH: Oh that's right, he's a Shondaland denizen.

HRISHI: Yeah and he was on *NYPD Blue*, I think, back in the day, as well, for a little bit. He's been on *Six Feet Under*. He was in Rob Lowe's show *The Lyon's Den*. He is awesome. He was in a lot of episodes of *The X-Files* if you remember that, he played Alvin Kersh in *The X-files*.

JOSH: He's a good actor.

HRISHI: He's fantastic. It was very neat how, in this episode, they took a couple of different jabs at D.C. I don't know if jabs is the fair thing to say but-

JOSH: Oh, and the Mayor himself has some complaints about the position he's in, the unique position he's in.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. It's a city whose budget is controlled by Congress and the President and despite that, or because of it, there are problems in D.C.'s infrastructure. The schools aren't great and the water's bad.

JOSH: Yes, that was very, that certainly resonated, what with Flint, the water still being toxic. I mean it's played for a laugh:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

C.J.: Can I get you anything? [Shouting] Carol, do we have anything?

CAROL: Umm, water.

GREG: Yeah, thanks.

CAROL: It's D.C. water.

GREG: I'm good.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah, it's played for a laugh and it's played entirely separately from the storyline about school vouchers but I thought it was great that they included that joke in this episode, you know this thing about D.C.'s water is terrible, which at the time it really was, I mean that was a fact in the early 2000's. D.C.'s tap water was terrible, the lead levels were 83 times more than the safe limit.

JOSH: Unbelievable.

HRISHI: It's a fair shot, you know, when Greg Brock says he's not gonna have the tap water but I thought brilliant to include it in an episode where we also see the Mayor of D.C. talking about the plight that D.C. public school students are in.

JOSH: What do you make, first of all, of President Bartlet's calling Charlie in from the other room in order to have this quick little conversation and then, what do you make of his, in fact, turning his mind around on the issue?

HRISHI: Yeah, well ok, before we get to that part, I just want to say about Charlie that, his reaction to the Mayor of D.C. is awesome. I love, when they just mention that he's coming to see the President, that he says 'about time'. Then later when he's actually next to the Mayor he's like a little star struck.

JOSH: [crosstalk] I like that too.

HRISHI: He's kind of fidgety and he's just happy that he gets to meet him, it's so cute.

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

CHARLIE: Mr. Mayor, Hi, I'm Charlie Young.

MAYOR: Hey Charlie, good to meet ya. How ya doing?

CHARLIE: I'm doing great, just great. I wanted to introduce myself because, well, I'm a big fan.

MAYOR: Well, thank you.

CHARLIE: I voted for you both times.

MAYOR: Well, I hope you're going to vote for me next time.

CHARLIE: Every time.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: This is one of the top cute Charlie moments.

JOSH: I agree, he doesn't try to seem cool at all, he's like 'I voted for you twice, I'll vote for you again' it's just pure enthusiasm and a little bit of giddiness, there's obviously a little bit of a hero for him.

HRISHI: Yeah, and that top cute Charlie list is tough to get on but this one is up there for me. So I thought, wow, you just need a sample set of one for your data to make your entire decision?

JOSH: Oh well, if Charlie's for it...! Done.

HRISHI: It did feel a little bit like, let me tell you what I know, I have a black friend, in fact. Let me get him on the phone, he'll tell you.

JOSH: It felt a little bit like that to me too.

HRISHI: Yeah, it then made me think of the time when I was I think, in 2nd or 3rd grade when we had a demonstration day about Native Americans in our school and one of the kids said "We should ask Hrishi, he's Indian."

JOSH: [Laughing] And did you correct him and say, no sorry, we say Native American?

HRISHI: [Laughing] That's right. I thought that part was a little suspect, but I did also like that the president got it reversed on him. He calls in Charlie thinking: Charlie's going to support me, look here's a guy who went to Public School, look at where he's sitting. He sees outside of the Oval Office and he tries to tell the Mayor as well:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: And you couldn't be a better advertisement for them.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Then he says, [using affected speech] 'let me clear my schedule and ask my valet to fetch a spot of tea'. [Josh laughs] Charlie comes in and then reveals that yeah I went to a public school but I would have liked to have gone to this private school, Gonzaga.

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

MAYOR: Why?

CHARLIE: There's never been a shooting there. They don't even have metal detectors. Almost everyone goes to college.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I thought it was great and also one that the president probably should have seen coming.

JOSH: Yes, I also felt the same way too and there's a look on the Mayor's face like 'I knew what he was going to say.' Look, there's only so much you can fit into a single episode of *The West Wing* but there's no conversation about maybe putting vouchers aside and putting more funding towards public schools that don't have to be the kind of schools that Charlie's describing. It's a very complex issue.

HRISHI: I feel like there's enough in the background there to suggest that the mayor says "look the Republicans are going to give me enough money for this,"-- talking about the larger systemic issues--I'm never going to get anywhere with an opposition Congress and all this stuff. This is actually something concrete that I can do to help 200 kids out of 68,000. Let me just do *this*." I thought it was really interesting. Lawrence O'Donnell was actually a substitute school teacher in the Boston area and that experience changed his mind about vouchers. I think it will be fascinating to hear his perspective on including that. I also loved the way that D.C.'s tendency to get short shrift was highlighted just by the way the mayor keeps getting passed off, they keep asking him to wait. He doesn't get the kind of attention certainly that the base closure meeting gets, or even the Union reps, it's an interesting hierarchy that they show in this episode. These guys get whatever they want, they get the nice room, these guys they can have ESPN, whatever. Then the Union reps get this storage room and folding chairs and they get Toby, but Toby has to leave sometimes. But the Mayor, he's never been invited to the White House.

JOSH: Yeah, not during this Presidency.

HRISHI: Yeah. Then, even just walking to whatever meeting, Josh has to keep asking him to hold on while he goes to attend to something else.

JOSH: Fair point.

HRISHI: I thought that was well done too. The other thing about that meeting with the mayor and the president was his point about how the president and Josh weren't really in a position to talk to him, or lecture him about the value of public schools, in a way, because they had not gone to public schools; they're Democrats who are constantly talking about how education is the silver bullet and all this stuff but they haven't gone to public schools.

JOSH: A little bit like Senator Hunt busting Josh Lyman for not having served in the military. Like, you're gonna talk to me?

HRISHI: Right, yeah and again, just like with the D.C. water thing, there's a great set-up to that earlier when Josh is talking to Donna about Ryan Pierce.

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

JOSH: You left the kid alone with the brass?

DONNA: Just for a minute, he actually seems to have a feel for that stuff.

JOSH: He's faking it. If you learn one thing in prep school, it's how to pretend like you always know what's going on.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which is true, but, a point that isn't raised in that episode, although maybe it's close enough with the thing that the mayor says about, you know, you guys didn't go to public school, no child of a president in the last 100 years, over a hundred years, no child has gone to public school of an American President except for Jimmy Carter.

JOSH: That is a telling statistic.

HRISHI: I mean, I'm sure that there are all kinds of things that have to be taken into consideration: security, secret service, all that stuff. But still for a group of people...

JOSH: Espousing the virtue of public education.

HRISHI: They aren't also willing to subject their children to it. In Washington D.C.

JOSH: Proud to say that my son has gone to only public education. My daughter, some public, some private. What are you guys doing with Watson?

HRISHI: [laughter] Watson's being home schooled.

JOSH: Oh, that's another way to go and equally valid.

HRISHI: I am a product of a mix of public and private education myself. I went to public school until 8th grade, my sister had gone to public school for her entire elementary and high school education and then she got to college and she told my parents 'I am not prepared for this and you need to figure out something else for Hrishi, you need to send him somewhere else, you should get him to whatever the best school is that is financially feasible' and I ended up going to Exeter, which we couldn't afford, but Exeter was the school that stepped up and paid for everything, and it was amazing. I mean, it was an incredible experience and I'm so happy that I did that.

JOSH: What a good and nurturing big sister.

HRISHI: Oh, yeah, I mean in addition to introducing me to *The West Wing*, there are many, many things that she's responsible for.

JOSH: She's a good one.

HRISHI: Yeah. One thing I was thinking about with the vouchers too, and the cost of schools, even if you have your tuition paid for, because this is something that I experienced, even if you have your classes paid for, there are so many-

JOSH: That's not it.

HRISHI: Yeah, there are so many things that end up coming up. One thing that I am forever grateful to Exeter for, is this, it felt a little, I don't know, I guess a little bit embarrassing at the time or something, but I feel like I can talk about it now, the cost of the prom. Our Senior Prom

was a fancy prom, it was a fancy private school prom and it was at Ipswich Castle and it was a really nice thing, but to go, you had to rent a tux, and you had to buy a ticket. And I had to buy a ticket for me and, you know, my date.

JOSH: Ay-yi-yay.

HRISHI: The combined cost of all of that stuff was something like \$140, you know with the tux rental and the two tickets and that's just not money that I had, there was no, anyway-

JOSH: Ah, that's painful. I thought you were just going to say books, books are so damn expensive.

HRISHI: Exactly, well yeah, there's books too. Anyway, one of the wonderful things about that school was, I mean there are a lot of kids, almost half the school gets financial aid of some kind, but for someone like me, who was there on a full ride, they actually, the financial aid office covered that stuff. They covered the cost of the tux rental and the tickets so I could still have the full school experience.

JOSH: The full experience, yeah.

HRISHI: I thought that was really wonderful. But not every school has those kinds of resources or necessarily that kind of generously thinking financial aid staff. So even if you get into the school there is just so much, so many other expenses. How did you like your private school Josh?

JOSH: Well, let's see, I went to Yeshiva for 1st through 8th grade. I went to public kindergarten. I went to Yeshiva for 1st through 8th grade and loved it. I went to Westchester Day School, Mamaroneck, New York, an Orthodox Yeshiva, and I got, I think, an excellent education there and because of the religious aspect of the curriculum, ethical issues were a part of the core curriculum and that's something that I treasure from my early educational experiences. And then I went to a kind of classic college prep private high school in The Bronx called Horace Mann which, if you want to Google, you can read about Horace Mann and its last many decades of questionable goings-on. But I thought I got a very good education there, and it was, maybe a little too much of an attempt to funnel its graduates into the best colleges, because I don't know how important that is in the end, but it also had a wonderful arts program and I really did a lot of great theater there and they're wonderful teachers and I had a great experience there.

HRISHI: And how well did you learn to always pretend like you know what's going on?

JOSH: I thought you had to go to boarding school for that. Because, if anything is clear from these 120 or so episodes, even when I have a sense of what's going on, I can't radiate it. I don't know.

HRISHI: Alright. Let's talk a little bit more about Ed and Larry. I think this is a tremendous episode for Ed and Larry.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: There's this part when they get called out of the base closure meeting and they have to go help Toby with the Unions, Josh tells Ryan and Donna that really what they have to do is ask

'and how much will that save' every few minutes but before that scene, there's a little bit of dialogue from Ed, you can't even hear it entirely, because it mostly comes through the closed door, but Ed has his version of 'how much will that save?' And it is a work of art:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

ED: Do you have long-run projections for the economies of scale you think are achievable for the net consolidations of troops and material in all of your recommendations?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought that is an excellent way to say 'and how much money will that save?' like you're really paying attention.

[laughter]

HRISHI: It's a great way to pretend like you know what's going on.

JOSH: Right, there you go.

HRISHI: And then Ed and Larry get to break down the incredibly complicated dynamics that go on with trade relations, which seems a little bit silly to have to explain to those guys, I feel like they probably know.

JOSH: I thought so too.

HRISHI: The import of cars will affect, yeah anyway.

JOSH: There can never be too much Ed and Larry though, I have to say.

HRISHI: I think so too.

JOSH: I love me Ed and Larry, Peter and Duffy.

HRISHI: Please tell me, I don't think this is probably a thing, but please I would just love if there were an episode coming up somewhere between now and the end of the series that was told from the point of view of Ed and Larry.

JOSH: [Laughing]

HRISHI: Where they carry the 'A' story.

JOSH: Wouldn't that be nice? No, that's not going to happen. I mean, possibly the reboot could be entirely from their point of view...

HRISHI: It would be awesome. I would love to [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] In my mind, they're living together, they're in their sixties.

HRISHI: They're Bert and Ernie in real life.

JOSH: Exactly, that's right, they've both got girlfriends in Canada, and they're very happy together.

HRISHI: There's an episode of Matt Fraction's run of *Hawkeye*, from Marvel Now, that came out a few years ago that is truly tremendous. In the first issue of the series *Hawkeye*, it's really about Clinton Barton, who is Hawkeye, it's about him while he's not an Avenger. It's just him, it's basically like, almost like a sitcom set-up where-

JOSH: Really? That sounds good to me.

HRISHI: It's so good. It's just him in the building in which he lives and his neighbors and no other real superhero stuff except for little tangential things like Iron Man comes in to help him set up his DVD player, stuff like that. But at one point, he rescues a dog from some gangsters and he calls the dog 'Pizza Dog' because the dog eats his pizza. Anyway, later on in the run, there is an issue that is told entirely from the point of view of the dog, and it's amazing. There's no dialogue that's discernible except for words that the dog understands.

JOSH: Brilliant, I love it.

HRISHI: So, I thought you could do a similar thing with Ed and Larry, they don't understand any words except for the ones that are directly related to, Chinese bras, I don't know. There's one other piece of continuity, a very light one that I appreciated. In addition to this being the kind of part two to 'Life on Mars' in terms of the main plot, we get the return of Claire Huddle.

JOSH: Who's that?

HRISHI: Do you remember Claire Huddle?

JOSH: Sure don't!

HRISHI: Claire Huddle's the woman who delivers the Vice President's resignation letter.

JOSH: Sure, now I know.

HRISHI: You remember? She's played by Mandy Freund and she doesn't have any lines in this episode but she's the one who lets C.J. in to see Hoynes. I love that she's still there. I was thinking when I was watching again, when they said, 'oh Hoynes doesn't have a staff, he doesn't have people,' I thought 'he's still got Claire Huddle.' Here he is now working in a law office but this person has stuck with him and I just loved that detail.

JOSH: Kind of the way that you still see Will sometimes.

[Laughter]

JOSH: They're very thorough that way, they keep that guy around, he used to be-

HRISHI: The most well paid extra. One of the things that was so neat about that, even though she didn't have any lines, it really writes this other part of the episode because it makes you think about Claire's own character. This person who knows about Hoynes' scandal, was there for the reveal of it, who delivered the resignation letter.

JOSH: Yeah, we'll give her an episode, one episode from Claire Huddle's perspective.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly

JOSH: We'll take a quick break now and when we come back, Lawrence O'Donnell will talk to us.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: Joining us now is Lawrence O'Donnell. He's the host of *The Last Word with Lawrence O'Donnell* on MSNBC. He was a producer and writer on *The West Wing* and his work included writing this episode, "Full Disclosure." Thanks so much for joining us Lawrence. We haven't spoken to you since way back in Season 2 when you played President Bartlet's father and a lot has changed since then. We're now in Season 5, we're in the post Aaron Sorkin years, and in Season 5 you came back to the show as a consulting producer. I was wondering if you could tell us, if we could start by, having you tell us about that experience, how did that come about? What was that conversation like when you first heard about Aaron leaving and then got this gig as consulting producer?

LAWRENCE: Well, that last episode that we talked about was my last episode on the show in my first run of the show. I did the first two years of the show, and then I left and went off to create my own show, which did get on NBC for a short run. It was called *Mr. Sterling* and was starring Josh Brolin as a young and suddenly appointed member of the United States Senate. That was, I'm sorry to tell the world, the single most difficult thing I've ever done in my life. Running a show on network television, I believe is the most difficult of human achievements. It's really the crushing schedule and, by the way that's the thing that show business has changed, show business has said to people like me in that position now, don't worry you don't have to do 22, you can do 10, you can do 12. It's that crush of 22 episodes that you are supposed to deliver for NBC, CBS, ABC, at that time, in those days and that's just an inhuman attempt. After my show was on the air for, I don't know, 6 or so episodes, there was a trend line in the ratings that was disappointing to NBC and so, so we were on the road to cancellation, it was pretty clear to John. And we hadn't quite gotten the word yet, and I'm sure John Wells got the word before I did and John called me up and said, 'Listen if your show doesn't get picked up for next season, we'd love to have you back at *The West Wing*' and I was reluctant and I said, 'Well, you know, I've already written for that show, I've done that' and he then intimated without specifically saying that it would be very, very different in the next season, probably very, very different and when I put the words together in my head what it sounded like to me was, it's entirely possible that Aaron wouldn't be there and that John would in effect, take over the show, and that became a public fact not long after that conversation. And so that actually made it really interesting to me because I looked at it as I've done that show, but I've never done it under the John Wells version of the show and John is THE master of show running in Hollywood history and so I went back to it in the spirit of, I'm going to go back now and take a course called 'Show running 101' and I'm going to sit there beside John Wells and I'm going to study how this is done and I'm going to study how he, somehow, holds 10,000 pounds over his head every day running *ER* at the time and running *The West Wing* and doesn't even make it

look strenuous after I'd been completely defeated by it and so that was my intent in going back, I really just wanted to take a graduate course in show running. Being the laziest person in the business, certainly at that point, I fought for and got the two days a week deal so I was headed for the laziest possible version of working at *The West Wing*, making very good money for doing it and, you know, two days a week. So you'll notice that the one we're talking about is episode 15 of season 5 because I was sitting there on my hands hoping I would never write an episode the whole year and at a certain point, John turned to me and said I know you're not eager to but I really, could you possibly do 15 for us? And, of course, I would do whatever John asked.

JOSH: How different was the writers' room under John as compared to under Aaron?

LAWRENCE: It was very different. The big, big difference was that what happened in the writers' room was always real. The biggest thing is you never wasted a minute, you didn't waste a single second and I noticed this actually in the first meeting, cos these are three hour meetings and writers rooms usually spend the first 90 minutes joking around doing nothing, like it has nothing to do with the show and it's literally just like waking up your voice box and talking and joking and it's entirely, it's joke filled for the first 90 minutes and everyone is avoiding getting to the work. With John Wells that period lasts less than 90 seconds and he goes straight to it and you know this guy has a million things to do as soon as he leaves this room and I remember, in the first meeting that John was running, making a couple of jokes and by the third time I made a joke, like an hour in, I thought 'woah, I'm not gonna do that anymore because I just used up 45 seconds of John Wells' time, on a goddamn joke, I can't do that!' The other thing about the Aaron room is, it wasn't always real, meaning: I don't think Aaron would be surprised for anyone to suggest that he can be moody. So what I came to realize was things like 'Oh I have a very good idea, I think I've just figured out how to solve this problem' but it's Monday and it's 11 AM and so I'm not going to mention it because it'll get shot down right now because that's just the way it feels right now. But Thursday, when Aaron needs to deliver an Act One for Friday morning's shooting, this idea is going to be great. This idea is going to unlock the puzzle and it's going to go straight into the script. And so there was a certain kind of management and I was able to read where Aaron was on that curve, you know of, will this click with him right now? And with John Wells, it's machine-like. If you have a good idea, and you mention a good idea, bang! It's in right now. And it's not a matter of mood, it's not a matter of "Is this Monday or do we wait for John to be desperate on Thursday?" None of that was there. And so it was very, very different that way.

HRISHI: I want to turn now to this episode, I wanted to ask you, how did this main storyline about Hoynes coming back, where did that come from? Was that one of the ideas that you pitched or was that something that had been collectively conceived in the writers' room?

LAWRENCE: No it was not collectively conceived. You know, I was watching the show when I wasn't working on it and so one of the episodes that really intrigued me that had things in it that I really, really liked was "Life on Mars" and what I loved about it was we were watching Leo and Bartlet and the team deal with a crisis, and it's a kind of crisis that America knew could come to a White House at that point, a sex scandal, and one of the things I loved about it was watching the language that Leo used when he was talking to Hoynes about what happened here. And I know that if I'd been working at show at that time I'd would have been the supplier of that language and I don't know who was, probably Aaron, it's perfect. So Leo says to Hoynes at a certain point:

[West Wing Episode 4.21 excerpt]

BARTLET: What about it's none of your business?

HOYNES: I leaked classified information, it is their business, it's also a felony.

LEO: Are you in a position to deny it?

[end excerpt]

LAWRENCE: And I loved that because that's the way that lawyers talk. Lawyers do not say to their criminal defendant clients, 'Did you do it?' That's goofy TV lawyering. They never say, "Did you do it?" They say things like 'Was anyone else in the room?' 'Would there be any records that you were in Miami that day?' So Leo is using very professional language in that situation, you know because *The West Wing* has this real halo image around the characters, I think people miss just how normal some of these political actors are and I don't use normal in a highly honorable way because if you look at that scene that Aaron wrote, the President of the United States who is by image of this fictional character just the most Pollyanna, honorable president in history, he is standing there, willing to conspire with the Vice President of the United States to cover up a crime. So the interesting thing in that scene is that Hoynes actually has the moral high ground, you know, the adulterer has the moral high ground over these guys, and so I looked at that and was absolutely fascinated by it. Another thing that I was fascinated about in *The West Wing* from the first time I saw the pilot was C.J.'s personal life. Because there's that fabulous first C.J. moment where she's on that exercise machine and there's a guy beside her who she's clearly kind of taken a shine to, and checking out, and looking at, and her beeper goes off and she has to go deal with the President of the United States. And I thought, 'Oh I really want to explore how her personal life works, I mean clearly she's of a certain age, she's got a biological clock ticking and yet she's married to the Presidency, and the protection of the Presidency, and so how does she deal with any of this?' And so that's just something I've always had my eye on with C.J., what about that private life, that personal life? And, you know, I know the way life works in those environments, and what can happen, and how the men are, and how it all works and so that was my choice to put C.J. in this position and for her to have a secret. And, you know, when you're that far into a TV series, you're in Season 5, it's very hard for any of your characters to have a secret. It's really, really hard. And this is the kind of thing that would be a secret and so it really came out of my first minute obsession with C.J.'s private life.

JOSH: So here's my question back with the scene from 'Life on Mars' when the three of them are talking about what Hoynes should do and what his next move should be, how come in 'Full Disclosure' when the staff eventually come up with that plan of collating a list of Hoynes' worst screw-ups that they can leverage against him

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

LEO: That mess he made in Mexico on immigration.

JOSH: Or the way he tipped our hand on the Energy Bill.

TOBY: And lost the entire New York delegation on the Transportation Bill.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: What happened to the felonious leaking of classified information? Why isn't that the number one bullet point that they have over him?

LAWRENCE: Well, because that's already going to be public information, that's going to be in the book. That's going to be in the woman's story, she's already revealing that, so that's not something they have to deal with. It's probably already come out in fact, it's probably already been out there and dealt with.

HRISHI: In Helen Baldwin's book?

LAWRENCE: Yeah, one of the many things in *The West Wing* that got set up and then that ship was just sort of sent out to sea and we never check it out, but if you consider the way he resigned, he said he's resigning because this is public information; he's not resigning just over an affair, he's resigning over the fact that she is revealing that he leaked classified information.

HRISHI: Josh, do you feel satisfied?

JOSH: I do.

HRISHI: Excellent. I wanted to ask about another part of this episode, which is the school vouchers for the D.C. public school system aspect of the plot. I had read that that part of the story was inspired in part by, you know, what had really happened with the Mayor of D.C. introducing this to President Bush, but also that it was inspired in part by your own time as a substitute school teacher in Boston?

LAWRENCE: Yeah, I was a teacher for years and I was writing a book at the time, and what bothers me about the issues involving public education is that it's one of the things for which more ignorance is thrown around by politicians than most other subjects. They've never been teachers, they don't know what the struggle is, they don't know what they're up against and I have to say when you're in the classroom and you're in these struggling public schools that have no hope of any kind of significant change in their struggle in the foreseeable future and you're sitting there dealing with a very, very bright fourth grader who is brighter than you were in the fourth grade, and you know what is ahead for her as she marches through this system and you know, that the way this system is going to serve her, she's going to be lucky to graduate from high school. You also know at the same time that within walking distance from here is a school in which she would thrive. One of the things that I used to watch when I was working in Washington was that the most vehement of the anti-school voucher liberal Democrats had, in their lifetimes, never spent a day in a public school. Not as a student and not as a visitor and not as a teacher. And that bothered me a lot. If I could have taken one of those kids across the street, to the parochial school, or to another private school, I would have done it, because I would have saved that one educational life and when you're dealing with real people, and real kids, whose names you know, as the mayor is, and as Charlie is, in this episode, it's very hard for them to turn away from the face of the real child and say no, because of a principle that is not easy for me to explain to you, you must stay in this school and you cannot go to Gonzaga as Charlie wanted to go to in high school. So yeah, that was very much a personal piece of writing and interestingly, from the liberal *West Wing* TV show, I am told that it has become a fixture in the kind of Republican-based school voucher world out there that pushes school vouchers and I'm told that they show that scene of the Mayor in the Oval Office routinely at their big gatherings.

HRISHI: And how do you feel about the reality of what the school voucher program has actually turned out to be because it doesn't feel very *West Wing* in its execution in the fourteen years since that was implemented.

LAWRENCE: Well, like everything government does, it's politicized and so, you know, I think there's a reasonable and useful version of the school voucher program and then there's bad versions of it, you know, and we usually do the bad version of whatever it is.

HRISHI: Did Democrats, especially I'm thinking about Democrats in Massachusetts, you know, give you feedback about your inclusion of this issue? I'm thinking about, you know, Boston Latin is a public school in Boston, it's the oldest public school in America, and it's a tremendous school. Did anyone say, hey how dare you betray us like this?

LAWRENCE: Well, Boston Latin is the best high school in America, I believe, and you get into Boston Latin by taking an exam, so it's not an available public high school to anyone who wants to go there, so let's not pretend that it is. There you are, right there, within the public school system saying we are going to make some decisions here that will determine in many ways the future of your life. And when I was a kid I took the exam to get into Boston Latin School when I was in the sixth grade, and I got in and was, like everyone in my neighborhood desperately afraid to go, cos it was like the wicked hardest school in the world and so I didn't go! Cos I was afraid of it! And I took the exam for it for high school, and I got in, and I didn't go again and I went to an easier--let's get this straight--I went to an easier and not as good Catholic school so there's, the subject has levels of complexity that could allow you to go on forever, and Boston Latin is one of the great elements of this story. If you tried to apply the Boston Latin model around the country, and you tried to bring it to scale, you would be doing a lot of harm to other public school kids who couldn't quite make the cut on that exam and so there's a lot of ways for you to harm kids and harm their opportunities in the public school system, a lot of ways to do it. But, you know, the thing that got the biggest, the only real big issue reaction, was an offhand reference in the base closure discussions about closing Fort Drum in upstate New York.

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

COMMISSIONER: First on the list is Fort Drum in upstate New York. It's primary mission is deep snow combat training. The Commission's consensus is that deep snow is no longer a training priority.

[end excerpt]

LAWRENCE: Well the reason I wrote that, is when I was working in the Senate for Senator Moynihan of New York, we were always fighting the closing of Fort Drum, and we were always winning, and so I always knew that Fort Drum was always going to be on the chopping block. So I threw it out there on the chopping block, and bang, the new Senator from New York, Hillary Clinton, immediately writes a letter, not to me who she knows has written the episode--and I by the way am a real person--she writes a letter to The West Wing addressed to Mr. Josh Lyman and that letter is a letter of complaint to Josh Lyman saying how dare you suggest that we could close down Fort Drum and so that was, for me, the single best policy reaction we ever got, and Senator Clinton did successfully keep Fort Drum open.

HRISHI: That's so great. I have a link to that letter and we'll put it up on the website so people can read that. Oh and there's a quote from you Lawrence here, it says "Josh Lyman is quaking in his boots."

LAWRENCE: Ah, yes.

HRISHI: That's great.

LAWRENCE: Sam Robards is in this episode playing *The New York Times* reporter-

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

GREG: Do you have a favorite parking garage for this sort of thing?

C.J.: Come on in, Greg.

[end excerpt]

LAWRENCE: -Greg Brock, and of course Greg Brock, like all of the characters I created is named after a real friend of mine Greg Brock, and Sam was just so wonderful in it, he's just a really wonderful and fluid actor, and Allison loved working with him in second one which I kinda knew she would, and that was one of those great things when you bring in a guest actor and it's as if he'd been there and been working with Allison for years. It was just great. He's just completely charming and charismatic and, you know, he auditioned for that part and he had flown from Sweden that day and stumbled off an airplane and so he gave what was probably his shakiest audition but he'd been a long time friend of mine and I knew his work and I knew he was absolutely great, as did everyone else in the room and so, you know, there was no question about who was going to get that part.

JOSH: Were you often in auditions?

LAWRENCE: Yeah, if I wrote the episode I would sit in auditions for any episode that I wrote and consider everybody.

HRISHI: So how did it feel having written your first solo script for *The West Wing*? Did it make you feel like maybe you did wanna write more for future seasons?

LAWRENCE: Yeah it did. I mean, I really, you know, I was a wounded warrior who healed, and I discovered I could walk again, and yeah, it really did. Working with the actors again was just magical and you know there's a very important element of this episode that was created by the genius Richard Schiff. Richard said to me, after he'd read the script and we'd done the read through, Richard said to me, so Toby knows. I said well, no, no-one knows, she's the only one who knows, it's her secret, only she knows. And he said no, no, no, no, Toby knows. Hmm, ok. So, Lesli Linka Glatter, we talk about this, Lesli directs it, so basically as she and I talked about it we realized, we don't have to change a word, we can shoot this thing and we can decide in editing whether Toby knows. We can take out that look in the Oval Office, we can just clip it, don't have to see it, you know we can do this. And so if you ever look at it again, and think about it, as when it's written, the writer does not think Toby knows. And then the actor thinks Toby does know, and so Toby plays it as Toby knows, all the way through. And it's every bit of Toby

knowing is in the silence, it's in silence, it's in his eyes. There's only one moment when he does something in dialogue that's based on it.

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

LEO: She ok?

TOBY: Well you know she got blindsided by this Hoynes thing on live TV.

LEO: And that got to her?

TOBY: Yeah, it did.

[end excerpt]

LAWRENCE: And watch the way Toby says, "Yeah it did". Now he could have just said "Yeah it did" just very matter of factly, like you know, yes, the ankle is broken, just really diagnostically, "Yeah it did", but you watch the way he does that and he puts something in that line that is knowing and it just makes you feel there's more in his head. I'm watching this happen on the set and I watch him do that, and that's the moment where I decide, yeah, Toby knows, because that's just a beautiful way to deliver that line and my alternative at that point would be to say to Richard you know, do you wanna now give us one straight where he just doesn't know. Once I saw Richard really taking over with this, I knew, before we got to the editing room, oh, I really *do* want to see that moment in Richard's eyes, I really *do* want to see this and so at a certain point I stopped caring about are we tipping this, and decided I care much more about Toby and C.J.'s relationship and Toby as a support system for her, and I want all of that. And that was all written silently by Richard Schiff.

HRISHI: That's amazing. I love that the after effect too of Toby's little spin on that line of "Yeah that got to her" because then we get to even see a little bit of a reaction from John Spencer where he's picked up on that from Toby, and suddenly he's got some glint of knowing in his eyes too. That there's more to this story at least that what there seems to be on the surface.

LAWRENCE: Yeah. You know one of the other real joys of the episode for me is Jesse Bradford doing Ryan Pierce, who I had not worked with before and I see him, and if you look at the episode again, just watch him, the way I was writing him in that episode is, he is Josh Lyman, this is what Josh Lyman was when he was Ryan's age. That's all you're seeing. You're watching Josh Lyman [cross talk] see himself in the mirror when he's that age.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That's great.

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

RYAN: That's good. ok, um, waive your finger in my face, look like you're gonna hit me.

JOSH: Are you out of your mind?

RYAN: That's good, that's great. Show Congressman Finn you're ready to kill to save his base. Come on, he's going to love you for this.

[end excerpt]

LAWRENCE: One thing that I used to want to see happen in my first two years there, that didn't happen, as much as I wanted it to happen, was I wanted to see how wrong people could be. I wanted to see our people, and I wanted to see them get outsmarted, and how they would deal with getting outsmarted, and when you'd realize that you were outsmarted, and here's the most difficult thing, in politics and in government, is getting outsmarted by somebody and then realizing that they are right. And the ego of men in those situations makes it very difficult for us, to put it mildly, to get to that space, and so we have that with Jesse Bradford, with Ryan Pierce, when he does that thing, that crazy thing, of bringing Congressman Chris Finn into the room and he does it so that Josh can get the credit of saving the Congressman's base, and he says to him 'Look, you are now going to get credit for something that the Commission was gonna do anyway' and that is a brilliant principle in politics and government and, believe me, I was in that position more than once, where I was positioning my team to take credit with certain political players, for getting something for them that they were gonna get anyway, no matter what, they were gonna get it anyway. But we got the credit and then they owed us, right, it's a very important concept. And so I loved that he both figured that out, did it, and Josh has to stand there and realize, "oh my God, this horrible little creature who I hate, is right."

JOSH: Yes, and he realizes it as he's being observed by them.

LAWRENCE: Yes, through the glass is so fantastic and it's just a great thing. And the other thing I loved about that was getting Donna to the table. In government there's all sorts of levels of the game. There's the question of were you in the room? There's another level of this, and that is, were you at the table? Donna had never been at the table. She had gotten occasionally near the room, in the room, she'd never been at the table. You'll notice I tried to give that some meaning earlier in the episode because little Ryan tried to sit at the table right at the beginning of the first meeting, and the very first words Josh speaks when he walks into that room is to Donna saying:

[West Wing Episode 5.15 excerpt]

JOSH: Get him out of that chair.

[end excerpt]

LAWRENCE: Get him away from the table, because for Josh and for all of us in that cult--and it's a huge deal when you get to sit at the table--and Josh couldn't stand the sight of that kid sitting at the table.

HRISHI: Well Lawrence thanks so much for letting us sit at the table with you for this, this was awesome. We always appreciate having you on as a guest.

LAWRENCE: Thank you very much and thank you for making watch this show again 'cause I just like it so much better--I like it so much better--when I watch it now.

JOSH: That wraps it up for another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*. We're glad you joined us. *The West Wing Weekly* remains, as always, a proud member of Radiotopia which is a collection of the finest, cutting edge podcasts on the planet. You can find out more about them

at radiotopia.fm. Shout out and thanks to Zach McNees and Margaret Miller and Ryan Pierce as played by Nick Song, our researcher. And also you can follow us on Instagram, on Twitter, you can sign up for our newsletter, which we can't afford to send out, and if you buy a couple more pieces of smerchandise at westwingweekly.com/merch maybe we'll eventually send you a newsletter.

HRISHI: I did remember one thing that I thought of during this episode which is that I really find some separation between Will and Josh Malina. Look, sometimes when I'm watching the episode I forget that I do a podcast with that guy on the screen. The way you speak in real life, sometimes reminds me a whole lot of Jeremy Goodwin and Will Bailey but then there are other times, like in this episode, where I thought my experience of you and my understanding of you, I don't know, it just is completely different from what I'm seeing on screen.

JOSH: That delights me to hear. I feel like that proves it, I *am* acting.

HRISHI: You are, you definitely are.

JOSH: I know, I thought I was, but sometimes like, was I? Haha, that makes me feel good.

HRISHI: You were.

JOSH: I'll take it.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

LAWRENCE: What's next?

[Outro Music]