

The West Wing Weekly
6.04: "Lift Off"
Guest: Allison Janney

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And mine's Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today we're talking about season 6, episode 4. It's called "Lift Off."

JOSH: It was written by Debora Cahn, it was directed by Alex Graves and it first aired on November 10th, 2004.

HRISHI: In this episode, it's C.J.'s first day as Chief of Staff. It's not an easy one because the Bartlet administration has to come up with a plan of action when an emissary from Georgia walks into the White House and offers them weapons-grade uranium. Josh seeks out a meeting with a congressman from Texas who's thinking about leaving Congress, that's Matthew Santos, and Toby and Donna try and find a replacement for the press secretary.

JOSH: Nicely done. Is that off the top of your head?

HRISHI: Basically.

JOSH: I'm impressed. I don't think I could describe the series, *The West Wing* generally, off the top of my head [laughter] so I'm impressed.

HRISHI: As I mentioned in the synopsis, we get Congressman Santos' first appearance in *The West Wing*, and there's a little bit of a spoiler, I think, in the titles because before we ever see him in the show, he's in the opening credits of this episode.

JOSH: Yeah, outrageous!

HRISHI: Jimmy Smit's. First appearance. In the titles.

JOSH: He must have insisted on it. Just kidding. It's an interesting choice. You would think they would have held back. Although, who knows, maybe it was a big press release at the time that he was even cast. It's probably, he's a big get and so they probably decided to milk it for all it's worth from the get-go.

HRISHI: Yeah, I guess so. I mean they've had big stars, but anyway, any chance of leaving some suspense about whether or not this character was going to stick around or have a long-term arc really, pretty well squashed by the time you see the name Jimmy Smits in the opening credits.

JOSH: True. I didn't break out the stopwatch to see how much more time I lost.

HRISHI: Its [laughter] but you did lose a little bit more.

JOSH: You're saying it's noticeable to you or just, it's a zero-sum game, and thus I must have.

HRISH: Exactly you must have. Snuffy's theme isn't getting any longer.

JOSH: That's true, so we better hurry up.

HRISHI: Coming up later in this episode, we have an exciting guest. Allison Janney is going to join us. We had a great conversation with her which we've already recorded and we'll play that at the end of our recap. We talked a lot about C.J. stuff with her. So we're going to save some of that for later. Let's talk about some of the other points first. Back to Matt Santos for a second, he's the congressman for Texas's 18th congressional district. And if you, just you know, anyone was surprised by a Democrat coming out of Texas, there are currently 11 Democratic representatives in Congress out of 36 seats.

JOSH: The bench is deeper than it once was.

HRISHI: Including the current representative for the 18th District. That's Sheila Jackson Lee, who by the way, graduated from Yale.

JOSH: Ding-ding.

HRISHI: The 18th District was also home to congresswoman Barbara Jordan and in 1972 she was the first southern black woman ever elected to the house and she was the first African American and the first woman to deliver a keynote address at the DNC when she spoke in 1976. She was the acting governor of Texas for one day in 1972 making her the first and only black woman thus far to serve as governor.

JOSH: Right on. Also worth noting that 18th districts everywhere considered a propitious for the Jewish people as the "chai" district, as it were.

HRISHI: So in the cold open...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

KELTIE: Morning, ma'am. Staff Sergeant Keltie. This is Sergeant Wolitzer.

C.J.: Is everything alright?

KELTIE: Sure is. May we?

SECRET SERVICE AGENT: Morning.

C.J.: No.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT: Sorry. Agents DeCastro and Shay – they will be...

C.J.: I do not need a Secret Service detail.

SECRET SERVICE AGENT: They'll give you a wide berth.

C.J.: *Could we please discuss this?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: This is thing that struck me on the second watch of the cold open. It struck me as a cinematic cross between the staterooms scene in the Marx Brothers *A Night at the Opera*...

HRISHI: Hmm.

JOSH: Classic scene that we can link to, in which their stateroom on this ocean liner is just... More and more people show up. It's fantastic! One of the great, I think, all time film scenes and I thought a little bit like Luis Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou* with C.J.'s eye and that close up. I was kind of waiting for a straight razor to go across it.

HRISHI: Wow. Shout out to the Pixies.

JOSH: Ah, sure.

[The Pixies – Debaser excerpt]

Ha ha ha ho
Slicing up eyeballs
Ha ha ha ho

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Did you notice that when C.J. is getting ready, she puts on her jacket and sort of a Bartlet-esque way herself.

JOSH: I, yeah, I did as a matter of fact.

HRISHI: I like that detail a lot.

JOSH: Yeah. It kind of portends the President Bartlet jacket swing duck...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...that she'll have to perform later.

HRISHI: Yeah, and it I also made me feel like it was a nice physical way to tie the two of them together.

JOSH: Yeah, absolutely.

HRISHI: Now, she's the captain of the team. She puts on the jacket the same way.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Some of the people who come in are C.J.'s Secret Service agents. And this was something new, I thought. Had we ever seen Leo getting his own security detail?

JOSH: No, that crossed my mind too. They seem to be a lot more concerned about her security than we have heretofore seen with Leo.

HRISHI: Yeah, maybe because she had already, in the past, gotten stalker death threats as we know from season 3, so, maybe that was why or maybe Leo had them all the time and they were just very discreet.

JOSH: Perhaps so.

HRISHI: Maybe Margaret is secretly – she's very secret service.

JOSH: Here's the thing I didn't notice on the first watch. There's that kind of funny moment where C.J. has delivered to her the days briefing books.

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

MARGARET: This is Elroy. He brings the briefing books. You guys are going to be friends.

CJ: These are this week's?

MARGARET: These are today's.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I didn't notice the first time I watched that somebody seems not to have briefed Elroy the extra. He's introduced as the guy who's going to help her out with the briefing books, because when C.J. asks if those are this week's he nods [laughter]. There's a little miscommunication and I think somebody should have said to Elroy, "Here's the scene we're doing." [laughter] These are today's.

HRISHI: Maybe Elroy was just giving a more all-encompassing answer, because she's not wrong, they are for this week.

JOSH: I see. You're Venn diagramming it.

HRISHI: Yeah, more specifically, they're for today.

JOSH: Yeah, you're right, okay, fair enough. He's a macro guy. My favorite filmic Elroy, since *The Jetsons* nonetheless.

HRISHI: I just had a niece born this week. Her name is Allora.

JOSH: That's a beautiful name. Congratulations.

HRISHI: Thanks very much.

JOSH: That's exciting. Birth stats? Weight? Height? Do you know?

HRISHI: Gosh, I don't know.

JOSH: Fair enough. Little and little.

HRISHI: Yeah, baby sized.

JOSH: Right. [laughing]

HRISHI: I never really quite understood the stats game, like the baby was born at 6 pounds, 6 ounces.

JOSH: And that the exact time and how many inches...

HRISHI: Yeah and which is fine if you want announce it. What's strange to me is when people want to know; when people are like, "Oh and what was the baby's birth weight?"

JOSH: It's just something to say, I guess, because there's not much to say about a new baby and you know, she looks like Winston Churchill.

HRISHI: Mm-hmm.

JOSH: Mm-hmm, like all babies. So there's not, there's just that not that much to point to specifics about a new baby other than stats.

HRISH: Yeah.

JOSH: I still calculate my own weight in ounces and my height in inches.

HRISHI: [laughing] And how are you clocking in these days?

JOSH: Many, many ounces and not so tall [laughter]. The height certainly seems to have stabilized, the weight still fluctuates.

HRISHI: [laughing] Will has this weird line...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

WILL: On behalf of the Vice President, and myself, and every man who's ever had a Wonder Woman fantasy, it's a bright day.

C.J.: Get out.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh dear. Yeah. Yeah. I don't know. [crosstalk]

HRISHI: [crosstalk] Gross!

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yeah, a little bit inappropriate and what are you gonna do?

HRISHI: You're gonna fire him I think.

JOSH: Did we ever discuss - wasn't, didn't C.J. kiss Will on the cheek recently?

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Was that the previous episode?

HRISHI: Yeah. Maybe it was last episode.

JOSH: Will was very happy about it.

HRISHI: He was, yes.

JOSH: Big beaming smiles. Maybe Will might have a little thing for C.J.

HRISHI: I think Will is really just desperate for any kind of attention.

JOSH: I think so too.

HRISHI: When C.J. walks in, there's this great moment where she smells the flowers and thinks they're for her, and then they're for Leo, but then she walks into Leo's office, which is now her office, and it's full of flowers and I had this visual memory of the third season for *Six Feet Under*. I don't know if you remember this, back in 2003, there were big billboards in LA. There was a photo of the cast shot by Gregory Crewdson, who's a great photographer. It's very rare that he does any kind of commercial anything but he did this shot of the cast of *Six Feet Under*, surrounded by flowers in the home and this was like the main image for the third season, and the lighting in Leo's office and the flowers and C.J. reminded me a lot of that image.

JOSH: That's a great shot. Have we discussed at all the change in cinematography on the show? Thomas Del Ruth has left the show as the director of photography and Michael Mayer has taken over, and I know on our message boards a lot of people have been commenting on the slight change and look of the show and maybe a little bit moodier or darker.

HRISHI: And you didn't even know they could get darker. It was already so dimly lit.

JOSH: Right, it was dark to begin with, yes, but there is a shift, and maybe I'm not articulating it well, a slight shift in look and lighting and I guess camera work as well. We got a lot in this episode of handheld camera work, which I think helps to sort of give us this feeling of seeing the administration through new eyes. I liked this episode a lot. And once we've gotten past the reservations we maybe had about the credibility of a press secretary moving to Chief of Staff, now that she's in, C.J. is great and it's I'm enjoying watching her first day and I think the handheld photography sort of accentuates the look and feel and movement of that first day on the job.

HRISHI: Yeah. This is so far my favorite episode of the season and we're only four episodes in but I love this episode too.

JOSH: Yeah, as do I.

HRISHI: One of the things that's going on is Toby is starting to make a mess of things in the briefing room. He has a gaffe after gaffe. He says C.J. Cregg's is not the only one working without a net.

JOSH: You know in the film *Bulworth*, Warren Beatty was working without Annette.

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: [laughter] So you were saying before I rudely interrupted you.

HRISHI: He's getting harangued by the press and then steps a little too far with his sarcasm and he says...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

TOBY: But in the event they all lose their way, the president can always send C.J. Cregg to Ramallah to swat at suicide bombers with her purse.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And the whole place goes crazy in there and the staff starts to run and this is where the Josh Lyman sliding GIF comes from. Remember you...

JOSH: Yes!

HRISHI: You made reference to it and I said I didn't know it.

JOSH: And here it is and it is an exquisite piece of physical comedy. I'd like to talk to Brad just about how, it almost it looks impossible.

HRISHI: It really, yeah, it looks impossible plus the reason why I brought it up right now is because you were talking about the change in cinematography and I just thought the moment when that happens, there's a bunch of things happening stylistically. It's a real move that they make just for this one scene. One, he slides across the frame. How does he do that? But they also do this thing where they do a reverb hit on the press saying "Toby."

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

PRESS: Toby!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It echoes out just as Josh's sliding across and then we move to Toby actually out of the briefing room. So it's like a time jump, a Josh slide and an [crosstalk] echo hit.

JOSH: Yeah, and then Josh catches up with Toby in an...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...unbelievably short amount of time.

HRISHI: Yeah. [laughs]

JOSH: The whole thing is kind of insane.

HRISHI: Yeah there's a little bit of like a fairy tale moment or something larger than life happening in just that brief moment. I really liked it.

JOSH: I liked it too. Seemed almost like a Bill Irwin gag.

HRISHI: I think Bradley Whitford has some dance training, right?

JOSH: You know, I don't know. I know he has a daughter who is a ballerina, and I know that he is great physically, you can tell from this, I don't know if he has training, probably having attended Juilliard. I imagine everyone who attends the Juilliard acting program has some dance training.

HRISHI: Yeah, and he can do the splits.

JOSH: Well he is ridiculously agile. Yes, and annoyingly likes to do all sorts of ridiculous physical stuff when he's working. I mean just before cameras roll, he's basically bouncing off the walls and doing splits and his legs over his head and he can put both legs over his head and you can roll them around like a donut [laughter]. It's kind of impressive and disgusting at the same time.

HRISHI: I think you might be describing some of our listeners' fantasies.

JOSH: Probably one or two. There's a Venn diagram that applies to anything.

HRISHI: Speaking of *Risky Business* and Bradley Whitford's *Risky Business* move.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: I think there's an interesting haircut choice for Bradley Whitford.

JOSH: Ah, I didn't really take it in.

HRISHI: It might be worth taking a look. He has almost like a military cut that's grown out, but it's a new haircut. It's gone from his sort of rakish, unkempt hair to something shorter and spikier and more hedgehog-like.

JOSH: [laughing] How did I miss that?

HRISHI: I don't know. I thought you would lead off with it honestly.

JOSH: I'm off my game.

HRISHI: Hold on, sending you a picture.

JOSH: [ding] Yeah, oof, dear. [laughing] Yeah, I gotta say he was maybe between haircuts when they filmed this episode.

HRISHI: It's not entirely unlike Rick from *Rick and Morty*.

JOSH: Ha ha. That's what it is. Very good. Good call. Very good. We'll put up a juxtaposition [laughing] and, you know what, they both burp a lot.

HRISHI: That's true! That's true!

JOSH: There is, the similarities may be deeper than we realize.

HRISHI: [laughing] Okay. So this first meeting with C.J. and now the rest of her staff is so strange and it's so tense and really, I was uncomfortable watching it. C.J. does a great job, you know, sort of slipping into the role, but I just couldn't stop thinking about how weird that must have been for them. And then Toby does this joke of "Oh, I'm gonna resign". He sells it, I think brilliantly and Josh too.

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

TOBY: I just think it's time for me to move on. This is my letter of resignation to the president.

JOSH: I don't want to pile on... but working for one of my closest friends is, I think, not gonna bring out my best.

C.J.: Josh...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: The first time I watch this, not knowing, I know that there are changes coming up in the show and I was like, "Oh my God, is this how it happens?" And I was like, yeah, I think it would be weird, because as soon as the meeting, as the meeting was going on, I'm like, this is awkward.

JOSH: Yeah. This is a new, new frontier.

HRISHI: So when they respond with, you know what this is too much, it's not going to work out, I was like "Yeah, makes sense to me," but then the president comes in with his letter of resignation and makes it this like big broad joke and everybody laughs and I thought "okay, yeah, great, everybody's laughing." The president's joke, "I'm not comfortable working for a woman. I'm going to let the vice president. I'm going to resign the presidency..." I mean that's ridiculous and so of course people laugh, but the Toby and Josh ones were a little too real, I thought.

JOSH: I see it the other way. I like the real ones and then the president one, I was like come on, they're still acting, I guess this is a non-credible moment to me, which is that they should have; C.J. should have started laughing immediately as soon as the president said what he did.

HRISHI: Yes. Yeah.

JOSH: It's just ludicrous.

HRISHI: Right exactly.

JOSH: For some reason they approach; the way the scene was directed and acted was as if that was still credible.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah.

JOSH: The president, really? And the president then, you know, chides Toby for laughing, like “Come on, we still could have still gotten her going.”

HRISHI: [crosstalk] No, he could not have.

JOSH: [crosstalk] No you couldn't. You said you were going to resign the presidency because you couldn't work for a woman like, that's ridiculous.

HRISHI: After you're the one who gave her the job.

JOSH: Yeah, right, exactly.

HRISHI: It just doesn't make any sense.

JOSH: It doesn't even make logical sense.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: You are correct. I mainly, I felt bad for Will who seemed not to be in on the joke.

HRISHI: Right. That's right.

JOSH: He didn't get the memo.

HRISHI: He has an expression of “Oooh!” I think he actually opens his mouth a little bit, or you opened your mouth a little bit. But anyway, I'm just saying, that part of the joke was like, all right, this is stupid but the Toby/Josh part of the quote – unquote “joke” really did not feel like a joke, because then, throughout the rest of the episode, the sort of underlying kernel of the joke, which is hey, this is weird; it becomes substantially part of the plot.

JOSH: Well, that's what I like about any joke.

HRISHI: I know.

JOSH: When there is some truth to it all.

HRISHI: Yeah. Oh I didn't say that I disliked it. I mean, I disliked it in terms of how uncomfortable I was, but I loved it in terms of the plotting of the show.

JOSH: Yeah, no. I think we see in Josh's meeting with Santos.

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

SANTOS: I hear C.J. Cregg got Chief of Staff. That's gotta be a blow.

JOSH: It's fine, really.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And you can tell in Josh's response that it was a little bit of a hit he took.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: As it would be.

HRISHI: Everybody keeps reminding Josh. They're like "Oof", you're staying in the job? You know the guys in the DCCC try to get him away and he says he's gonna stick around and they're like, "Wow, really?" and yeah and Santos actually tried, is the only one who really kind of tries to put a positive spin on it.

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

SANTOS: You couldn't do the kind of politicking you do behind Leo McGarry's desk. You'd be making sure the trains run on time. They need you, you love that fight, and you're good at it. I don't love it.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Josh is sort of like "Yeah, yeah, yeah". I think he's trying to buy into what Santos is saying, but I think he also knows that it's not true.

JOSH: Well, I wonder, I thought it was maybe trying to give us, through Matt Santos a little bit of insight as to why Leo, I mean, I think we're going to find out down the line what Leo has in mind for Josh rather than Chief of Staff, but, Leo can't tell us what he was thinking at this point and I think we're getting maybe some idea of why Josh's talents and skills would be better used elsewhere. But what I really like in this episode is that you see, rather than addressing it head on, you see in Toby's behaviour a couple times, that he's having some trouble adjusting to the new world order.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Just some looks that he gives C.J. and he's little bit hurt. And then at one point he actually says to her, as if quite taken aback...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

C.J.: It wasn't a suggestion.

TOBY: It was what? An order?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And the answer of course is “Yes, I outrank you and I am giving you an order.” It's the kind of, can you imagine him ever having that response to Leo?

HRISHI: Right, right.

JOSH: I wonder whether you, perhaps reading into it, that there's any taking an order from a woman aspect to it or it's just that it's C.J. and he's used to being on par or sort of outranking her on these matters, and all of a sudden it's just like “Oh, yeah, you're my boss.” He's having a little trouble accepting that.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think, I didn't think that it would be any trouble taking orders from a woman, but more that, this is his friend, his dear friend, who he brought into this campaign. He's been her boss the entire time, the press secretary reports to the communications director and, certainly they trade ideas like peers, but really he has been her boss and now suddenly this person who he introduced to the administration is now his boss. That's gotta be so crazy. That moment specifically I thought was really rough.

JOSH: Yeah, I mean recognizing that the power dynamic has shifted, you'd think it really ought to have more on Toby, should have been on his mind, to put her at ease that he'd be good with falling in line. It's sort of, I'm a little bit disappointed in Toby, that he should have sort of processed that this is her first day and she now is the boss and maybe that he give her that due respect, but he's having trouble doing it.

HRISHI: Yeah. Well, I think we've seen that Toby's not great at self-preservation.

JOSH: True. I wasn't even suggesting from that point of it, but you're right. He ought to be cognizant of how he needs to act moving forward, but I think that from the friendship point, like okay, this is weird, my friend and who's somebody who was maybe an, underling is too strong, but the, over whom I had some power, now has that power over me and I'm just going to cede it because otherwise this could feel really awkward.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean takes a generosity of spirit that I think Toby doesn't have an excess of.

JOSH: Right and when it's first made clear to him that “I don't expect to be handed a single person who's going to be the next communications director, I want a choice. I want to see a list,” he reacts also in a way that is undermining and reminded me actually very much of what sometimes happens when pilots are being cast and happens in Hollywood, which is that the creative team will fall in love with an actor and decide this is the guy or the woman I want for the role, and when they bring the idea to the network, the network always wants to see more than one person. They don't want to cede the choice completely to the creative team. They want to see a few people and often, I think what. Is that the creative team then brings in the person they want and several other people that they don't think we'll be as good.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: In other words, they try to tee up their person by surrounding him or her with lesser talent.

HRISHI: Toby tries to pad the list with lame-o's and then he gets busted actually while doing it. You know, Donna says to him "Isn't this a waste of time?" He says "It's a complete waste of time" just as C.J.'s coming in. I mean he is undermining her and he's defying her orders, and he also just keeps getting called out. I mean the power dynamic is what it is, but he just keeps stepping into the bear trap, I feel like.

JOSH: Yeah, no. Toby's one of those guys who believes that he knows best. And so whatever it takes for his decision to fly he's going to make it happen.

HRISH: Yeah, but by the end of the episode Toby and C.J. do kind of make up and I love this moment. He gives her this information about how Jensen in the DOD that she needs in her battles with him and she takes that in and she says to him...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

C.J.: I love you! Desperately.

TOBY: I know.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I like that.

HRISHI: He says it so quickly and like dejectedly that it's actually very hard not to love him in that moment.

JOSH: I agree. That's Toby and that's the brilliance of Richard Schiff in the portrayal that even when he's being a knucklehead, you kind of can't help feeling affection for him.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah, it's great and it is an acknowledgement on his part that they are still friends and you know that this is not something that's be no destroying their friendship. It's just this is just a moment. That's great. The Hutchinson stuff, I mean, here's another person who's doubting C.J. a lot and giving her a hard time. He says "Ah the woman of the hour" and by calling her that, I think he's paying her a compliment, but I think there's something cynical underneath it as well; like the fact that he's saying of the hour, there's some indication that he thinks that she's not going to stick around for very long.

JOSH: I think you're right. I think it's a subtle dig. Good catch.

HRISH: Yeah, because then they go into the Sit. Room and Hutchinson's running the show.

JOSH: I like that Margaret has to actually, physically pick up C.J.'s hand and throw it on the scanner to get her in the Sit. Room. That's a great move.

HRISHI: [laughing] That's great. It really is. Margaret is on fire on this whole episode.

JOSH: Yeah, great episode for her.

HRISH: Yeah then Hutchinson in the Sit. Room just takes up all the oxygen and he's been a guy who's been annoying ever since he showed up. I mean, he even before he showed up, he was sort of a spoiler for the president often and the things that he wanted they'd have to deal with them. But then once they actually cast him, Steve Ryan like embodied the guy on screen, he's really been nothing but annoying the whole time.

JOSH: True.

HRISHI: And it makes me wonder why they keep him around. He just always seems to be trouble.

JOSH: That said it is refreshing to have a Secretary of Defense [laughter]. There's at least a certain amount of security in having someone in the role.

HRISHI: Yeah. Yeah, it's too bad that Trump's Secretary of Defence was mad as hell and couldn't take it anymore [laughter]. When they're in the Sit. Room, by the way, they mention Oak Ridge.

[West Wing episode 6.04 excerpt]

DELOIT: Besides which, we take foreign-owned nuclear material and dump it in Oak Ridge, Tennessee, every environmental group, every community...

MCNALLY: We can't let this go public.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Oak Ridge, by the way, is where enriched uranium was produced commercially for the very first time and in fact; enriched uranium is sometimes called "Oralloy", which is O-R-A-L- L-O-Y or Oakridge alloy. Oralloy is your third favourite filmic Elroy.

JOSH: [laughing] Yes! Boom!

HRISHI: I love this episode's presentation of the different press secretary options. This all reminded me of when...

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: ...Mrs Landingham had to be replaced, and we got to see all these candidates come in.

JOSH: Yes. Reminded me a little bit also of the auditions for the role of Hitler in *The Producers*.

HRISHI: The one thing I don't understand, because we find out that CJ keeps a quote "In case I get hit by a bus file" according to Carol.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Right? And she says you've got appointments today with the obvious top choices, spokesmen from State, Interior, etc.; but one: most of these candidates are

terrible and you would think that C.J. having a list would have weeded some of these terrible choices out. But then what's up with the guy who shows up and says...

[West Wing episode 6.04 excerpt]

LAKELY: Joanne, marry me. Make me the happiest man in the world! (laughing)

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: ...and giggles!

JOSH: I wrote down the line and just wrote a series of question marks. I felt, is there something I'm not getting?

HRISHI: Yeah, like who's he talking to? There are no TVs on, how'd he get in the room? Who is he talking to?

JOSH: Entirely perplexing. I've no idea. Is there some rhyme or reason that someone else can point out to us, that we're missing?

HRISH: There is no answer that I can think of that makes any sense.

JOSH: [laughing]. Yep, can't think of it either.

HRISHI: Yeah, but even without that guy, even without Joanne will you marry me, I am surprised that these are the people who C.J. thinks are good enough to replace her; with the exception of the one person who Toby likes.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: That guy seems totally fine. But like shouldn't they have all been somewhere in that level?

JOSH: Yes. This would be another subsuming of credibility in order to have a funny sequence.

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah.

JOSH: [laughing] But you're right, the rest are like, wait, these, these people are terrible and one of them's insane.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah, one of them is a potential security risk. How did he get past the guards at the front?

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: But it also gives us our first introduction to Annabeth Schott played by Kristin Chenoweth.

JOSH: Yes, who I believe is 59 inches long. I'm not sure of her weight, how many ounces.

HRISHI: She comes in, not looking for the press secretary job, which you know, there's some bad staff work happening, because it's not even that - she shouldn't be in that meeting. She's applying...

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: ...for a different job and then somehow Toby cannot understand what she's saying, that she's like "I'm here looking for this job". And he's like "This isn't the job that we're..."

JOSH: It's a meet-cute.

HRISHI: Yeah a little bit of funny confusion that happens, but one of them, there a couple moments of cross confusion where like okay, should we now, now everybody knows what's their... there should no longer be this confusion, you know, Donna says...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

DONNA: Much of the job is, you know, briefing the press.

ANNABETH: For a deputy?

DONNA: Deputy what?

ANNABETH: Are you the gal I talked to on the phone?

TOBY: Thank you so much for coming in, but we're going to move on to somebody who has a clearer understanding of the position.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: You're right. No, it's odd.

HRISHI: But we get to meet Annabeth, who actually has great ideas for what they should do, and we find out that she's the one who discovered Taylor Reid.

JOSH: Yes, Toby's taking enough of her ideas to present them to C.J., and it seems at first try to take credit for them. Then eventually says that they're Annabeth's ideas, but the one thing I noticed and I thought that this, you know, sheds further light on how Toby's feeling about this C.J. as Chief of Staff of it all, is that the one thing that Annabeth says to Toby that he doesn't share with C.J. is, you're going to be very difficult to replace. Those are big shoes to fill, that purely complementary part of it. He doesn't share with her; he's not ready to say that.

HRISHI: Yeah, he's still stinging.

JOSH: Which I thought was interesting.

HRISHI: I love how completely disarmed Toby gets by Annabeth's compliment, when she says you have a watchable quality, much like Taylor Reid, and then he's just completely nonplussed from that.

JOSH: Yeah, and he repeats it later to C.J.

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

C.J.: You most certainly have a quality.

TOBY: I'm watchable.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah, it's so cute.

JOSH: So cute.

HRISHI: Nonplussed, by the way, often misused.

JOSH: Often misused. Yes, but I thought you deployed it perfectly.

HRISHI: Thank you.

JOSH: I think Kristin's a great new presence on the show, as is Jimmy Smits.

HRISH: Yeah, I agree.

JOSH: You feel some fresh air being breathed into the show. I like it.

HRISHI: The whole episode feels like a restart.

JOSH: That's true.

HRISHI: They've hit a refresh on the series and yeah, they're introducing these new characters; Annabeth from the start, you feel like here we go, this is a character who's going to be sticking around.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: We already know that Matt Santos is, so you don't even have to wonder about it. But yeah, this feels like we're in a new era, not just with C.J. taking on the job, but all these other introductions.

JOSH: Yeah, and along with Jimmy, we get his support staff and people in supporting roles that I think are terrific. We get Evan Arnold as Ned and Karis Campbell as Ronna and we're going to meet them and get to know them a little bit better and I hope we'll have them as well as Kristin and Jimmy on the show.

HRISH: Yeah.

JOSH: Soon enough.

HRISHI: One thing that I loved about this episode is the end. The whole episode changes after C.J.'s final meeting with the president. He tells her that she can take the call with the UK prime minister and then the whole episode starts to breathe, and I realized that up until that moment, it had been non-stop, like the moment of Josh sliding and the echo, like things are just happening so fast. Kristin Chenoweth, by the way, like such a great addition, partly because she can just handle the speed of the dialogue so well.

JOSH: Mm-hmm.

HRISHI: But the episode of been going so relentlessly, so quickly, and then suddenly, for the first time I feel like it kind of slows down and CJ has a moment of confidence where she's like, "okay". She walks out of the president's office and the whole thing just breathes and I thought that was really nice and it settles down in a way that it lets you really buy into this shift by the end; when C.J. tells Margaret...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

C.J.: Would you please set up a call first thing tomorrow morning with the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom?

MARGARET: Sure. Who's going to be on the call?

C.J.: Me.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And she sits behind Leo's desk and, you know, it's a really wonderful execution of the arc of the Marx Brothers beginning.

JOSH: Frenetic pace of it.

HRISH: Yeah, to this sort of solitary moment at the end where things have expanded and quieted down.

JOSH: It's kind of a "What kind of day has it been?" moment.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: You know what scene I wish they had handled differently or excised completely, is the scene where C.J. visits Leo in his hospital room.

HRISHI: Oh yeah?

JOSH: It's beautifully acted by Allison, but what I would have preferred to see was either that scene minus any dialogue, or maybe that scene not existing. It's just a little, I feel like it was caving into a baser TV drama impulse to have her go into the room of the man who's hooked up to a machine, his job she's taken over and say out loud...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

C.J.: I don't think this is gonna work out.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And she acts it beautifully, I mean she's incredible, but, I would rather have seen the look in her eyes that said it all...

HRISH: Yeah.

JOSH: ...and not heard her articulate the thought out loud, after all he can't hear her. Or I think we got this moment, this moment could have taken place elsewhere or not at all.

HRISH: Yeah. I'd liked her being there in Leo's room. I liked that she left the place to sort of try and recenter.

JOSH: And decompress.

HRISHI: Yeah, and Leo is the sort of touchstone for like; this is how it's supposed to work. This is the guy who ran this office the right way. Can I just absorb something from him? But I think you're right, if that scene had existed without dialogue, that would have been really, it would have given it a complexity that I think it lacks right now.

JOSH: Exactly and when you've got an actor of Alison's caliber, it's all there.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's in her eyes. It's on her face and you don't need to wrap it up with a little bow of dialogue.

HRISHI: Yeah. I'm with you on that.

JOSH: I thought Fred Armisen was good as Roman Mindeli.

HRISHI: Dude!

JOSH: Did you write down the same thing?

HRISHI: This is, okay, here's what I wrote, "Mr. Roman Mindeli from the Republic of Georgia is played by Eugene Alper. It feels like a Fred Armisen character."

JOSH: Haha. Wow. Wow! How do you like that? It sure did.

HRISHI: That character is ridiculous.

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

ROMAN MINDELI: I wanted to speak to Mr. McGarry. This is gift I bring for him. Saperavi, from my own vines.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] Yeah. He just wandered, in either from a Fred Armisen sketch...

[Brooklyn Nine-Nine episode 1.01 excerpt]

AMY: What's your name?

(Fred Armisen character) MLEPNOS: My name? Mlepnos.

AMY: Can you spell that please?

MLEPNOS: M L E P... "clay"

AMY: Did you say "clay"?

MLEP(CLAY)NOS: Yes. The "clay" is silent

[end excerpt]

JOSH: ...or from, certainly at the very least, from a big block of cheese day episode.

HRISHI: [laughing] Right, right. By the way, my other favourite moment of this episode is a funny one, when CJ calls from the Debbie/Charlie zone. She calls Margaret and she says...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

C.J.: Margaret, did the Secretary of Defense call for me? [pause] (half-whispers) It's C.J...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] Ha ha ha. It's pretty great.

HRISHI: Really wonderful. Like I said, this is just a huge episode for Margaret. That was one where she didn't even have to be on screen or we didn't even have to hear her voice.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: And we're like "Oh Margaret", just killing it. I like it when she says, you know, C.J.'s asking her questions and she says...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

MARGARET: You really have to start walking now.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Like she's forgotten the walk and talk part of the...

JOSH: I do like when Charlie grabs her by the arm and walks her around to...

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: ...how you approach the Oval Office.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's great. Charlie's really cute to her the whole episode. You know, when he says...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

CHARLIE: Just today. Tomorrow you're on your own.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I loved that. I actually thought about Charlie a little bit with the Annabeth thing too, because he comes in for the bike messenger job and he ends up getting this...he ends up proving that he's actually much more valuable than that.

JOSH: Good point!

HRISHI: And I thought, Annabeth, she's coming for this media relations thing, but she's already got ideas that seem to be big ideas, and she wants to help find the new press secretary. And yeah...we're going to take a quick break and when we come back we'll be joined by Oscar winner Allison Janney.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: Allison thank you so much for joining us.

ALLISON: I'm very happy to be here with you guys. It's been a while.

JOSH: It is very kind of you, to give us your time.

ALLISON: I have to say these days, it's kind of a pleasure to go back and look at a *West Wing* episode. This episode, "Lift Off," could actually air today, and just fit in perfectly.

JOSH: It would be about President Trump choosing Sarah Huckabee Sanders as his new Chief of Staff.

ALLISON: [laughing]

JOSH: That's what you're saying you want.

ALLISON: No!

JOSH: [laughing] That's how I interpret what you just said.

ALLISON: Oh my God, please don't.

JOSH: When did, I assume John Wells, tell you that you're going to be the choice for Chief of Staff? When did you learn about this storyline?

ALLISON: I don't remember that moment. I do remember, knowing me, that I was probably like "Are you sure? I don't know, really? I'm not sure." Oh, I was just not entirely behind the idea because I was so comfortable in my position there in *The West Wing* as press secretary, and I thought I was doing a great job, and I just, I loved the way things were and I knew that kind of change was going to create some bumps along the way for me, Allison Janney, and for C.J. Much more fun to show C.J.'s bumps along the way, than mine, and there were a few after stepping into those shoes.

JOSH: Yeah, but interesting. So truly your response was you would have just as soon stay doing what you're doing? I think of you as just so capable of doing anything. Like, I can't imagine you would actually...

ALLISON: Well, let's just say this, if I had started off in that role, I think, I'd be totally game to jump to that challenge, but I tend to be self-deprecating but my political savvy, and I just knew that it would be hard shoes for me to fill and to stand there and just spit out all this...It's easier to do that as press secretary than to have to be the boss of Toby and Josh and it was difficult for me. And, I didn't mean to get ahead of myself here, but going down the road in further episodes, I remember always having to tell the director, I know I don't have a line here, but shouldn't they all look to me for a nod? Like I'm needing to have that power and I can't create that myself. Everyone has to give me that power. Like I can't play the Queen and walk in the room, everyone else makes me the queen, I have to...so those moments I found a little tricky and it was uncomfortable for me, to ask for those things. But no, I think C.J.'s absolutely capable of doing that job, but I love how she goes about it in a way of let's just not make this a big deal, okay, let's just, you know, just business as usual, I'll just be Chief of Staff but it's not, like it's kind of a fish out of water but not really out of water, but, you know different water and it was enormously fun to watch her navigate the transition and everyone else.

HRISHI: What were the bumps that you anticipated for yourself, the Allison Janney bumps that you thought might be coming your way.

ALLISON: Having to be the boss of Josh and Brad and Richard and be in a room and have to have them listen to me and take orders from me.

HRISHI: Yeah, the acting dynamic would have to change.

ALLISON: Actor dynamic would have to change and, I don't know if they all thought it was a good idea for me to be Chief of Staff. I know, maybe this is a little bit of characters bleeding into actors and because I'm sure there were moments when you see maybe Toby or Josh should have been given those shoes to fill, and not C.J. Everyone was so into politics, but me.

HRISHI: Yeah.

ALLISON: So to play that role, I just felt like such a pretender to the throne and I felt like everyone knew it. So it put more pressure on me, I felt more insecure and more self-conscious about taking over a room in that capacity, as Chief of Staff.

HRISHI: I'm surprised by that because, you know, really you just have to act like you know that stuff and that you'd proven very well.

ALLISON: Yes, but they know me so well, they knew me so well personally, they knew how far afield I was from that role. My own insecurity, I felt like they're laughing at me. They totally know I don't know what the hell I'm talking about [laughing]. I don't know.

HRISH: In some ways it feels like this episode could have been the first episode of the season.

ALLISON: Yeah.

HRISH: I understand they had to lay the groundwork to get there, but there's something about, even just the way the episode starts, everything, it feels like a real new beginning, but I love that. I loved that even though we don't get it as the season premiere, there's sort of a treatment of it like it was an entirely new chapter starting.

ALLISON: Yeah, and I was kind of disappointed when I googled this episode and in the synopsis of the plot, it doesn't mention anywhere that C.J. becomes Chief of Staff [laughing]. I was like, "Wow, bury the lead there!"

HRISHI: As the person on this podcast who's responsible for the synopses at the beginning, I have learned to be very distrustful of the official synopsis.

ALLISON: Yes. I think I recall you saying that on one of the podcasts and it's true. I don't know who does them, someone who doesn't watch the whole episode or I don't know.

HRISHI: There's a lot of physical humor in this episode with all of the high-stakes and changing roles and introducing new characters. There's still room for some really, just funny physical stuff.

ALLISON: One of my favorites, and I don't know if it was the first time I did it, but I know we all loved for the opportunity to duck under the Bartlet putting on his jacket moment.

JOSH: That was awesome!

HRISHI: Fantastic!

JOSH: Very well executed.

ALLISON: I loved it! I couldn't wait to do...I love stuff like that. It just makes it so fun, to have in the middle of an incredibly serious moment. Just plough through it. Yeah-

JOSH: Incoming.

ALLISON: Yeah, fix my hair, incoming, let's keep going.

HRISHI: The other one that I love is the one that feels like it must have been a little bit technically intricate to execute. It starts off with Toby, C.J. and Carol are walking down the hall and Toby has a bunch of documents in his hands, which is already funny and

then he's also holding a bottle of water and then you put another piece of paper on there and then you take the water from him.

ALLISON: I know!

HRISHI: And you take a sip...

ALLISON: I was looking at that and you gotta know that that was not in Aaron Sorkin's thing because I just said, "Here, take this." I actually ad-libbed, which is a remarkable thing, and I rewound and watched that little moment because I loved it so much. It was just delicious.

JOSH: I'll remind you where in the post-Sorkin years, please.

ALLISON: Oh, that's right! Oh, that's right! That's right. Maybe that's why, that's why I did it. I felt like comfortable enough to throw in a little ad lib.

HRISHI: It's an unbelievable piece of work between all three of you, because as you take that sip and then you try and give it back to Toby, and he starts to reach for it and as you put in his hand, he's like, "Ugh, I don't want that." And then you have to give it to Carol instead.

ALLISON: To Melissa Fitzgerald, who is just standing there holding it...

JOSH: It's great!

HRISHI: Yeah.

ALLISON: ...looking at it like, what am I gonna do with this now? And, my other favorite thing is Brad Whitford's *Risky Business* moment.

HRISHI: Yeah!

JOSH: Awesome! We've talked about it. We didn't know when it was coming because it's a much gif'd moment where he slides, it's got to be a Guinness longest...

ALLISON: [laughs] I know.

JOSH: ...stocking foot slide on camera.

HRISHI: And he's like fully 45 degrees as he does that slide.

JOSH: It looks physically impossible.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's a great piece of physical comedy.

ALLISON: It was so much fun to see that, just sliding right, trying to get there, to just be there whenever, when Toby gets out of his disastrous press briefing. It was...God, it was fun!

JOSH: And the look down the hall. I'd like to see the outtakes from that moment.

ALLISON: I would too. I think John Wells has got all these outtakes in a vault. I think we need to do a midnight caper and go over there and break into [cross talk] that vault and see them.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah, 20th anniversary's coming up, maybe they'll put out something? It would be fun to see an extended gag reel or something like that.

ALLISON: Oh God it would be great!

HRISHI: There's a moment where C.J. is given a briefing and Margaret says...

[West Wing episode 6.04 excerpt]

MARGARET: Leo likes to glance at the top sheets before senior staff, circle anything he's got questions about.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: ...and again, this is just like a little physical detail, but the way you go about, you circle one thing, circle another thing and then right before you go ahead and circle almost everything on the page, there's just like that little hesitation with the pen.

ALLISON: [laughing] I'm just like, "Oh [expletive deleted] it!"

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah!

JOSH: [laughing] Yeah!

ALLISON: Yeah, just circle the whole [expletive deleted] thing, I need help with everything.

JOSH: That's the difference between just a regular gag and elevating it to another level.

HRISHI: Yeah.

ALLISON: And then to go further from that gag, it's obviously C.J. can't, it's too uncomfortable to get behind Leo's desk and then Toby and Josh turn their chairs around to face her at the little desk, that she's like, she just can't get behind. And then to even before that, when she comes in and sees all the flowers.

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

C.J.: Wow! People shouldn't be sending me flowers.

MARGARET: They're for Leo.

[end excerpt]

ALL: [laughing]

HRISHI: That's brutal.

JOSH: Yeah, I like the way you respond. Your reaction is very funny. You kind of just walk on by, you don't you don't want to live in that moment at all. No smile.

ALLISON: Oh my God. [laughing] So, so funny. Oh my God.

HRISHI: Let's talk about the moment where C.J. enters into the briefing room to talk to the press corps as press secretary for the last time.

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

C.J.: Good morning. This will be my last briefing as White House Press Secretary.

[end excerpt]

ALLISON: That made me cry watching it. It was so [cross talk] beautiful.

JOSH: [cross talk] It was sweet.

ALLISON: And it was so bittersweet and just lovely and, so graceful, and just wanting to say goodbye to a room of people that she'd grown fond of. Even though I'm sure a lot of them she had difficulties with, but it was such a sweet moment, and then for Bartlet to come in and bust in on the press briefing and be the one to announce that she would be moving to Chief of Staff is such a great favor he did for her, to show his support of this decision, and it was a lovely moment.

JOSH: It was a lovely scene, and I also liked what you had to say about the press corps and about the journalists with whom you have worked with for so many years, that was refreshing, given today's take from the press room.

ALLISON: I know and when the president comes in and they all stand up, would that even happen now? I guess they have to, I don't know, I don't know, but not, everything about that scene just...

JOSH: Well now the chairs are electrified. They just give 'em a jolt and everybody stands.

ALLISON: [laughing] Yeah, it was a beautiful scene of what, I don't know if the press room ever looked like that or anyone stepping down. I would imagine, you know ours was a little sweeter than the reality would be, but former administrations, but certainly this one, it would never...oof.

HRISHI: I thought was a beautiful detail that C.J. has prepared this heartfelt speech

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

C.J.: These past six years working for this exceptional group of journalists...I'm sorry, uh...thank you, ladies and gentleman, the president of the United States.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And before she can even get the first sentence out, it's interrupted by the president. It felt like a great encapsulation of what the job is too, that there's always things happening, and the president might walk in and say something and whatever plan you made to do this wonderful gesture, it doesn't actually get to happen as you orchestrated in your mind.

ALLISON: Yeah. I need to just let it go, on to the next thing. And Toby, I mean Richard Schiff's, Toby's first briefing is one of the most hilarious things, I mean just the way the shot starts with him to like down below the podium then he's like, comes up and it's just everything about it is such a train wreck in such a great way.

HRISHI: What's happening behind C.J.'s eyes in the moment where, after the president does announced her as Chief of Staff there's the reaction, people stand up and clap and there's a look that you give, it's a complicated look I think.

ALLISON: Yeah. It's a look of gratitude for the president for doing that. And then a look of sheer terror and like "Oh my God" it's real now.

JOSH: [cross talk] What's ahead?

ALLISON: [cross talk] And everyone knows, and my life is changed forever and I see a sea of some faces happy for me, some not, some already thinking it's a bad decision.

HRISH: Right.

ALLISON: I think, yeah, there's a lot going on there, but it's definitely, "Okay. This is real."

HRISHI: Yeah.

ALLISON: This is real now.

HRISHI: It felt to me like there was some element of pride but then almost like not wanting to let the pride quite show.

ALLISON: Yeah. I think that's even better. I think you probably saw but yeah, I think there was pride there and then I think the next moment is the flower one.

HRISHI: Yeah.

ALLISON: So any pride that she did have...

JOSH: Right.

ALLISON: ...is like "Oh, yeah, get back down..."

HRISHI: Yeah.

ALLISON: "...on the ground." And then Margaret. I mean all the stuff with Margaret is so wonderful.

HRISHI: Yeah, I think maybe the best job offer ever.

[West Wing episode 6.04 excerpt]

C.J.: You're an odd woman and I've never quite understood you but you're extremely capable and you run this office like a Swiss watch and you're tall, which is reassuring. Leo may need you, and if he does, that's okay but if he's willing to part with you, I hope you'll stay.

[end excerpt]

ALLISON: [laughing]

JOSH: Great dialogue, great stuff.

HRISHI: Okay, this might be, this is a little risqué, maybe?

ALLISON: Okay.

JOSH: I'm scared.

ALLISON: I'm curious.

HRISHI: The first shot of this episode is through a peephole.

ALLISON: Oh, that's right!

HRISHI: And you are only half dressed. We see you in a bra.

ALLISON: I know! I can't believe I did that and was okay with it. I think...

JOSH: What's up with that bra?

ALLISON: I think maybe the way Alex Graves, who directed this episode, I think the way he described it was, that it would be through a peephole, so you wouldn't be in the foreground. It would be sort of blurry and...

HRISHI: Right.

ALLISON: ...whatever and I don't honestly know if I saw that episode before yesterday, when I watched it.

JOSH: Truly?

ALLISON: I swear to God. At a certain point I stopped watching the episodes because you know how it was. It was just; we were eating, sleeping, breathing, drinking, *West Wing* and you got home. You're not gonna, I'm not gonna watch *West Wing*.

JOSH: Yeah.

ALLISON: I want to do anything but *West Wing*, so I honestly don't think I watched that episode until yesterday. So I was kind of shocked at it. I was like, "Hey, hey, hey, hold on! That is not so peep-hole!"

JOSH: [laughing]

ALLISON: Like I could [cross talk] see my stomach...

JOSH: [cross talk] Alex lies!

ALLISON: I could see my bra! I'm fine with it. I look back on myself with age much kinder and I think I look fantastic!

HRISHI: But given how "prudish" the show has been until this time. That's basically a nude scene.

JOSH: Yeah. Did you mind shooting it?

ALLISON: I don't remember shooting it. I don't remember anything. I'll tell you the only thing I remember and I don't remember a lot in my life, and I was looking at this episode going "God, I don't remember shooting that scene, I don't remember shooting this. I don't remember any of this." And then when I got to a scene with Margaret where I had to say; and I wrote it down because I wouldn't be able to say it.

[West Wing episode 6.04 excerpt]

C.J.: Where's the non-proliferation one?

MARGARET: I have it.

C.J.: And the uranium repatriation study?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughs]

ALLISON: That was the one I remember. I said that! I remember that! I remember I couldn't say those words as fast as I needed to and I told Alex, I said "Just shoot, would you shoot it from the back? Get it on the back of my head. I'm not going to say it. I'm not going to be able to say it." I don't even know how I said it. Uranium repatriation and non-pro...

[crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] Those are the kind of word-burgers that can turn into a real situation because...

HRISHI: [laughing] Word-burgers!

ALLISON: Yeah, that's perfect!

JOSH: After missing it once or twice, this feels like there's such a light being shined onto it that you're just gearing up for that moment in the scene and it can turn into a real situation.

ALLISON: It decreases your chances every time.

JOSH: Absolutely.

HRISHI: Yeah, let's talk about C.J.'s first time in the Situation Room.

ALLISON: Yeah. How about Steve Ryan is Secretary Hutchinson?

JOSH: He's good.

ALLISON: Talk about an enemy, just evil, mean man.

HRISHI: My favorite Steve Ryan role, I don't know if we've talked about this Josh, is that of the one-armed man on *Arrested Development* who teaches the kids a lesson about that's why you always leave a note.

[Arrested Development Episode 1.10 - *Pier Pressure* excerpt]

NARRATOR: George Sr had used his considerable means to stage intricate scenarios to teach his children what he considered valuable life lessons.

GEORGE SR (on phone): I need help.

J. WALTER WEATHERMAN: I'll get my gear.

(sounds of a car hitting something, fabric ripping and kids screaming)

J. WALTER WEATHERMAN (missing his prosthetic arm and sleeve from his jacket): and that's why you always leave a note.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] Did you reference that once before?

HRISHI: I mean, I'm always thinking about "That's why you always leave a note". So C.J. goes into the Situation Room for the very first time, I believe, right?

ALLISON: Well, it was certainly her first time as Chief of Staff.

HRISHI: Yes. Yeah.

ALLISON: In the Situation Room it was a slap of ice-cold water in her face by Secretary Hutchinson, who basically just runs over her in every way.

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

HUTCHINSON: Get the president your report on domestic storage capacity.

CJ: Hang on; I'm not sure we're ready to...

HUTCHINSON: He asked me for it. We done?

[end excerpt]

ALLISON: Just saying you're not going to have a role here in this room. I have a direct line to the president. We are doing this, we are doing this and you don't know what you're talking about. And you see Anna Deavere Smith across the way looking at me like, "Oh you poor thing, we got to get you on the right page here." She comes to her defense certainly and says this just came in the room.

HRISHI: Yeah.

ALLISON: Settle down Secretary Hutchinson. But so she does think she has Anna Deavere's character on her side, but she kind of watches her fumble.

HRISHI: I thought it was a neat dynamic, the triangle there. Because Hutchinson really acts like he's running the room, like it's his room to run, though it's Nancy who sits at the head of the table and I would think that really it would be hers or maybe it's the chief of staff's and instead he just sort of takes up all of the oxygen. I was surprised that Nancy sort of wasn't speaking more and then I thought actually maybe Nancy's doing the thing that she thinks is right, which is deferring to the chief of staff, giving C.J. a chance, but then before C.J. can actually take the chance...

JOSH: Hutchison.

HRISHI: ...Hutchinson just jumps in and wrests control, then acts like he's the authority.

ALLISON: She's not a total idiot and there she does bring up some good points, but he just barrels over...

HRISHI: Yeah.

ALLISON: ...and runs roughshod over her.

HRISHI: He is the worst. I do like that C.J. finally gets to ask Margaret...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

C.J.: Hutchinson's a son of a bitch. Is that just me or...?

MARGARET: No.

[end excerpt]

ALLISON: I know [laughing].

HRISHI: We talked about Margaret a little bit. Can you tell us more about your own relationship with NiCole Robinson?

ALLISON: I did love working with NiCole. She was really quirky and odd, like C.J. says, and had a peculiar sense of humor and it was hard to say where NiCole ended and Margaret began, or vice versa. I don't know, she was wonderfully quirky in that role. She was great in it, and I loved the relationship journey that C.J. goes on with her now as her assistant. They have a few bumps finding their way.

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

MARGARET: That was something - everybody pretending to resign.

C.J.: Bless their cotton socks.

MARGARET: But you know I'm actually leaving, right?

[end excerpt]

ALLISON: And then she turns out to be the one who helps her swim.

HRISHI: Yeah, this episode also introduces Kristin Chenoweth into the mix for the first time.

ALLISON: That's right. I love seeing her pop in. Those are great scenes of them interviewing people and then in comes Kristin Chenoweth thinking she's applying for a different job altogether. She thinks she's coming in for deputy press secretary or something and then ends up being incredibly valuable and her advice...

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

ANNABETH: You just need a little grooming; I can take care of that. And I'll help you find a new press secretary. A real search, not some 24-hour emergency rescue mission.

[end excerpt]

ALLISON: It's a wonderful addition to the cast just for her size alone next to me in our future scenes together. One of my favorite lines where I'm walking next to her and I say...

[West Wing episode 6.12 excerpt]

C.J.: I can't believe we're the same species.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: Well, let's turn to the writing a little bit. I wonder if you had a conversation with Debora Cahn at all about this episode, before you started shooting it, or during.

ALLISON: No, I never had any conversations with any of the writers about any of the material except to say what a great episode, I'm so excited I get to do it and Debora was one of my favorite writers.

JOSH: You're like me in your approach Allison.

ALLISON: Am I?

JOSH: I mean, it's been far more successful for you, but we have similar approaches.
[laughs]

ALLISON: [laughs] I think you could probably be a better dramaturge than I could Josh, but I...

JOSH: I don't know.

ALLISON: ...I read something and I go "I don't know, if this is what they want me to say, I'll say it". I don't deign to think I could think of a better way to say something or this would be better if C.J. did this or that. I just never felt comfortable doing that. I totally trusted them and...

JOSH: Yeah, well my thought process is "They're not paying me as a writer." So...
[Allison laughs] I'll do what an actor does which is to simply say out loud what the writers get paid to do.

ALLISON: Well, that's another good, that's another good reason to stay in your lane.

HRISHI: Right.

ALLISON: And I definitely like to stay in the actors' lane and let the writers write, the directors direct, producers produce.

HRISHI: I love that Debora Cahn got this episode because I remember we spoke to Josh Singer a few episodes ago, about an episode that he wrote and in it he mentioned that he felt like Debora Cahn became kind of the soul of the show, in a way. And I feel like C.J. has been that as well, for a very long time and one of the things that I love about her promotion to chief of staff was sort of a recognition of that idea. That she was the soul of what's going on in *The West Wing*. And so I thought I don't know if that sense of Debora Cahn grew out of writing an episode like this, but it felt like a really great match.

ALLISON: I would love to ask her about that if she was the one who suggested this storyline or did she just hear about it and wanted to write for it? Because she thought, I don't know, that's interesting.

HRISHI: Is there more that you wanted to talk about? Any notes that you made?

ALLISON: Lily Tomlin. She's hysterical.

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

DEBBIE: Is she nervous?

PRESIDENT BARTLET: No, she looks fine.

DEBBIE: Well, that's good. I'd be apoplectic.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Oh I know what I wanted to ask you about, you know with all the shuffling that happens between offices and jobs, one of the hardest moments I think is when C.J. asks Carol to go work with Toby instead.

[West Wing Episode 6.04 excerpt]

CAROL: C.J., do you want me in? I'm not sure where to sit.

C.J.: Oh, God, right. Toby's going to need you.

CAROL: That's fine.

C.J.: Just for the next couple of days.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Like you said, Margaret becomes her lifeline as the assistant to the chief of staff, but in the bargain we lose this Batman and Robin dynamic between C.J. and Carol.

ALLISON: You're right. That was a really sweet moment. And you saw all over Melissa Fitzgerald's face that she was not going to be in the room with C.J. on this journey and she accepts it with grace but a little bit of sadness.

HRISHI: Yeah, Carol gives a nod, almost like a kid being asked to babysit.

ALLISON: You're not...

HRISHI: Yeah.

ALLISON: Yeah, babysitter. You can't come to the party.

HRISHI: Right.

ALLISON: Exactly. It's like, okay. Well, I understand.

ALLISON: Maybe another time. Okay. Yep. I got it good, good. Yeah that. But there's definitely hurt there. Oh God, Melissa.

HRISHI: One of my favourite things, and I think a lot of our listeners favorite things, is the knowledge that you and Melissa are friends in real life.

ALLISON: Yeah.

HRISHI: All the moments were... Like when you called her in the middle of our taping in DC and it's just one of the best things.

JOSH: That was awesome.

ALLISON: That was hilarious and I just talked to Ron Klein on the phone the other night; he was on the stage, I guess, when that happened, when I called in.

JOSH: That's right, Papa Smurf as he's known on the podcast.

ALLISON: That was the most confusing things... Because I just thought she had a TV on that was so loud and "I was like what is going on?" I just couldn't figure it out. It was so hilarious.

JOSH: Even when you don't know there's an audience, you know how to work an audience.

ALLISON: That's why I was like with you guys, "Do I have to look good? Are you Skyping from a stage with a 500 [crosstalk] thousand people..."

JOSH: [crosstalk] Right, we will not we will not betray your trust again.

ALLISON: Oh my god, that was hilarious. But there's something else that remind me of... Oh, yeah! Well, you know I just worked with Brad on *Mom*, he did my...

JOSH: Yes.

ALLISON: ...last episode before Christmas on the *Mom* show and he had to play just absolutely three sheets drunk in every scene and he was hilarious. Who knew he could play...He never had to play drunk on *The West Wing*, he had to play hungover, I think.

HRISH: Yes, that's right.

ALLISON: He never had to play drunk on *The West Wing*, but we're all, what my point is, we're all still friends, all of us and we always love seeing each other. We all love each other, right?

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for joining us Allison and thanks to all of you for listening.

JOSH: I guess that does it for another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*. Thanks to everybody who donated to the now-defunct Radiotopia fundraising drive. We made it past 25,000 new donors, which is awesome. We all get stickers. It ends happily. There's much joy and we thank you for the incredible support of our show and of Radiotopia in general, which is a collection of fabulous podcasts that you can learn more about at Radiotopia.fm.

HRISHI: Even though the fundraiser is over, if you do want to support Radiotopia, you can still do it at Radiotopia.fm. You can also go to the West Wing Weekly and support our show by clicking on the Donate tab. You can follow Allison Janney on Twitter. She's

@AllisonBJanney. You can also follow our show, The West Wing Weekly,
@WestWingWeekly.

JOSH: And you can follow us at our names.

HRISHI: Many thanks to Margaret Miller, Nick Song and Zach McNeas, and if you missed it over the holidays, I hope you didn't, there's a special *West Wing* Christmas edition episode of *Song Exploder*; where Yo-Yo Ma discusses *The Prelude from Bach's Cello Suite no. 1 in G major*, which you will remember is the piece of music that causes Josh to suffer from PTSD in *Noel*.

JOSH: Mm-hmm.

HRISHI: Okay.

JOSH: Okay.

ALLISON: What's next?

[Outro Music]