

The West Wing Weekly  
6.12: "365 Days"  
Guest: Fmr. Deputy Secretary of State Tony Blinken

[Intro Music]

JOSH: Hi-ho! You're listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. I'm Joshua Molina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Today we're talking about season six, episode twelve, it's called "365 Days", or as I like to call it: [clears throat], "I said, 'let Bartlet be Bartlet', did anyone even hear me?"

JOSH: [laughs] That's good, that's the synopsis right there, that's a Hrynopsis [Hrishi laughs]. It first aired on January 19th, 2005. It was written by Mark Goffman. It was directed by Andrew Bernstein. Andrew Bernstein who worked for a long time as an A.D. on the show and steps up here and directs an episode. He would later hire me for the episode of *Psych*, Dulé Hill's show, that I was on and that was very nice of him.

HRISHI: Was he directing that episode?

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And as the director he got to hire you?

JOSH: Um, well, I guess he was involved. I'm sure knowing Dulé, and I think - I knew James Roday already - I had some friends, I was stacked, I had an inside track.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: But, uh, I always assume even though it's usually the producers of a show, and the casting directors, and the people involved in a show that are kind of more important than that episode's director, that the director usually has some say, or at least casting is run by him. So at least Andrew Bernstein didn't say that, "He's difficult to work with, I know him from *The West Wing*, do not hire this man."

HRISHI: He kept that part to himself.

JOSH: Exactly. Thoughts, not words.

HRISHI: Let me give you my synopsis. It's the day after the president's final State of the Union Address. It was a hit, but Toby isn't fooled by his own writing and neither is Leo who comes back and tries to take a bird's eye look at what's left to be done with the scant year left in the Bartlet presidency. But Leo's in an odd spot, with other staffers switching between respectful deference towards him and rushing off to do important pressing work that doesn't involve him.

Kate deals with a crisis in Bolivia where the U.S. is seen to be interfering with elections that...maybe they are? And it escalates into a hostage situation. Charlie tries to find a sexy way to talk about the earned income tax credit, and Annabeth helps the First Lady with an event by finding a sexy way to talk about NASCAR. No Josh, no Donna, and no Matt Santos in this one.

JOSH: You might have come across writer Mark Goffman's name recently, because he's one of the executive producers of *The Umbrella Academy*, a new series on Netflix.

HRISHI: Which also features Lauren Schmidt Hissrich, another *West Wing* friend and *West Wing* writer, as one of its writers.

JOSH: There we go, another example of people continuing to work together. It is a truism, but only because it's true, that you should treat people well on your way coming up, probably in any business, but particularly I think in show biz, because you never know whether this AD or even PA, and I've had this happen, production assistant later hired me when he was directing an episode of something. It's like, just, there's so much volatility in the quote unquote Ladder of Showbiz, that I mean, you should treat people well anyway, just as a decent person and not an [expletive deleted]. But in Hollywood you never know when that person that you think works for you is going to be in a position to hire you three weeks later.

HRISHI: I do like how much overlap there is post-*West Wing* between *West Wing* people. There's always an outstretched feather.

JOSH: Yeah, that's right. Like the wing of a California condor, it encompasses much. [Hrishi laughs]. Hi-Ho! [Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: You weren't listening when I did my-

JOSH: Synopsis?

HRISHI: Synopsis.

JOSH: Actually I did listen, and the thought that hit me was that that synopsis sounds better than the episode I watched.

HRISHI: Ohhh, no.

JOSH: Not that I - I don't hate the episode. I think it's well written, and I think it's very well directed. I kept thinking as I watched, "there's not a lot of meat on the bones." The bones are there for a decent story, what's happening in Bolivia could be super compelling and exciting but it sort of happens off-screen and it's not of primary importance. The earned income tax credit could be a fertile topic to really dig in, but as I was watching I kept, you know, at first I was thinking, I should really learn a lot about this. But as I watched, I was like, nah, it's not really that important to this episode in this way. The actual substance of it, kind of not that vital to the

episode, and then what I was most sort of struck by and moved by is Leo's story and his return. But even that sort felt a little bit sapped of energy, which it sort of is by its nature. He's kind of this older more infirmed guy. His breathing is noticeable and labored. The thing that really moved me about the episode, I guess what I'm saying, is it feels to me like maybe the underpinning of the entire series, if you had to pick one thing or focus on one area, was the friendship between these two men, President Bartlet and Leo, and it is in a sad, bad place, and Leo returning to his old stomping ground is kind of a little bit like a dinosaur, and he's out of place and-

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That affected me. It's kind of a bummer to watch. Part of what I'm saying is maybe about not loving episode is just that it was effective in-

HRISHI: Right!

JOSH: And what is trying to affect is a feeling of just great sadness and regret and maybe pity. It's a rough one to watch.

HRISHI: It is. Yeah, I think it right episode is effective in portraying a situation where people feel frustrated, and a little bit like they've lost their compass and Leo's there trying to find it again. But in order to establish that story you have to really drive home how ineffective things have been.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: But it did feel so much like, "Let Bartlet be Bartlet," but that was in season one and this is in season six. The difference is really significant. In one, it's like, "Just getting started, what do we want to do? Okay, let's make this count." And here it's like, "We're almost at the end, didn't really do that much, didn't accomplish so many of the lofty goals that we had set out for and now we've only got a year left let's make it count."

JOSH: Mhmm.

HRISHI: It's not exactly the fiery rhetoric that I think we kind of want, you know.

JOSH: Although, you know, when Leo finally has it out with the president over their sad, managed meals-

HRISHI: [Chuckles] Yeah.

JOSH: He has some fire in him, and what he has to is valid. I mean, the beauty of being a lame duck is you've got nothing left to lose anymore and you still got a year here. I get that's not the episode they were trying to make, but I kind of wish that they had backed that scene up so that

we could have seen at some point in this episode what the response is going to be to that. Otherwise it felt like a lot of a long, slow, kind of build up to this, so just wasn't a very active episode.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: He's not really sure what his purpose there is, everyone's kind of dancing around him because they kind of seem to feel sorry for him. There's a lot of forlorn looks at him kind of behind his back, as people exit scenes with him.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: There's a lot of, "ooh, Leo, are you sure? No, I'll come to you, are you sure?" It's just a lot of pussy-footing around him. It made for a hard, a difficult forty-five minutes.

HRISHI: You know, there are examples of presidents who had great final years. You know, presidents who took big swings in what could be considered their lame duck era.

JOSH: Hit me with one.

HRISHI: Teddy Roosevelt, maybe. George Washington, maybe. FDR, I think Ronald Reagan. And if you look at some of the economic outcomes from Bill Clinton, maybe Bill Clinton. I mean, it's a tough time, but it's not to say that you can't affect change even in that point in your administration.

JOSH: So the Roosevelts, they were closers.

HRISHI: Yes, exactly, yes. I mean FDR died in office, but still.

JOSH: Well, that's a strong statement.

HRISHI: It's a strong goodbye.

JOSH: #FinishStrong. [Hrishi laughs]. My wife and I say that to each other a lot.

HRISHI: You say #FinishStrong to each other?

JOSH: Usually we don't say hashtag, but on occasion we throw that in there [Hrishi laughs]. Because we recognize that the phrase "Finish Strong" is very hashtaggy. So it's said with a modicum of irony, but it's also a way to urge each other to, whatever it is, finish the dishes-

HRISHI: [Laughing] Yeah, that's what I was wondering, is this the dishwasher?

JOSH: [Laughing] Yeah, it's usually very important stuff.

HRISHI: [Laughing] I actually need that for when it comes to doing the dishes. For some reason I always end up sputtering out about 80% of the way through any dishwashing. I get to a certain point where I'm like, ugh, is it not over already? And then I'm just like, I'll do the rest of this later.

JOSH: That is my approach, quite literally, to everything in my life. [Hrishi laughs] It's why I'm ineffective as a man. [Hrishi laughs] That doesn't sound good, I should - ineffective as a person. Actually, I saw a very compelling take on this concept of finishing strong. I finished the second season of *Patriot* last night.

HRISHI: Oh, you finished strong, watching TV?

JOSH: No, that's not it, so much as, there is a scene between John Tavner/John Lakeman and a young French girl, and he's explaining, without spoiling the series, a series that I again urge everybody to watch-

HRISHI: And I will second that urging.

JOSH: Right. I'm glad that you watch it, and it's short. You binged it, yes?

HRISHI: I did.

JOSH: Finished strong.

HRISHI: That's one thing I'm really good at. Watching TV, my gosh, I could win championships.

JOSH: Yes. If only I could monetize it. Oh, wait, we have. [Both laugh] There's a scene where he's explaining how he does, he's, you know, an undercover operative and he sometimes has to do some very, very difficult even physically painful things, and he explains to her and then sings a song to her, about the concept of going halfway and then taking one step more.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And when you go halfway and then one step more through something difficult, it's closer to go to the other end of the task or the objective than it is to go back to the beginning. I actually thought, I found that scene very moving.

HRISHI: I thought it was really beautiful. I think that show is great and incredibly underrated.

JOSH: As do I.

HRISHI: I'll tell you what I found the most moving in this episode was the scene between Will and Leo when he finally talks about his reasons why he went with Russell. In a new way, you know, we'd heard the sort of pragmatic reasons: the chance to do something with a potential

future president and make his mark early, and I think a lot of people maybe found that unsatisfying. Personally, it made a lot of sense to me, even if people were disappointed at some level of, oh, this guy's left our team. But here we really hear him explain that his reasoning really is an extension of the love, this feeling of betrayal or something, it's actually not a betrayal. Again, the compass that he was following was one that he thought was set out by the president and Leo.

JOSH: Yeah. I feel like they're trying to do a little bit of character rehab for Will here in that scene.

HRISHI: The whole scene is great, but Will says this:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*WILL: The truth is, I'm not really sure I ever even realized this before now, I spent the last year and a half looking for what you saw in him. You and the president. When you gave him this job. You picked Russell. Him. To serve as VP to a president with a serious health condition. You were aware you were picking a potential successor. On some level I just trusted that. And assumed I'd eventually discover what you knew then.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I thought by addressing Leo, in some ways, the character is addressing the writers. He's like, "you folks wrote me into this plot corner, and now we have to figure out a characterological underpinning for it, that makes sense given that this is a smart, good, person who we came to really love in season four.

JOSH: Yes, I think you're right. I think it is a little bit of that. And I wrote in capital letters COP OUT, [Hrishi laughs] although I like the scene very much. Only in that there was no response to the following quote from Will:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*WILL: Tell me what it was, we'll compare notes. I know. Doesn't work like that. He's my guy, I have to figure him out on my own.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I wrote COP OUT because, one, I think these two guys could have a real conversation. I think Leo would have a response to what Will has asked. "What did you see in him?" I don't think, you know, Leo would just sort of gaze at him and then Will would be like, "I get it, I have to figure out why I fell in love with him." I feel like there would have been an actual answer, there would have been a real conversation.

HRISHI: Ahh.

JOSH: I don't think he would have said, "It doesn't work like this." I think he would have said, "Well, this is politics. Can you talk to me about why this was your choice? Like, I'm not going to leave the room until we actually have a conversation."

HRISHI: I actually liked it. I didn't think that part was a cop-out because I like how it left Will with the chance to actually go on thinking that there is something for him to find. Because I think what Leo knows, and what we know, is there isn't some hidden depth or some actual quality to him that they liked. It was that we were in the throes of season five doldrums and in the darkest parts of the series, you know, basically when the Speaker of the House dictated-

JOSH: Mmhmm.

HRISHI: A defeat to the Bartlet Administration and after Zoey's kidnapping and everything else they just accepted it. They didn't put up a fight. And they went with the person they thought could get confirmed. And Leo, I think, if left to have to actually answer his question wouldn't have a good answer. He doesn't say to Will, "You know what? We don't actually see anything in him. It was a political calculation and we just went with it." It gives Will the chance to walk out of that room with this optimism that, "Yeah, someday I'm going to find it," and I like that.

JOSH: I agree with you that Leo's answer, were to be honest, would be along the lines of what you just articulated but I feel like he's, Leo's, getting let off the hook too easily. I mean if that's his answer, then maybe Will should be working for somebody else. This is high stakes, and he's now running this guy's campaign.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: If you never thought there was anything to him, would you tell me now? [Laughing] I'm not saying it's bad writing, or bad for the show. I guess on Will's behalf-

HRISHI: [Laughing] Yes.

JOSH: I felt it was a cop out. Like, give the guy an answer! Maybe that's really what I was reacting - by the way, I'm glad you brought up this scene, because as we know, I have an imperfect memory for my past and my distant past especially. And I really remember very well shooting this scene. I've been waiting for it all season, I didn't remember exactly where it fell.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I just remembered a scene with John Spencer in a largely empty office, in his new office, and so when we got to this episode, I was like, "Oh yeah, that's what I'm remembering." I just have this scene of - I remember really relishing the opportunity. It's not like I have a ton of one-on-one scenes with John. [Cross talk] I don't know if I have any others. Nothing comes to mind

immediately. And I remember relishing the chance, the opportunity, to work with him one-on-one and also feeling like I was getting kind of a masterclass. I just remember, you know, I've admired his acting I'm sure since the moment I joined the cast. But there's something about working with him one-on-one, the simplicity and the honesty of his approach, and it was like playing tennis with someone who's better than you. It was just sort of interesting to watch, and I remember trying to soak up how he worked. And I'm glad I got that opportunity because it turned out to be not long before we lost him.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah. One of the reasons why I love this scene is because of this unspoken complicated dynamic between the two of them. The two characters are in such different places emotionally in this scene. Like Will is having this earnest moment of trying to seek out some guidance and wisdom. And it's sweet to hear you say that about John Spencer, because I feel like it parallels a little bit of what Will is going through, where he's like, "Please let me like learn something from you, give me some sense of - be a mentor a little bit in this moment." [Cross talk] My interpretation is that Leo actually has this very cold and pragmatic reason for going with Russell, he and the president. And so he sat there looking like, I know there's some good in here and Leo is sitting there feeling some sort of guilt, and trying to have this sort of Socratic approach to the conversation. Letting Will really do the talking. And it seems like mentorship, but it also, I think he is letting himself off the hook by not actually answering him. And so it ends with Leo never having to actually come clean, and Will being like, "I'll carry on!" You know? I think it's really great. The kind of, I guess, emotional discrepancy that we don't often see on the show. It's like there's a dramatic tension here that is just different. You know? I think we heard at one point that the key to *The West Wing* was you have two people in a room who want different things and they have to convince the other one.

JOSH: [Cross talk] Right.

JOSH: Mmhmm.

HRISHI: Or something like that. Right? I don't know something about this dynamic felt unique.

JOSH: Yeah, yeah, I agree. It was unfortunate, I'm not sure if it's in this scene, but throughout the episode that Leo and others refer to:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*CHARLIE: He's in office, watching State of the Unions.*

*TOBY: Unions?*

[end excerpt]



JOSH: I'm like, oh my God, have you guys never listened to *The West Wing Weekly*?

HRISHI: [Laughing] Or even your own president, who would have surely corrected them.

JOSH: Indeed. State of the Unions?

HRISHI: Yeah. Although the president himself has one where at one point, when he's finding out the details about the situation in Bolivia, Kate tells him that there have been contractors who were captured and the president says:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Captured by who?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes, I noticed that.

HRISHI: Which is surprising because he's somebody who in the series has corrected the who/whom mistake himself.

[West Wing Episode 2.08 excerpt]

*CHARLIE: Why do you need a new one?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: I'm giving mine away.*

*CHARLIE: To who?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: To whom.*

*CHARLIE: To whom.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He gave him the kniiiffffeeee....

JOSH: [Laughing] I did bump on that.

HRISHI: Ok, and while we're talking on the topic of language nitpicks, I got one for you Josh.

JOSH: Yes. Nitpick. Bring it.

HRISHI: Similar to your issue with Haponica-

JOSH: Oh, yes.

HRISHI: Later in the episode, when they're all being called back in, and they're trying to figure out what's going on and Kate says, "maybe there's a stock market crash in Guyana," and what we hear is, Will says:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*WILL: You mean with all my money in sapodilla [pronounced sa-PO-dee-uh] futures?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Sa-PO-dee-yah? I don't even know what we're talking about.

HRISHI: Well, you're supposed to be talking about a fruit, the sapodilla (pronounced sa-puh-DEE-uh).

JOSH: I don't even remember that moment.

HRISHI]: Even if you want to be really gringo about it I think you might say sap-o-dill-a, but not sa-PO-dee-uh.

JOSH: Sa-PO-dee-uh? That's pretty bad, I didn't even notice it. I must have blocked it.

HRISHI: It's just one line, but yeah, so I thought maybe that was one where, you know, you saw it on the page and you said it the way you thought it might be said and nobody stopped to say, "actually..."

JOSH: Oh, that unquestionably is what it is what is. Where was I being protected? What is- spell that word?

HRISHI: S-a-p-o-d-i-l-l-a. Sap-O-dee-ya.

JOSH: Sapodilla. Yeah, I don't even know how I'd come up with that. Geez.

HRISHI: I didn't know that fruit, I thought, and I looked it up, and it turns out I do know this fruit, I just know it by a different name. It's also called chikoo. And it's delicious. And I'm going to give another endorsement here for Natural's Ice Cream in India. Some of the best ice cream I've ever had in my life. And one of the flavors of ice cream you can get is chikoo or the sapodilla fruit. There's a chikoo flavored ice cream. Or you can also get it as a shake. And in fact one of the great treats I've discovered here in LA is down in Artesia which is like the Little India. It's not in LA, it's a little city south of LA, and there's a sweet shop, an Indian sweet shop there, and you can get a chikoo shake. It's sort of like a mango lassi, you know, in that world. It's a milkshake,

and it is so good. Anyway, I heartily endorse chikoo, or sa-puh-DEE-uh or sap-o-dilla, not sa-PO-dee-uh.

JOSH: Sa-PO-dee-uh. That's rough. Apologies. Apologia.

Hrishi: [Laughing] Another think I liked in this episode was learning about Kate's past a little bit.

JOSH: Ah, we finally get to the multi-spoused Kate.

HRISHI: Yeah it's her anni-vorsery, I like that term.

JOSH: I do too.

HRISHI: I just like this detail, that she's been divorced twice. It's great. I mean, that is a really interesting detail. And then also this exchange that she has with C.J. about the contractors in Bolivia:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*C.J.: These are tough guys, they can hold out till the election.*

*KATE: You saw the video. When you're being held, ten days is a long time.*

*C.J.: Have you ever been held?*

*KATE: I've held other people. 24 hours is a long time.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes, that gave me pause. That was a scary moment.

HRISHI: I mean we've talked about her super spy past.

JOSH: Mmhmm.

HRISHI: But it's also like the realities of her CIA super-spydom also has these darker aspects.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: It's not all just speaking Farsi and Chinese, you know, fluently. It's also being in a situation where they've captured people and are holding them prisoner and presumably interrogating them.

JOSH: And one can imagine the line between this professional tidbit we've learned leading also to someone having some personal relationship issues.

HRISHI: [Laughing] Yeah.

JOSH: A couple husbands. You can see, if that's your job, it might be hard to balance things on the home front.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. Which is, I think, something that's been built in to so many of our characters on this show that their real relationship is to the work. And so they don't have an opportunity emotionally to get involved with other people. But here, you know, Kate comes to us a little bit later in her career, and it gives us a chance to have that same sort of story told in a different way. She also has that same quality, but she actually has gone through two marriages to get there.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: The situation in Bolivia, by the end of the episode, is not resolved at all.

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: And we never come back to it. Spoiler alert, but not really, because we never come back to it later.

JOSH: Spoiler un-lert.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. I thought maybe this would hang on to the next episode and they would figure out a way to resolve the crisis but it's just left hanging.

JOSH: I liked the sort of turn we got in the sense of his seeming almost falsely modest about this roaring success that he's had with the speech he's written for the State of the Union. And then at the end sort of getting called out by Leo and our realizing that in fact he can't take these compliments because he knows he's written something that's not worthy of the approbation that he's getting for it.

HRISHI: Yeah. I love that it seems like only Toby and Leo are in on it. I don't know if it's to their credit, or to everyone else's discredit that they're the only ones who are recognizing the hollowness of what he said, or the sort of toothlessness, I guess.

JOSH: Although he maybe doesn't quite explicitly state it, I think President Bartlet knows as well, and we get a sense in that scene with him and Leo.

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: I never had to make a speech based on the maximum amount I could stand up.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: So he knows he missed the mark, and he knows he set the bar low.

HRISHI: But then why, it seems sad that he knows that and yet he's buying into the accolades.

JOSH: That's true. But I did sort of get that sense in that final scene. And at one point he says, "Come on, we're going to do this the day after?" Kind of suggesting to me, implying that he knew they were going to have to have this conversation. But can you give me a couple days to falsely enjoy [laughs] the praise? I mean, it seems like a lessened President Bartlet. It's not the guy-

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: We voted for twice.

HRISHI: Absolutely. And I think you made a really great metaphor, sort of connecting two different things in this episode. You talked about how there was not really a lot of meat on the bone. And you also talked about the contents of their dinner. The president is eating this sort of macrobiotic stuff and Leo is eating the heart-healthy stuff, and essentially they're eating for their mortality's sake. Not eating for-

JOSH: Hmm.

HRISHI: Pleasure or gusto, they don't get to-

JOSH: They're at subsistence level.

HRISHI: Exactly. Yeah. And it feels like that's what they're doing with this State of the Union speech and maybe with the final year of the presidency as well. It's like, we wanted to do all of these things, but right now we have to just eat these vegetables in order to try and last as long as we can.

JOSH: Although I like to think that just after the flentl these guys are enjoying a sapodilla [sa-PO-dee-uh] milkshake.

HRISHI: [Laughing] Yeah. I think so. But the sadness of it is the fact that we have been here before. We had this exact same thing in "Let Bartlet be Bartlet." You know, Leo comes back after having an argument with the president about who's driving whom to the middle and saying, "Everybody hey, let's get it in gear, let's dream big." And everyone gets psyched up and then now years later into the second term, they still feel like they haven't accomplished those things.

JOSH: Yeah, and also, now I'm tying it all to the greater episode itself, nobody knows exactly what Leo's there for, how to use him. This is what Leo does. This is what you bring Leo back for. If not this, what? He's the guy who lights the fire.

HRISHI: [Laughing] I have to say, in terms of like, fires being lit, this did not sound like someone who just had a fire lit under them. When Will, who was the last line in the flentl is:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*WILL: A resurgence in civil rights activism couldn't hurt anyone.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Reep-roah.

HRISHI: Oh my gosh, that is one of my favorite quotes from Martin Luther King, Jr.

[both laughing]

JOSH: I can see the poster. Oh my God, that's hilarious.

HRISHI: I was a little bit disappointed in a moment where Will comes into Leo's office-

JOSH: The first time?

HRISHI: Yeah, the first time when he asks him what he's doing and he's listening to these old speeches of the inaugurals and the States of the Union and you know, later of course he can't say one sentence without Toby being able to quote them verbatim because he wrote most of them. I was a little bit disappointed that Will didn't recognize what it was he was watching, listening to, I mean he's seeing it on the screen.

JOSH: I didn't think about that.

HRISHI: And there was that moment when he first goes into help Toby with the speech writing, you remember, he asks for every single thing that the president has ever spoken out loud.

JOSH: That's true, very good point.

HRISHI: To try and get himself familiar with the patois. Because of that I felt like he should know what he's already watching. And also just because, I think this is one where I feel like if Aaron Sorkin were writing this episode, Will would know absolutely because he would have that speechwriter's superpower, you know, where people know the exact number of words in the

Gettysburg address, and they can quote long passages from speeches given by other people. Like, they just know this stuff cold.

JOSH: You're right.

HRISHI: I felt a little sad that Will, Sam had said, he's one of us, and therefore by association he really ought to know this stuff too.

JOSH: Yeah. Since you brought up the specter of the, "How Aaron Would Have Done It," there were a couple other moments in this episode where the exposition was a bit clunk-a-lunk and we have Kate stepping into the Oval saying:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*KATE: Well, up till now, they've been one of our most cooperative allies in the war on drugs.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Just reminding the president about Bolivia 101. It just seems like is this really what Kate Harper would be saying to the president?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's just, I think it would have been more elegantly shared with us or we would have gotten our gentle lesson a little more gently.

HRISHI: That's funny. I thought you were going to point to a different piece of clunk-a-lunk, which I'm adopting and now stealing for my own. Toby says First Lady's going to be attending a stock car race. Annabeth says, "Hell yeah." Toby says, excuse me? And then Annabeth says this thing:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*ANNABETH: Colorful regional colloquialism betokening enthusiasm of a visceral if not rowdy variety.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oof.

HRISHI: That, to me, sounded like bad *West Wing* satire.

JOSH: I also winced at that one. I didn't put that in the exposition category, because it's not really anything we need to know. When exposition is clunky, you can feel the steam coming out of the writer's ears. We've got to tell them this.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: But how do we do it without sounding like we're telling them this. That's just a nobody says that run of attempted Sorkin that I also did not like.

HRISHI: Yeah. When I fell off the *West Wing* wagon in early season five days, it was because of moments like this where I felt like there was an attempt to make characters sound smart by putting these impossible sentences in their mouths and not impossible because of how smart the contents of it were, but smart in its decoration.

JOSH: Right. And it just sounds like something that's pre-written. The character's not finding these words at all, it's like, "I was waiting for you to say that so I could say this thing that I wrote earlier this morning." [laughing] By the way, I would say that altogether the NASCAR subplot- though there were aspects of it that I enjoyed- kind of bothered me because it felt like it was sort of damning East Coast sort of elitism at the same time that it trafficked in that.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Because there were clearly these moments of busting you for, hey, you sound like, hey, you know- some of it just didn't work where, you know, Annabeth busts Toby for using the term Fly Over States.

HRISHI: Right. Which Toby would not use.

JOSH: Or if he did use it, he wouldn't have done so unknowingly. He knows that it has a sort of nasty connotation-

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: That you're talking about discounting the thoughts and votes and desires of a huge mass of people in the country.

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*TOBY: Just make sure we avoid a flyover values disaster.*

*ANNABETH: Sorry?*

*TOBY: People in the middle of the country who you fly over when you trying to get to-*



*ANNABETH: Real cities? Can't imagine why you'd be worried about offending them.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And he kind of laughs like, you got me. But that's what flyover means. I mean, if Toby was going to use that phrase, he was doing it knowingly.

HRISHI: Right. That was the part that felt like a stretch to me.

JOSH: Right. And then the other thing that bothered me is that Annabeth herself engages in it. She makes all kinds of comments that are exactly what she's busting Toby for. She talks about all the women who are going to be there, or all the people who are going to see this massively popular sport. Most of them are going to be drunk. I mean, she just - she's engaging in the same sort of stereotypes about them, and what they're going to be wearing. It's just kind of have your cake and eat it too subplot that I didn't love.

HRISHI: I guess I felt with Annabeth there was a little bit of nobody hits my little brother except me.

JOSH: That's...fair.

HRISHI: Yeah. So she takes offense at Toby saying something about NASCAR culture, but she can make all the jokes she wants.

JOSH: I guess, okay, that's- okay, you know, an apology for Annabeth. But one that I can accept.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I also looked up, by the way, because I remember I've always been bemused by the fact that NASCAR racing is or was the most popular sport in the country. And apparently, it has had a huge drop off in both live and TV viewership in the past few years. And that may be just that there are a lot more choices of things to watch on television all together so everything's dropping off. But NASCAR TV ratings plummeting, they're down by some measures as much as 30% in the past two years. So there you have it. Interesting or not.

HRISHI: Yeah, one of the things that I really liked that Nick dug up for us is James Buchanan's last State of the Union.

JOSH: Ooh, there were some rough quotations.

HRISHI: It's pretty brutal.

JOSH: Would you like to read something into the record?

HRISHI: Arguably the worst president?

JOSH: Or, as Nick put it, the [expletive deleted].

HRISHI: I like that his final State of the Union Address is basically, him saying, "Slavery and the Confederacy... shrug." He called the big issue of slavery, "Happily a matter of but little practical importance." That was in his inaugural address, so we already knew that he wasn't going to be great. The reason why he wasn't going to get involved in the secession, he said, "it is beyond the power of any president, no matter what may be his own political proclivities to restore peace and harmony among the states." [Josh laughs] You know, the United States of which he is President.

JOSH: [Laughing] Right.

HRISHI: He says, "Wisely limited and restrained as is his power under our constitution and laws, he alone can accomplish but little for good or for evil on such a momentous question."

JOSH: Yeah, that's a rough message from the President of the United States. It's like, "Hey don't look at me."

HRISHI: Oh yeah. His message was aim low. #AimLow.

JOSH: Buchanan out.

HRISHI: [Laughing] Ahh, all these people are yelling, "Finish strong," at him, and he's, eh. [Josh laughs]. Or this!

JOSH: I wanted to read something into the record too. I had a book recommendation triggered by this episode. The talk about the CIA, there's little scene between Toby and C.J., and they're talking about trying to figure out what those quote unquote "contractors" are actually doing in Bolivia. And do they work for us? And for whom do they work, and in what capacity? And Toby says:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*TOBY: Are we at all concerned about our checkered history down there? Allende, the CIA and Che Guevara?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: There's a lot for people to sort of question about the CIA and there's reason for people to be dubious. And I read a fantastic book called "Legacy of Ashes: The History of the CIA," by Tim Weiner. It's a fantastic book and it charts the entire history of the CIA starting with its being

established in 1947, post-World War II by Truman. And looks at the tension of the dual missions of the CIA. Some who led it emphasizing espionage, and acts of spying and gathering of intelligence. And others who put an emphasis on covert action. It's a very eye-opening look in great detail. Fantastic read. And in addition to the morally questionable, or in fact, reprehensible things that have been done by the CIA, it's also a bit of a revelation about how incompetent the CIA has been at times throughout the years. This excellent read, and I just pulled out one little quote.

HRISHI: And out as you read it, I just want to preface this for the CIA if they're listening, [Josh laughs] Josh's views do not represent What's Next Productions, LLC and are solely his own.

JOSH: I'm good with that. [Hrishi Laughs] "The agency held the position, duly stated in a formal estimate signed by Richard Helms," Helms was the DCI under Johnson and Nixon, "A formal estimate signed by Richard Helms that Latin American Military juntas were good for the United States. They were the only force capable of controlling political crises. Law & Order were better than the messy struggle for democracy and freedom." Which I thought that that was an interesting quote apropos of this episode.

HRISHI: Mmhmm. I wanted to talk about another thing that Toby says to Will. Toby and Will have one more lap around the fight they keep having about, you know, Toby's mad at Will for having gone with Vice President Russell. We already know this.

JOSH: Yeah, this is a real retread, that moment.

HRISHI: Yeah, but I thought there was one part that sparked something new, something that I liked in it. Toby is asking Will for the Vice President to go out there and be the voice of the policies that were set forth in the State of the Union. And Toby wants more from the Vice President, Will says he's gonna get exactly what he's gonna get because the campaign has to come first. Toby says, "One week in support of the man who plucked him out of obscurity." They keep talking about the Vice President and then Toby does this turn at the end:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*TOBY: The rules of politics should be suspended any chance we get, it's disloyalty.*

*WILL: The Vice President has been nothing but steadfast.*

*TOBY: I wasn't talkin' about him.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And there, in terms of the last two sentences that he said, he's accusing Will of being disloyal. And it's a clever way of putting it, but it's also not anything new. He thinks that Will's been disloyal.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: But what I liked about it was the sort of added layer. I wanted to apply that layer, I wasn't talking about him to even earlier in the conversation, to the part where he says, "One week in support of the man who plucked him out of obscurity."

JOSH: Hmmm! Oh, brilliant. Ugh, God, you're good.

HRISHI: Wouldn't that be great if he's talking about himself and Will there.

JOSH: That's some great writing right there. I think indeed he is! I mean, it's revealed essentially in this conversation he's talking about Will and not the Vice President, so-

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Oooh! Nice pull.

HRISHI: And for me that justifies this whole-

JOSH: Revisit.

HRISHI: Yeah, revisit.

JOSH: Well done. Well done. You just made me enjoy that scene more retroactively.

HRISHI: Awesome!

JOSH: I just wanted to point out a quick appearance, one of the contractors who's being held is named Creasy. And Mrs. Creasy, whom we see in a screen within a screen was played by Ursula Burton, Yale '88, boola boola. Classmate of mine.

HRISHI: No kidding!

JOSH: Yeah. Terrific person and very talented women. She also played Hannah Smotrich-Barr on *The Office* in six episodes, she's done all sorts of stuff.

HRISHI: And did you get to interact with her when she filmed that part for this episode?

JOSH: No. I watched the episode today and went, "Oop, Ursula Burton!" So I'm sure it just happened elsewhere, she probably wasn't even on the set, it was on a location shot outdoors somewhere, and I probably never got to see her. She might have been at the table read, and maybe I'm forgetting that she did the episode, but I don't think so.

HRISHI: Speaking of other cast members, I don't know if there are a lot of *Mad Men* fans who are listening to this, but if there are, I wanted to point out that Leo's intern who we see at the end of the cold open.

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*LEO'S INTERN: Are we done, Mr. McGarry?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That actress is Alexa Alemanni, who was on *Mad Men* for a bunch of the early episodes. She was Don Draper's secretary.

JOSH: Uh, fantastic. I had a representative Paul Gosar ay-yi-yi moment, if that's how you pronounce his name. [Hrishi laughs] Is that his name?

HRISHI: I don't know how to pronounce it, yeah.

JOSH: He's the one who said, essentially-

HRISHI: Yes, yeah, I heard that too.

JOSH: Liar, liar, pants on fire to Michael Cohen during his testimony.

HRISHI: Not only did he say it-

JOSH: He had a poster made.

HRISHI: He had a sign [laughs] for, a giant poster made-

JOSH: Can you imagine him at Kinko's going, "This is gonna kill, wait until I bring this thing in!"

HRISHI: Oh, man.

JOSH: Oof. And, uh, anyway, C.J. says:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*C.J.: Liar, liar, pants on fire.*

*TOBY: It won't rhyme in Spanish.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I don't know if you saw the SNL cold open from right after-

JOSH: With Ben Stiller.

HRISHI: With Ben Stiller, yeah. Right after the Cohen hearing where, the section where Paul Gosar speaks. That was my favorite part of the whole thing. He was played by Kyle Mooney.

[Saturday Night Live Episode 44.14 Excerpt]

*KYLE MOONEY as Rep. Paul Gosar, R-AZ 4: You didn't do this for Donald Trump, you did this for you. That's important to you, to look up here and look at the old adage that our moms taught us: liar liar, pants on fire.*

*KYLE MOONEY, as Rep. Paul Gosar, R-AZ 4: You are the liar! That's been established. (Laughter) That's why I went to Kinko's, and I print up this'n. Liar, liar, pants are fire. (Laughter) DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHAT THAT MEANS.*

*BEN STILLER, as Michael Cohen: Honestly, not really, I'm having trouble understanding a lot of what you're saying.*

*[Laughter]*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Very funny.

HRISHI: On that note, let's take a quick break.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: We got some thoughts on this episode from the former Deputy Secretary of State under President Obama, Tony Blinken. Before that, he was the Deputy National Security adviser, he was Kate Harper.

JOSH: Mhmm.

HRISHI: And I asked him a few questions about Kate Harper's story.

HRISHI: I'm joined now by Tony Blinken, who was the former Deputy Secretary of State under President Obama, and before that he was Deputy National Security Advisor. Thank you so much for joining us.

TONY: It's great to be with you.

HRISHI: Is it fair to say that Kate Harper, in this episode, has the job that you had?

TONY: Pretty much. She's the senior National Security Councilperson and the National Security advisor to the President, and I was the deputy to the National Security Advisor, but she is pretty much filling the job that I was in.

HRISHI: Before we get into the actual episode, I also wanted to ask you about your Secretary of State title. I know that sometimes there are subdivisions of Secretary of State, like regional qualifications. Did you have a particular regional focus?

TONY: I did not. There's a deputy who's the number two to the Secretary of State. In my case I worked for John Kerry. He was the Secretary when I was deputy, and basically I had zero depth on anything so my responsibility was to find the smartest people that we could who actually did have real expertise in, you know, in Europe, Latin America, arms control, democracy, human rights, you name it and just help them get the best out of themselves and their teams.

HRISHI: Did you like it that way, having a little bit of a taste of everything around the globe?

TONY: Oh, it's extraordinary, because you really have to get your feet wet on pretty much everything that comes across the transom for the United States in foreign policy, national security, international economic policy. And it's a different story every day. That's what's so great about it.

HRISHI: Hm. And, you actually advised *The West Wing* on episodes.

TONY: Ha! You know, during the Clinton administration, when the *West Wing* was in its heyday, I worked for President Clinton on the National Security Council staff, and indeed a number of us had the wonderful opportunity to occasionally advise on different storylines, on different episodes. It was a great experience. But one of the funniest things that happened was, after one of the State of the Union addresses there was a big party at the White House afterward, after President Clinton delivered the State of the Union. And we were standing around talking, and I saw someone walk behind me and I didn't get a full look at him, but I said, "Oh, I know that person, he's on staff, but I just can't quite place him" And then I realized it was actually Brad Whitford.

HRISHI: Huh! [Laughs] Yeah, one of the staffers.

TONY: So, art meets life, life meets art, exactly. I always said to Brad he could definitely have done our jobs [Hrishi laughs] I'm not sure we could do his.

HRISHI: For this episode, did Kate's storyline resonate with you?

TONY: Absolutely, because what's powerful in this episode, among other things, is that you're sort of minding your own business with an agenda for your day, and a bunch of things that

you're planning to do, and all of a sudden, out of nowhere, in a way that you don't expect, something happens halfway around the world. And it totally changes the trajectory of the day.

HRISHI: This storyline about Bolivia specifically, did you feel like this episode handled that kind of story line in a plausible way?

TONY: Yeah, it did, in a number ways. First, when something like this happens, and in the case of this episode, ultimately Americans taken hostage, these contractors, you know you're first challenge is to just try and get the facts to figure out what's going on. And it's pretty opaque because you may not have great visibility. We had an embassy in Bolivia, and of course in the episode, so you're trying to get information from the embassy and other sources. But you're really struggling first of all, to figure out what's actually happening. And what the episode does a really good job of too is showing that even within the government, one part of the government is questioning whether they've been getting all the facts from another part of the government.

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*KATE: They're claiming the contractors are CIA, sent down to hijack the election.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Are they?*

*HUTCHINSON: No, sir.*

*C.J.: What are they doing there?*

*HUTCHINSON: They're private citizens.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Who happen to take camouflage gear with them on vacation?*

*KATE: They're part of the coca eradication effort, sir.*

*CIA DIRECTOR ROLLIE: They work for the government.*

[end excerpt]

TONY: And so, when they're looking at whether these contractors were just contractors, or maybe were doing something a little bit more nefarious, that's exactly the kind of question you're asking internally; what's actually going on here. We need to know all the facts before we start trying to resolve the situation.

HRISHI: And what was the likelihood that when you were in a situation like that that you would be able to get all the facts, especially if there's something nefarious happening?



TONY: Well, I can only speak to the administrations that I worked in, and I think I feel pretty confident in saying that we would get all the facts, we'd get them right away. You wouldn't have a case of the right hand keeping something from the extreme right hand or the left hand keeping something from the extreme left hand. But you always wanted to make sure there isn't something going on that you weren't aware of, and someone forgot to tell you. Make sure that your ducks are in a row before you actually launch whatever it is you were gonna do.

HRISHI: I think you may have fallen for my trap which is admitting that there were nefarious things going on sometimes.

TONY: [Laughs] Well, again, in our administration, I don't think there were. But, you know, there's a long history in Latin America. The episode touches on this very effectively.

HRISHI: Yeah.

TONY: Of American intervention, trying to swing elections in one way or another, make sure that the person that we like came out on top, or the person we didn't like didn't. And that's a history that thankfully has mostly come to an end but it's something that still resonates powerfully in Latin America. We're seeing it today with the crisis in Venezuela. That's the other thing I like so much about this episode, it's remarkably prescient both in sort of imagining something like what's happened since in Venezuela. It's also incredibly prescient because the storyline revolves around contractors, who are working in Bolivia to eradicate the drug crop, and you know, we had really interesting challenges arise over these contractors in other parts of the world later on, particularly in Iraq. And this episode foreshadows a lot of those questions.

HRISHI: And so, did you ever touch on something like that? Contractors? Or really any kind of activity about eradicating crops?

TONY: Yeah, in two ways. Actually when I was Deputy Secretary of State I was down in Columbia. This was a few years ago, when the Colombian government decided that it would stop using aerial eradication, and particularly there was a chemical being used in aerial eradication that they had concerns might be carcinogenic, although the World Health Organization said it wasn't. There was a friendly argument back and forth between our governments about whether they should stop eradication through the air but ultimately, close partner, sovereign government, good ally, it was their decision, not ours. I think in decades past, that might have come out a different way. The American government might have used a much heavier hand to say, "Actually, no, you've got to keep doing this." So, I had that direct experience. And then with contractors, throughout the course of the War in Iraq, contractors played an increasingly large role in Iraq and also in Afghanistan. In some cases performing truly heroic work, but there were also problems with real excesses by contractors, including human rights violations. So this is something that we were constantly struggling with and balancing. You know, there's a really useful role for them, but if they start to take over, your defense responsibilities and security responsibilities and are not answerable in the same way that someone wearing an American Uniform is you, you may have a problem.

HRISHI: If you can be candid about this, do you think that there are levels of secrecy in terms of how people are hired and nested companies, underneath the umbrella of the CIA somewhere, that are so sort of deeply intertwined with a complicated knot that it would actually be impossible by design for you to fully trace it back?

TONY: Look, in my experience, I'm not big on conspiracy theories. I think most of the bad things that happen in government are just done because people make dumb mistakes, not because they have malicious agenda. Now, maybe that's changed. [Hrishi laughs] But at least in the administrations that I worked in, usually it was not malfeasance, it was nonfeasance, someone just getting something wrong. And conspiracy theories of that kind always struck me as mostly absurd because so many people would typically have to be in on them that it just didn't hold up. That said, here's what does happen: you have people who are lifelong bureaucrats in government, and I use bureaucrats not in a pejorative sense, just their job. They stay. Administrations come and go. New political appointees come in. And then they leave. They may not know in detail what's going on, even in the agencies that they're working in or in some cases, even in the agencies that they run. That's really more what happens than anything else. You have to know to ask the right question. And make sure that things are being done the right way, transparently, with the proper vetting, with the proper procedures. And if you don't ask, business may continue as usual. And it's only when something bad happens and something blows up that you realize, oh, I really should have asked the question.

HRISHI: That's one of the things that struck me in this episode. You know, we're in the Oval Office and there's sort of a question that needs to be answered about whether or not these contractors were actually working for the government or not.

TONY: That's exactly right. And it's a really good illustration of the fact that again, if you come in as an administration, even in the case of the Bartlet Administration, I guess, in its last year at this point. There's still things that you kind of take for granted and don't even think to question. And then when there's an actual crisis, it dawns on you, gee, I better ask. I better make sure.

HRISHI: One thing that's kind of crazy is how casually I think they talk about this history of American interference in foreign elections.

TONY: Well, you know, it's a long and very unfortunate history. Now, in fairness, much of it was in the context of the Cold War, and there was a perception that if we didn't have friendly governments, especially in our own neighborhood, in Latin America, that would come to bite us. But we of course did things that denied countries, denied people the Representatives of their own choosing. And that ultimately did tremendous damage to our reputation and our image, and I think, as a result, did damage to our interests. Because the people saw the United States not as a friend, partner, and ally, but as someone who is bigfooting their own rights and their own will and their own interests. Thankfully, that has not been the story of the last twenty years or so. And there's been a dramatic change in the relationship between the United States and our neighbors in Latin America. It's one reason why it's really important that we handle the crisis in

Venezuela the right way and not the wrong way. To make sure that whatever decisions are made reflect the will and the decisions of the Venezuelan people. Not decisions that we make for them.

HRISHI: Hm. But memories are long, and so do you think that there is some sense in places in Latin America where they look at the results of our most recent presidential election and think that there's some kind of karmic retribution at work?

TONY: Ha! You're right, memories are long, and it's funny because I think Americans tend to not think in the same way. Which is to say, we tend to be focused on tomorrow, we're not so big on history.

HRISHI: You talked about how some of the bureaucrats do last for multiple administrations, which means that they could cross parties and-

TONY: That's right.

HRISHI: Their ideologies might be at times in accordance or in conflict with people who are in power. At the end of this episode when Leo's got everybody revved up he asks everyone what they want to do, and Kate says:

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*KATE: A new approach to Latin America.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: We never actually come back to this storyline of Bolivia in the series again, so let's just say they do formulate a new approach to Latin America in that final year of the administration and then people have to carry it out. Were you ever a part of that kind of seismic shift in policy towards a geographic region where you say, "Okay, we're going to undo everything that came before?" and what was that like if so.

TONY: Most of the time there is evolution not revolution in American foreign policy. But here's one example where we did make a significant change. And that was in the way we dealt with two countries: Iran and Cuba. In the case of Iran, we of course spent a lot of time and effort negotiating an agreement with Iran on dealing with this nuclear program. And I think this is one of the greatest achievements of the Obama administration. Obviously President Trump didn't feel the same way, and threw it out. Which I think was a huge mistake. But that was a pretty significant revisiting of the way we would deal with this problem posed by Iran in its nuclear program.

HRISHI: Which do you think was the more dramatic shift? The Obama Administration decision to try and negotiate and establish some kind of relationship or the Trump administration's decision to completely undo it.

TONY: Yeah, that's a great question. And actually, you know, implicit in your question in a sense is my answer which would be the Trump administration, because despite the fact that this agreement was extraordinary and hadn't been done before, there had been efforts to engage Iran on its nuclear program diplomatically in the past, including by the Bush administration. And certainly by the Europeans.

HRISHI: Right.

TONY: So it wasn't like we were doing this totally from scratch and it wasn't totally novel. We succeeded where others hadn't been able to. I think the wholesale rejection of that agreement and tearing up something that had just been achieved in which the other party, in this case Iran, was actually making good on its commitments, hadn't violated the agreement. That was pretty revolutionary, and in a bad way, because it sent a very strong message to countries around the world that the United States can't be trusted to honor the agreements it signs. It makes it very, very hard to do diplomacy and actually get results.

HRISHI: Yeah, there's almost like a temporal version of "Full Faith and Credit" that needs to exist where [cross talk] administrations will recognize the agreements from other Administrations so people can have some faith in them.

TONY: [Cross talk] Yes.

TONY: Yeah, and at the very least, again, had the Iranians been violating the agreement, then the Trump administration would have had cause to get out of it. But they weren't. And their own intelligence agencies, our own intelligence agencies, were telling the Trump Administration no, the Iranians are actually making- there are a lot of bad things Iran's doing around the world, but one of them is not violating the agreement they signed.

HRISHI: Yeah. There's a brief mention in this episode here and there about a break in the DMZ in North Korea.

[West Wing Episode 6.12 excerpt]

*KATE: Okay, next crisis: Korea. A three-foot hole has appeared in the DMZ fence.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It kind of comes and goes in a way that almost feels like it's not really, I wouldn't even say it qualifies as a storyline. It's almost like just another straw on the camel's back.

TONY: Hmm.

HRISHI: Of the things that they have to deal with. Did it seem too big to be treated so lightly?

TONY: No, again, what it seems to get right is this sense that there is so much incoming from all directions and you're constantly in a situation where the urgent is crowding out the important. And again, you may have this very proactive agenda of all the things you want to do, and that gets thrown out the window by the three or four things that come in out of left field that you just weren't expecting.

HRISHI: It's been a few years since you've been in the White House. You left on January 20th, 2017 and I have two questions: one, how is retirement treating you [Tony laughs] and a related question, do you feel the itch to get back?

TONY: You know, I was in government for almost 25 years. And I gotta say, post-government life ain't bad.

HRISHI: Hm.

TONY: You sleep longer, you exercise more, you get paid better in the private sector, all sorts of things, so I can't complain. I had a great run. But I will say, at least for me, there is nothing quite like going to work every day and having either literally or figuratively an American flag behind your back.

HRISHI: Hm.

TONY: There's a sense of mission and a sense of purpose that you get from that that I don't think, at least in my experience, you don't find anywhere else. And it's again something that I think *The West Wing* captures so powerful in every single season. And I think a lot of us in those jobs, and they're hard jobs and they're demanding, and there are days when you're saying to yourself, "God, how much longer do I have to keep doing this?" But in the same breath, you're saying to yourself, "I can't imagine doing anything better."

HRISHI: Tony, thank you so much for talking with me. It's a pleasure to get your perspective on this stuff. And thanks for taking this podcast so seriously as to give us such thoughtful answers.

TONY: Well, I love the podcast and I'm a longtime fan of the show so it's fun to revisit it. But it was great watching the episode, because it was just a reminder of how good *The West Wing* was at capturing the reality of the experience that so many of us had in government.

HRISHI: Awesome. Thank you so much.

TONY: Alright. Pleasure.

JOSH: That does it for yet another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*, thank you for listening. Thank you to Margaret Miller, thank you to Zach McNees, thank you to Nick Song for their skill and sweet, sweet loving.

HRISHI: [Laughing] I'm Hrishikesh Hirway, with me as always has been eye candy Joshua Malina, thanks Josh.

JOSH: Boom, sure. Thanks for having me.

HRISHI: If you'd like to leave a comment about this episode or look for merch or find anything else about us, go to [clogvlogs.com](http://clogvlogs.com).

JOSH: You can follow us on all social media. You can figure out our names, and the name of this show. Dick around a little and follow us. [Laughs]

HRISHI: *The West Wing Weekly* is a proud member of Radiotopia, a collection of excellent independent podcasts under one umbrella formed in partnership between PRX and Roman Mars. You can learn about all the shows at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm)

JOSH It's a big umbrella. Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

TONY: What's next?

[Outro Music]