

The West Wing Weekly
6.16: "Drought Conditions"
Guests: Debora Cahn and Richard Schiff

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. I'm Hirshikesh Hirway

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina

HRISHI: And today we're talking about "Drought Conditions". It's episode 16 from season 6.

JOSH: This episode was written by Debora Cahn. It was directed by Alex Graves. And it first aired on television on February 23, 2005.

HRISHI: In this episode, the campaign story and the White House story come back together. We've spent the last two episodes bouncing back and forth between the campaign primary trail and the west wing but now, because of a DNC gala, all of our characters will be under one roof. But in the middle of the fight for a new President, and in the wake of Toby's brother's recent death, not all is well. Toby and Josh crash into each other with words and fists. And Kate Harper and Will Bailey end up silently flirting and looking like they want to crash into each other with other body parts.

JOSH: [laughter]

HRISHI: And we're joined for this episode by our very special guest, writer Debora Cahn.

DEBORA: Hello!

HRISHI: Thanks for joining us.

DEBORA: I'm so happy to be here.

JOSH: Right? The first time must have been fun, or you wouldn't be back.

DEBORA: It was so fun.

JOSH: It really was. There was wine.

DEBORA: It was far more fun than I had anticipated.

JOSH: [laughter] This is a great episode.

DEBORA: Awww.

JOSH: So, this should be a fun conversation.

DEBORA: Good. I'm glad.

HRISHI: There's a lot of strategy in this episode. The way you plant things and pay them off is so smart. There are little ways you do that and there are big ways that you do that, and I think it works really well.

JOSH: I agree. That's one of the great joys about watching the episode more than once which I did. I get to go back and sort of reverse engineer and see all the craftiness you put into it.

DEBORA: I'm glad you see it. It was a little difficult to generate it. This was a very significant episode for me. It holds a very special place for me. Because it started out as a little bit of a nervous breakdown. I had a lot of trouble figuring out what that math was in the very beginning. And I was trying to break this episode and I was trying to figure out how the story with Toby and the strange woman in the bar was going work. And how it would cohere to itself and it would also weave into this story that was in the recent past which also had to cohere and how the two would speak to each other but have integrity on their own. And I had not done that before. I mean I was learning a lot on the job and I went home one weekend to try and break this episode and by Sunday morning I had like completely fallen apart. And I called the great Carol Flint, who is a wonderful, wonderful writer and person and I think I was like, sobbing on the phone. And she was like, "why don't you come over?" And she has this glorious, sun-drenched, oasis of a home in Santa Monica with this beautiful garden in the back and this cuddly, reassuring big dog and we sit out there in the sun and she just completely calms me down. And slowly takes me through these two stories and we figure out how they're gonna work and how they're gonna work with each other. And it was all darkness and it became light. It was like a big turning point in my learning how to handle story and how to break story. And also, the dramatic difference between my mood at the beginning of that day and at the end, I kind of, I often look back on that day and think, "This was an unbreakable story and then I sat with Carol Flint for two hours and then it was fine." And try and remind myself when I'm really struggling with writing that it does work out. There's always a way to make the pieces come together. And it had that horrible horrible beginning and then it became kind of one of my favorite episodes. One of my favorite things that I've written.

JOSH: Is breaking a story not initially a group effort? Does it generally fall on the writer of a specific episode?

HRISHI: And I'll ask, could you explain what "breaking a story" even means?

DEBORA: Ah. Breaking a story is figuring out how a story is going to be told. So, we knew that Toby's brother had died. And we knew that Toby was supporting this way leftie candidate, and nobody knew about it. And we talked extensively as a group about what the general progression of those stories would be. But under John Wells, once the writer's room has kind of figured out what the beginning and middle and end of a story is, then it is incumbent upon the writer to take that home, do your homework, figure out what are each of those scenes going to look like. As opposed to, what are the story beats look like, there's the movement of the story and then there's what is the scene that's going to dramatize that movement. So, part of the story breaking process happens in the writer's room around a big table with a bunch of people and a bunch of white boards and then some of that happens you yourself on your own trying to figure it out.

HRISHI: What does it actually look like when you're doing it? Are you working with note cards? Or do you have post-it notes? How do you shuffle the pieces?

DEBORA: A lot of people use note cards. People are kind of violently loyal to some version of how to write out story beats. And whatever they learned first that's...kind of like they've been printed like a duckling on this process. So, there are rabid note card fans and then there are rabid post-it people. I imprinted on using a white board when I'm in the writer's room so that I can erase things and move things around and see it all at once and make arrows from one

scene to the next and where you're gonna move it and what it's referring back to and then I just go home and use a laptop computer and shuffling things around on a page.

HRISHI: Well, if it's okay I'd love to start with the beginning of this episode. The very beginning of this episode is a beautiful example of just a little plant and pay off, I think. We start with this close-up. It's Toby at the bar but all we see at first is a shot of a drink which is in focus and a newspaper which isn't. And the newspaper sort of moves and your eye travels to it and you try and read it and it's just a little bit out of focus and it makes you want to squint. And then immediately it goes to Toby, it reveals Toby, and he pulls out a pair of glasses. The glasses are motivated by the way the newspaper is shot out of focus.

DEBORA: Well, Alex Graves ladies and gentlemen. Once again, it was such a joy to work with him and know that anything that you plant like that he was going to use.

JOSH: This episode is a bit of a love letter to glasses I feel.

DEBORA: It's a love letter to you, dude. It is a love letter to Josh Malina, and I hope you appreciate that.

JOSH: Yeah, I was going to say by the transitive law. It is a love letter to Will Bailey.

DEBORA: Yes.

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: And glasses wearers.

DEBORA: A specific glasses wearer. But anyhow. We'll get there.

HRISHI: The glasses end up being a huge part of the story and the symbolism of the entire episode. And so, it's a really nice way to introduce them. And then, you know, it's Chekov's glasses. Here's a question I have though. Toby pulls off the glasses, and then he says something, and I don't know what he says. It sounds like he might be saying, "11:30 or 11, 3". What does he say there?

[West Wing 6.16 excerpt]

TOBY: 11-3

[end excerpt]

DEBORA: He says, "11-3". He's looking at the sports page, he wants to know what the score was in a game.

HRISHI: Ah.

DEBORA: He can't see it and he looks through the glasses and then he can see it.

HRISHI: Look at that.

JOSH: Ah ha.

DEBORA: It was always a little bit of a balancing act because people spoke so quickly on this show. I mean it was, kind of, became either a trademark or a cliché depending on how you look at it. Everybody spoke really fast. It was hard to tell when you listened to things like is the

audience going to get it? Do we need to make things clearer? Or is our audience just used to tracking that racing dialogue? And my Aunt Ruthie would always call and say, “I can’t understand anything that they’re saying. Can you tell them to talk slowly and clearly?” And I would say, “Yes, that’s exactly what I will do, Aunt Ruthie.”

JOSH: I heard that from my grandparents often.

DEBORA: Yeah.

HRISHI: You know my move in that moment is to just turn on the closed captioning but the closed captioning was no help it just says, “Toby whispers to himself.”

DEBORA: Terrible. Even they can’t follow it and I think they have the script.

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: So, I think the Mets beat the Yankees by eight in interleague play.

DEBORA: That is exactly what happened.

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: Yes. Yes.

HRISHI: This is the real *West Wing* fantasy. So, this scene leads to our introduction to the mystery woman in the bar and she asks another question that ends up hanging over most of the episode

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

SENATOR RAFFERTY: What happened to your face?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then we go to the Santos campaign. And this is another really nice move that I think you make where we have Matt Santos singing “Allison” by Elvis Costello.

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

MATT SANTOS: [Singing “Allison”]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Loved it.

HRISHI: He’s in a good mood and we go a little further into the scene and then we find out that Josh is complaining about the coverage of some writers. Some writers have written about Senator Rafferty’s speech instead of about the Santos campaign and the surprise showing in third place in the New Hampshire primary. And it turns out there’s one writer who wrote enthusiastically about the campaign and it’s a writer named Allison Wexler at *Newsweek* and that’s why Santos is singing “Allison”.

DEBORA: Now I watched this scene today to remind myself about the details of the episode and I noticed this one point where I wrote

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

JOSH: They write about it now, everyone who can spell is writing about it next week

[end excerpt]

DEBORA: And I was like, “Oh remember the old world, when things took a week to go around the world?”

[laughter]

DEBORA: As opposed to like, “They’re writing about it now, everybody else is going to be writing about it by lunchtime.”

HRISHI: Yeah.

DEBORA: It’s just such a different concept.

JOSH: Speaking of Santos’ singing, you have to pay a royalty, no?

DEBORA: Yeah.

JOSH: Was that pricey?

DEBORA: Uh. It was not a bank breaker for this.

JOSH: Ah.

DEBORA: But there was also you know it’s an old economy show.

[laughter]

JOSH: I wrote a web series with a limited budget and there’s a scene where two characters are kind of having their first date and the woman says, “Should I play some music?” and he says, “Yeah, that’d be great.” And she says, “What do you like?” And he says, “Do you have anything in the public domain?”

[laughter]

JOSH: That’s how we got around that.

DEBORA: That’s very funny. That’s a good solution.

JOSH: I think they played Gregorian chants.

HRISHI: You know one thing about that music license though is they didn’t have to pay as much as they might if they were actually to play the Elvis Costello because then they’d have to license both the master recording as well as the publishing. Here, because it’s a new sound recording by Jimmy Smits, they only have to pay half of the license, just the publishing side.

DEBORA: Did you know that before? Or did you look that up?

HRISHI: I know that because I’m a musician and I have had songs on TV.

DEBORA: Oh my God. I’m so happy that you knew that before. I love that.

JOSH: So, there could be a series of affordable concerts in which Jimmy Smits sings the songs of Elvis Costello.

HRISHI: [laughter] Exactly.

DEBORA: That's right.

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

SANTOS: [sings] *Allison...*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah. This is the reason why in a lot of movies you'll hear a song by The Beatles or a song by Led Zeppelin or other sort of notoriously expensive songs but it's not the original; it's a cover. You know, some modern artist doing a cover of it. It's not just because they want to be hip. It's also because then they'll only have to pay half of the very expensive fee and they can pay less for the sound of the recording.

DEBORA: This is such good insider information. We should have you on television all the time. Oh, I guess this isn't television, this is the radio. But whatever we have you on, it should be at least once a week.

HRISHI: I will happily bore people with the ins and outs of music licensing. It's probably the worst part of my life. One thing that's neat about "Take Five" by Dave Brubeck, the song that's playing during the gala? So, the guy who wrote that piece originally is Paul Desmond, and when he died, he left the royalties for the composition to the American Red Cross in his will.

DEBORA: Wow.

HRISHI: And so, because of that, anytime somebody uses that song, anytime there's a license like this, the Red Cross gets money. And the Red Cross gets about \$100,000 annually from the royalties of that song.

JOSH: Look at that, Alex Graves and Debora Cahn saving lives.

DEBORA: That's fantastic. I'm going to put it in every episode I write of everything.

JOSH: [laughter]

HRISHI: Yeah. Good call. Back to the mystery woman for a second. You know we'll just spoil it here because everybody's seen the episode, we hope by the time they're listening to this. Mystery woman who turns out to be Senator Rafferty is played by Mel Harris. And I was wondering did you have a hand at all in who was going to be cast for that role?

DEBORA: Yeah. And I loved her from *Thirtysomething*, and I was so excited that we got her. I was thrilled.

HRISHI: Do you tend to write with people in mind for guest roles?

DEBORA: Sometimes. I certainly find it easier to write when I have somebody's voice in my head. But not always. I mean, it's great to be on a long-running show because you know your actors, you know your characters, you know kind of what you can lean into for them. And there's a lot of liberty in that being able to work with a kind of a particular tone of voice in your head. But it's also nice to just like make somebody up.

HRISHI: After we come back from the titles. After we hear Santos' rendition of Elvis Costello, we go to the titles. When we come back, we're in the White House, and Toby is there, but I thought this was an interesting decision, there's no title card indicating that it's a flashback which is a usual *West Wing* move. Whether it's "Tuesday, 10:38pm" or, you know, "24 hours earlier" something like that. There's no external indication that it was a flashback.

DEBORA: Well it didn't seem like a far enough distance back to really explain it. And also, there was something that was kind of fun about this "you don't quite know where you are" and "you don't quite know what's the past and what's the present" and they meet at a certain point. And this was what was so terrifying for me when I showed up shaking at Carol Flint's house. I wasn't sure if we would be able to in the story make it clear and not...you know be interesting and mysterious...without just being illegible.

HRISHI: Right. Well, you've got the nice timeline indicator of the cut on Toby's face.

DEBORA: Yes.

HRISHI: That's one thing. You know, that either this is before that scene where he had the cut on his face or it's much later. And you know I think most people can figure out okay this is before the cut appeared.

JOSH: Hat tip to the make-up crew.

DEBORA: Yes. They're good, that make-up department.

HRISHI: Can you tell us about the thread that runs throughout the episode about C.J.'s blouse? Because it's one of my favorite parts.

DEBORA: I think I have to say like a little bit about the whole episode which will kind of explain my feelings about that thing.

JOSH: Sure.

DEBORA: So, like I said before. This is, I mean I guess this is a weird thing to say in public but whatever. This is one of my favorite that things I've ever written.

HRISHI: That's not weird.

DEBORA: There was something about this time where we'd gotten through the first year without Aaron. And with John reshaping the show in a way that kind of hopefully worked to take those characters and that place and that storyline from where Aaron had left it and kind of create something that was a little bit reflective of his vision and the writing staff's vision while still honoring where we'd come from. You know like we hadn't completely fumbled it at that point. And so, there was a little bit more confidence like all this was going to be okay. And we could have a lot of fun like this is the most fun I've ever had in a piece of writing, you know, things like, the coffee, things like the M&M's that Cliff Calley is obsessed with, and the shooting of the rubber band and the song and you know, being able to be able to put in kind of like oddly elevated language like Toby uses with the mystery woman.

[*West Wing* Episode 6.16 excerpt]

TOBY: I'd offer to make an honest woman of you, but you'd tire of me. And then I'd be left with nothing but my knitting.

[end excerpt]

DEBORA: To be able to have the confidence that you can give this cast basically high farce and also deliver this kind of devastating piece of drama about Toby's brother is dead, he's not grieving for the loss of him, he's grieving because he, you know, wishes he was alive so he could kill him with his own hands. And this kind of horrible rift of Toby and Josh having lost each other. So, yeah, I mean, the coffee, there was, how, it was fun, it went on and on and on and on and on. And it's not always obvious when you kind of set up a bit like that, like how many times can you hit it before it begins to get tedious or not funny or whatever and you know when you have Allison Janney you can hit it a lot of times it turns out.

HRISHI: What I love about that story line is how it's a little bit of a secret just among women in the office. You know C.J., Margaret, Annabeth and Kate are the only people who sort of are fully aware of what's going on with C.J.'s blouse, talk about it, ask about it. And I love that kind of inner camaraderie that you build in with that. C.J. runs into Margaret and of course Margaret is going to try and help her and having to lend her her jacket. But Annabeth's flinging the rubber band at her to try and get her, you know, she notices the coffee stain and trying to protect her from that. And then Kate just asking her straight out:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

Kate: What happened to your boob?

C.J.: Really?

[end excerpt]

DEBORA: Yep. C.J.'s hiding this stain from basically a bunch of guys in the room who will never notice it so there's some irony there.

HRISHI: OK but one guy who is noticing some details with ladies or with one lady in particular is Will Bailey as played by our very own Josh Malina.

DEBORA: This Josh Malina who's right here with us? I will say we got to a point where we felt like Josh Malina's great and let's give him kind of this story that can play out with Kate that is just delightful and we'd been looking for a while for a place to put it in and we wanted to give Will a little bit more of a personal life and a personal point of view and I was thrilled that I got to play that out in this episode and I love that scene, I love the scene over the cheese where the two of them just look at each other back and forth.

JOSH: Me too. I want to say two things about that. One is that a lot of people love to tweet to me about how Kate is so completely out of my league and it's one of the things that I would just never buy.

DEBORA: [laughter]

JOSH: People love to say that to me. And I always think these people have obviously never seen my wife.

DEBORA: True, true.

JOSH: Yes. And also, I loved this episode in that the beginning of that storyline because it is rare probably on TV in general but even more so on *The West Wing* that you have an entire

sequence without dialogue. And of course, even if you are not putting dialogue in the characters' mouths the scene is still written. And it was a lot of fun to play with what you had written for us and to just have that kind of space for it to breathe and live and I actually remember shooting that very well and having a lot of fun with Mary and with Alex doing that sequence.

DEBORA: That's one of those things where it's a real gift to be able to work with people for a long time and get to know them as people, as actors and as characters, like all three of those things. I mean, you often play extremely intelligent, intellectuals on television and anybody who knows you in real life knows that you are in charge of bringing humor and sometimes embarrassment to any space that you walk into and so knowing that we could play that kind of story line with you and it would just, you know, you could do that scene in your sleep. It was not a difficult scene for you. And just knowing that that was available to us was really great.

HRISHI: How did you decide that "Take Five" was going to be the music? Was that something that you wrote in?

JOSH: Good call.

["Take Five" Music Excerpt]

DEBORA: That was the great Alex Graves who chose that.

HRISHI: Interesting.

JOSH: Perfect choice.

DEBORA: Yeah, it's just fun. It's just fun. It works. And the lights work, and the room works. And you know kind of setting up the thing for Allison to kind of pay off her humiliating day alongside this moment where Kate has also had her own humiliating day and comes out of it in a very different way. And it's fun.

HRISHI: Yeah.

DEBORA: It's just fun to do that.

JOSH: That's a great little thing you devised as well the lead up the through line of her being interested in this guy that Charlie is sort of dangling out there and it turning out that he's one of her ex-husbands. I'd forgotten about that as I watched it. And that killed me. I loved that.

DEBORA: And that she has so many.

JOSH: [laughter] Right.

DEBORA: Ex-husbands.

HRISHI: I also appreciate that there's still some adherence to the idea that they're actually working on something for the White House. There's this diplomatic mission to Mali that they're working on but of course we never actually hear anything about the diplomatic mission but I love that you still had this piece of substance to pin this storyline on that gives Kate a chance to be able to ask about the guy while coming in, you know while being able to sort of maintain her normal attitude.

DEBORA: I agree. And I think that there's another place that for me was really fun in finding a way to kind of bring substance back into the story when so much of it had been eaten up by campaign story it's you know the thing about actual drought conditions and to me it feels like kind of a classic *West Wing* moment of we have a very strong argument coming from very smart people who we really respect and then we hear a much stronger argument from the other side.

HRISHI: Yeah.

DEBORA: And it possibly goes without saying that all of that came from Eli Attie and Lawrence O'Donnell who kind of helped me put together those arguments. And it's one where you kind of get to go through the delight of what *The West Wing* can teach you which is that that guy that you hate that's on the other side of the aisle that you think is just evil is trying to save the world too. In a different way than you ever imagined.

HRISHI: Yeah. That's another wonderful sort of bait-and-switch that you give us. Cliff Calley comes in, working now I guess as a private sector lobbyist to argue against C.J. about this water bill and yet you get to just sort of really like revel in your hatred for this guy but then it turns out not only is he better at making the argument than the argument the White House is making but under his motivation is actually something that is more pure and altruistic. Even though he's got it covered up by this private sector lobbying.

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

CLIFF: There's a drought in Kenya. There's a drought in Zambia. There's a drought in India, and Pakistan and Ecuador and Paraguay. And there's a drought in Malawi and Uganda and Australia. We're the only nation on the planet that can afford the \$10 billion investment it'll take to perfect desalination technology and the federal government's never gonna make that investment unless they're forced to...

[end excerpt]

DEBORA: There's a little bit of I will call my own work a little bit ham-fisted and on the nose in the comparison between how Cliff is irritating and how Josh is irritating:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

CLIFF: C.J. Cregg with the snazzy promotion, I don't know if I bow or kiss the ring, what's the protocol?

[end excerpt]

DEBORA: But even though it's super on the nose I still enjoyed it. Watching Josh come in and just be a, well I can't think of a polite word to say.

JOSH: Well it's fun all together to see Josh Lyman's sort of altered status...

DEBORA: Yeah

JOSH: ...at the White House. Having trouble just getting in the door.

HRISHI: Yeah, you do. You set this up that like Cliff is the Republican version of Josh and you know there's been some comparisons to him in other contexts just because he's one person who actually dated Donna before but this is one where you know that kind of gets set up but I

definitely didn't mind at all when you did like sort of just laid it out there when Leo says, "We've dealt with that kind of situation before." And then the next thing you hear is Josh yelling off screen. And Josh goes pretty full Rahm Emanuel.

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

JOSH: No! I am in town for one day! Tell him he reschedules this thing again I'm gonna tear off his head and fashion his skull into a decorative fruit bowl!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: We know that Rahm Emanuel was an inspiration for Josh Lyman but here it feels like it's been a little while I think since we've gotten to connect with that side of him.

DEBORA: Yeah. I mean my favorite part of that story line is him at the door unable to get past security.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I love that.

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: I also like that one of the attempts that he makes is to get Toby's attention to sign him in and Toby gives him absolutely nothing and it plays as a comic moment but it's sort of also a harbinger of what's boiling between these two guys.

HRISHI: Yeah let's talk about that dynamic. I mean, Josh goes in when he finds out about Toby's brother's death and he goes in to give Toby his love and his condolences but Toby is cold to him and just the layering of the sense of these two different betrayals that Toby is going through you know that David's suicide obviously is the more extreme. It doesn't feel that it's over-written at all, but you make it very plain for us to connect the dots between the betrayal he feels from Josh and the betrayal he feels from David.

DEBORA: Yes. So, he's lost two brothers at the same time and it's not 100% obvious which one is more painful. It felt like writ larger than before an investigation of this relationship of two brothers that we've been watching for years on this show and we love when they are more powerful together than apart.

JOSH: Mm hmm.

DEBORA: And I loved being able to draw out this process of what happens when one stays, and one goes. And when you find your path someplace else. And this dynamic that we've all gone through in different places you've got a job and you're not colleagues, your family but then it ends, and you move on and you're not really family. And was that a real relationship? Was that kind of real love and trust or was it not? I remember John Wells talking about this. He has a brother that he's very close to, Lou Wells. John talked about what it was like to fight with Lou when they were young. And the idea that basically like it would start with an insult and then somebody would like grab a ball point pen and fling it at the other one and then the other one would like take the first one's skull and bash it into the coffee table. Like it escalates so quickly. My brother's ten years older than me. He won every fight by kind of crushing me with his little finger, so I never had that dynamic, I never experienced that dynamic and I loved that idea. And

that's what we were trying to play out here. This idea that there's hurt feelings and there's an insult and then this tiny little thing gets flung which opens up this Pandora's box that they've kind of both like you know these are the punches they've both been wanting to hurl for years. And they finally get the opportunity. And I think that it worked although there was like a great and horrible moment on the set when we were first staging that scene and I was like trying to recreate this very evocative story that John Wells had told in the writer's room and I just remembered Brad Whitford looking at me and going, "So I throw my file folder at him. I fling my file at you." And he was hugely making fun of me but then really made the moment work.

JOSH: [laughter] It's a good fight. I think it's very well-staged. It's like two feral cats going at it. I like the sort of inelegance of it. It looks real. It's credible.

DEBORA: Yeah.

HRISHI: Nothing like seeing two legal scholars fight with each other.

JOSH: [laughter]

DEBORA: Yeah. And we talk about how these are people who kind of opened their veins into this job and who it was life and death for them, and it was really gratifying to see it play out in that kind of visceral, familial way.

HRISHI: I mean that kind of visceral depiction just isn't something on *The West Wing*. I mean there've been very few moments of any kind of violence; most of it happens off screen. There've been a few people who've been killed where we see it, but it's been a while. But this is actually more shocking than anything else to see these two guys in a head lock. What I love most about this scene is that it leads to the cut on Toby's face and the way that that works throughout the whole episode. To me the fight is almost incidental just to the idea that this question lingers you know. It's almost like with Josh in "Noel" and there's the question with how did he cut his hand.

DEBORA: Well it's possible, I'm not saying that I would steal things from Aaron but it's possible that I stole that directly from "Noel".

HRISHI: [laughter] Awesome.

DEBORA: There's some likelihood that it was directly stolen.

HRISHI: [laughter] That's great.

DEBORA: As is much of my work directly stolen from Aaron Sorkin.

JOSH: To me the most painful moment in this scene is after Josh has left and Toby essentially weeps; he just has sort of an anger, frustration weep. It's so personal and so well-acted.

DEBORA: Yeah. And he's crying in a way that he refused to for his brother.

JOSH: Right. It's a release of sorts.

DEBORA: This is one of the episodes where I got a call where I was told to go to Richard Schiff's trailer which was always a terrifying thing because he is brilliant and very strong-willed and I was never sure that I would know how to spell my own name when I left a conversation with him. And, you know, greater men than I kind of shook at the notion of having to go to Richard and hear what he thought about a story or a scene. And I remember being terrified. I

don't remember what the story was and how he asked for it to be adjusted but he had very strong feelings about this story about Toby and his brother. I think he'd thought about for a very long time. And I think that we played it because it was an idea that Richard wanted to play out, and that we loved. And I remember being terrified and going in thinking, "I don't want him to tear down my story." And I remember arguing with him and feeling lost and then going and doing some rewrite that ended up being better. It was again one of those moments where like you wrestle with the process and it comes out okay, like you don't lose yourself, you don't lose your story. You can take in the feedback of your creative partners and really collaborate.

JOSH: No recollection at all about the issue involved?

DEBORA: I will actually go back and look at my notes and see if I can find it and if I can I will let you know.

JOSH: I am intrigued.

DEBORA: There will be a big difference between the first draft and that second draft. Or for the first shooting draft and the second shooting draft.

HRISHI: Well actually coming up later we're going to be speaking with Richard Schiff about that scene because he had some thoughts that he wanted to share with us.

DEBORA: Oh good.

JOSH: We're being called to his trailer.

DEBORA: I'm so glad because he did a lot to shape that story. He really did.

HRISHI: The part in this episode that really crushes me is this exchange between C.J. and Toby after the fight:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

C.J.: Want some water?

TOBY: No.

C.J.: Scotch?

TOBY: No.

C.J.: Want me to go?

TOBY: No.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: The last "no" just kills me so much. And I know you've already said you know how great the cast was. I just wonder when you write a scene like that, were you writing with the power of what Richard Schiff could bring to it in mind?

DEBORA: Yeah. Absolutely.

HRISHI: Like, if you didn't have Richard Schiff in that role, maybe would you have written that scene differently?

DEBORA: Yes. And if you didn't have a relationship that went back that far.

HRISHI: Right.

DEBORA: Where the audience understands that these people are...you know, it's another moment where he's basically allowing her to be with him in his grieving in a way that he hasn't allowed anybody in his family or anybody in his life. So, to know that and then to also be able to kind of you know, then you go to the party where you're playing the sexual tension that we have always wondered about between the two of them and to know that all of that can exist in the same space you know you're riding on seven years. You're not just riding on the ability, the incredible ability of these two actors, you're riding on a relationship that people have been watching for years.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I like also that she has brought him a cup of ice ostensibly I guess for his wound and his response is to start munching on the ice. She gives him a sweet look too like, "Eh."

HRISHI: [laughter]

DEBORA: Yeah. And that's Richard Schiff. That's...that ain't my idea, that's his idea.

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: [laughter] That's great.

DEBORA: And honestly that scene with you and Kate, with you and Mary is the same thing. I mean I went back and watched it again and I remember writing the looks in the script like very carefully writing out when who looks to who...and whom. I think there's a "whom" in there somewhere. And then watching it in the cut we go back and forth and back and forth and back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. Because the two of you know how to do that and to make each look into another line in the conversation.

HRISHI: Uh-huh. Yeah. Each one has a slightly different color to it.

DEBORA: Yeah.

JOSH: We had a lot of fun doing that.

HRISHI: I want to go back for a second, I want to go back to Senator Rafferty and the mystery of the mystery woman. At the end of the episode when it's finally revealed that the woman in the bar is Ricky Rafferty you know I was, really, I was like oh wow, I got really taken by that. I was...I bit hard on the head fake. But then when I watched it again, I realized there was one line where I feel like you might have cheated me into my false sense of understanding. There's a line where Josh says to Toby:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

JOSH: Does it bother you someone's stealing your stuff? Does that trouble you at all?

TOBY: It doesn't.

JOSH: It would. You're not a good sharer. Only way it doesn't bother you is if you handed it to them yourself.

TOBY: *Shut the door.*

JOSH: *Ricky Rafferty. Are you out of your mind?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I feel like that was a little bit of playing fast and loose with our expectations, you know, in order to trick us.

DEBORA: When I watched it that stood out to me as well. I think there was a plan behind it which was that Josh is kind of setting up the idea. He's creating an opportunity for Toby to confess.

HRISHI: Yeah.

DEBORA: And Toby doesn't, and he says, "I know it's Ricky Rafferty." I think that was the idea behind it.

HRISHI: Ahhh.

DEBORA: But I don't know that it was so beautifully executed.

HRISHI: Got it. Got it.

DEBORA: Just between ourselves.

HRISHI: Yeah.

DEBORA: On my side, not on Brad's side.

HRISHI: Yeah. And so that idea of naming the character Ricky Rafferty, you know this idea of the mystery of the mystery woman in the bar hanging over us for that long. How did that play into your planning for the episode?

DEBORA: I think from the get-go there was this idea that somebody with a gender-neutral name was kind of running as a spoiler and we were going to find out that Toby was helping that person.

HRISHI: Mmm hmm.

DEBORA: You know I think that the part of it that became clearer in my kind of nervous break down session with Carol Flint was that we could really lean into this idea that you think it's somebody that Toby's having an affair with and in a way it is.

HRISHI: Right.

DEBORA: You know, in a way you do have to fall in love with this candidate...

HRISHI: hmm-mmm

DEBORA: ...and in a way devote your life to them for a period of time. And that felt really good also to kind of be able to play with the idea that he'd been alone for a while and that he's lonely in his personal life and he's lonely in his professional life because his best friend basically left him for another candidate.

HRISHI: Yeah. And it is like an affair in that you're betraying this commitment that you've made publicly.

DEBORA: Right.

HRISHI: Here's a complete aside about the Presidential M&Ms.

DEBORA: Mm hmm

HRISHI: Do you know the Presidential M&Ms which are real, only became a thing in 1988 and before that the gift that they used to give out were cigarettes?

DEBORA: No way!

JOSH: What?

HRISHI: Yeah. They used to give out Presidential Cigarettes until the Reagan adminis- the end of the Reagan Administration they changed it over to M&M's. Probably you know because C. Everett Koop I guess.

JOSH: Wow.

HRISHI: Reagan actually brought M&Ms to Gorbachev in 1988.

DEBORA: No way!

HRISHI: Yeah.

DEBORA: Oh my God. That's so great.

HRISHI: But it ties really well into the moment of you know where it really feels like the two of them escalates and she asks him if he smokes and he says, "oh, only you know the occasional cigar, not cigarettes." And then he asks the bartender, "you got any cigarettes?"

DEBORA: Yeah.

HRISHI: He also wanted M&Ms.

DEBORA: He did. He really just wanted M&Ms.

HRISHI: Josh, can I ask you about the scene with Mary McCormack?

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: When you two were figuring out that scene, was there a you know, your regular inclination to just like mess with her or do something to like make her laugh or break it in anyway?

JOSH: My memory is that as Debora said you know the scene was written so that there were beats in there and I remember we discussed them all and Alex weighed in but then it was all sort of in the playing of it and you know it's the kind of thing it's all about the timing and getting it just right and I remember doing it a bunch of times and just enjoying the moment of it. I don't think Will Bailey is the most confident man around women perhaps, so I thought that it was sort of it had to be more of a tentative thing where he's kind of just realizing, "Wait a minute. Is this

happening? Is there something there?" I wrote down as I watched it that it's one of the worst pick-up lines ever is that he says:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

JOSH: Do you mind if I stand here and pretend we're talking but we actually don't?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughter]

DEBORA: [laughter]

JOSH: He doesn't even...he doesn't even say what I might say at a party like that like, "Will you talk to me?" like "Will you be the person I can stand next to and talk to?" That's the kind of thing I would say at a party. This is just can I stand next to you and appear to be with you, but can we not actually talk. I love that Debora had that as the sort of downbeat to a little silent seduction. So, to me it was about noticing her with fresh eyes after first running into her and opening with that line and then sort of picking up on the fact that "I think she's checking me out too."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: So, there was definitely a whole mini story to tell and I just remember it was great fun to film. But I don't think Will was maybe confident enough to be initially trying to make her laugh or to make too much happen. To me it's was more about his realization first of all of this woman standing next to him and of course they're not in the normal office attire and just noticing her and then noticing her noticing him. And then trying to figure out what to do with it.

HRISHI: I love that it's set up with this kind of 7th grade dynamic between the two of them when Will walks in in the initial conversation between Charlie and Kate:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

JOSH: Am I interrupting?

KATE: You were in New Hampshire, right?

JOSH: I was.

KATE: That's nice.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Of course, you wouldn't think that she actually wants to talk to you because the last thing she said to Will was how nice it was not to have him around.

JOSH: Yeah, this is true. Yeah. I think he's probably better writing words down for somebody else...

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: [laughter]...than actually engaging in witty banter off the top of his head. There's definitely a clear eyeline. There's one quick glance at her décolletage if you will.

DEBORA: If you will.

JOSH: Yeah. I remember when filming thinking like what is just...trying to stay just this side of appropriate.

HRISHI: [laughter] Was that something you wrote in? Was that one of the looks you wrote in Debora?

DEBORA: I think I wrote, "he looks at her, she looks at him." That kind of thing. And I think that the fantastic thing of he barely looks at her and sort of sees the first piece of her he comes across and it is not her face.

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: [laughter]

DEBORA: [laughter] Yeah. I think you found that moment man. And I have to say that line that you referenced about you know, "Can I stand here, and we not say anything?" It was nice for me to be able to write about the dynamic of what's it's like to fall in love with people who are really, really, really smart but not necessarily well-versed in the social arts.

JOSH: Mm hmm.

DEBORA: That was like. I've definitely had that conversation. [laughter] I've definitely had...and I think it's not uncommon among these people who deal with their intellects and only their intellects 28 hours a day. And are incredibly passionate and you kind of fall in love with their passion for their work.

HRISHI: There's a line in this episode that reminds me of the rare moments when someone says something nice about me on Twitter:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

ANNABETH: You know you work somewhere, and your perspective and your realm is different from everyone around you. And it's busy. People don't have time to pat each other on the back. And I don't want that. But gosh, it's just nice to hear that they think I'm good.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughter] I love that scene by the way and in my reverse engineering second watch I notice that it's entirely credible that she'd have this scene or mini-breakdown or get weepy on a day when she had a door slammed in her face. Because earlier on she's talking to Toby and he just boom.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Just brutally shuts the door in her face.

DEBORA: I think that there were certain points where we really wanted to point a finger at that and say, "Yeah, we get it. She's not part of the gang of four." She's different and what is it like to come into that family and try and fit in. And you know, knowing that all of us were a little bit going through that process in those years.

JOSH: And we've always seen a very brave front from Annabeth. It's interesting to see that there's actually something behind it. It's interesting to flip it and get her perspective on what it's been like to try to join a team like this and what it would mean to hear some positive feedback

like that. And you also get another dose of how Will deals with people and deals with sticky moments. He actually just looks for the door as she's having her moment I notice.

DEBORA: [laughter] Yes.

JOSH: [laughter] He's literally looking for an exit and he's like "can I go now?". He's not entirely there for her.

HRISHI: [laughter]: He's there to point out that she's wearing glasses when she says she's got something wrong with her contacts.

JOSH: Yeah. That's right. Hey, thanks for that.

HRISHI: I love the reference to *The Jerk* from Santos.

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

SANTOS: I was born a poor black child...close but no...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I was wondering whether a 2019 audience would get the reference.

HRISHI: I hope they do.

DEBORA: You know I feel like it exists in the world in the kind of generally held lexicon outside of *The Jerk* because as is probably obvious at this point, I didn't even know I was quoting *The Jerk*.

JOSH: Is that true?

HRISHI: Really?

DEBORA: I just know...Yeah. I had no idea.

JOSH: That's funny. Oh my gosh.

DEBORA: I had absolutely...I had seen the movie whatever 15 years before.

JOSH: That's hilarious.

DEBORA: I have certainly seen the movie. But I think, "I was born a poor black child..." is not...exists in many other places in the culture.

JOSH: Is that so?

HRISHI: Oh man.

DEBORA: It must. I mean it would have to.

JOSH: Another aspect of the episode that I thought pointed out an interesting difference in time is that I guess the bit that Toby has given Rafferty.

HRISHI: Oh, about healthcare.

JOSH: Yeah is about healthcare and about single payer particularly and there's discussion in this episode about it being such a far-left sort of stance to take.

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

JOSH: I can see where this Rafferty thing is heading. Four weeks of articles about single payer healthcare and it all reads like vintage Bartlet.

CJ: You know the president is not the first guy on the planet to try and phase out insurance companies.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's interesting now that if you look at the Democratic field for the nomination now everybody has to grapple in one way or another with single payer and where they stand on it and whether or not to share their stance on it.

HRISHI: Yeah that's what I thought that Toby was bringing some real Bernie heat you know years before his time. That's really what Bernie did in 2016. Now in so many ways the debate for 2020 is framed by things that Bernie said by being such a powerful advocate for things like Medicare for all he really did pushed the conversation to the left.

JOSH: For sure.

DEBORA: Rewatching it I could not believe how Bernie it was.

HRISHI: About Cliff Calley, did you feel like you had to try and draw him closer to Josh at all? I think Mark Feuerstein bring such a specific kind of sort of sleazy charm to it that is his own and is different from Bradley Whitford's vibe. You know in order to sort of like make the comparison between the two of them, did you feel like you had to point him in a direction that was sort of Josh-ish?

DEBORA: There were certainly moments like the one we that talked about earlier that were really set up to make the direct one to one comparison, but I actually don't have exactly the same perspective on it. He surprised me in how Josh-like he was. I think that we wanted him, we wanted a character that we were gonna hate and then love and think was really sleazy and horrible and then fall in love with and think was he one of our own. And he just – I find him to be pretty lovable from the get-go. And I think Mark is just a likeable guy and it's hard for him to play despicable again I was kind of having a good time with you know him trying to throw off Leo and C.J. in that first scene where they're together and the déjà vu and interrupting them and all of that. Again, I was having fun. There are certainly ways where we could have leaned into how distasteful he was and we just kind of decided not to bother.

HRISHI: Yeah, you're right. I mean slimy is not actually the right word. Even, seeing him, my first inclination is to be happy. Because he is the guy who saved Leo. He is more I guess rakish than sleazy or anything like that, even when we first met him and he was this sort of adversary because of the sub-committee that he was on he still presented as the guy with such principles and was more like our characters despite being on the other side of the aisle. So, I think yeah, it's hard to see him and be like you have to kind of remember that oh yeah he has an adversarial relationship with some of these folks because my you know last memory of him was that he's a friend.

DEBORA: Yeah. And I remember there was a lot of back and forth about whether this should be a brand new character that we've never seen before or should we kind of pick a republican from

the history of the show and it was one of those moments where we kind of think he's such a good actor and did we really play out that whole story and wouldn't it be nice to have him back.

HRISHI: I love too that again the idea comes from Leo to hire him. You know in the past the President and Leo were both sort of excited about this idea of hiring people who disagree with you. And the gang of four was against it. I love that term by the way, "the gang of four" for them. And you know they would fight against it. And then here C.J.'s in Leo's job now and she's gonna be the one who has to have to make the offer, but you can still feel her fighting against it and Leo's all about it:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

C.J.: You want me to hire Cliff Calley?

LEO: He knows the hill; he knows what he's talking about.

C.J.: You're talking about a guy who used to work for Congressional republicans

LEO: I'm talking about a guy who shut down an investigation of my substance abuse history because he thought maybe we should be governing the country.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I loved that that continued even though she's now got to be the one who's actually making the offer.

DEBORA: Yeah. And it was nice to be able to kind of drag out her entry into that position.

HRISHI: Right.

DEBORA: And not fall into the thing of like, "Oh well, you know she had a tough first day but now she's really got it."

HRISHI: Right. And I'll just remind folks in case they've forgotten you wrote "Liftoff" you wrote the episode where C.J. had her first day of work as the Chief of Staff.

DEBORA: Yeah. It was fun. It was a really fun one.

HRISHI: So, you've got a great direct connection already to those feelings. You've already spent a lot of time in there.

DEBORA: Yes, that's true.

JOSH: I like that with Cliff you also get a second dose of politics as seduction as C.J. despite Cliff's having turned her down sort of drops her off with the president at the DNC gala and tells the president to take his time with him as he's going to sort of maybe lure him into taking this job.

DEBORA: Yeah. There was something wonderful about kind of seeing her in the party having remembered the seductive quality that that place has on people.

HRISHI: I'd love to talk about the end of the episode and especially the return of the glasses. In the last moments, now we know where the scene is happening that Toby is downstairs, the gala is going on upstairs, that's why Senator Rafferty is there and they have this last exchange

where she makes him put on the glasses and she says, “Oh makes you look smart.” And he says, “I thought I looked smart before.” And she says, “So did I.” It’s a great exchange and even Toby is amused by it, but I love that the thing that you leave us with is Toby trying to look through the glasses again. It feels like this moment of denouement where he’s like trying to get past his anger with his brother and with Josh by extension and you know literally trying to see things the way somebody else had to.

DEBORA: Yeah. Well said. I don’t know what I can add to that. You made it sound so beautiful. I’m sort of moved by your interpretation of it. It’s exactly what I intended.

HRISHI: Awesome. I also really loved the writing and the sentiment of what Leo says to Toby you know when he comes in when he comes in to tell him that he has to stop working with Rafferty. This bit of dialogue:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

LEO: You are no longer the guy who picks losing candidates and ushers them to their principled end. You’re the guy who takes good men and makes them great. You and Josh you still think you’re terriers barking at the heels of the party. You are the party.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love that. And then I love what comes right after that where he says:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

LEO: Don’t pretend you’re still an outsider with a ponytail and a dream. You work in the White House.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: All of that, I just wanted to say. That’s some great writing.

DEBORA: Thank you. It’s one of those things where it was...it was kind of tickled me to see that when I watched the episode today because it is a sentiment that I have revisited in recent years. In my own professional world I work with writers, many of us are people who found comfort being alone in a room and being different from everyone around us and trying to somehow express that quietly on a page and sort of slip it out into the world and when you’re working on a television staff maybe you come in that way but eventually you become management. You have a responsibility to writers who are starting out and who don’t have as much experience as you. I’ve been on both sides of that conversation kind of discovering and helping other people discover that they’re not in some hidey-hole anymore you know wearing a hoodie and typing in the corner of a Starbucks. Like, they’re management and it’s time to sort of step up and see that you’re not just responsible for doing your job you’re responsible for helping other people do theirs and helping this thing not only succeed but succeed with a certain amount of good feeling and joy and a sense of humor.

HRISHI: My last thought is thank you for helping us do *our* job with a sense of humor and joy.

DEBORA: Awww...it’s my pleasure.

JOSH: Let’s take a quick break and when we come back, we’ll talk to Richard Schiff about his thoughts on “Drought Conditions”.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: We're joined now once again by Richard Schiff.

JOSH: He's back!

HRISHI: Thanks so much for coming to the studio Richard.

RICHARD: It's a pleasure to be here.

HRISHI: We were talking to Debora Cahn and she told us that you had very strong feelings about this episode and the storyline about Toby's brother.

RICHARD: Yeah. I'm interested because you know my memory of these days on the *West Wing* is somewhat blurred.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: I think I talked about an episode that she wrote with you and I, Josh while we were stuck in your office during the lockdown.

JOSH: "No Exit"?

RICHARD: Yeah. And I remember having a long conversation with Debora that kind of left her in tears which ended up being what I thought was a fantastic kind of series of sessions between Josh's character and mine.

HRISHI: Well how did she end up in tears?

RICHARD: Because I was kind of brutally honest, I would say. In that episode I thought she had written something, she's never you know not good as a writer but she didn't go as far as I thought she could have with two characters that don't like each other stuck together without just repeating what we've already established between the two. So, she ended up going really deep and ended up coming up with stuff that was way beyond what I had even imagined and the fact that tears happened only means that she cares very deeply about her work. But I don't remember our discussions for this episode and I'm sure I had very strong feelings but I'm curious to know what they were.

JOSH: How often would you read a script and then speak to the writer after?

RICHARD: I can't remember not doing that.

JOSH: I thought you might say that.

RICHARD: Sometimes it's minimal and sometimes it's you know and the current work that I'm doing now it happens a lot and it usually has to do with you know a subject has been opened or a wound has been opened; well let's you know bleed or let's go a little bit deeper or funnier or whatever it is. But I don't remember...I just watched that episode, it's tough to watch. It was a very, if not the hardest, close to one of the hardest acting challenges I've ever had that episode. But I don't remember the discussions about the writing.

HRISHI: Well after we finished recording with Debora, she went back and looked at her notes, she had the original draft that she had written, and she had the notes that she'd gotten from you and she sent us an email. The subject line is "How Richard changed the Toby Story". She

writes: I went back and looked at my notes and found a useful document called "Richard issues". Sure enough it's all there. He made a huge impact on the story about the death of his brother. I was going to have the brother's death be a result of his refusal of treatment for his cancer. Richard urged me to make it an outright suicide, not a passive thing. And he wanted me to lean into Toby's rage, not his sadness. A much more interesting, dynamic look at grief. Holy [expletive]. Richard made it a lot better. He made the Toby story more specific and alive in other ways as well not just that but that's the biggie and going through the things we discussed it looks like I took all of his notes. He's a smartie that Richard Schiff. Thank him for drastically improving that script.

RICHARD: Notice she's never hired me on a show she's written since.

JOSH: [laughter]

RICHARD: No she was one of my favorites because she really just never settled and if you gave her a note if you opened up a discussion as vulnerable a creature as she is she put her two feet on the ground, stood and listened and clearly took an honest look at what we were doing and came to the right conclusion. I loved working with her I really did.

HRISHI: So, it sounds like you set up this hardest acting challenge on the series. You set it up for yourself.

RICHARD: I don't remember that he had just refused treatment and it makes...I must say I was right.

HRISHI: [laughter]

RICHARD: It made for a much more dynamic and painful storyline that my brother committed suicide because it cuts to the quick of the cowardice that I think Toby felt his brother was guilty of. And immediately I think of the director who killed himself because he couldn't face his disease, Tony Scott...

JOSH: Mmm hmm.

RICHARD: ...who I knew and really respected and liked. Robin Williams is another one who just comes to mind.

HRISHI: I think by making it a suicide as opposed to a refusal to get treatment, by making it more active of a choice it also connects it to the Josh Lyman story. The betrayal that Toby feels about a choice another, you know a figurative brother has made too.

RICHARD: Right, right.

HRISHI: Having it be a suicide the parallels are a lot more clearly established.

RICHARD: You know what's brilliant about the writing in this episode; it's really brilliant are the glasses.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: And Leo at some point referring to the glasses his brother's glasses that he's always holding. And Rafferty says put them on and Leo says try them on and the end of the episode he puts them on after Rafferty leaves the bar and actually starts to see. It's a great metaphor

seeing the perspective of those who have either betrayed or who you felt have let you down. And it's quite beautiful.

HRISHI: It's a little object of empathy.

RICHARD: Yeah.

HRISHI: So, can you tell us about the scene between Toby and C.J. when she comes in after the fight?

RICHARD: Well Allison and I have many times said about each other that there are certain scenes and challenges that we could not do unless the other one was there. I think she'd said it about the Alzheimer's episode and a couple of others. I just watch that and very riveted by her in that scene. Not every actor can make a scene completely about the other person. And her presence was 100% if not more there for C.J. for Toby. There's no one I'd rather do that scene with and it was reflective of Toby and C.J.'s relationship that that could happen, that kind of emotional spill could happen. It was a tough day to shoot that scene and she was there every second, every moment and couldn't have done it without her there.

HRISHI: I know the show is famous for doing take after take. Is that a scene, I don't know how you could do that scene take after take.

RICHARD: No, we did it take after take. I think I built the platform for that scene in a good way because I hit those marks if you will, those moments I remember in every take from every angle. Although Alex likes to hit the close up, up the nose shots there were other shots I don't ever know if they were used. That was a full day. I remember how the cameraman reacted coming off the eyepiece I think which was the last take. He just kind of shook his head and went, "Wow." And I always look to the way the cameraman pulls off the eyepiece as to whether, because you have no other gauge...

HRISHI: Right

RICHARD: ...you know as to whether an impact was made. You know.

JOSH: When you do a heavy-duty emotional scene like that, do you like to do your coverage first or last or does it not matter?

RICHARD: It depends. You notice how C.J. reacted, how Allison reacted to that and I always feel that a scene is nothing unless the impact is made on the other actor or actors and so my obligation is to be as full for lack of a better word when the camera is on her as it is on me. It didn't matter in that particular instance where the camera was because I had to be at that level no matter where it was.

HRISHI: What did you connect to in order to get to that place emotionally?

RICHARD: I wish I was a note keeper like Debora. I'm sure I had notes in my script, but you know you keep getting rewrites, so I don't know. I don't remember. I know it was something very much at the core of where my pain lies and my fear of cowardice which I think is what Toby was going through my fear of being alone, but I don't know what I used.

HRISHI: You watched that episode for this, did you watch it when it came out?

RICHARD: No.

HRISHI: Have you watched it in the meantime or is this the first time you'd seen it?

RICHARD: I think I've seen pieces of it. And I think it's because of you guys. Because I think we did an episode of the last show that I directed. and then I said let me go look at "A Good Day" because I had to prep for that episode while doing acting in this episode.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: So, I went and looked at that episode and I went, "Ok it's not so bad." [laughter] And then I went, "Oh, right this was right before that." So, I saw a little of it and that was it. I couldn't watch it all. So, this was the first time. And I had to watch it twice as I guess most people do to catch all the nuances of what the hell we're talking about.

HRISHI: Mm hmm

RICHARD: So yeah this is pretty much the first time.

JOSH: How about the fight scene that preceded this one? It's a messy and uncomfortable scene. Was it fun to shoot? Or was it a messy and uncomfortable to shoot the fight with Josh?

RICHARD: I don't think I was a fan of that scene when we were shooting it or when I read it. I thought it was odd. I understand it now in context having seen the whole show, but I thought it was going over the board a little bit. I love the scene and the writing of the argument between us and the betrayal that's there and also the hardcore point of it all you know. Healthcare. Fascinating that we had that fierce debate and yet here we all still are having the healthcare debate:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

TOBY: There's a profit-generating industry leeching the life out of this country's healthcare. You got something better you wanna talk about?

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: So, I thought the argument was as intense as it should have been. But I thought the fight...and I remember watching the fight and I remember I had to walk towards him to start physical contact and I never felt comfortable...it didn't make sense to me. That meant we both decided to fight. That always jumped out at me as odd. I also thought it was odd because it wasn't shot in the sequence and I don't think it was written in the sequence where and maybe it was I don't remember where he freezes frame...

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: ...and cuts to me talking about the coins in my fist:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

TOBY: My brother said never walk down the street without a roll of pennies in your pocket. You belt a guy with a roll of pennies in your fist, you do some damage.

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: And after seeing that and going back to the fight, I'm shocked that we didn't stage that fight so that Toby just pummels the living hell out of Josh because clearly, he was a kid of

the streets and knew how to take care of himself. Of course, he's not going to really do that but in that moment of rage I see more of a Ray Liotta moment in *Goodfellas* you know when he beats up the boyfriend across the street with the butt of a pistol.

JOSH: Toby might have had a roll of pennies in his drawer.

RICHARD: And he could have gone and reached for it. Yeah. So, the fight was always difficult for me. And yes, it wasn't pleasant to shoot. And I remember telling Alex I think you know we should stage this a little more. More of a stage combat just make sure we don't get stupid and then I saw him whisper something to Brad and I know that he said, "Go after him." So, the fight was fairly real, and I guess that's what he was after. I don't know, what did you guys think of that?

HRISHI: I think the blocking note you had is absolutely right on. I didn't think about that but I totally feel that Toby walking toward Josh to initiate the fight makes it premeditated in a way that takes away from the spontaneity of what had happened like even when Josh throws the papers and the freeze frame happens that feels like a level of violence that was shocking and that actually the first time I watched it I thought, "Ooh that's how he gets the cut. It's like one of the papers cuts him on the face." And I thought that was it. But the fact that it then gets into hand-to-hand combat was really surprising and there's one thing if the two characters are right next to each other and there's almost, you know it's almost inevitable but the fact that...

RICHARD: We had to walk...

HRISHI: ...you had to circle the desk.

RICHARD: We had to walk towards it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: You know it's written so that there's got to be a cut and so I guess there's got to be a fight, so I understand it from that level.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: But it always popped out at me as being a little odd.

HRISHI: To me it definitely stretches the constraints of believability. That it would actually get to...

JOSH: That they'd come to blows.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: Until this current White House. You can see...

HRISHI: Sure.

RICHARD: You can see fist fights. You know. Just Scaramucci whatever the hell his name is. You can see him like you now bumping people in the hallway.

JOSH: He only had an 11-day window though.

RICHARD: Yeah. And the 10 days he was there. Palmer got kicked out for over-doing the violence.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean between these characters it feels like well-placed sentences is a bigger weapon than the fist.

RICHARD: Well I think it elevated beyond that, it's still weird.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: I think it elevated to the point where it's understandable but a more accidental way of getting physical might have helped that.

HRISHI: You know even when you're just pretend fighting with your friends or something like that and you don't have to make it look real and it's not real your body has a biological response you know your blood kind of gets going and your hackles get raised. Did you have to do any damage control with Bradley Whitford you know before and after the scene just to be like, "Alright, this is all in the name of the game. Everything's fine."

RICHARD: Brad and I have known each for other a long time and we've had our conflicts.

JOSH: Hmm

RICHARD: You know we love each other like brothers but we hate each other like brothers. So I don't know if we did that and I think it was good to vent a little bit I think he enjoyed that you know I mean I think one of the reasons why they did the fight at all was because I think they were taking advantage of the fact that we had friction. At that particular time, we probably had a little more than normal.

JOSH: Would this be professional friction or personal friction?

RICHARD: Well they spill into each other if you take your profession personally. Brad and I have talked about it many times since. Once with Martin in Washington, D.C. we had a long talk about you know how sometimes we bring out the worst in each other but sometimes we bring out the best and it's because I've known him, he was a roommate of my brother's since college. And you treat people that become kind of family differently.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: No, I don't think we had a you know tea after the fight. And I don't think we needed to. I think we both kept it within the realm of what was required and that worked. I thought Brad was great in that scene. I do have to say that in this episode, is it this episode? Yeah. With Josh and Mary. That scene when Will says to Kate at the Gala whatever the hell that is with all those circular shots of Alex's and hanging lightbulbs.

JOSH: He likes to revolve.

RICHARD: He likes to revolve when not a lot is happening.

JOSH: Right.

RICHARD: [Unintelligible] said that to me once that a director's job is to make things that aren't that interesting interesting.

JOSH: An extension of Tommy Schlamme's credo.

RICHARD: Right. Not that what Debora wrote wasn't interesting, but it wasn't the most important elements of the...so he likes to create camera movement which noticeably I did none of in my episode.

JOSH: [laughter]

RICHARD: And regrettably. Then the camera comes to a relative halt when Will says to Kate, "Can we just stand here, pretend to be talking and not." And then the following, you know what is it, 20 seconds?

JOSH: It's 40 seconds.

RICHARD: Is it 40?

JOSH: Yeah.

RICHARD: See time flies. That was just a great scene. I really enjoyed that.

JOSH: Thanks Richard. We had fun filming that.

RICHARD: And that was a surprise to the characters.

JOSH: Rare for the *West Wing* to take that long of a silent pause.

HRISHI: Tell us about your scenes with Senator Rafferty played by Mel Harris.

RICHARD: First of all, she was just really good.

HRISHI: Did you know each other before?

RICHARD: No, no and I had forgotten that she was in it when I saw it. And I went, "Oh, she's great. This will be fun to watch."

JOSH: I've always wanted to work with her.

RICHARD: Really?

JOSH: Turns out I have. No, I'm being you.

RICHARD: Oh. Again, I thought it was great the way it was setup. You thought they were having a tryst or love affair of some kind:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

SENATOR RAFFERTY: You think we rushed into this?

TOBY: Maybe.

SENATOR RAFFERTY: You sorry that we did?

TOBY: I am not actually.

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: I loved those scenes. I thought she was great. I thought it was a great mystery set up in that you don't reveal who she is until much later in the episode but there's this kind of bond that they have:

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

TOBY: If you didn't do what you do, what would you do?

SENATOR RAFFERTY: Medicine probably. That's a lie. I'd grow apples. I'd run an apple orchard and cider mill and I'd be fat as all get out.

TOBY: Sometimes I think what if I was at UNICEF or United Way pulling together the AIDS fight or back in New York giving the public-school system a round would that be a more effective use of my 24 hours. Not this. Not pushing on the ocean.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's a great line.

RICHARD: Yeah. And the fact that the two of them are bonding over the futility of their efforts I thought it was a love affair of sorts. It was kind of a sad alone night of two people on the road somewhere. It was beautifully written, and Mel Harris was just phenomenal I thought.

JOSH: Doesn't she say at one point something like, "Never ask a woman if she wants to get together and talk."

RICHARD: No, yeah.

HRISHI: Never call a woman...

RICHARD: We need to talk...

HRISHI: And say we need to talk.

JOSH: I see. Is that bad? I thought, "Wait a minute, I didn't know that."

RICHARD: Toby says, "Duly noted." Well it usually means you have to break up.

JOSH: Break up. Yeah.

RICHARD: I think is what the point is.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Did it take a while to find that dynamic between the two of you or was it pretty instant?

RICHARD: I don't have a lot of memory of it. I'd imagine it was pretty instant and if you take in her disposition at the bar and the way she listened I would imagine it was immediate. There are certain actors you just start working with and it just clicks.

JOSH: And Richard has chemistry with everyone.

RICHARD: How come it never happened between us? I can't figure that out.

JOSH: No. "No Exit". That's chemistry. It's combustible.

RICHARD: Combustible energy yeah.

JOSH: Sure.

RICHARD: I don't know if you meant that or not but that's very kind.

JOSH: I did.

RICHARD: Well thank you.

JOSH: And it was.

RICHARD: Thank you.

HRISHI: Richard thanks so much for joining us for this episode.

RICHARD: My pleasure.

HRISHI: And we're going to talk to you more in our next episode, talking about "A Good Day" which you directed.

RICHARD: Ok.

JOSH: That does it for another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*. Thank you for listening. And thanks to Debora Cahn for joining us.

DEBORA: It was a pleasure.

HRISHI: And if you miss Debora Cahn in your life now that the *West Wing* is over you can see her work in *Homeland* and she's also written on the new show *Fosse/Verdon*.

JOSH: Love that show. And they do like to use, they've got a little 18 years left, 15 minutes left. It's a little bit *West Wing-y*, the chyrons.

DEBORA: It is.

JOSH: I like that.

DEBORA: It's true.

HRISHI: If you want to leave a comment for us or for DEBORA you can do so on the *West Wing Weekly* website which is thewestwingweekly.com. You can tweet at us, but Debora is not on twitter so she's not going to see it.

DEBORA: Awww.

JOSH: Thanks to Nick Song, Margaret Miller and Zack McNees who is with you Debora Cahn even as we record, right?

DEBORA: Hey he's right here, we're hanging out.

JOSH: Look at him, our man on the road. Thanks to all three of them for their work on the show. *The West Wing Weekly* remains a proud member of Radiotopia which is itself a cornucopia of fabulous podcasts. You can find out more information about those podcasts at radiotopia.fm.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

DEBORA & RICHARD: What's next?

[Outro Music]