

The West Wing Weekly
6.17: "A Good Day"
Guest: Richard Schiff

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Today we're talking about "A Good Day." It's episode 17 from season 6.

JOSH: It was written by Carol Flint. It was directed by Richard Schiff. And it first aired on March 2, 2005. That's a really easy month to pronounce. March.

HRISHI: [chuckle] Coming up later in this episode we are going to be joined once again by Richard Schiff. A continuation from our conversation with him last episode to tell us about his experience directing this one.

JOSH: Double dose. Schiff-Schiff. Pizza-pizza.

HRISHI: Humber, cumber.

JOSH: [chuckle]

HRISHI: Boutros Boutros

JOSH: Ghali.

HRISHI: [laughs] Here's what happens in this episode, according to NBC: "Congressman Santos masterminds a plot to pass the president's stem cell bill while the Republicans aren't looking. A group of middle school children who are part of the "Future Leaders for Democracy" visit the White House and seek out Toby to discuss the voting age. And Kate has to deal with an impending invasion of Canada."

JOSH: Mm-hm.

HRISHI: Let me start right off by saying, this is an episode among season 6 episodes, that is beloved by *West Wing* watchers.

JOSH: Heh, they're wrong.

HRISHI: [chuckles] Well, according to the statistical ranking of *West Wing* episodes based on IMDb votes...

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: This episode ranks third among season 6 episodes.

JOSH: Really?

HRISHI: I was surprised by that too...

JOSH: I find that surprising.

HRISHI: Here's my theory.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: The Santos stem cell subterfuge subplot...

JOSH: Well said.

HRISHI: Is so stupendous that it surpasses all other sides of this story.

JOSH: Mm-hm. Well, let me ask you quickly, a question about that. Because this feels to me like an episode comprised of multi-plots that don't quite gel, to me.

HRISHI: No, they definitely don't.

JOSH: I do enjoy the sort of thriller aspect of the great Democratic sleepover.

HRISHI: When they turn into werewolves.

JOSH: Right. Exactly.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I don't understand, maybe there's a simple explanation, as has happened before. The initial time when the vote is called off is as they are walking in for the vote, or, in fact, Santos has walked in already and then makes a quick exit and says, "Haffley has cancelled the vote." Right?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Why...

HRISHI: Can't he do it again?

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Yeah. I don't know.

JOSH: Okay, then absent a simple explanation for that, that plot line falls flat for me. I want to experience the moment as the Democrats are, and in fact, Cliff Calley does at the end, it's kind of a big gotcha moment. It feels great. But I don't quite understand why Haffley didn't see that mob of Democrats and cancel the vote again.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: There's definitely a piece missing for us to understand as an audience, "Oh, they got 'em, they're screwed now." There could have been an issue of optics where maybe the press wasn't covering the walk in the first time, but the second time the Democrats had tipped off and there were a gaggle of reporters watching this exultation of Democrats enter the chamber and you could realize that Haffley's hand has been pressured in a way, press-wise, which is going to look bad for him...[cross-talk]

HRISHI: [cross-talk] Right, right.

JOSH: ...to see a mass of Congresspeople walking in to support a bill and to have him call off the vote. It needed something. Something for me to understand, "Ah, this is why..." [cross-talk]

HRISHI: [cross-talk] This is check-mate.

JOSH: Yeah, exactly. This is why this is the coup de grâce, this is why there is no way out for Haffley.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Instead, I just kept thinking, "Why doesn't he just run in and say, 'We're not going to vote.'"

HRISHI: Yeah.

[scratch record sound effect]

HRISHI: Hello, we're interrupting our own episode, from the future, after we've finished this discussion because I have some more information.

JOSH: [laugh] Ten million gigawatts!

HRISHI: [chuckle] That's right, so here's what I've learned since we recorded our discussion. Two things: I'll let you know that we are no closer to an actual answer but I have a little bit more data. There's one thing that Margaret found on House.gov, the United States House of Representatives website. There's a line that Cliff Calley says, just off hand says, "Doing the rule now," when they're about to take the vote. And the rule that they are talking about is this here. It says, "The consideration of a measure may be governed by a rule, which must be passed by the House that sets up the particulars of debate for a specific bill, how much time will be allowed for debate, whether amendments can be offered, and other matters." And so one possibility is that when they set up the rule for the vote when they come around the second time, the rule has been set in such a way that when the Democrats show up in force, there's nothing that they can do to undo it.

JOSH: It's too late.

HRISHI: It's too late. Yes.

JOSH: Which we intuited that that had to be the situation for that plot to pay off. I think I'll still stand by my criticism that they should have made it clearer to people as ignorant as I.

HRISHI: Right, that definitely wasn't made super clear. But then, here is a conflicting piece of information.

JOSH: Uh-oh.

HRISHI: Thanks to Eli Attie, I got to speak with somebody who knows House rules very, very well. In fact, I don't know if you remember, but there's a time in *The West Wing* where Josh tells them to do some complicated things to buy them some time.

[West Wing Episode 3.04 excerpt]

JOSH: Tell them to call the minority leader's office, tell them we need to stage an exhibition.

DONNA: Will he know how that works?

JOSH: There's a rule against exhibitions on the House floor. He'll have one of our members bring a poster on the floor, another one of our members will object, and the chair has to rule, followed by a vote of the full House, and it will buy twenty minutes.

DONNA: Ok.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: When they were writing that, this is the person who they called to get advice about what kind of nonsense they could throw in to buy some time. So this is somebody who has worked for Congress and knows about this stuff. He declined to be identified.

JOSH: Mmmm, what's his name again?

HRISHI: [chuckle] But he said, "The Speaker has a great deal of control of the House floor schedule and can put things on and take things off, usually with caucus support, but does control things. And as long as he or she is not troubled by the optics"—just as you said—"they can announce a bill, remove it, start it, remove it. It's one of their true powers."

JOSH: Ok. So I guess we don't have a real resolution here.

HRISHI: Right, exactly. It's not made explicitly clear, maybe it is the optics, maybe it is the rule. So, more information, unfortunately no firm answer.

JOSH: Hmm. I wish they had approached it where you know, Haffley came out and says, "I'm just going to cancel the vote again," and they we see a bank of reporters and we kind of see him caught like a deer in the headlights, something like that. It would have been a little bit more to the caper, altogether, if they had made it an optics issue.

HRISHI: Exactly. If Cliff says, "Well you could do that, but here comes the press right now."

JOSH: Right. And you and I also discussed off-mic, but didn't mention when we had our conversation that there's a story, and we can link to an article about it, and I'm looking at the headline here, "Blair's Whips Fooled by West Wing Plot."

HRISHI: That's right! This same move was used in real life in Parliament.

JOSH: How 'bout that. Here's a bit, "The television series *The West Wing* about the life and times of a fictional US president was the inspiration for the "rebellion by stealth" that humbled Tony Blair and his Chief Whip, Hilary Armstrong.

"Slumped in front of the television on Sunday night, one of the leaders of the revolt watched with growing interest as Democrats won a key vote on stem cell research by pretending not to be around." And apparently, this is what they emulated and it worked!

HRISHI: Yeah, they hid until they called the vote. [chuckles] Ok, our amendment is done and now we are going to leave the future and go back to the past, which for people listening to this, is the present.

[sound effect]

HRISHI: That aside, that part is like they are pulling a heist, it's kind of like *The West Wing's* version of a heist movie. Where they gather the team together, they lay out their plan, and you know, you get their banter in the back room before they go off for one final job together. That plot line is the reason why, I think, this episode ranks so highly among season 6 episodes with viewers.

JOSH: I suspect you're right.

HRISHI: Because I can't imagine that it's for the other plot lines in this episode which are kind of nothing burgers to me. We have the Canadian invasion which centers around a dispute between hunters and the stakes are so low that even Kate Harper, who is actually the person who has to manage it, is flabbergasted.

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

KATE: Do we even have a map of Canada?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: She's like, "We're in the situation room, we are talking about this, this is crazy!" And, I agree. [laughs] It's kind of crazy, but also in the end it's all fine, nothing happens, and it's a little bit unclear, I don't know, the rise and the fall of it, I don't know is there an arc in there? Has anybody learned anything? I don't really feel like they have.

JOSH: No, it was kind of a blurred resolution altogether. Get a bullhorn, call off hunting season a week early. Which seemed to me, itself might cause more of an incident, like that probably... [cross talk]

HRISHI: [cross talk] [chuckles] Right.

JOSH: [cross talk] ...would have really riled people up. It might have actually provoked the whole thing into becoming something bigger, but I guess we're meant to believe that it just defused the situation.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think you're right. What about all of those people who have planned vacations, who are going to show up for the last weekend or something like that.

JOSH: Sure, and I guess there are probably hunters' rights issues, there's a hunting season, what do you mean you're calling it off?

HRISHI: Right, I mean there are tourism issues, you know there are economics of those local places. I was just thinking about that story line and the Nobel gala and forgot for a second about the voting age discussion between the kids and Toby, which I actually really enjoyed.

JOSH: Hm.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I actually found the issue and issues revolving around voting age very interesting.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I liked the idea of a group of young, politically motivated kids, who are adamant about being heard, that don't want just the nickel and dime tour of the White House and want to be heard.

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

CODY: We're a political group. Did you even read our materials?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I liked the idea of Toby, who obviously is not a big fan of kids and doesn't even want to spend the ten minutes that have been assigned to him early in the episode to spend with children, actually sees something in these kids, and maybe particularly in that lead kid, and then he takes them seriously. I think there's a great moment in the Roosevelt Room, when he asks the kid to sit down and says, "The meeting is yours," and you just kind of see a smile break out on this kid's face for the first time. He's being taken seriously, he's not being talked down to, and he's going to get his moment. So, there's a lot of things I like about it. I thought it suffered a little bit, as some of the rest of the episode does as well, from the words almost coming too easily. The words that are put in these kid's mouths, these sort of blocks of dialogue, that I feel almost came too easily. Like they're a little bit overly precocious. There's another scene, which I felt kind of paralleled this, when Cliff Calley and C.J. are playing the roles of Cliff Calley and Haffley.

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

CLIFF: *'Everything's a game with you,' I say, 'even research that could save millions of lives.'*

C.J.: *'Stem cells not a game,' thus speaketh Haffley.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I thought that dialogue too, felt fully fledged in a way where you want to see the actors to be finding the words rather than having these big dialogue meat sandwiches just ready in their mouths.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: There's just some of the dialogue was too easy.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's come up before. In this season we've talked about it and maybe in the last season as well. There's like a smarty-pants-ness that really doesn't need extra decoration. You don't need, "speaketh" to make these characters smart.

JOSH: Yeah, and it's a fine line, I'm not arguing for a dumber *West Wing*. I love the fact that it celebrates intellect and I love that this show celebrates language, but it is a fine line and sometimes it veers over. And when it does veer over it's clunky.

HRISH: Yeah, I agree with you about the scene about C.J. and Cliff, but I actually found the kids really compelling and believable. And I thought their performances were great and I thought their dialogue worked. I believed them as the kinds of kids who would be this riled up and passionate and get to this point, I also thought they would be so hyper-articulate, that they would be that precocious that they would speak that way. I bought it.

JOSH: Perhaps so. I thought the kids were good, I thought the dialogue for the most part was good. I guess that for me, it was a matter of occasionally veering over the edge and just having the arguments and these really articulate responses too at the ready.

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

CODY: *What about children as young as 12 get tried for crimes as adults? So, I'm mature enough to face sentencing as a full citizen but not to vote?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Maybe it's just the slightest difference in performance, I would have liked them finding the words a little bit more. It's one of those things that, as an actor, I deal with, every actor deals with. And is an interesting, technique-wise, an argument sometimes for not being 100% solid on your lines, altogether.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: I've heard actors say, "I'd like to be about 70% there, so that like a normal human being, I'm a little bit finding the words as I speak them, rather than speaking chunks of fully formed dialogue that appear to have been in my head.

HRISHI: Yeah, I know. I wish I knew my lines in real life 100%.

JOSH: [chuckles] Yes, as do I.

HRISHI: I wish I could get to 70%, honestly [laughs]. I imagine that those kids had practiced this argument. They were so used to being shot down that they had thought and debated and rethought and repositioned themselves to parry every single attack that might come their way,

that by the time they are having these discussions with Toby, everything comes out fully formed just because they already have it ready to go. They don't have to find the words.

JOSH: That is a fair point. It's almost like a debate team that's ready, "Let's do this." [cross talk]

HRISHI: [cross talk] Exactly.

JOSH: [cross talk] We're ready, we know what the arguments against us are going to be and we know what our counter-arguments are. So I do buy that. Just for me, sometimes, it stepped over the line. I also loved the moment when Toby, having promised, "I'll do you one better," and then just mentioning it to the president, Toby then just sort of casually, as the president walks into the press conference, says:

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

TOBY: If you're in the mood, there's a young man in the back you might wanna call on.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I loved that. And it wasn't a hard press, you know Bartlet, being Bartlet, is going to find the time to call on the kid. And then I liked their interaction and that the kid had the balls to ask a follow-up question.

HRISHI: I know!

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: That's not something that a responsible parent would choose to do. Yeah...

CODY: A follow-up, sir. Do you think we'd have such a large deficit if children were allowed to vote?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love it!

JOSH: And that's wonderful, that's the kind of chills moment that is classic *West Wing*. I loved it. And I liked, actually, that the president, he had to find his response in the moment, which was, "That sounds like something that is worthy of consideration." And I liked that moment. That moment felt spontaneous to me.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah, I loved that he had the balls to go one further too. It's just never enough. [cross talk] And they already built that into the character, that he is just is that tenacious.

JOSH: [cross talk] Fantastic.

HRISHI: But I am totally with you about C.J. and Cliff. I actually found that scene a little annoying because, the part where it annoyed me, is when C.J. sort of turns up the acting and starts to get in character and is not just practicing what they are going to say but actually emoting a little, and I thought this is getting a little too big.

JOSH: Yes, it's a multi-level issue; it's layered. Not only is the dialogue too easy for them, but they are pretending to be other people. They're enacting a dialogue and that dialogue looks like, "Hey, let's do that thing we rehearsed earlier where you play you and I'm Haffley." It's like, "Wow, that really came to them [snap] like that."

HRISHI: Yes, and like you said, she's not just acting and saying the words of Haffley, she's also narrating her own dialogue, like she's giving herself [inaudible due to laughing].

JOSH: [laughing] Yeah. It's a little too much.

HRISHI: Yeah. And it's interesting, so I spoke to Richard already, you had to run off to shoot your final episode of *The Big Bang Theory*, so I'm excited for you to hear our conversation. Because he had some pretty sharp words, himself. I think it's not unfair to say that he's not a huge fan of this episode. Despite having directed it. Let's talk about some of the stuff that we did love from the stem cell vote heist.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: How about the dude from Arkansas? Did you hear his line? At one point when I was first watching this episode a few months ago, I took a screen shot and I posted it on Twitter. Because it was soon after Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez had mentioned that the rent was too high in D.C. for her to afford an apartment.

JOSH: I thought of the same thing.

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

CLIFF: So the rumor's true, you really do sleep in your office.

ARKANSAS CONGRESSMAN: Can't afford D.C. rent on this salary.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I thought, "Hey, look. *The West Wing* predicted a lot of things." Oh! By the way, also, speaking of new, Democratic congresspeople, Representative Ayanna Pressley, who is a Congresswoman from Massachusetts, earlier this year, in March of 2019, introduced legislation to lower the voting age, from 18 to 16.

JOSH: Hmm.

HRISHI: I'm reading from an article here on Boston.com, it says, "Pressley cited youth-led political activism on issues from gun control to climate change as one of the reasons for her proposal. She herself attended and spoke at the Youth Justice Rally last month on Boston Common, during which students called for increased investment in youth jobs and education." As you may know, the amendment didn't go forward, but again, it was timely. I mean the reasons that these kids are interested in it are still true, and if anything, they are even more pressing. Reasons for climate change are amplified, and school shootings are something that *The West Wing* wasn't dealing with, but we are now. And these are all reasons why I loved this part of the episode. Because I felt like it took these things and now it feels even more relevant.

JOSH: Yeah, I'm absolutely with you there. As it happens, just last night I was talking to my son, who is 17. My father, who is 80, had a little mutual birthday party we had for them because their birthdays are just a couple days apart. And my son was wondering aloud how it could be that climate change is not the number one political priority everywhere, particularly in the United States these days. And I suggested to him that he ponder the voting age and the, maybe, median age of our Representatives and that the answer might lie therein. And I think you are absolutely right; he's very concerned about climate change and the kind of world that he's going to live in and he's also a kid who's been on lock-down twice in high school.

HRISHI: Has he really?

JOSH: Mmm-hmm.

HRISHI: As drills?

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: No?

JOSH: No, two incidents—if that’s the correct word—that proved not immediately dangerous, but that were traumatizing to say the least, just the same, because the kids were on real lock-down and it took a very long time to find out that they were not in immediate danger.

HRISHI: Oh my God.

JOSH: This is just a reality that faces our kids and why we see a lot of young people finding their voices, which is great. Until they are 18, they don’t currently have a way to express that with a vote.

HRISHI: Yeah. There are two principles in this episode that I think were well said and I think people would do well to pay attention to. One is the President saying,

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Well, as adults we’re certainly not shouldering our responsibility and your generation has a vested interest.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And again, if you don’t want to get to the point where you are interested in lowering the voting age, just the principle of, as adults, what do you owe the generation below you and maybe two generations or three generations, depending on some of the people in office. And the other one was something that I was thinking about after Santos’s discussion with the Arkansas Congressman. What did you think about their stem cell morality conversation?

JOSH: I was very disappointed in it, if we are talking about the middle of the night during the sleepover conversation. And it was one of those...again, I thought it was a bit of one of those hack moments for a show that is as good as *The West Wing* which is that they are in this middle of the night, tête-à-tête at the very beginning of the discussion. [chuckles] They’re not deeply into it, in fact there’s even a moment where Santos tells us something that we know already, that’s already been stated early in the episode:

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

SANTOS: If not used in research, these cells would be thrown away, and there would be no outcry from Congress.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And you kind of see, almost in Arkansas’ face, “Oh, wait a minute, well, that’s a good point.” And I’m like, “Are you kidding me?”

HRISHI: Which is the first thing we hear from Kristin Chenoweth in the cold open, right?

JOSH: Right, I’m saying, as a viewer what we already know, you’re telling me that these people have been considering the legislation and are on the verge of a vote, they haven’t processed that yet? And you see it play on his face, it’s kind of like, “Huh. Well that’s a good point.” I’m like, “No way! Not this conversation...” [cross talk]

HRISHI: [cross talk] Like, after they've already had one vote scheduled, it's not even on the eve of the vote, it's round two.

JOSH: Yeah. It made me lose...either you lose faith in the program at that point or you go, "Arkansas dude, you're not taking this too seriously because you haven't read the cover page on this piece of legislation."

HRISHI: Here's the exchange between Annabeth and Cliff at the beginning. She says,
[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

ANNABETH: Isn't this funding limited to genetic material that is being thrown away?

CLIFF: Yes, which is why we have enough Republicans to make it close. A dozen...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yup.

HRISHI: They already have Republicans on board because of the fact that these are stem cells that are otherwise going to be discarded. So, other people know what's going on.

JOSH: Right. I often lauded the Sorkin years for being a step or two ahead of the audience, this seventeen steps behind doesn't work.

HRISHI: Mmm-hm. But here's the thing that I liked about it. This is only touched upon on screen, but I really liked this idea:

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

SANTOS: And you know, if it's a moral call, and I, I agree it is. What about the morality of dragging our heels when we could be alleviating suffering?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And that's the line that I really appreciated from this episode. In debates where religion is used as this sort of fulcrum between two sides of a potentially moral issue, I was thinking about how much it rests on just life or death. There's kind of like a binary aspect to things, whether you're talking about capital punishment, or you're talking about abortion, or you're talking about any number of issues, I'm surprised that there isn't more discussion within a religious context about suffering. About the quality of life. And I was thinking that maybe because you have things like the story of Job, where suffering is meant to be part of existence. There isn't supposed to be any kind of relief from suffering that God owes you.

JOSH: No, sometimes religion frames suffering as ennobling...

HRISHI: Right, exactly, yeah. So maybe that's why that there's some built in hair shirt quality to life that allows people to just go along with letting suffering exist in the world as opposed to addressing it with a kind of moral concern, the way that they have the same kind of moral impetus for questions of life or death.

JOSH: Yes, well said. I think you're right that in that conversation they were just starting to put one toe towards the juicy, interesting, uncomfortable aspect of the conversation, that it is a sanctity of life issue, but do you apply sanctity of life simply to an embryo or to millions of people who are suffering as well. I mean, that's an uncomfortable and interesting conversation that they didn't quite get into. The battle wasn't quite joined, but the specter of it was raised.

HRISHI: Yeah. I appreciated the specter; it gave me things to think about. But it would have been nice to see them think about a little further too, as opposed to get back to where we had started in the cold open in the Annabeth / Cliff version of a telladonna.

JOSH: Right, that's not an issue that was going to be resolved during this episode, but finding them in the middle of the night or morning, discussing it in hushed tones, I would have liked them to be further into it.

HRISHI: Yeah, I hear you. But I still appreciated it.

JOSH: Yes. And apparently there's been, I've been reading up a little bit, there's been a bit of progress, I guess, legislatively. I think during the Bush years, which is I guess when this episode would have aired, President Bush had restricted stem cell research to a finite number of lines. Sixty or so stem cell lines that could be used, and President Obama I think, removed that restriction.

HRISHI: Yeah. Huh. Obviously, I am not someone who knows a lot about religion, but I was just thinking, besides the book of *Job*, there's also the story of Jesus and the lepers. And that is an example of, I mean there are examples of Jesus alleviating the suffering of the living.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Maybe this is already happening, but I wonder if there is an argument to be made for the miracle of what can happen with stem cell research, I don't want to draw the point out too far, but [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] No, this is interesting too. Because me, I'm certainly no expert, particularly when we get to the New Testament, but I think, in having contact with the lepers, Jesus was technically breaking the law of the Old Testament. So I think there is a parallel there about going into a questionable legal area in order to alleviate pain and suffering. I feel like we should have a religious and a medical expert on.

HRISHI: Yeah. Any theologians or political historians who want to tell us about times when stem cell research and stories from Abrahamic religions were united, please let us know. I'd be really interested in learning about that.

JOSH: The whole stem cell discussion also reminded me that I have banked somewhere, cord blood, that's one type of stem cell, the umbilical cord blood that can, I think, be used in certain situations, both for the child and for the mother. And once a year, I get the reminder that I've just re-upped and I'm storing it somewhere. God forbid I should need it, I have no idea how to get it. [chuckles] I'm going to have to run back to my house and go, "Where the hell is that bill? Who's got my cord blood?" Can I just point out one really weird moment, early in the episode?

HRISHI: Yeah, please do.

JOSH: I'm a very twitchy person, I have a lot of tics and probably a dose of OCD. And I'm not, I think, generally particularly twitchy on camera; maybe when I'm playing someone else I get less twitchy. But there is a shot, that is not primarily of me, but about three-and-a-half minutes in where my eyes are just bugging out. I must have been tired or something, because I get twitchier when I'm tired, and I don't know how they chose to leave this moment in, but my eyes are bugging out of my head. I just do like a multiple eye twitch and then I open them really wide and it's just a weird, weird, vulnerable moment for Will Bailey/Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Wow! I didn't notice it, I've gotta go back.

JOSH: Maybe we can GIF it. It's about three-and-a-half minutes in and it's right after Donna says, "We have the votes."

HRISHI: That's great. Should we talk about President Bartlet and Dr. Takahashi?

JOSH: Yes, also a weird kind of plot without any real payoff. I didn't quite get that. I also want to throw out there that as a result of my working on *The Big Bang Theory*, and particularly during this final season, I got to work with a trio of Nobel Laureates myself. Kip Thorne, George Smoot, and Frances Arnold. So that was a lot of fun.

HRISHI: Wow, in what capacity?

JOSH: They played themselves. Sheldon and Amy, the characters on *The Big Bang Theory*, are potentially up for a Nobel Prize and during a little dinner we meet all three of them. And they all have issues with Sheldon.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: It's funny. It's just fun to meet such accomplished people, but it's also fun to see them enter the world of doing a four camera sit-com. [laughing] It's kind of a fish out of water thing. All though, all three of them did very well. They all got their laughs.

HRISHI: According to C.J.:

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

C.J.: Those Nobel Laureates can party.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Uh yeah, I watched them pretend to party and they did very well. [laughing] I can't say that we went out afterwards for real drinks, but they were good at pretending.

HRISHI: Well what did you think about this part of the episode?

JOSH: I thought it had unrealized potential. You know, in the end, it was another issue, or another set of issues, that didn't get deeply explored. The differences in their approach to economics, it was just kind of lightly touched on and I thought that they either needed to go deeper or be played for greater comedy. I didn't quite get the value of this subplot.

HRISHI: Yeah. To me, I thought, again, looking for what it changes in our characters, what it changes in the plot, the thing that I got most from it, though it felt like it maybe took a long time to get there, but it was the conversation afterwards that the president and Abbey have:

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

ABBEY: It's like Eisenhower.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: In what way?

ABBEY: Even though he had been a general, when he was president he couldn't do anything to control the military industrial, you know.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: [deep breath] He did one thing.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I was a little surprised that they didn't actually spell out what the one thing was that he did. But you know he addressed the nation [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] He came up with the phrase "military industrial complex," I think.

["Eisenhower's farewell address to the nation" excerpt]

EISENHOWER: "We annually spend on military security alone more than the net income of all United States corporations.

"Now this conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence—economic, political, even spiritual—is felt in every city, every State house, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet, we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications. Our toil, resources, and livelihood are all involved. So is the very structure of our society.

"In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex."

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I guess that's where, having spoon-fed us some parts of this episode, the fact that they would just leave that unsaid was a little surprising.

JOSH: Yeah, I had the same moment too. I was thinking about that speech where he kind of blasts the military-industrial complex. I couldn't really come up with something else.

HRISHI: Yeah, I figured that that was what it was and so when the president makes up his mind in that moment to then give this press conference:

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: One big regret, and here's your lede, people, is my failure to bring the budget deficit under control. I know an election cycle is warming up and no one wants to hear about budget deficits, but both sides are going to hear about them from me. That's my campaign promise.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: There's a bit of talk throughout the episode about his lame duck status and what's left for him, and I think maybe, you know, there's a very brief mention of a veto override that happened, so, there are a lot of challenges to his power; both because they don't control the House anymore, but also because he's towards the end of his second term. So I think he's looking for where he can still make a difference and this long, long conversation with Dr. Takahashi allows him to get there. Where he's like, "Oh, I still have some moves I can make."

JOSH: Some juice.

HRISHI: But I guess I do again feel a little like the board is set and we end with the board being set, as opposed to starting with the board being set and then actually seeing him do something with it. Because he just says, "That's my promise, they're going to hear about it from me." But then he doesn't actually say what he's gonna say.

JOSH: Yeah, even another line-and-a-half of dialogue and they're going out on some suggestion that he's making a stand or staking a strong position would have put that moment into something that's a little bit more [cross talk]

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah, what's something that he can say to both sides about the budget deficit that's actually going to change the campaign trail, possibly.

JOSH: Yeah, it's a sort of weak *Stella Got Her Groove Back* moment. It's just doesn't quite pay off, "You know what? He *is* having a good day. He is turning it into something." It's just that I think this episode has a lot of set-up with too paltry of a payoff.

HRISHI: Yeah. Well, my apologies to anybody who loved this episode and feels disappointed in our reaction to it, but [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] That's our job, dammit.

HRISHI: I think this is our honest read on it.

JOSH: Candid reaction.

HRISHI: So let's take a quick break, and then when we come back we'll get into my conversation with Richard Schiff [cross talk]

JOSH: [cross talk] We'll get Richard's honest read...

HRISHI: It's very honest.

[Ad break]

JOSH: And now, let's hear from Richard Schiff, whom many of you know from his work as Toby Ziegler on *The West Wing*, the television series that this podcast is about.

HRISHI: I'm here in the studio with Richard Schiff, thanks for joining us, again.

RICHARD: My pleasure, I'm worried that I'm overstaying my welcome.

HRISHI: No, this is fantastic. You can come for every episode if you want.

RICHARD: [chuckle]

HRISHI: But we'll that this double-header. So, this is the second episode that you directed, did you enjoy directing the first time and you wanted another shot at it?

RICHARD: I was always told by Tommy, and they were always asking me, "When are you going to direct? When are you going to direct?" And so I was kind of the floor coach in terms of making sure guest directors were staying on point, if you will. So I directed one, and it went okay. But what the producers were able to do the first time was make me very light in the episode previous, because you have to prep for two weeks or ten days.

HRISHI: Right. You mean you only had one or two scenes [cross talk]

RICHARD: [cross talk] Very light. I had one or two scenes in the episode before I directed the first time and only one or two scenes during the episode so that I could focus on the directing aspect of it. And in this instance, I had to do "Drought Conditions" while I was prepping and I made a very conscious choice that I am going to live in the present and the demands of "Drought Conditions" were so intense and demanding as anything I've ever done up to that point, that when the A.D.—the Assistant Director—from the episode I was going to direct started walking up to me, I would just put my hand up and go, "No." Because I was preparing literally to do the scene with C.J.in "Drought Conditions."

[West Wing Episode 6.16 excerpt]

C.J.: *Want some water?*

TOBY: *[softly] No.*

C.J.: *Scotch?*

TOBY: *[strangled laugh and sniffle] No.*

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: So I was really behind and not a hundred percent prepared for this episode when I started directing it.

HRISHI: As a director, what does prepping actually mean? What does it consist of?

RICHARD: Well, not only do you have to scout and look for locations, so we had to go to City Hall, where we shot all of those Congressional scenes.

HRISHI: Los Angeles City Hall?

RICHARD: Los Angeles City Hall, and you'll notice that in any movie about Congress, that it's Los Angeles City Hall because it looks the most like Congress. But it is also going through the script and looking at it from an angle which I'm not as used to and figuring out beats and blocking. I don't like to block actors until they bring it themselves, but you have to have an idea of where things are. And the Situation Room, I've never been in it as an actor. It was the first time I was in that room. So I had to gauge that whole thing. You have to cast, you spend hours and hours looking at actors. So, there's a lot to prep. And then there's also, as Debora Cahn established in our last talk, I like to give notes to writers; and I had a lot in this episode.

HRISHI: This episode was written by Carol Flint.

RICHARD: Carol Flint. And I had a lot. And I spent a long, long day with her on the script, out of which, a couple commas got changed.

HRISHI: [chuckles]

RICHARD: And that was it. So, I have to admit, full disclosure, I wasn't inspired by this episode. There was elements that I do like, but it didn't initiate celebration in my creative mind.

HRISHI: So do you get a chance to go back and say, "You know, between the demands of the episode that I'm doing this week and what this particular script is, I think maybe I'm not the right director for this one. Why don't you give me a different episode later."

RICHARD: You know, we had had the talk well before this was all scheduled. You know like, "Hey, last time we did it in a way that was really helpful," and I don't think they can really switch around stuff. So I don't think there was a chance to do that, a, and b, I think my inclination is to say, "Ok, I can deal with this." And on the day when the A.D. from my directing episode would walk up to me, it wasn't like a pre-meditated, it was like an, "Oh, my God, I can't deal with that."

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: Also, Doug Ornstein was my A.D. for this one, and he had the flu. So, every time I turned around to look for him, he was in the corner half asleep, trying to retain some energy for the next phase of work that he had to do. And God bless him, he made it through it. But he was really sick. And I think I noticed that I sounded sick in this episode. I think I was very nasal just watching it this morning. So we may have had a lot of that. All of these seem to be excuses for what I think wasn't a great episode, but I don't think it was a great episode.

HRISHI: Even after watching it?

RICHARD: Oh, yeah.

HRISHI: Really? This is an episode that a lot of people really love.

RICHARD: Really?

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: That's great to hear, I might just be like, neurotically self-critical.

HRISHI: Well, I think the Congressional story line, and the kind of bait and switch, and the sort of cloak and dagger aspect of it, is really fun and exciting. And there is something kind of classically *West Wing* about it, but also it's in this new form, with Santos as part of the mix, there's something really satisfying about the sneakiness of it.

RICHARD: Well, now, when you have Mitch McConnell blocking every vote that he could lose; I certainly jumped to that when I was watching it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: Yeah. I thought it was a little easy, even though, it was built up as hard. A little bit of an easy bait and switch. But I'm glad that people like it. I'm glad that you like it. And there's a lot that I do like about it. I was going to get to that.

HRISHI: Yeah, let's get to that. What are some of the parts that you liked the most from this episode?

RICHARD: Well, I fought very hard to cast Nathan Brooks Burgess in the role of the Arkansas Congressman.

HRISHI: He's so great.

RICHARD: So great.

HRISHI: He was an actor that you knew already?

RICHARD: No, he came in and we were casting for a tiny role and he immediately caught my attention, because he carries with him an unabashed vulnerability. And that's really rare. And I immediately liked him. And I said, "Do you mind reading for this role? It's a little larger, and you might need some time to look at it." And he said, "No, of course not." And he left and then I got into a fight of sorts with the casting director, Laura Schiff—who's unrelated and is great—but she insisted and the producers agreed that he'd had nothing on his resume. He was very inexperienced.

HRISHI: And you sort of made him this offer to audition for this other part without consulting them first?

RICHARD: Well, I couldn't let him go without asking him to do this. And I think it's kind of my prerogative to do that [chuckles]; I didn't know that I'd get a discussion over it. You know, it was just a read. But they were really like, "No, no, no, he's not ready, he's not ready. He doesn't have the experience. He's great, but he doesn't have the experience." And I go, "Let him read." "No, he's not right." "Just let him read." So, he did read, and he was great. And he had the quality I was looking for. He was somebody who had a real moral dilemma and had no politics in him, no gamesmanship. He was literally a rookie, and young, and there to do the right thing.

And he's the only one in the episode who's not talking about advantages and angles and secrecy and tricks. He's there to vote.

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

SANTOS: Got your voting card?

ARKANSAS CONGRESSMAN: Right here.

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: He's there and he never leaves his office. You know, and it's adorable and moving. And I thought he was perfect for it, so I had to fight to get them to offer the role to him.

HRISHI: Yeah, he's great.

RICHARD: The kids, I also had to pull teeth to get those two lead kids, because they were a little older than I think Carol wanted. She wanted them to be young.

HRISHI: How old were they?

RICHARD: I don't know.

HRISHI: They seem like they may be fourteen or something. [cross talk] Thirteen, fourteen, something like that.

RICHARD: [cross talk] Yeah, yeah.

HRISHI: I can't imagine them being younger.

RICHARD: Me either. I don't understand that discussion to this day. [chuckles]

HRISHI: Do you actually read with those kids, when they came into audition?

RICHARD: I don't know, I probably did.

HRISHI: Cody Zucker who is played by Seth Adkins and Landry Allbright who played the girl, Elisha.

RICHARD: And that was a nice storyline. I liked that; I liked the storyline.

HRISHI: Was it tough, as a director, to have even these many scenes with these characters? Because it's not nothing, it's not like Toby pops in for a couple lines, it's a real scene.

RICHARD: I often hear actor/directors, you know, John Turturro talked about it recently. You know, you're schizophrenic, you put on one hat, you put on the other hat. It wasn't too difficult.

HRISHI: Can you direct a scene that you are in?

RICHARD: Yeah.

HRISHI: Or do you have to lean on the cinematographer and other people?

RICHARD: Well, I always do that. I would always have to at that point. I always leaned on the director of photography for sure. But, I don't remember that being all that difficult. I wasn't pleased that I had so many scenes, and there weren't a lot, but there were still more than the first time around. I enjoyed working with those kids and Kristin Chenoweth—who's a doll—and that storyline had a nice payoff.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: And I loved how Seth, I loved how awkward he was. And if anything, reflected the Congressman from Arkansas a little bit. Like, in just a few years, you could be him.

HRISHI: Right.

RICHARD: Even his speech wasn't perfect diction. You know? And he was steadfast and kind of fierce when he needed to be. And as soon as he got an inch of what he wanted, he got a big smile on his face, and to successfully achieve what you came for is great for any character, but he handled it with the exact right amount of appreciation and joy and accomplishment. And the girl, Landry, is kind of his side-kick, which was unfortunate that she was written only as the one who kept him in check.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: But she still had really lovely moments and I loved the way she looked at him and the way she checked in with Toby. She was really pleasant. Yeah, a good storyline.

HRISHI: The two of them reminded me so much of Evan Handler and Connie Britton in season three.

RICHARD: Huh.

HRISHI: As those characters, Doug and Connie. She even has, almost an echo of Connie's lines. In those episodes, at the beginning of season three, Connie is constantly sort of jumping in after Doug says something inflammatory or really contentious.

[West Wing Episode 3.02 excerpt]

CONNIE: Doug means well, you know, and he's smart.

SAM: Connie, it seems to me your job is to wait until Doug leaves the room and then say, "What Doug really meant was..." How much they pay you for that?

CONNIE: Sometimes it's my job to say it when he's in the room.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Elisha actually says the same thing

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

CODY: We've been shuffled around; ten minutes here, ten minutes there. It's like there's a plot to keep us from discussing our agenda with anyone that matters!"

ELISHA: What Cody means is that children's suffrage is a complex issue and it...

TOBY: I, I get it. I get what he means.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: She's trying to smooth things over. I thought it was unfortunate, but also very true to life. There's a young man, especially at that age, who's just absolutely ready to be strident and forthright and there's a young woman who might end up being more concerned about smoothing out the edges for everybody. Making sure everyone's comfortable. And it's an unfortunate, but accurate depiction of reality.

RICHARD: Yeah, I just wondered about the gender. Why not switch them?

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. I think it would have been a more interesting dynamic there, if that had been the case, but it didn't feel false.

RICHARD: No, it didn't feel false at all. And a credit to Landry because she was so good.

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah. I loved how there is this whole discomfort around Cody. He does push too hard, but it's also only because he's pushing too hard that I think that Toby actually sees a kindred spirit in this kid. I mean, obviously, he gets the same line, "Our day is being parceled out into these meaningless ten-minute blocks."

RICHARD: Right.

HRISHI: And maybe it took that, you know, to see this guy, who's also passionate to the point of maybe making other people uncomfortable.

RICHARD: Yeah, unapologetic. No, it's a good point. And they were great. And then there was Mark Feuerstein, it was interesting to me, it was like, clearly he's there to replace Josh.

HRISHI: I loved the scenes with him and Josh, especially.

RICHARD: They were great. And I loved the little do-si-do around the desk and that Josh is sitting in the desk at the end.

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

CLIFF: Take your time. My office is your office.

JOSH: It was, in fact.

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: But the residue of the last episode, "Drought Conditions," for his character, as well as mine, I was curious, because he was an obnoxious ass [expletive deleted] in a very fun way, and very pompous and very like, "Yeah, oh wow! A job in the White House! Uh, no," he says, right? And then in this episode, he's a [cross talk] complete full team player.

HRISHI: [cross talk] He's a full team player!

RICHARD: So I'm not quite sure that I buy that. And similarly, you would expect there'd be some residue from Toby's plummet in the previous episode. If there's a way out, it would be with these kids, I think, so that's okay. But I didn't feel that residue and that's because I just watched it. But still, I don't know how much time went by either, but you like to not just throw stuff away.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: You like to have episodes bleed into each other and reflect each other a little bit more.

HRISHI: My interpretation of it, giving it as much of the benefit of the doubt as I can, but also I think there's been enough of an establishment of Cliff Calley's character and the kind of person he is, that I feel like he's a guy who once he makes the decision to [cross talk] actually back something, he really dedicates himself to it.

RICHARD: [cross talk] Yeah, that crossed my mind as well.

HRISHI: He has to be convinced that it's the right move, but once he does, like in "Drought Conditions," he's lobbying for these big businesses, but the real reason is that he has this actual moral objective that he's trying to accomplish. And that's the thing that's driving him.

RICHARD: Yeah, and the ruthlessness of the character is still self-announced.

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

C.J.: *You're going to talk him into scheduling the vote on a squash court?*

CLIFF: *And shut him out with my awesome forehand at the same time. Here's how it will go. I will say, "Oh, nice nick," squash talk, "and nice maneuver on the floor yesterday, pulling the vote."*

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: He's a lovely actor, I mean he's really fun, he's really present and he's really game and carried that whole storyline.

HRISHI: I remember his wardrobe was interesting to me. He's not dressed like a normal D.C. person. Right? In this he was wearing the dark suit and the purple tie? I think it's an interesting choice about his wardrobe, it feels like he's still dressing like a lobbyist or something like that. It almost feels like the guy on the floor of Atlantic City or something. I thought it was a neat way to kind of connect his lobbying past, you know, it was a way of having a little bit of bleed there. He's still a little bit in the clothes of the lobbyist even though now he's showing up to Congress in this form of being Legislative Director for the White House.

RICHARD: I'd love to take credit for that, but I have none. You have to mention Lyn Paolo, who's our brilliant costume designer and it might have been Mark's choice as well.

HIRSHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: And it might have been mine, but I doubt it.

HIRSHI: [chuckle]

RICHARD: Unless it's story specific, I don't think it's something that would cross my mind. I think there's too much else to do and Lyn Paolo is so good.

HIRSHI: Right. That's why you have an Emmy-winning costume—

RICHARD: Lyn Paolo, I think I did one costume fitting season one and I said, "I trust you, whatever you want to throw at me is fine." And then if I gained weight or lost weight, that's the only time I saw her. She was fantastic.

HRISHI: I want to ask you about one quick moment in this episode, which is when Santos goes into the office and it's dark and he sits on Donna.

RICHARD: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

DONNA: *[Screams, something crashes]*

SANTOS: *Oh, no, I'm sorry, I'm sorry.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I feel like that's something that could either be really funny or could not work. It's the kind of thing that could be too broad, especially in the context of something like *The West Wing*, which, has historically had had some really great slap-sticky, pratfall moments, kind of like that, that land because you're not expecting them. Was that a tricky one to find or to block?

RICHARD: I remember being in that room forever, because that room, there were many scenes in it. I remember loving Janel in that scene—and Jimmy—and I don't remember it being much of an issue. I think that once we got up to the floor that it was written well. They introduce each other awkwardly, and she's clearly a fan of sorts of Santos and they're allowed to have that moment.

[West Wing Episode 6.17 excerpt]

DONNA: *Oh, God, I didn't plan, I mean I—oh, I crashed.*

SANTOS: *You're Russell's chicken fighter.*

DONNA: *Donna Moss. You're Matt Santos.*

SANTOS: *I'm running for President. And I haven't shaken your hand.*

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: The slapstick moment works because we don't extend it, you know if Jimmy Smits and backed up because he was scared or something silly, then it wouldn't have worked. But the fact that he just sat down and accepted the awkwardness of it.

HRISHI: Are there things about this episode that you remember having a harder time capturing?

RICHARD: The Situation Room was hard. And that's the storyline that sticks out at me as being tough. I didn't like it. I know it's supposed to be odd, I guess.

HRISHI: It neither leans too far into the drama because the stakes are very low, and it's also not funny, exactly.

RICHARD: Not funny [cross talk]

HRISHI: [cross talk] But I think sometimes it's played for laughs.

RICHARD: Yes, I think you're right. And I didn't know what to do with that. I thought it was just filler, to be honest. I thought Mary was great. My friend Jack Conley, I got to cast as the general.

HRISHI: William O'Leary?

RICHARD: Yeah. William O'Leary, I remember seeing on Broadway and I liked him as an actor. We're making fun of Canada, which is really what the storyline was. You know? And the Canadian Ambassador pretends to never be in these intriguing circumstances and never having to slip a deal under. I just didn't really buy it. So at some point, I think I asked Josh and Mary to just react as if this guy, what game is he playing, like look at each other like, "I don't get it." This guy's just doofy. And if they did that, I don't think it made the final cut. I wanted to react honestly to how absurd I thought it was, and didn't quite get there. Although, Mary's character certainly reacted to the absurdity, every facet of it. She kind of held that storyline together. Because it was just ridiculous and it was ridiculous to her in character.

HRISHI: After you wrapped this episode, did it change your feeling about directing? I mean, after the first one you said you felt like it went well enough that you wanted to do it again. After now, having done two episodes, how are you feeling about it?

RICHARD: I didn't want to do another *West Wing*, I knew that. I didn't enjoy this process.

HRISHI: Was it mainly because of the demands of everything you had to do as an actor beforehand while prepping?

RICHARD: Well, mostly that because if you're prepared you can do anything, right? And if you're behind in preparations you never feel like you're in present time. You're always catching up, worried about the next scene you haven't fully scoped out yet.

HRISHI: Especially for a show as complicated as this is.

RICHARD: Yeah, there's no easy shoot. You know, my feelings about the show changed, you know? And I'm wondering if I was sensing, or if I already knew the storyline that was coming.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: And if they were planning on doing something that I didn't agree with. I wonder if I knew that at this point, because I know that Alex Graves had said at some point that there's a great storyline coming for you and I go, "What?" And he goes, "I can't tell you." "Why can't you tell me?" "Well, because we don't want an actor to give it away."

HRISHI: Huh.

RICHARD: And I said, "You mean, Romeo can't know that he dies?"

HRISHI: [laughing]

RICHARD: [chuckles] It was an absurd thing and immediately my hackles went up, oh, they know this is something that they know I'm not going to like.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: And I don't know if that conversation happened or if I actually knew, but I was sensing a malfunction coming in the relationship with the show.

HRISHI: Would you say that "Drought Conditions" marked some kind of ending point for you?

RICHARD: Well, it might have been written for that purpose. It might have been written to define the schism between Toby and the rest of the White House, and Toby and the campaign.

HRISHI: Right. But I guess I just mean, from your own experience with the show, you spoke so lovingly, if that's fair to say, about "Drought Conditions" and your experience making that episode that the contrast between that and your experience making this episode, I was wondering, if when you look back on the show, if you think of "Drought Conditions" as a sort of marker of okay, this is where things changed.

RICHARD: No, that was already happening. It was already happening. You know, one of the reasons I love and speak with great love for "Drought Conditions" was because Debora Cahn got Toby.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: And that was not happening on a regular basis. I think, overall, since Aaron had left and Tommy, there was a disconnect between what they were writing and how I reacted to it. I don't think, as a rule, that they really got Toby. There's a lot of lines like, "I'm irascible." Or "Toby, you're a curmudgeon." Just stating stuff that people may or may not have thought about the character, as opposed to exploring where he is in this phase of his career. And "Drought Conditions" did that fantastically.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RICHARD: But other than that, I don't think it was done.

HRISHI: Have you directed episodes of other shows that you've been on?

RICHARD: Uh, no, not that I've been on. I think you direct television, you know, if you're Alex Graves or Chris Misiano, that's what you do. You become a master at that. And you have a voice. I'm not a good enough director to bring a voice to it. I think I did with the first one because I had Eli Attie and we were collaborating. So unless you're doing your own material, or material you're very inspired or close to, it's an exercise that's unnecessary to me.

HRISHI: Is it something that you could metabolize as a form of education for your own acting?

RICHARD: I started out as a director in theater, you know, and I started out on the other side of the table. And that was very informative when I started to go on the other side of the table, because I knew, that unless I brought something that was profound that they would forget me in ten minutes. 'Cause I forgot people in ten minutes. So it informed that and it informed a lot of things in terms of making moments happen on stage or in film. But that's the extent of it. But it did make me more sympathetic to directors who come in having already blocked the scene. So after that point, when I had to do that, and realized that actors would need to change that, I ever since I've been more accommodating to directors, in that, I will go, do you need me over there to get this shot? And rarely are they willing to admit that. They'll come up with some kind of justification for [cross talk]...not even creative, just something silly, "Well, I thought he was thirsty." You know, something stupid.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Creative way.

RICHARD: So I go, "No, seriously, do you need me there for this shot?" "Yes. I was hoping to get this three-shot..." "Ok, I'll come up with a reason to cross there, you don't have to give me a reason." I used to just say, "No." [chuckles] "No, there's no reason for me to do that." Just a very singular perspective on a collaborative effort.

HRISHI: [laughing]

RICHARD: So that's helped quite a bit.

HRISHI: This is great.

RICHARD: Good.

HRISHI: Thank you so much.

RICHARD: My pleasure.

JOSH: Ok, that wraps it up for us. Thanks for listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. Thank you to Margaret Miller, Zach McNeas, and Nick Song for their help in making the show.

HRISHI: And of course, thanks to Richard Schiff for joining us again. You can follow Richard on Twitter @Richard_Schiff, he's also on Instagram @TheRichardSchiff.

JOSH: *The West Wing Weekly* remains a proud member of Radiotopia, a pupu platter of the finest podcasts in the land. You can find out more about the other shows at Radiotopia.fm.

HRISHI: We promise that you won't "poo-poo" them.

JOSH: That's right, poo-poo.

HRISHI: [chuckles] Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

RICHARD: What's next?

[Outro Music]