

The West Wing Weekly
6.13: "King Corn"

Guests: Karis Campbell, Evan Arnold, Lauren Smith Hissrich, and Michael Grunwald

[Intro Music]

JOSH: Hello and welcome. You're listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. Today we're talking about "King Corn." It's Episode 13 from Season 6.

JOSH: It was written by John Wells. It was directed by Alex Graves. It first aired on January 26, 2005.

HRISHI: This episode takes place entirely in Iowa. We get to see one day from the perspective of three different campaigns. And joining us later will be two of the actors who portrayed two of the campaign workers, Karis Campbell and Evan Arnold, who played Ronna and Ned from the Santos campaign, respectively, will be joining us to talk about their experiences on *The West Wing*, and with this episode specifically.

JOSH: Huzzah!

HRISHI: That'll be fun. Josh, I'm going to start off by saying this. I think this is my favorite John Wells episode.

JOSH: Favorite episode written by him?

HRISHI: Favorite episode written by John Wells. Yeah.

JOSH: Huh...

HRISHI: Because usually, the John Wells episodes are the season openers or finales. And they have more of a cliffhanger-y kind of flavor to them.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And as you know, I like the sort of 'slice of life' episodes a little bit more, and this one is really like a slice of life on the campaign trail, and I thought the John Wells' take on that kind of a story was really great.

JOSH: Me too.

HRISHI: I love the way the three stories are told.

JOSH: It's another breath-of-fresh-air episode, and it feels like the energy of the series is moving out on the campaign trail and moving away from the core crew we've become accustomed to over the past many seasons. The focus of the show is shifting.

HRISHI: In some ways this episode, it does feel like a pilot, I get the you know, it does almost feel like it could be a season one, episode one take on things. There are moves that are made here that are so different from *The West Wing*. In some ways, it feels like a blueprint for a new

show. Even though there's so many familiar moves within it. I love the structure of this episode. Taking this one day, starting at 5:45 in the morning, going up with the wakeup call, and telling each story within its own kind of silo in the middle of the episode, and then wrapping them up, you know, the beginning and the end all together. I thought that was really cool.

JOSH: It put me in mind of *Russian Doll* on Netflix.

HRISHI: Yes. A great show.

JOSH: Yeah, I'm only a few episodes into it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: But I'm many deaths into it already.

HRISHI: And *Russian Doll* and this episode both, I think, owe a debt to *Groundhog Day*.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: Here especially because the day starts with an actual wakeup call, and you get the shot of the alarm clock, and the time it feels a lot like the beginning of every day in *Groundhog Day*.

JOSH: Yes, I did notice, though, that in the Josh Lyman wakeup, he gets his 5:45am wakeup call at what appears to be 5:46 according to his desktop clock.

HRISHI: It's true. And you know, the opening title that we get for each of them is that it's actually 5:46 in the morning.

JOSH: There you go. Oh, so it's the call that's off.

HRISHI: The call is just coming a little bit late, you know, they got to make— they've gotta call all these different people at 5:45.

JOSH: Unless the title card is off.

HRISHI: Right. All right, let's start at the beginning. We don't actually begin the episode on this Wednesday morning that episode centers around we actually start the night before with, again, a different kind of motif than we've seen on the show. They're just all these different shots of different hotel signs in Iowa, as Patsy Cline plays [sample of Patsy Cline's "Walkin' After Midnight"], sort of establishing where we are and the flavor of the place as Donna arrives at the Holiday Inn.

JOSH: Yes, I wrote down that I really, really liked the cold open. I wrote 'terrific cold open.' It's tight, it's taut, it's fresh, it's new...It's kind of wow!

HRISHI: This is a different version of "Walkin' After Midnight" by Patsy Cline that I'm familiar with. It kind of sets the tone for what we're talking about here, where it's like, it's something both very familiar, all the moves, all the notes in the song and the lyrics are the same, but it's presented in a way that I was not used to. And so, in some ways, it kind of felt like a good template for this episode.

JOSH: Good point.

HRISHI: And one of the reasons why I love this episode is because it feels really economical. Like, I think they do a lot with few moves, and it starts right away. Donna walks into the hotel, and she has a shorthand with the people at the front desk.

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

DONNA: Hey, anything for 412?

HOTEL CLERK: Mr. Bailey is still in the café.

DONNA: Thanks.... Goodnight.

HOTEL CLERK: 5:45 wakeup call?

DONNA: Yeah, or you could just have someone come to my room and hit me over the head with a mallet or something.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: In just a couple of lines, you know that she's been there for a long time. And not only Donna, but a bunch of people they say "Oh, Mr. Bailey's still –"

JOSH: I liked "Mr. Bailey." I gotta be honest.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I felt respected. For once.

HRISHI: It's just smart writing how much they convey in just a few lines.

JOSH: Yeah, good storytelling.

HRISHI: And then we go into the mobile version of the Russell campaign, and Mr. Bailey is pretty, again, brutally tactical.

JOSH: Yes, in his little booth that he's commandeered.

HRISHI: Yeah. What do you think of this strategy?

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

CHRISTINE: We've got two recently released federal inmates, airline mechanics, two men over the age of 80, a comedian, a nun.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Fill the debate stage with fringe candidates, so that Hoynes looks closer to the fringe candidates than he does to Russell, even though they both had served as Vice President.

JOSH: Yeah, I like it. I think, you know, as we'll soon learn in that scene with Donna that there's such a thing as too fringe-y. Scary fringe-y.

HRISHI: Yeah. But the idea that if you put crackpots on stage, the gravity will actually pull Hoynes closer to their direction than towards Russell's direction is a shrewd one. I mean, if he's right, I don't know that he's right. I mean, like you said, like some of them are so fringe that I don't think that it'll actually work the way that he wants it to work. But it is it's also a pretty harsh assessment of where Hoynes actually is.

JOSH: Indeed. Will also has carefully created 'tired hair.' I looked at myself, I was like, I wondered how long hair had worked on me to make me look just that sort of tired at work and up late.

HRISHI: I mean, that must have been nice, right? To go to hair and makeup and not have the usual...

JOSH: Oh, it's fantastic. Yes, the normal daily fight is to try to look my best, which is just an utterly depressing endeavor. I like when they're like, you know, you don't have to worry about shaving or maybe even showering, and you don't have to do your hair. Nowadays going to hair is depressing for another reason, because they have to create the illusion that I'm not losing my hair. But back then, they just had to "tire it up."

HRISHI: So, Donna's come back from raising a bunch of money. They're raking it in on the Russell campaign.

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

WILL: Don't be a tease...

DONNA: Half a million.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Money is not an issue. The issue is the actual campaign events. They have to do this event in front of the Corn Growers Expo, the Iowa Corn Growers Expo. This really becomes the heart of the episode because all the candidates have to decide what they're going to say about ethanol.

JOSH: Ethanol being the touchstone of the Iowa caucus. And apparently, this is, in fact, the case you can't show up and not talking about ethanol.

HRISHI: Yeah, there's sort of one thesis underlying this episode, which is that you can't win in Iowa without being a supporter of ethanol. And it's a matter of either you come out for it, and pander and get further ahead. Or if you're against it, you come out against it as most of the candidates, everybody Russell, Santos, and Vinick are all against it. And it's a matter of whether you say that, and torpedo your chances are not. But history, since this episode is aired, has proven that that's actually not the case, since Ted Cruz in 2016 went to Iowa was against ethanol, which I guess makes sense as a Texan.

JOSH: Pulled a Vinick.

HRISHI: And he won the Iowa caucus.

JOSH: That said, I think you and I both read the same article suggesting that the Democrats are still kowtowing to ethanol by and large, in order to woo a rural vote that has been eluding the party.

HRISHI: Yeah, there are a couple of articles that we'll link to so people can read about this more on their own. One is an article in *Politico* magazine that sort of detailed the 2020 Democrats' stance on ethanol, and how all of them have basically fallen in line in support of ethanol despite other policy positions that they have that might make you think that they would have come out against it.

Then I actually spoke to the author of that piece. Joining me now is Michael Grunwald, senior writer for *Politico* magazine. He's the author of the piece from March 2019, "How the 2020 Democrats Learned to Love Ethanol." Michael, thanks so much for joining me.

MICHAEL: Well, thanks for having me.

HRISHI: So, in this episode, one of the central plot lines is that all the Democratic candidates are expected to support ethanol production. But it's actually kind of cynical because none of them actually believe in ethanol production. And I was surprised when I was researching for our discussion to find your article in *Politico* magazine, because it turns out that maybe things haven't really changed that much since this episode aired in 2005.

MICHAEL: Well, the main thing that's changed is that there's a lot more evidence that ethanol is bad. But certainly the ethanol pandering has not changed their I guess, a lot of rural votes in Iowa.

HRISHI: You know, I'd read a study from the Department of Energy that said ethanol production is getting better and getting more efficient. And you know, at one point in the *West Wing* episode, they talked about how it takes a gallon of fuel to create a gallon of ethanol

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

SENATOR VINICK: Making a gallon of ethanol takes almost a gallon of oil. That's like saying using tonic water as an additive reduces our demand for gin.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So, you know, it's not a net energy creator. But in this Energy Department report, it says the ratio is actually gone up two to one, and it's going to get better as technology continues to improve. Have you found that that's not the case?

MICHAEL: Well, no, that part is true. Certainly agriculture, corn growing, ethanol production, all of that has gotten more efficient. But back in 2005, there was a real misunderstanding of ethanol's impact on the environment, partly because people weren't as focused as they should have been on climate change, which is the main area where ethanol is so problematic. Back in the days of 2005, people figured that the actual act of growing ethanol was carbon neutral, because, you know, you took the corn and you ran it through the ethanol plant, and that created some emissions, and then burning it in your car created emissions. But then you would grow more corn, and through photosynthesis, that would take the carbon out of the atmosphere. So,

between growing and burning, that seemed to sort of cancel each other out. But what people realized, and it seems sort of obvious, but it took a big article in *Science Magazine* to kind of point this out for the first time, is that, you know, it wasn't like, before we started using ethanol that that land had been, you know, pavement or a parking lot. It had, in fact, been growing corn. And when you use an acre of land, to grow corn to grow ethanol, somewhere else, you've got to grow an extra acre of corn to feed cows or feed human beings. And essentially, that acre of corn is likely to come out of grasslands or wetlands or forest land that used to store a lot of carbon. So essentially, the opportunity cost of growing this ethanol is taking a lot of carbon and sending it into the atmosphere. And that's why all biofuels really have a carbon problem. But ethanol seems to be the worst.

HRISHI: I thought that there was such a surplus of corn growing in America, that ethanol production grows out of that, that we had corn to spare. And so, we didn't have to worry about taking an acre from somewhere else. In order to grow the corn that ethanol was supplanting.

MICHAEL: Well you do hear that a lot. But remember, this is a global market. There's a fixed amount of land in the world. And there's sort of a fixed amount of food demand. And when we use that great agricultural land in the middle of our country to grow corn, it can be used to feed somebody, or it can be used as fuel to feed an SUV. Land turns out to be extremely efficient at storing carbon and growing food, and not so efficient at growing fuel.

HRISHI: What do the people who are on the ethanol industry side of things say to you when you're talking to them about this?

MICHAEL: Well, one thing they point out is that they've gotten a lot more efficient, as you mentioned. And they do say that it's not like the United States has a corn shortage. But remember, about 10 years ago, when the United States Renewable Fuel Standard went into effect. And really, the US had a huge boom of ethanol production and started devoting its, now I think about 40% of its corn crop goes to fuel, you saw simultaneously a huge spike in food prices around the world, and tremendous geopolitical instability. You had sort of these tortilla riots in Mexico, there are places like Sudan, and Pakistan, that were not exactly particularly stable to begin with, were having tremendous problems with the rising price of food. I remember it was about 10 years ago, I went to Brazil and talked about how the increased the price of soybeans and grain was creating tremendous pressure on the Amazon, and you talk to people in the field. And what they said is, the price of grain goes up, the forest comes down. And that's essentially the problem with ethanol. It is pretty transparently an effort to boost agricultural prices, to boost grain prices, which is great for the farmers. And we're very good at finding ways to use public policy to help farmers. But it's not so good for consumers. And particularly when it comes to raising grain prices, that has a real effect on land use around the planet.

HRISHI: So, it's almost like the exchange that we should be looking at is not how much it takes in terms of fossil fuels to produce the ethanol at the ethanol plant. But actually, in terms of the carbon exchange between what the ethanol gives off and what the plant life that might exist in that finite amount of land might be able to absorb back in.

MICHAEL: Exactly. We're sort of talking about – it's kind of complex, the life cycle analyses of carbon. But essentially, when you think about it, there's sort of a fixed amount of land in the

world. And with that land, we're going to need to feed 7 billion people. And we're going to need to store an awful lot of carbon – the sort of carbon that we use to store naturally before we started burning fossil fuels. And now we're going to have to sort of store extra carbon to hopefully someday remove some of those fossil fuels that we've already spewed into the atmosphere. And so really, the way to think about all biofuels is that every acre of land is really precious. And if it isn't sort of serving one of those functions, if it isn't storing a lot of carbon, or it isn't producing a lot of food, it's having a negative impact on greenhouse gases.

HRISHI: So, given everything that you've learned, why do you think that the 2020 Democrats aren't coming out against that at all? What's the reason for hanging in there?

MICHAEL: You know, it's funny. In some ways, this seemed like the perfect year for Democrats to turn against the ethanol industry. Because first of all, in 2016, Ted Cruz on the Republican side actually ran against ethanol, and he won Iowa.

HRISHI: Right.

MICHAEL: One of the only states he won, so, it sort of showed that it could be done.

HRISHI: And that theoretically, is even a harder mountain to climb than what Democrats have to do, because maybe he's got a court rural support even more strongly and deeply than Democrats, where their support is coming more from urban parts of Iowa.

MICHAEL: Exactly. They've done so badly in rural America, that they feel like that's just not sustainable, that if they want to win back some of those Rust Belt states and the middle of the country, that they're going to have to do better with rural voters. And there's no question that in Iowa, where ethanol creates about 44,000 jobs, and it really is a pretty big industry, and a lot of these small towns that have been so sour on Democrats, they feel like this is a way where they can say to rural voters, hey, you know, President Trump, he's been kind of a mixed bag on ethanol. He's supported the Renewable Fuel Standard. But he's also provided all kinds of exemptions for oil refineries because he's even more in the tank for fossil fuels than he is for corn. And at the same time, President Trump's tariffs and his trade war have really created huge problems for farmers, corn farmers in particular, and for rural America in general. So, a lot of Democrats are saying, Hey, you know, we can't afford to give up this opportunity. So, you're seeing even Democrats who have been really quite critical of ethanol in the past, like Kirsten Gillibrand, Cory Booker, are now saying, like, hey, this ethanol is maybe not the long term solution, maybe it's just a bridge fuel. But we've got to stand with Iowa farmers.

HRISHI: You have this quote in your article from Senator Booker saying, "it's not a question of 'if,' it's a question of 'when.'" So, right now I support ethanol. I support our farmers but know this transition is coming." I mean, does this feel emblematic of the 2020 Democrats in general, kind of wanting to play both sides?

MICHAEL: It's a little like St. Augustine, right? Like, Lord give me chastity, but not quite yet. Look, I think what Senator Booker said is exactly right – that you can see a transition coming to electric vehicles, and the sort of global marketplace, you know, or the rush for alternative fuels. Electrification has done really well, and biofuels have done really badly. But what he's saying is right now there aren't enough electric vehicles to provide one for everybody. And he's saying,

look, if we want to do something about climate change in the transportation sector, then for now, ethanol is the only option. The problem is that there really is just mounting science that ethanol, which really was touted as this kind of plan to save the world. And a lot of people like, you know, Al Gore, were really excited about it in its infancy, it really turns out to be more of a sort of planet killer than a planet saver.

HRISHI: Well, there are still several months before the actual caucus. Do you think that there's any chance that anybody from the crop of Democrats might change their tune?

MICHAEL: You know, I have to say yes. I would say there's a chance because it seems like when you've got 20 people running for president in one party, you would think that these candidates would be looking for ways to set themselves apart from the pack. And, you know, being the greenest of a green pack seems like a pretty obvious way to do it. Even if it turns out to be kind of better politics in New Hampshire than in Iowa, you want to stand out somewhere. That said, so far, you haven't seen anybody take a bold stand on ethanol among the Democrats, not even Jay Inslee, who's running as the climate change candidate. And I'd be lying if I say I really expected somebody to do it.

HRISHI: In the *West Wing* episode, you know, the Democrats that we see all take the pledge, despite believing otherwise. And the one person who doesn't is the Republican candidate, the character that Alan Alda plays. Vinick comes out against ethanol because he's been against it as a senator from California. He's been against it publicly, and then he just sticks to his guns. And in the episode, it's sort of a foregone conclusion that he's basically committed political suicide in Iowa by doing that, but at the same time, it's a very, you know, admirable *West Wing* moment, because it's somebody who has decided to go against groupthink and move away from pandering and speak their mind despite the consequences.

MICHAEL: Well on the Republican side last time, you saw Marco Rubio and Jeb Bush, who had always been anti-ethanol, they flip-flopped. You saw Bernie Sanders, who had always been anti-ethanol, he flip-flopped. And the one who stuck to his guns was Ted Cruz. And he won, though, I must say, as a caveat that I heard from Democrats and Republicans in Iowa, that a lot of them, they pointed out, that usually is a pretty right wing candidate like Ted Cruz, who wins the Republican caucus in Iowa, and some of them think he would have won by a lot more if he hadn't come out against ethanol. And that Donald Trump, who came out very strongly in favor of ethanol during the Iowa caucus, that that really did help him win Iowa in 2016 against Hillary Clinton. Because remember, Barack Obama had won Iowa fairly easily. And he was a big biofuels guy and an ethanol guy. And it was the biggest slip of any state in 2016.

HRISHI: That's, I think, part of the reason why it seems even more surprising that they would stick to supporting ethanol, because it does seem to be, not just in urban areas, but throughout the state, it seems like it's receded in its importance in favor of other kinds of issues, social issues, abortion, gun rights, things like that, that the voters are actually more keenly tuned into.

MICHAEL: I pointed out in my story that in even in Iowa, the wind industry is a much bigger industry that produces far more energy than the ethanol industry, even though Iowa is the number one ethanol producer. And yet you still saw even Michael Bloomberg, who back in 2007 when he was trashing ethanol had said that basically, the only reason to support ethanol is if

you're a presidential candidate, and I'm not interested in that. Once he became a sort of momentary presidential candidate, and he never even ended up announcing he flipped too.

HRISHI: Right. Well, I guess we know it's a bipartisan issue, then.

MICHAEL: Yeah, political courage, or the lack thereof, tends to be bipartisan as well.

HRISHI: Michael, thanks so much for taking the time to talk to me about this. Your article was great. And we're going to link to it on our website so people can check it out. Thank you so much.

MICHAEL: Yeah, anytime.

[Transition Music]

JOSH: One of the interesting things about this episode and I guess about the current day situation is there seems to be like a whole, I guess this the find this a lot in politics, where there's almost a wink-wink about it, you're pandering to people, they probably know you're pandering. Some people in your own party who would disagree with the position you're taking are probably inclined to let you off because they know you're pandering. It's the whole multi-level approach that just isn't genuine, but it's just sort of how the game is played.

HRISHI: There's a quote I read from John Wells, when he was talking about this episode saying that this is the central issue for campaigns. He said, "What are you willing to sacrifice? What of your integrity? What do you have to do to be politically expedient? The political professionals are telling you, it doesn't really matter what you say, you're just trying to get votes and make a difference when you get elected." That's a recurring theme.

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, well explain it to them after someone's actually elected us to something, okay?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You have Will Bailey, Josh Lyman, and the new introduction of Stephen Root and Patricia Richardson coming in for the Vinick campaign, all kind of serving this role of telling their candidate, you just need to do this for your political future. And then you see how the different candidates react to that advice even though they all get the same advice.

JOSH: Yeah, it's interesting, what we don't really seem to have is anyone on the strategy end with his or her head in the clouds. It's the candidates who rankle under the pressure of being pushed towards a position, they would rather not take or that they in fact do not hold. And all the operatives are saying the love of God, just indulge me here and say what you need to say.

HRISHI: Yeah, I wonder what the Russell haters might think of Russell in this episode, and what he says, because he has his reasons for why he's against ethanol. He articulates them, in fact. He's the person who happens to buy in to the arguments that all these political advisors are making. He gets it. And he has his objections. But he also doesn't need to be like spoon-fed a kind of campaign strategy 101 in order to go out there and do the pandering that needs to be done.

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

WILL: We're set on this ethanol speech?

RUSSELL: Don't worry. I'm not suicidal, I'm gonna take the pledge.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, that's right. In a sense, I could almost – although it wasn't a real focus of this episode – I could a little bit see because I was looking for what Will sees in Russell, in terms of this one micro cosmic issue, we've heard Will say before:

[West Wing Episode 6.08 excerpt]

WILL: Bob Russell might be the next President of the United States. You get in now you can make him the candidate you want him to be. After that, we make them the president we need him to be.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And that's sort of like that's what that John Wells quote was about.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Get him in office, and then start doing the good things that you all know are right and good. And Will Bailey at least has someone who's going to play ball and who understands that approach.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Whether or not that's admirable. He's got what he needs and what he's looking for. Josh Lyman and Matt Santos seem to have never had a very basic conversation. I know I kind of said this before. But again, Josh seems to be misreading or forgetting what caught him up in the Santos orbit in the first place. Or the aura of Santos. He's not that guy. He just isn't that guy. And even though he even does it, you can see it in his good performance. You can see it in Santos' face when he stands up there and reads from the teleprompter. He's probably you know, basically gritting his teeth. This does not look like a happy guy. This looks like someone who's taking his medicine.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And Josh Lyman should have made that read by now. And then you know, on top of it, the candidate's wife is also making clear that that's not what she's about. It's not what Santos is about. What are they doing? What do they get into this for? You know, that's like Josh has got to take a deep breath and figure out whether he can work with this guy.

HRISHI: In some ways I admire Russell, because he doesn't– you don't have to waste all that time. They sort of have these philosophical arguments about, why is the Iowa Caucus even important? You know, and it's like, well, this is the board and how you're going to play it. I guess it feels like it should be played at a more sophisticated level than what we're dealing with here.

Although I like I said, I liked this episode a lot, just in terms of the actual mechanics of making a campaign. Here you are at the Iowa Caucus and you're deciding, you know...

JOSH: Yeah, no, I split, I eventually just let go of it and decided to enjoy the episode rather than continuing to write down, essentially what you're saying, like, they're not past this point? And it's – I just decided, you know, in its own terms, there's something interesting going on between Santos and Josh. There's– they've already even had that moment where Josh was like, wait a minute, you're not even in this to win it?

HRISHI: Right, right.

JOSH: You're just out here to do something. And they really should be past that point now and come down to one strategy, are we going to do the politically expedient things that we need to do in order to try to mount a serious campaign for the presidency? Or are you just trying to make a statement? In which case, you know, I think would Josh would have been on board with coming out to Iowa and, you know, speaking out against ethanol.

HRISHI: Yeah. Let me also add another layer of ambiguity to the storyline, because there's this kind of aspect to it that's taken for granted that like, ethanol equals bad.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: But there is a little bit more nuance to it than that. And, you know, this episode, not surprisingly, pissed off the actual ethanol industry, who pointed out that the episode got a lot of things wrong. It hasn't improved that much in the very recent past. But from the 90s, when this energy sink that Russell describes, actually was the case, till 2005, there were actually a lot of improvements. So, by the time the episode aired, even then, it was no longer the case what they're talking about. And now the energy efficiency is higher still.

JOSH: Better.

HRISHI: I think there are plenty of reasons to still criticize ethanol, or at least be wary of it. I feel like they're using it as this stand in for–

JOSH: We're all meant to understand that ethanol is bad.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And it doesn't make sense.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I think, really, the issue itself is just sort of a convenient reality that this is something you have to talk about in Iowa, but really it could have just been a black box to get to the thing that John Wells was talking about, which is this idea of like, what do you say that's actually in your heart versus what do you say in terms of what you need to get elected?

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: But you know, when you're a TV show that millions of people watch, and you treat a real issue–

JOSH: There's a responsibility there.

HRISHI: Yeah. And people weren't happy. And that's not the only thing that people were upset about.

JOSH: What else?

HRISHI: There's a smaller thread in this episode, not even a thread, really – just a mention of a woman in Turkey, who is going to get the death sentence for adultery. And turns out Turkey was not so thrilled about that. Turkey, where the death penalty was abolished, they had not executed anybody since 1984. I mean, say what you will about Prime Minister Erdoğan – he abolished the death penalty fully in 2004. This episode got a lot of criticism from Turkish politicians. And it ended up leading to John Wells and the president of NBC, Jeff Zucker, sending an apology to the Turkish ambassador.

JOSH: As they should have. I mean, that that's a big miss.

HRISHI: Yeah. The letter said, "In the future, we will not only visit Turkey, a country that we admire, but also present a better and correct portrayal of your country."

JOSH: Or as we have in the past, we'll make up a country and say it happened there.

HRISHI: This is the reason that you have Qumar.

JOSH: Right! Dump it on Qumar!

HRISHI: You've got no ambassador to apologize for when you make up a country.

JOSH: Yeah, that was a big miss on their part. I also had trouble with that story for another reason. My usual reason, which is language and language precision.

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

TV REPORTER: The conviction of the young woman comes at a precarious time for Turkey, who has until recently enacted reforms...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Turkey, "who recently?" Is that the right pronoun for a country?

HRISHI: Yeah, I'm trying to think –

JOSH: Turkey, who has recently enacted reforms?

HRISHI: I think you would. I think you might.

JOSH: I think I specific Turkey, maybe. Turkey, who was recently eaten at the Thanksgiving table.

HRISHI: I think you might like if you were talking about, say, a debate in the UN, and you're referring to the positions that the countries are taking on a specific issue, you might refer to them as 'who'.

JOSH: Well, in the UN, I could kind of see you're kind of putting the person, an ambassador on the ship of state..

HRISHI: Yeah. And giving them a voice as if they are an individual.

JOSH: But just a country? “America, who usually supports..”

HRISHI: Yeah, like in a war, I could see the use of ‘who’ there.

JOSH: Well, maybe I'm just wrong. Weigh in, people!

HRISHI: “America, who fought against Germany in World War Two,” you'd say “America which fought against Germany?”

JOSH: I would say “which country fought against Germany...” But that's how I speak. Yeah, now I guess when you're talking about war: who fought whom? Well, I don't know. Maybe I'm just wrong. It sounded very odd to me in this context.

HRISHI: Yeah. You know what the Turkey death penalty thing reminded me of was *Aladdin*. I remember being a teenager or close to it, whenever it was that *Aladdin* came out. And there was a song at the beginning of it that I listened to – me like, oh that's super racist. It starts off with the song waiting for the land from a faraway place...

[Except from Disney's *Aladdin*]

...where the caravan camels roam. Where they cut off your ear if they don't like your face. It's barbaric, but, hey!, it's home.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Wow. Wowza.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: No, I don't recall that lyric.

HRISHI: I remember thinking at the time, that was incredibly racist. As like that's, I guess, really thinking about the sort of the social responsibility of an enormous Disney movie, in terms of its portrayal of other geographical regions.

JOSH: They should have set that [expletive deleted] in Qumar.

HRISHI: Even if it is, you know, it isn't modern day anywhere.

JOSH: Yeah, that's right.

HRISHI: Yeah, there's a xenophobia in there that that's a bummer. And it's crazy, that a show as sophisticated as *The West Wing*, would fall into this, too. I called up Lauren Hissrich on *The West Wing* Bat Phone. And I talked to her a little bit about “King Corn,” and she had two great stories to tell us. Joining me now is Lauren Hissrich to tell us about the town of Santa Paula's crazy campaign to get Arnold Vinick to be from their hometown. This is the thing that actually happened after this episode came out. How did it happen? Break it down for us.

LAUREN: So, the very first thing that I remember happening was getting a box of oranges delivered to my office. There was a postcard that it was attached to a box of citrus. And it was

from the mayor of Santa Paula at the time, Mary Ann Krause. And she's very open. She had started a campaign on behalf of Santa Paula to have Arnold Vinick, a fictional character, be from their very real town. And that's where it all began, actually.

HRISHI: And it's just because at one point, Vinick says...

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

SENATOR VINICK: I grew up in a citrus farming community in California.

[end excerpt]

LAUREN: Correct.

HRISHI: It's just that one line.

LAUREN: One single line.

HRISHI: So, what did you when you get this box of oranges? And then what happened?

LAUREN: Well, obviously, I ate some of the oranges and shared them with the writers. And they were great. You know, Santa Paula is known as, I believe, the citrus capital of the world, is the self-title. So you know, when you get requests like that, you sort of think, well, that's nice. And then you just keep writing the story and those requests never drive story. So, we eventually get to an episode in the future, where we do return and all the sudden we need to make a decision where he was from. And that decision was very easy at that point in, you know, I still did a lot of the researching on the show at the time as well. So, I looked into Santa Paula, and I made sure that it is a place where Vinick could be from not just the citrus part of things, but a town that could build the political character that we had built. Obviously, a sort of small town would help us in a way, you know, he talks about when he moved there with his family when he was a child actor, I think he was born in New York, but that his family wanted to move away from the big city and into a small town. So obviously, Santa Paula was a small town that suited us well, you know, but also sort of would build the moderate Republican that Vinick was, you know, the sort of economy of the town, the political makeup of the town. And it all started to fit for us in a really nice way.

HRISHI: It feels a little bit greedy of Santa Paula to want this, given that they're already calling themselves the citrus capital of the world... Come on. How many superlatives do you need?

LAUREN: I have to say, though, it is one of those hilarious stories that you just think like, well, this can't be real. It seems too weird to be true. And in fact, it's true.

HRISHI: That's amazing. That's a great tidbit that you got tangled up in because of this episode. But I also want to ask you about another crazy outcome from this episode, which you told us about when you first came on the podcast. You mentioned briefly, but, you know, we were so far from this episode we didn't get into it. Which is that you ended up in court with the government of Turkey.

LAUREN: Is that "King Corn?" I had forgotten which episode that was.

HRISHI: Yes that's also this episode.

LAUREN: Wow, that's a lot for one episode. I think I never went to court, but I was named in the lawsuit.

HRISHI: Oh that's what it was.

LAUREN: Yep. Which was against NBC, Warner Brothers, John Wells, and me – a no-one who had just found a single article about a woman who I believe was stoned to death in Turkey for...cheating, I want to say? And Turkey did not like how this sort of storyline reflected on their country, which I understand.

HRISHI: Yeah. That's crazy, because what I had read was that at least state-sanctioned executions had been abolished at that point.

LAUREN: Mmm hmm.

HRISHI: But this is not a government execution that you were talking about.

LAUREN: That's exactly it is that nowhere in the episode were we saying that the Government of Turkey was allowed to stone someone to death. Executions happen all the time all over the world, by people who aren't the federal governments of those countries. And yes, that's exactly what we were saying. But the good news is, is that when I was researching, I mean, I obviously kept really good records. And the case went away pretty quickly, because we had evidence that this had in fact happened and that we were just reporting it as fact. So, it didn't go away quickly. But that is definitely the weirdest lawsuit that I was ever part of.

HRISHI: That's crazy. So, but you have to parse the idea of the newsperson in the episode says, this person has been sentenced to death for her crime. And somehow you have to spin that so that the Turkish government could feel like they weren't actually being -- that somehow that wasn't a government decision.

LAUREN: Yeah, that's exactly right. And it is again, "sentenced to death." You use that term loosely anyway, again, "sentenced to death" doesn't have to mean in a court of law, you know, someone can be facing their own death sentence by any group of people.

HRISHI: Crazy. Lauren, thanks so much.

LAUREN: Of course. Of course, I'm so happy to be doing this again. This is always fun.

[Transition Music]

HRISHI: Okay, so before we get into the actual three chapters of Wednesday, at the beginning of this episode, we get Josh encountering Donna in the elevator.

JOSH: Delightfully awkward.

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

DONNA: I'm sorry I couldn't find the button.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah, it's chilly in that elevator.

JOSH: Indeed. I mean, they really can't, they can't find anything to say. It's amazing that the relationship has devolved to this point.

HRISHI: I love that scene, because it's so well acted. And we have invested six years of understanding into it. All the things that have happened to those characters before that moment that that scene wordlessly evokes.

JOSH: Yeah, absolutely. And we know, under different circumstances, this could have been a romantic thing. I mean, here they are out on the campaign trail. They're out of town, they're at a hotel, oh we're right across from each other. I mean, you know, those people who are shipping Josh and Donna are wishing they would just choose one room or the other.

HRISHI: I know. It almost happens.

JOSH: Almost.

HRISHI: You know, not only are they in the same hotel, they're on the same floor, they're on the same elevator, and then their rooms are across the hall. And then you know, there's this cute moment where Josh still doesn't know how to open his own hotel room, and Donna has to show him how to use the key. Josh makes these stupid jokes, and Donna is not amused. You know, the first time I watched this, I was like: is this it? Is it finally going to happen? And he goes up to her door, but alas, he does not 'hashtag' finish strong.

JOSH: Indeed, not. And then he goes back and I thought this is a great little piece of business, a nice piece of behavior, and he tries to open his door the same way he's used to. He's learned nothing.

HRISHI: It's a good payoff.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: So that ends our night for our heroes. And then and then the next morning begins with Donna's POV. Donna goes off and she's driving around. We get to see Trevor, who dropped her off at the beginning of the episode, and it's Aaron Ashmore, who people might recognize from any number of things. I first saw him in *Veronica Mars*, where he played the ridiculously named Troy Vandegraff. He was in *In Plain Sight* with Mary McCormack.

JOSH: Ah. Who wasn't?

HRISHI: And I think a lot of people probably know him as playing Jimmy Olsen in *Smallville*.

JOSH: And apparently, he's on a show now called *Killjoys*, which I will refer to as Killsjoy.

HRISHI: Donna's day is sort of what begins this first chapter, but we aren't tied to Donna's POV. It's really more done as a stand-in for the Russell campaign. We're just sort of following that campaign storyline. She just is our entryway. Later we get the scenes on the bus that we talked about between Russell and Will, and one of the things that Russell makes reference to, which is not explained until later within the Santos storyline is the Black and Brown. Will says the Black

and Brown is coming up, which is the Black and Brown Forum in Iowa. It's - I'm reading from Wikipedia - "the nation's only presidential forum in which all candidates have the opportunity to answer central concerns of African Americans and Latinos." And it is recognized as the oldest continuous minority forum for presidential candidates in America. So, it's a little bit whiny of Russell to say, "Do I really have to go to that? It's not a fair fight, he says:

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

RUSSELL: Atkins and Santos get to stand up there holier than thou, and rail against racial injustice while the rest of us loiter around like those two albino twins from The Matrix.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Any kind of good sense about his comments of ethanol that had come before, kind of get washed away with that.

JOSH: Well, Russell's generally a wash. For everything you say, "oh he's kind of slick" or kind of on top of something, there's always something dumb he did or said that balances it out.

HRISHI: And then the day and the chapter ends with Russell going to the Expo and doing what he is expected to.

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

RUSSELL: Now I'm not saying this just because I'm in Iowa, I say this everywhere I go, we need more ethanol production.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's not a struggle for Russell.

HRISHI: No, and everybody agrees. You know, Donna comes back from her tour of the fringe candidates and says it'll be a circus without the jugglers. Russell delivers his line, and Will says...

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

WILL: It's not already a circus?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: So, you're telling me this guy's not Jewish? I don't buy it. "It's not already a circus?"

HRISHI. It's canon. He's goy.

JOSH: Yeah. Okay, chapter two, we get to watch Brad Whitford wake up, at either 5:45 or 5:46. And we see Josh Lyman's day and his day of completely misunderstanding his candidate, having had a speech drafted for him, which conflicts with the candidate's own views. This is where I started to have that feeling again of, "Come on! Talk to the guy! Have a five-minute head-to-head before you jump into Iowa!"

HRISHI: This is an interesting contrast from our last episode on the road with these two because they had the same conflict about the education plan.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Santos did not listen to Josh at that time. Josh was saying, "hey, you can't talk about this stuff." In the end he did anyway. It moved the debate forward and got him some attention and it ended up being an effective strategy, even though it was against what Josh had advised. Here somehow the impact of that, I don't know maybe Santos was exhausted from having fought that fight, even though he won. And here he capitulates.

JOSH: Yeah, but I like in a way what John Wells has done because I really didn't remember what happened. And I kind of thought it was going to be a reread of sort of the same beats and the same story where he's going to stand up, disregard the teleprompter and say what's on his mind. And so I was kind of actually pleased that they went a different way with it. And we see that the guy is human, and that he's subject to the pressures of the campaign, and maybe he felt bad because he didn't have very many beans in his jar.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And he's starting to look a little bit more, though not like an invigorated one, but he's looking more like a candidate. He's looking like a guy who's willing to play the game and who's, however begrudgingly, doing the things he needs to do to position himself with some success, at least here in Iowa.

HRISHI: I like the idea that someone who starts off being on the margins, gets to have these approaches that you can only do sort of with the luxury of not taking your own candidacy very seriously. You know, you can do these, sort of, more daring moves going against the conventional wisdom. But then as those unconventional moves give you success and move you more into the mainstream in terms of your renown, you then back off the things that actually got you there because you do have to abide by conventional wisdom if you want to actually stay in those places. I mean, it's kind of feels like the story of "Let Bartlet Be Bartlet," and as you know a lot of things about the Bartlet administration here getting to see it on the campaign trails and meet new microcosm for it.

JOSH: Right. These little storylines always remind me of the greater storyline of the movie *Bulworth*, in which I played a small role, in which you have Warren Beatty as Senator Jay Bulworth, who has in fact, hired somebody to kill him for insurance reasons. And he realizes for the first time in his now soon-to-end life that he has the ability to say whatever he feels and believes and say it in any form he likes, and it's freeing for him the same way that a candidate who believes that he's not going to win or a president who has no more races to run, theoretically is free to do say as he or she pleases.

HRISHI: Yeah. But being leashed by your own success from having been of the leash is a really neat dynamic. There's a strange moment in this episode, where Josh and Santos are having their own version of the ethanol debate. When Josh says:

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

JOSH: What is this the insult and injury tour? We're going to North Dakota next, tell them South Dakota has a cooler sounding name?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It was a strange example. Since in season three, we already had that storyline, kind of—

JOSH: Oh that's true.

HRISHI: You remember Donna has to go to North Dakota —

JOSH: Literally about the Dakotas!

HRISHI: And about their names ---

[West Wing Episode 3.20 excerpt]

MAN: Ms. Moss, are you aware that studies clearly show the word 'North' leaves the impression that the state is cold, snowy and flat, significantly depressing tourism and business start-up?

DONNA: Due respect sir, your average temperature is seven degrees, your average snowfall 42 inches, and a name change isn't going to take care of that.

WOMAN: We enjoy roughly the same climate as South Dakota. We took in \$73.7 million in tourism revenue last year, they took in \$1.2 billion. They have the word 'south.'

DONNA: Also Mount Rushmore.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Haha. Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah, that was a great scene in that episode.

JOSH: That was good. They didn't quite top it here. It's like a little -

HRISHI: It's a weird callback.

JOSH: A little tip of the hat.

HRISHI: That's what I was wondering. It's like, it doesn't feel like it can be coincidental. And yet at the same time, it also feels like it doesn't remember this previous scene.

JOSH: It's an interesting question. Yeah.

HRISHI: Here's a part that I loved. After this, Josh and Santos are than arguing about the Black and Brown Forum and what Santos can say or can't say. While they're having that argument - I think this is, again, just great economy of storytelling - while they're having that argument, you might not even be paying attention while it's happening. They're walking out to a runway. And they go to this small plane. And as they're talking Santos walks around the plane.

JOSH: Mmm. I love that.

HRISHI: And you see him sort of like touching little parts of it. And it's easy to miss the fact that he's actually inspecting the plane. Because there's no – we aren't given a reason why he would do that. It is in some ways. It just feels like the walk and talk happens to be taking place around this plane. And then it pays off afterwards, when Josh finally gets on the plane after worrying about the size of it. And you see that Santos is actually in the cockpit and he's going to be the one flying it.

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

JOSH: Where's the congressman?

RONNA: Up front.

JOSH: Up front?

RONNA: Well, he can't exactly fly it from back here.

SANTOS: Everybody set? You might wanna buckle up, Josh. I don't think I'll ever get tired of doing barrel rolls.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, that was great. I noticed it, too. Like it was really taken as, is he a nervous flyer? Yeah, it was trying to remember where did he serve, but he was a Marine not in the Air Force. So that was a good little review.

HRISHI: Yeah, by the way, there's stuff that gets talked about in this episode, issues that are mentioned in this episode. An immigration bill that was, you know, co-sponsored by Vinick and Santos. So, in just the briefest way possible. Like the word, they mentioned the word immigration, they talk about free trade at one point, and they talk about NAFTA. And they talk about ethanol. And one thing I kind of wish - don't know if it's possible in an episode of TV - but I wish there had been a moment where there was some policy person, somebody who could come in and explain how all of these issues are actually all intertwined. Like NAFTA and free trade and immigration, all these things they share, if not one fulcrum, they're all sort of interconnected. And I would appreciate it just for the educational value for myself. But the idea of how subsidized corn exports from the U.S. to Mexico to press corn growing...

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: ...efforts in Mexico, sending waves of unemployed farm workers north of the border to the US to try and find work. There's something really fascinating.

JOSH: Yeah, there's root-level connections.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I wish there was just a little something to sew those all together.

JOSH: Don't we know anyone smart?

HRISHI: I mean, that's where I'm like, "where was Lawrence O'Donnell on that?"

JOSH: Mmm hmm. Which candidate says at one point during this episode:

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

SENATOR VINICK: Do we really want workers in Malaysia to be earning our minimum wage? I mean, do you have any idea what real estate costs in Kuala Lumpur?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I thought that was interesting. That really caught my attention.

HRISHI: Yeah. Vinick is an interesting case. It feels a little bit like in some ways he is as much a liberal fantasy as President Bartlet is.

JOSH: Mmm hmm. I know what you're saying.

HRISHI: I don't know if I'm completely able to articulate it. There's something about it's, like, this is who a liberal would dream up for a principled conservative opponent.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Not just as a principled opponent, but one who is getting a lot of success in the Republican party as well. Like, not just somebody who is like, "oh, here's a principled opponent who's doomed to a...

JOSH: Right. This is a guy that can get some traction in the in the mainstream of the party.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah. No, I know what you're saying. And also, it feels, to me what I think we know to be the case, which is that, though maybe it was undecided at this point, I think the powers that be on the show are revving up towards potential reinvigoration of the series and the continuation of it with a new president. So, I guess that, you know, I can feel the approach by John Wells and company of trying to give us two viable candidates either who could take the series forward for another four or eight years.

HRISHI: And we know that Alan Alda was a candidate for President Bartlet's job...

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: ...before Martin Sheen got it. And here, he does come across as the most West Wing-y character of the three of them.

JOSH: Right. But he's the guy who's got it going on. He's the guy that is not going to talk out of both sides of his mouth. He's going to lay it out the way he sees it, and still come out ok politically. He's not going to, you know, self-immolate. He seems to be the person who can walk the line, and kind of be the genuine real-deal guy who's telling you what he believes. And either do well with it or suffer little fallout for it.

HRISHI: Yeah, there's stuff I really like about where we are right now in the series, because they are really giving you the sense of an election, I think. You have these three storylines and these three characters. One is the established, right, we have Will and Donna and Russell. We know all of them. We've known their stories for a while. And then we have this sort of upstart Santos.

This character came out of nowhere. And in this world of the show, the candidate comes out of nowhere, we're going to get to know Ned and Ronna a little better in this episode, when we talked to Evan and Karis. But to audiences at home, they might not be as familiar with them as actors. You've got Josh trying to do what he can to push his way up the hill. And then you've got Vinick, and the way that they're presenting Vinick, as a threat to the democratic counterparts is so real. One by casting a huge heavyweight like Alan Alda.

JOSH: Right, I agree,

HRISHI: But then also by casting his staff with Stephen Root.

JOSH: Whom I love. An actor who can do anything. And we loved him with Gary Cole in *Office Space*.

HRISHI: Exactly. Yeah, that's right.

JOSH: Yeah. So that's a little mini-reunion that happens off screen.

HRISHI: That's right. I forgot about that, of course. And Patricia Richardson, whom millions of people know from *Home Improvement*. So, it feels like they're setting him up, like, even with the casting to have this kind of formidable quality.

JOSH: And I think when we finally get that meeting, although it's a casual encounter between Santos and Vinick in a restaurant, I think, and they sit down and have a little chat, it feels like two titans coming together. I mean, I do think the one thing I will say is there's a little bit of a telegraph coming from the show and that Russell and Hoynes are straw men. Hoynes we never even see; he's just mentioned. And Russell is Russell. It was never going to be Russell. So, we're sort of, you know, the gloves are off. And we're kind of seeing...

HRISHI: That's true.

JOSH: It's going to be these two guys.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: And I like that they sort of have a little meet-cute and a smiley, friendly, sort of humorous conversation at the restaurant. And they both seem formidable and kind of worthy opponents.

HRISHI: Yeah. So, going into the third chapter, the introduction of Vinick - well, first of all, we should mention that this is the first episode in which Alan Alda appears in the opening credits.

JOSH: Hmm, I didn't notice. I've lost even more time.

HRISHI: That's right. You have.

JOSH: Now there's a single, there's there's just a single still of me.

HRISHI: There's not even room to flash your entire name across. It just says 'Joshua Ma-'

JOSH: That's right. Well. I had bad agents.

HRISHI: Well, you said, if it means I can get even one more dollar, they can take my name off entirely.

JOSH: That's true. I just don't remember getting an extra dollar.

HRISHI: So, Alan Alda joins the series as a regular here in the opening credits. He also would eventually be nominated for an Emmy for this season, and in part because of this episode. But again, one of the things that I love about the economy of this is when he gets his wake up call. He sits up, and you see he does he looks at a couple of photographs in frames, and we don't even see what the contents of the photo frames are, but I think you can tell just from his expression – he's such a good actor –

JOSH: He's looking at family?

HRISHI: He's looking at - to me, I'm like, "Oh, that's a picture of his wife." And there's a combination of – somehow, he manages to get across both happiness and grief in his expression.

JOSH: Yeah, you're absolutely right. Later, he'll sort of give voice to it in sacrifices you make...

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And he talks about missing many birthdays of his kids. We get a – I don't know what the word is for the sort of avuncular – his grand-vuncular...He's got his granddaughter on the phone, he sings to her – it's very sweet moment as he's walking, I think, to give his speech. I also thought it was really cute that he makes a reference to Mantovani to his granddaughter...

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

SENATOR VINICK: *[Singing] Happy Birthday to you...[Laughing] Well, Mantovani, I'm not.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: ...it can't possibly have landed with his granddaughter, whatever age she is.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: But it's a sweet moment because we see what he's given up.

HRISHI: You know, by the end of the episode, we actually do get to see what's in the picture frame we see Vinick and his wife, or a woman who we might assume to be his wife, who is no longer alive. But I kind of wish almost that they hadn't shown it.

JOSH: Because you had already gotten it.

HRISHI: Yeah, it ties the whole thing off, but I didn't need it. I got everything I needed in that first version. And, you know, I love that, and I was impressed by the restraint and really impressed by the performance. A little bit of writing that I like, too, in the booth when Santos professes his admiration for Vinick not taking the ethanol pledge.

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

SENATOR VINICK: Well with my ethanol tantrum, I suspect my work here is done. I think I've managed to successfully drag my poll numbers below as a pro hockey score.

SANTOS: Well, at least you've still got a full set of teeth.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You know, they're both in the hockey metaphor there. But I like that Santos is also like his 'full set of teeth' is also talking about like, sort of, he hasn't had to make the sort of toothless move of saying he's for something that he's against. I like that. And Vinick you know, ruefully is like, "my staff is very proud." And Santos, you know, again, I love the performance.

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

SANTOS: Well, if they weren't, I was.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: The humility there. And the sort of honesty of that confession to say to, like, your political opponent: I admire your principles, and you did a thing that I couldn't do. I just thought it was really wonderful how much he downplayed that line.

JOSH: I agree.

HRISHI: All right. It's time to talk about it.

JOSH: [Laughing] I've been waiting for it. I think it's, I think we build up to this fever pitch moment.

HRISHI: Mmm hmm.

JOSH: The montage.

HRISHI: Mmm hmm.

JOSH: A Ryan Adams acoustic song...

HRISHI: "Desire"

JOSH: "Desire"

HRISHI: A song choice that almost certainly wouldn't be made if the episode were made today.

JOSH: Hmm, good point. Maybe they'd have a *Bryan Adams* acoustic song called "Desire." Very good point. Yes. A song that is explicitly about desire and we get a long, loving, sultry look from Will Bailey as the ice cream novelty machine hoovers up the love of his life: a Nestle's Ice Cream Sandwich.

HRISHI: I thought it's so sweet. How, when we see Will Bailey wake up in the morning, he has a picture frame next to his bed with an ice cream sandwich in it.

JOSH: Yeah, that would have been...it was a nice moment. I've been asked about this moment, many, many times I think really by now I should have put it to Alex Graves and I will ask him. I

remember – I believe I remember -- that when we were shooting it, I found the whole thing odd. I didn't realize how odd, indeed, it would be until it was part of a montage set to a song about deep desire and there was that close up. I'm sure I wasn't around when they decided to do an extreme closeup of the ice cream sandwich. I mean, on a certain level as sad a commentary as this Will Bailey's life, in a very deep way I relate to it. I like me some ice cream.

HRISHI: Yeah, but this is a level of food porn that goes beyond Instagram photos.

JOSH: Indeed, indeed. There's something sexual about the machine itself.

HRISHI: I mean, in the eye of the beholder.

JOSH: I guess.

HRISHI: By the way, I'd like to give a little callback shout-out to a past episode of our own way back, way back in 2016.

JOSH: Whoa.

HRISHI: We were talking about Season 1 Episode 16, "20 Hours in LA."

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: I was talking about Donna and Josh, as we often do, and the dynamic between the two of them in the hotel room and how really, we're getting a very clear sense of how much Donna's into Josh, and how sort of cute and flirty she's being on the bed.

You said:

[Excerpt from The West Wing Weekly Episode 1.16]

JOSH: I will somewhere down the line have an episode where I'm in a hotel room, but I'm in love with an ice cream novelty.

HRISHI: [Laughing] That's like wish fulfillment for me.

JOSH: Do you remember that episode? And there's a musical montage during which I stare loving at an ice cream in a vending machine? That's my romantic storyline. That's years from now, and we'll approach it again.

HRISHI: I haven't seen that one.

JOSH: Oh, you actually haven't and you literally don't get the reference from that. Okay, "King Corn" meet you here. Same place, same time, two years from now.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It took us an extra year.

JOSH: Well, I hope it didn't disappoint.

HRISHI: No, it lived up to it. So, I've been waiting for this. It was a little mini spoiler for me. I knew at some point there was going to be some scene between you and an ice cream sandwich.

JOSH: Indeed, I just gave the two minutes' worth of what the 'ship' name would be for these two lovers that this sandwich – Sandwill is what I came up with. I'm sure somebody out there can top it.

HRISHI: [Laughing] I like it.

JOSH: This is like, I can actually see the conversation where they're saying- I'm having weird *déjà vu*. Did Brad say this, when they finally you know, the writers in the desperate attempt to come up with some sort of romantic pairing for me, could only come up with an ice cream sandwich. Okay, who else would Josh Malina have chemistry with? I know!

HRISHI: Gonna have carnal knowledge of a Carnation ice cream sandwich.

JOSH: Ah. There we go.

[Arrested Development Episode 1.02 excerpt]

GEORGE BLUTH: Oh, there you go. I am having a love affair with this ice cream sandwich you want some?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Here's the real question. How many ice cream sandwiches did you get to eat?

JOSH: None? If memory serves, zero.

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: Yeah. What a ripoff.

HRISHI: But actually, in all seriousness, I am really drawn in by these campaign episodes so far: "Opposition Research" and "King Corn." I love them. They're making stylistic choices in terms of, like, the lighting and the way things are shot.

JOSH: Kudos to Alex Graves and crew.

HRISHI: Yeah. But it ends up making me feel like I'm watching a spin-off of a TV show.

JOSH: Right. Shared DNA but a different creature.

HRISHI: Yeah, and this might be heretical, but I think I might like the spin-off better at this point.

JOSH: Hmm. Yeah, I think the series is progressing in a way it needed to.

HRISHI: Mmm hmm.

JOSH: I mean, we know there's just a season and a half left, but it's feeling refreshed and like it could have gone a little bit further...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...than it ultimately will go.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I also wrote, “icky flentl,” because just, just as we go to black and the credits begin, we hear Brad kind of moan in bed.

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

JOSH: [sighing]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It’s gross.

HRISHI: Again, “ickiness” is in the ear of the behear-er.

JOSH: That’s right. I’m sure there are many fans that loved it and made it over and over and it’s probably somebody’s ringtone.

HRISHI: Let’s take a quick break, and when we come back, we’ll be joined by Karis Campbell and Evan Arnold.

[Ad break]

JOSH: Joining us now: two friends of mine, to whom I haven’t spoken in a long time. Karis Campbell, who played Ronna on the show, and Evan Arnold, who played Ned. Welcome, guys.

HRISHI: Thanks both of you for taking time to talk to us and coordinating your schedules so we can talk to both of you together.

KARIS: Absolutely.

HRISHI: I think one of the reasons why I’m so happy to have both of you on at once is because I think of Ronna and Ned as a team. You know, this is Team Santos – this the team that’s established when Josh shows up at their door. And I wanted to know if that feeling carried over to you two as well. Within the world of *The West Wing* did it feel like you two were coming in together as a team?

JOSH: And do you live together now?

KARIS: We do. Yeah.

EVAN: We do. We do. We are co-parenting. [Karis laughs] I remember, you know, meeting Karis doing our first episode together. And please correct me if I’m wrong, Karis, but I remember we actually had to re-audition for our own roles.

KARIS: We did. Yeah.

EVAN: I remember waiting there in the waiting room next to Karis. Just thinking what if I don’t get my own part?

JOSH: Wait. What does that...[crosstalk]

EVAN: [crosstalk] I really liked working with Karis. I'd like to be on the team with her.

JOSH: What does that mean re-audition for your part? After shooting?

KARIS: Yeah, we did. So, we were introduced in the "Lift Off" episode as congressional aides. And so, we came in and did these small roles. And so, we did that episode together like Evan said, and then they started considering expanding the storyline, and they wanted to bring -- they thought it was very reflective of not Santos' personality to bring his crew with him and his kind of reflected in his loyalty. And so yeah, we had to go back in and they were going to, you know, determine whether or not we had the chops to really carry these characters through. And so yeah, we sat next to each other thinking, gosh, I hope I'm right for this.

JOSH: I've been through a lot of indignities in this business, but that's pretty horrible. Making you addition for the roles you already booked.

KARIS: Exactly. That we get originated. But in all, you know, in all fairness to them, we ended up having very little screen time in "Lift Off." Maybe they just didn't realize, you know, if we could act beyond walking around a room.

HRISHI: Did the two of you know each other before you started working together on the show?

KARIS: We didn't. No. That was an introduction.

EVAN: Yeah, it was fun. I remember talking to you by the star wagons outside the soundstage as we were just trying to get to know each other. And you know, my story was like, where are you from? I'm from here you are. Yeah, I grew up in LA. What about you? Um, my family's globetrotting. And you know, your story is very, very interesting, Karis, your whole upbringing.

JOSH: Your parents were Harlem Globetrotters?

KARIS: And yeah, [laughing] well, they were Harlem Globetrotters, which is so strange. I know. It doesn't look like I'm the product of 'Trotters.

HRISHI: And since Evan comes from the Washington Generals' family, [crosstalk] [Karis laughs] you were immediately pitted against each other. [

JOSH: [crosstalk] There it is.

KARIS: Exactly. Yeah, No, I just, I grew up abroad.

HRISHI: And how did you work your way towards acting?

KARIS: I sort of found acting when I was in high school and just really loved it. I found my home. And from that point on, you know, continue to explore all sorts of different aspects. And I was classically trained. I did quite a bit of theater before I ventured out to Los Angeles. Reluctantly.

EVAN: *The West Wing* likes theater actors, too.

KARIS: Yeah. That's right.

EVAN: I have a very fond memory, of just loving the moment and being jealous at the same time, I was in the makeup trailer with John Spencer and Kristin Chenoweth when we were outside Royce Hall at UCLA one day, and they were just trading Broadway stories back and forth. And I was a fly on the wall, and I was listening to their opinions, critical, supportive, loving, harsh, specific and it was so much fun. And I can see how they do love their theater actors. And you need it. You need training and competence for these very fast walk-and-talks.

KARIS: Absolutely.

JOSH: Yeah. This is true. Do you have any memories of this specific episode now and "King Corn?" Where did we shoot -- I can't even remember, where were we?

KARIS: Yeah, it was a mixed bag. We started off in Pasadena and then ended up going to Toronto and so a lot of that was shot right outside of Toronto. And that's all the, you know, the authentic cold air scenes, rosy noses, cold red hands. Yeah, so we transition. So you can see everything that was happening in the defunct sort of sports store the beginnings, the humble beginnings at a campaign that was all in Pasadena.

EVAN: I remember every location. From City Orange, to when we were in the Winnebago we were going up and down like Zoo Drive by Griffith Park. We did that right. Oh, we did Burbank. We did Toronto, there was so much block shooting going on. They were cross boarding three and a half episodes at the same time. And then bits in Toronto, that wonderful junket up there with LA. It was wild [crosstalk] from a scheduling perspective.

KARIS: Yeah.

JOSH: Can you explain for people who don't understand block shooting and cross boarding and all that?

EVAN: I think you do a lot better explaining that. But what I know from hack-like perspective is you're shooting bits and pieces of multiple episodes at the same time. They'll try to say, ok, which actors can we use this one day? Or if it's more location dependent, we're going to do scenes here, and then we'll filter it in. Can someone give a better definition than that?

JOSH: No, that makes a lot of sense. I was just gonna say in contradistinction to the Sorkin years where this would never have been possible. Under John Wells, you know, they would, I guess, have banked scripts ahead of time or have a sense of where they were going so that scenes could be shot that weren't in the next episode. It takes a certain amount of planning. And then of course, it also feels a money saver, when you can, you know that you're going to shoot scenes over the course of several episodes in one location. Rather than keep having to book that location going back and forth, week after week, or whatever it is, you can actually plan ahead.

HRISHI: The locations don't correspond to what we're actually seeing in the story. But you did have to go travel together to shoot some of these things. And one of the things that I love watching this episode is the sense of how this kind of travel ends up bonding the different aides together.

[West Wing Episode 6.13 excerpt]

RONNA: Next is the nation's oldest Dairy Queen, where you try soft serve and talking about jobs and the economy. Next we fly to Iowa's Cornrowers' Expo...[crosstalk]

JOSH: We got a plane?

NED: Sort of.

JOSH: With wings?

NED: Small ones.

RONNA: [crosstalk] ... watch as I impale myself on the mighty-sword-of-corn-based-fuels speech.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I was wondering if you had a similar kind of experience going on the road instead of just sort of showing up on set and doing this as a day job when you actually have to travel. Does it end up making you bond more tightly?

KARIS: I think so. I think one of the things that I was really kind of touched by honestly, revisiting these episodes has been a long time since I've seen them is how much paralleling was happening. And I don't know if this resonates with you as well, Evan. But we were at the very beginning of this journey together on the campaign trail. You know, they were very modest, humble beginnings. I think our infatuation with Santos, you could really see in both of us that we were just taken with him and honored to be part of this journey, and kind of this really palpable level of disbelief. Like, we just couldn't believe that we were doing this, that there was even any kind of hope that he could be president. And I felt very much as an actor, the same kind of sensation, like, Oh my gosh, I'm on *The West Wing*. This is— I think I was filled with so much disbelief and just, you know, kind of a wide-eyed optimism, and I felt like it was really blurring the lines between Ronna and myself as an actress, Karis, just being completely in awe of getting to be on this journey.

EVAN: I had so much fun. As soon as you go on location, for me, it feels like actor camp.

KARIS: Yeah.

EVAN: And it's just it's another level of adventure...

JOSH: Exactly.

EVAN: Yeah, our characters' missions were aligned. We both are loyal to Santos. We both love him and respect him. We work in concert with each other, but as people and as characters, we got along swimmingly. And it was just, it was so much fun in the second year traveling to Toronto. You're like, "Oh my gosh! Extra adventure! Oh, hi, Sam Robards. Oh, hi, Josh and Janel. Oh, hi, Bradley. Look at this, hey, there's snow!" This is something different for everybody.

KARIS: Absolutely.

EVAN: It was so much fun.

HRISHI: How about Jimmy? What was Jimmy like to work with?

EVAN: I just want to say one thing quickly about Jimmy, he is one of those actors who is so giving, he looks towards you in the scene, he gestures towards you in the scene – how can I include the other actor? How can I give a moment or share a moment with the other actor? No one was neurotic, or obnoxious on this set. Everybody was so highly competent that nobody had to be weird. And I had the best time ever. But one of the first thoughts I had about Jimmy was, he's got a lot on his shoulders, you know? A lot of focus, a lot of words. And he's still taking the time to be giving to another actor and thinking about another actor. I felt that for me, and so I'm a fan.

KARIS: Yeah, I totally concur. He is such an inclusive and just a warm human being. And I think, echoing what Evan said, I think it was a huge undertaking for him. And I think even in his own quiet way, he sort of was questioning, you know, why he was there, and being able to kind of play with these other actors who were so well established and so confident in the roles that they embodied on the show. And it's such a, it was such a specific show as far as pacing and language and everything else. So, I think it was really humbling for him. But he was just such a delight. And Evan's absolutely right, he was always so inclusive on and off camera. And you know, you can tell valued everybody.

JOSH: That's high praise indeed. That's one of the nicest things I think you can say about an actor is that they're looking to connect and to make moments and to, you know, share the focus. And it's important you guys help create the whole world around the candidate. And it has to be kind of filled with life. And, I think you guys did a very good job of that. There's just the hubbub of the campaign that surrounds him. And a lot of it is in between the lines of dialogue and around it.

EVAN: Thank you so much. I mean, yeah, Brad's passion and Jimmy's depth and pathos made it easy for us to just look at him going like, “yep! This is our guy. He's everybody's guy.”

KARIS: Absolutely. And I think we were there to protect it as well. Josh is struggling to try to understand this guy. He believes in him, that the depth of his commitment to him is evident, but he's trying to figure him out. Like, this guy isn't anything that familiar to him at all. And I think our jobs were to also help to kind of explain that bring them into the fold, bridge the gap between these two men.

JOSH: That's interesting. In this episode, one of the things I wrote down in my notes as I watched is that it still seems evident here kind of a massive misread on Josh's part of who he's dealing with, even though we've seen him kind of fall for the guy and jump in. It's like on the entire ethanol issue where he's just drafted an entire speech that is counter to the guy's take on the issue. And then just really pressures him hard to just read it off the teleprompter. It says it's still like classic Josh Lyman hubris still at play.

KARIS: Absolutely. Yeah.

EVAN: I felt at times I was being a little Negative Ned, as I looked towards Josh.

KARIS: I think we called you that, didn't we? I think we called you that.

EVAN: I liked being called Elmer Fudd Jr. the best, or Ted. I liked a couple other moments later on. But yeah, because I was protective, I was wary and this guy - is he bending our guy? Is he going to break our guy. We you know, who's the new guy?

HRISHI: In the process of working on developing these characters, did you end up finding it a new connection to real world political figures?

KARIS: Yeah, I mean, I'm completely deluded. I'm actually quite convinced that I worked in politics, which my husband always has a nice, you know, he chuckles about it, but I feel like every time there's a new campaign season, I really genuinely feel like I was in the trenches. And I think working with people that had been embedded in Washington and had some intimate relationships with real campaigns, they brought such authenticity to the world. That... mean, it was a civics lesson. But I did have somebody come up to the ones who worked in government. And it was so sweet. They were very effusive and just how much they adore the show. And they said, you know, there is one thing that we feel like doesn't quite ring true about *The West Wing* because we work in government. We actually live in Washington, DC and work in government and, and nobody in government actually works that fast. I thought that was really good.

HRISHI: Maybe if we gave them all only 44 minutes to finish a [crosstalk].

EVAN: Can I say a favorite moment for me from that episode, besides watching every graceful moment of Karis' brilliant acting was actually watching Alan Alda when we were in the forum or wherever we held that.

KARIS: Yeah.

EVAN: That ethanol pledge, triple moment between the candidates. There was a moment I believe, where Alex said, "could you just speak? You know, we're just trying to get the light flares right or a camera angle right." And he just extemporized what seemed like a legitimate political speech that went on for in my mind 12 to 15 minutes.

JOSH: What?

EVAN: It could not have been that long. But he just went...

JOSH: No kidding!

EVAN: ...and he wasn't yapping, it was -- it all flowed and made sense.

HRISHI: Well, thank you so much, both of you for taking the time to talk to us.

KARIS: Absolutely. Yeah, no. This is such a pleasure, such a thrill to get to revisit the series and get to be on with you guys. And, and I've been thoroughly enjoying the podcast too. So, I will definitely continue to listen to it.

JOSH: Awesome. Thank you.

EVAN: This has been an incredible honor, an incredible honor to work on this series. And it's so wonderful that you called us up together to recount some memories. Oh! And can I just say one other thing about Karis and me...

JOSH: Please do.

EVAN: When you were talking about our bonding and our connection? And I think for me, you know, I will always feel this strong connection with Karis. And I, you know, I'm a staffer, also with Ramon, Dianna Maria Riva, Matt del Negro, the horrible, horrible situations of John Spencer passing away...

KARIS: Oh my gosh, yeah.

EVAN: We were all invited to the memorial on the Warner's lot. And Kristen sang "For Good." And Bradley spoke. And I just remember, you know, ok, I'm walking in, oh, I'm obviously going to sit in the row, you know, near Karis. We're this element where this unit together as characters and people. And so that's just a way I wanted to articulate the fact that, yes, I just feel like we're, we're linked. We haven't seen each other much over the intervening years. But it's one of those things where we talk again, right now or we see each other and you'll

JOSH: ...pick up where you left off.

KARIS: Yeah. Absolutely.

JOSH: That's the actor's way.

KARIS: I agree. Those bonds have certainly lasted even if we don't see each other on a regular basis.

JOSH: Right on.

HRISHI: Well, thanks for giving us the opportunity to bring you two back together for this conversation.

KARIS: It's great.

JOSH: Great to talk to you guys. That was fantastic.

HRISHI: Thank you.

KARIS: Huge pleasure. And thank you so much.

HRISHI: And that does it for this episode.

JOSH: It doesn't be done it again.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for listening. Thanks to Evan Arnold and Karis Campbell for joining us. And thanks also to Lauren Hissrich, and thanks to *Politico* senior writer, Michael Grunwald for talking to me about his article. You can find the link to that on our website.

JOSH: Thanks to Zach McNees, Margaret Miller, and Nick Song for keeping us drawing together.

HRISHI: Visit westwingweekly.com for all the links that we talked about, lots of additional reading materials, and you can leave comments and get into fights with people if you want.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: If by the way, thewestwingweekly.com is too spicy of a forum, you can always talk about the episodes on our Facebook page, where you might have a little bit more control over what you see. You can always block people or hide comments that you don't like. There's also a West Wing Weekly discussion group that is moderated.

JOSH: If you want to buy some of our merchandise, or even better give us money for nothing, you can go to ClogVlogs.com and hit the "merchandise" or "donate" buttons. The West Wing Weekly is a proud member of Radiotopia, which is a collection of great podcasts. That's all I've got.

HRISHI: Go to Radiotopia.fm to learn more about all the shows. You can follow our guests online, too. You can follow Karis Campbell on Instagram: @Karis_Campbell. Michael Grunwald is on Twitter: @MikeGrunwald. And Lauren Schmidt Hissrich is @LHissrich on Twitter.

JOSH: You can follow us on Twitter. You can follow us on Instagram. You can follow us on Facebook. But don't follow us on the street. That's creepy.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

EVAN and KARIS: What's next?

[Outro Music]