

The West Wing Weekly  
7.05: "Here Today"  
Guest: Richard Schiff

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: Once again you are listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I am Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today we are talking about episode 7.05, it is called "Here Today."

JOSH: It was directed by Alex Graves; it was written by Peter Noah and it first aired on October 23rd, 2005.

HRISHI: And joining us later in this episode, Richard Schiff. In this episode three things happen really. Toby gets fired from the White House in the wake of confessing that he is the leak. Ned gets fired from the Santos campaign, along with a bunch of other staffers, in the wake of continued bad polling and Ellie Bartlet gets engaged to a research colleague in the wake of getting pregnant.

JOSH: And Will becoming the new Communication Director, apparently not a thing.

HRISHI: That is a post-Toby-ergo-proctor-Will.

JOSH: [laughing] Fair enough. Look, I'm back on the show, that's a thing. Come on!

HRISHI: That's true, and you are back in the opening credits.

JOSH: Yes, I'm realizing, I must have had quite the summer break. I must have been out of *The West Wing* world for an extended period of time. I don't recall it. But that must have been strange. I also went quite a while without a pay check, which must have been a bummer.

HRISHI: [laughs] This episode starts with the end of the last episode. We get a replay.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*TOBY: I did it.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Have we ever used that device before?

HRISHI: Yes

JOSH: We've backed up a little? Ok. Cause I ... I was watching it and I was thinking, "I can't believe C.J. is reacting this way". I thought it was immediately off the moment where Toby had said "I did it" and now she is pretending he didn't even say it. [Josh and Hrishikesh laugh] This just isn't credible, that that is how she would act, "Let's pretend you didn't say that because I am dumb."

HRISHI: [laughing] So, did you not figure out until Toby said 'I did it' again?

JOSH: I got wise pretty quickly [Josh and Hrishi laugh] but there was at least a nanosecond there where I thought "Well, this isn't credible."

HRISHI: It's kind of an extended "previously on" within the actual episode.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: I wondered why they didn't include this in the "previously on" and instead included it in the meat of the episode.

JOSH: I guess for dramatic purposes, they felt they wanted to ramp into it.

HRISHI: And they were able to change some things that made it feel different from the last episode. In Mr. Frost, the episode ends with some dramatic music as Toby makes his confession that he did it. Here the music gets taken away. And so, it feels a little ... it just has a different feeling. And instead there is some sound design, I don't know if you noticed this, I had to turn it up a little bit. I thought I heard it. So instead of music there is ... it sounds like wind blowing really hard outside of C.J.'s office.

JOSH: Mmm.

HRISHI: Or she has the AC blasting.

JOSH: I didn't notice that.

HRISHI: I love the way this episode is made.

JOSH: As do I. There is a very light touch to it. Given the dramatic import of what we are learning and seeing unfold, I thought in the writing, the acting and the direction there is kind of a nice, subtle approach.

HRISHI: We talked about Alex Graves directing style in "The Mommy Problem" and how he just pulled out all the stops and I feel like he took the opposite approach in this episode and I love it.

JOSH: Yes, we get multiple scenes that are in silence dialogue wise even.

HRISHI: Yeah. The whole episode is about, I think, containing the amount of information that we get. Which I think is a really smart way to let this story unfold. But everything is sort of revealed in kind of clues and half shots and in shadow and it rarely feels like we are getting the full picture. And sometimes that is done literally. We don't get the full picture and I feel like, I don't know, it felt like an incredibly beautiful, subtly made, arthouse film. It also often felt like the first third of like an artsy horror movie.

JOSH: [laughs] Right! I liked that; major things are happening in this episode. Things that pull at the DNA of what *The West Wing* and our squad of heroes, what those things are and mean to us, but the temptation to do it in an overwrought manner was resisted in a very pleasing way.

HRISHI: Yes. Actually, I think the word I was looking for is "ominous." They just subtly hover in the world of ominousness for the entire episode. And this sound design here, this subtle

wind blowing outside of C.J.'s office, I think, is the first move in what we will see as a continued series of moves throughout the episode.

JOSH: I agree. As I watched the beginning of the episode, I was writing things down like "significant", "irreparable", "feels like the beginning of the end" ...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It is ominous.

HRISHI: When we get our first new scene, our first new bit of conversation, C.J. says that she cannot speak to Toby anymore.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*C.J.: Call the White House Counsel's Office and someone over immediately.*

*TOBY: I just didn't want you to think ...*

*C.J.: We really can't have any further conversation without counsel present.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: We get Mike Wayne back. Mike Wayne who is a White House lawyer who we have seen before. He was in "Privateers"; he was in the Jeff Perry scenes. He was in "Han" as well. He is played by Benjamin Brown.

JOSH: Yes. And played well. I liked the initial blocking of the scene between C.J. and Toby where, just coming off of the revelation that he was the source of the leak, she stands...I like the physicality of it. We are waiting for what is going to be her response, and I like that her response is "I can't respond, I cannot say another word until we have counsel in the room."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I did find it interesting, it is a great shot too, when Mike initially walks into the office, we see just sort of his feet against the light of the room behind him and I kept thinking "somebody close the door".

HRISHI: Right [laughs]

JOSH: Although it is such a great shot, I understand why they didn't. [laughs]

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah ... Yeah. This is a tricky episode I think, for us to discuss compared to other *West Wing* episodes, because so much of what I want to talk about is visual. We've even talked about how some of the *West Wing* episodes could just play like radio plays, where you don't even need to see what is happening, just the dialogue is enough for the story telling.

JOSH: Not true of this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah. I mean I guess it probably could work, but what makes it such a great episode is, it is so visual. And I wish we could just show people what we are looking at,

because I feel it is going to be hard for people who are listening to, everyone you have to go re-watch this episode.

JOSH: Yes, I felt this is one of those *West Wing Weekly* episodes where you want to do a PowerPoint presentation in order to discuss it.

HRISHI: Yes, absolutely.

JOSH: And I would say, great performances all around in this episode and Richard, in particular, and there is an extra frisson of something, knowing how much he doesn't want to play out this storyline, and we will talk to him later about that, but so much of his incredible performance in this episode is when he is not speaking. Just the expression, how he carries himself throughout this episode in what must be this incredibly painful process.

HRISHI: Yeah. He somehow seems like a black hole in this episode. Like he is pulling in light and, I don't know, like the light is bending towards him. It is so immense.

JOSH: Yes, I agree, and it sort of invites the viewer to project on him what you think is happening in his mind. So ... you know, there is ... as I experienced it, there is dignity, there is shame, there is defiance, there is almost a wry humor about where he has landed. There is so much going on in that extraordinarily complex character that is Toby Zeigler.

HRISHI: There is a scene early on with Charles Frost and Kate that I also love, where you see Frost's body, seated, but not his face, except in a distorted reflection behind Kate, who is speaking to him but with her back to the camera. And the whole thing is sort of encased in shadows and as the scene continues, the camera pushes in on the distorted reflection of Frost's face.

JOSH: It is fantastic, I love that shot as well and, although it is hard for me to articulate, you know, it is the kind of shot that might, in the hands of a lesser director and cinematographer, feel overly choreographed or staged or ... it just works and I feel like there is a very thin line between it working and it feeling like 'ah they must have spent seven hours getting this just right' but it feels right for the moment.

HRISHI: Yeah. This is one of those horror movie shots for me. Where you just, the sense of foreboding is looming, and everything feels a little bit inhuman or subhuman or something. The fact you don't get to see ... you don't get to see either characters face clearly in this scene.

JOSH: And Frost is an odd character. He is a very odd character and it somehow feels right not to see him straight on but to see him in reflection like this, slightly distorted.

HRISHI: Yeah and Kate is sort of giving him a dressing down for having ambushed C.J. and giving her his theory. But he is also kind of smug about the whole thing because he knows now, he is being taken seriously.

JOSH: Yes, and that he was on to something.

HRISHI: He is a weird guy though, because later in the episode Kate comes back to him and tells him that she has a theory of her own, and initially Frost doesn't have any respect for the alternative theory, until he hears that it is this incredibly dire scenario.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*KATE: It's a pretty scary scenario, actually. It leads to Russia and China on the brink of confrontation, two neighboring nuclear powers, India and Pakistan, poised to pick sides, Japan and the United States being drawn in against their will. It's your basic horror show – World War III nightmare.*

*FROST: Very cool. You wanna grab coffee?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right, he's kind of jazzed by it and maybe uses the moment to hit on her [laughs].

HRISHI: Yeah, he's a little turned on by the impending apocalypse.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Which is strange [laughing], I mean I don't really know what to do ...

JOSH: "Wow it is even worse than I posited! Right on."

HRISHI: Back to Toby, he gets quarantined from everyone. He can't go back to his office and he gets sort of shut away and told to wait until Oliver Babish can come in and question him.

JOSH: In the Roosevelt Room.

HRISHI: Yeah, and Ed and Larry come in to see Toby. Again, we don't see them, we never even see their faces actually, the way it is framed, we see Toby addressing them, but we only hear their voices and we see them out of focus and from the shoulders down.

JOSH: Yeah, and Toby is mean and curt and dismisses them.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I love when later Toby tells Babish that he spoke to them briefly and, I think it is Mike, demands their full names and extensions and I am thinking 'I gave you their full names, Ed and Larry'.

HRISHI: [laughs] It is spelled E D N Period L A R R Y.

JOSH: That is right. "I told you his name."

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: I assume their pronoun is him, his, he ...

HRISHI: And then Toby also says:

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*TOBY: We didn't discuss anything; I was curt and dismissive. As instructed.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughing] I was like, “nobody told you to be a jerk.”

JOSH: That was your interpretation. Great performance by Oliver Platt as well. I love his Babish and we have seen Babish can be big. He has had his over the top moments that are delightful. In this situation he’s got personal and we will talk about them explicitly later, but he has got personal thoughts about everything that is going on, but he is all business. And I think Oliver gives a great, sort of underplayed performance.

HRISHI: I think so too. We have seen him poking at C.J. in a kind of playful way even when he is trying to explain to her how serious the situation is. And he has a completely different way of comporting himself here.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*BABISH: When you spoke to Greg Brock of the New York Times, you were aware you were speaking on the record?*

*TOBY: I am the White House Communications Director – I have a rough understanding of the protocol involved when speaking with journalists.*

*BABISH: That’d be a “yes”?*

*TOBY: That would be an “of course”.*

*BABISH: And your intention in conveying this information to Greg Brock was that it be published in his newspaper?*

*TOBY: Yes!*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: They’ve passed the point of Babish needing to explain how serious the situation is, and instead there is something kind of mournful about the way Babish conducts all of this.

JOSH: Right. I was thinking, as I watched, even if I were Toby, I would want Babish to be the guy who’s doing this. There is a sense of Oliver Babish, sort of drilling down into the matter in the way that he needs to as White House Counsel, but also, almost in a sense, protecting Toby as well, or doing this the way it needs to be done.

HRISHI: Yeah. Meanwhile, as this is all happening, the Santos campaign is confined to the airplane.

JOSH: Yes

HRISHI: It’s a great way to reinforce the claustrophobia of the entire episode and the quiet of it, because it’s on this plane, it’s at night, lots of people are sleeping and so this mood of what’s happening in the White House gets to be carried into a totally different context.

JOSH: That is true and the opening dialogue of that scene between Helen and Matt Santos, in one sense is just throwaway dialogue, but I was weirdly touched by it, where Helen is trying to get him to watch a few minutes of a movie with her.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*HELEN: Something we can do together.*

*MATT: Our own machines, our own headphones, how are we doing it together?*

*HELEN: It'll be a shared experience. You remember those?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I found it kind of weirdly touching that she is just trying to, "Can we do something that's kind of together?"

HRISHI: Yeah. Ok, so on the plane, Lou continues her streak of torturing poor Ned. He comes over to Lou and Josh who are seated next to each other on the plane to tell them that they're nine points down. Which is the same place they were in the polls in the a few weeks ago but Lou and Josh are bummed.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*LOU: When the polls spit out the same number, day in and day out, it's time to stop talking margins of error.*

*JOSH: Nine points is nine points.*

*NED: That is what I thought then, but you were all so happy.*

*LOU: So, basically, you've been wrong about this twice now.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oooch! Yeah, it's a good scene, it's good dialogue and Ned does start to look, I have been feeling largely that Louise's malice towards him is unwarranted and a little bit unfair, but in this moment, he starts to feel a little provincial.

HRISHI: Yeah and it doesn't feel like it comes out of nowhere, I felt there were bits of this, especially when we first met Ned and Ronna, but yeah, Ned has definitely been wrong or sort of said the wrong thing multiple times, but now it's August and the situation is more dire as the calendar flips closer to the election.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: But I feel bad for him. In the end they decide that they need to shake things up and he has to get fired, according to Louise, but Ned's take on it is pretty different. He does not mince his words once he finds out what is going to happen.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*JOSH: I want to thank you for all your hard work.*

*NED: Screw you! You know, you can fire as many of us grunts as you want, but you wanna know why this campaign is floundering, look in the mirror.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, excellent scene, well-acted by Evan Arnold and Brad Whitford. I also liked previous to that, the scene between or among Helen, Matt and Josh in which they discuss this potential downsizing of 45 or so people on the Santos' staff and Helen's against it on a sort of personal level and Santos is dealing with the political reality and trusting Josh and, even to the point that Josh sort of thinks Matt's going to want to handle the firing of Ned personally.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*JOSH: Do you want to be the one to tell him?*

*MATT: You can take care of it.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It was just this kind of, I thought, a great sort of gritty, political moment.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I thought it was such an interesting contrast to what happens with the president and Toby where C.J. says she'll take care of it, and they even try and insulate the president from having any kind of interaction.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*BABISH: Respectfully, Mr. President, you should not be in the same room with Toby Ziegler. He is radioactive, sir. Potentially toxic to the Presidency.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Thank you for your counsel, but I have to do this myself.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And at that moment I, at least, as a viewer, was thinking because there is some personal sort of affirming things that Bartlet is going to want to say to Toby but we are to discover in the ultimate scene in the Oval Office, I think he wants to say the fairly cutting critical things that he says to Toby, and he wants to say them personally.

HRISHI: Absolutely. I thought "Oh, he knows he has to do this, but he wants to cushion it for Toby by delivering it himself and not having it be so impersonal". The situations are a little bit different because Ned isn't being fired outright, he is just being transferred back to the congressional office. It feels like he is being fired but he is still going to work for Matt Santos and Santos says he will "Find a job for him in the administration once we win" and so maybe it is more of a routine thing, but just the idea that he is fine with Josh doing it, it's such a great set up for this moment, and then in the end what the president says to Toby is so brutal.

JOSH: Yeah. It's a neat piece of misdirection. I liked my foiled expectations, made the moment land all that much harder.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: I also like the moment, just outside of the Oval, where Babish feels compelled to give him a little bit of an 'atta-boy' for his years of service, exactly what he didn't get from Bartlet.



HRISHI: It's funny. I loved that too because Babish, he doesn't actually thank Toby, he says

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*BABISH: I thought he'd thank you for your service.*

*TOBY: He's angry.*

*BABISH: Someone should thank you for your service.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And that's it, Toby never actually gets it.

JOSH: You're right. It's mild.

HRISHI: Leaving it hanging like that, I think, was kind of [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] It was kind of the way a lawyer might say 'thank you for your service'.

HRISHI: Yeah, like the way a lawyer might advise you not to apologize because it somehow implies that you are guilty of whatever the thing is. He can't actually extend something in case it is interpreted as a statement of whatever.

JOSH: Exactly, any lessening of what Toby appears to be guilty of.

HRISHI: Yeah. One thing that I wanted to go back to is this thing that Ned said to Josh, that "If you want to know why this campaign is floundering, look in the mirror". What do you think of that?

JOSH: I understand it emotionally. I entirely understand Ned's response and I think it is a very good scene and I also, I liked his initial response which was "this can't be coming from the candidate himself, and I am going to go speak to him" and then Josh just makes it clear that "trust me, it is" and so I understand the emotional desire to just hit back with "you're the problem" but I think there is probably also some substance to it. On some level, even if Josh is right to make these changes, it has come to this point because of Josh, so no matter how you look at it, Josh ought to be doing a little soul searching too, about how he has handled the campaign thus far.

HRISHI: Yeah. I mean, as he tells Louise himself, this is the team that got Santos this far. An incredibly unlikely place to be for a dark horse candidate, and so you know, he's supposed to be the coach of the team. If he is not getting the best out of his players, do you blame the players, or do you blame the coach?

JOSH: Yeah, right and obviously you are not going to fire yourself, but you might take a look at why we are in our current situation and still down nine points.

HRISHI: Yeah. Back in the White House, Toby calls in his lawyer, Alana Waterman, who we have actually met before. Do you remember her?

JOSH: Course not [laughs].

HRISHI: I love this call back. It's unexpected. but it just makes the universe feel tied together in a way that is really satisfying to me. She is an ally and I think, I can't help but like her in this episode right. Do you feel that way?

JOSH: I do not feel that way.

HRISHI: Oh!

JOSH: Interesting. I was put off by her initial private conversation with Toby in which she explicitly says, "For the sake of my reputation" and there may be more going on as to why she takes this tack, and she is trying to get him to do something more along the lines of self-preservation. Maybe I am naïve, but I just sort of wondered, is he being that well served by his lawyer, whatever he ultimately decides is her responsibility to consider how best to make that happen.

HRISHI: Huh, that's really interesting. Let me come back to that in a second. My feeling was I liked her. And what I liked about that overall was the last time we met her she was sort of an antagonist. She was in "Red Haven's on Fire." Do you remember the scene where the First Lady, before hiring Amy, just says "oh god, this woman is coming over, please save me?" They're at like a reception, and it's Alana Waterman. She comes over and she says "oh First Lady, did you see my op ed" and Amy jumps in and she's like "oh yes, I thought it was brave, the way you basically screwed everything up and did everything wrong, I thought it was really courageous" and Abbey was like

[West Wing Episode 4.17 excerpt]

*AMY: You said, "save me".*

*ABBEY: I meant walk me to the other side of the room or something.*

*AMY: Oh. Oh. Sorry.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right, this is where Abigail kind of makes a turn in how she feels about Amy.

HRISHI: Yeah, and she realizes that this is the Chief of Staff that she needs. So that's Alana Waterman, that's Toby's lawyer. The woman who has written that op ed.

JOSH: No kidding.

HRISHI: I just love the idea that the world of beltway insiders is small.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*ALANA: All anyone's going to say is, "How did Alana Waterman, that smart, tough, savvy, Washington in-fighter, let her client do something so crushingly, boneheaded moronic as to get himself six years in jail?"*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: She lays out that he is looking at potentially 63 to 78 months in jail

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: and Toby says

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*TOBY: 63 to 78? How do they come up with those numbers, picked out of a hat, dartboard?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I wanted to say 'rock, paper, scissors'? [Josh and Hrishi laugh] I really, really would have enjoyed that call back.

HRISHI: [laughing] That's a great joke Josh. That's really good. So ok, so now back to your point, is Alana's job as a lawyer to serve her client by doing what he wants in the best way possible or to advise him and urge him to do something that is going to actually, maybe, save him or keep him out of jail? Something like that. Or reduce his sentence?

JOSH: Maybe it is just a question of approach, you know, the serving of an ultimatum during this conversation seemed overly aggressive to me. I agree that maybe she should lay out all the options and urge him to consider, but "I will not represent you anymore if this is the tack you are going to take", just seemed, I don't know, just seemed a little bit out of place.

HRISHI: I love that this is your take on it. I wouldn't have predicted it, but as soon as you have said it, it makes sense, it connects to a longer thread of Joshie-ness that I have experienced, because I was just listening to episode 1.12, "He Shall, From Time to Time..." because the *Cats* trailer came out

JOSH: [laughing] I knew this was where you were going ...

HRISHI: The *Cats* trailer came out and I wanted to go back and listen to [laughing] when you tried to explain to me what the, the first time I ever heard the words 'rum tum tigger' [laughing] and so I listened to that and was laughing but I was in the car and I started driving and the episode kept on playing, after I got off a phone call, and we were talking about that episode in which Leo tells Sam, specifically, don't write a statement of support for me, on behalf of the president and he says "if I go down, I go down, I am not taking anybody with me" and Sam is like "You know what, I disobeyed you, tough" or something like that.

JOSH: And I didn't like that.

HRISHI: And you did not like that. You said

[West Wing Weekly Episode 1.12 excerpt]

*JOSH: I was with Leo on that, it really wasn't the right thing to do, Josh and Sam and their insistence on doing the exact opposite of what Leo has asked them to do.*

*HRISHI: Oh yeah?*

*JOSH: "Enough with saying one thing and then doing whatever you think is right! I told you how I wanted this to be handled. It really was my call to make. Enough with the then running out and doing your goody two-shoes thing that you think is what I really want. I told you what I really wanted." I don't know. It pissed me off."*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And that goes along with what you are saying here.

JOSH: Yay, that makes me feel strangely good about myself, that there is some internal logic or consistency to my points of view, because sometimes I feel like I am reinvented every day. I wake up because I don't remember

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I don't remember anything that came before. [laughs] So I am glad you track that for me. Yes, there's some moral or logical consistency to me.

HRISHI: You're like the inverse of *Groundhog Day*, every day is different, but you are just a baby.

JOSH: Yeah, somebody remind me, who the hell am I? What am I like? Speaking of the *Cats* trailer, how weird is that? We won't be the first ones to discuss this, the social media is aflame, is on fire, with people pondering the *Cats* trailer of it all. But wow, that looks weird!

HRISHI: I mean I just wanted to send it to you and just say "So really Josh, this is what you want me to watch?" [Josh and Hrishu laughing]

JOSH: Yes, I will have to see the film before I can figure out whether I can further defend the work. But wow, that is odd. It's just weird and super sexualized.

HRISHI: It is so creepy.

JOSH: Yes, I think there is probably more than one viewer had a good 'rum tum tigger' after watching it.

BOTH: [laughing]

HRISHI: Josh! Oh God.

JOSH: Yeah, it's weird. I would like to get it out of my head. I can't even look my cats in the eye anymore. [Josh and Hrishu laugh]

HRISHI: Man. Ok, well when we are on the lighter side of things, let's briefly discuss Ellie's engagement.

JOSH: Sure, yes, one of my not favourite plot lines of this episode. And not necessarily to even fault the plotline but, I don't know, it felt a little bit out of place in this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's tough in the miasma of foreboding that's all over the rest of the episode to have this kind of funny little domestic moment. Even the exchange with Helen and Matt, it's hard for this moment, they push so far into the darker depiction of this storyline, that those little moments that do pepper *West Wing* episodes didn't quite work for me.

JOSH: Yeah, and maybe we are being unfair because life continues apace outside of any individual storyline in this swirl of a world that we are looking at, but I did feel the same way. I also felt again, and I anticipate that you are going to agree with me, but perhaps I am wrong, that we had another example of, I think how difficult, outside of Aaron's writing them, how

difficult it must be to write for the president and Dr. Bartlet. There's just a very fine line, they're both very smart and they're both very clever and they're playful with each other, but if it is not just quite right, it's a little clunkified and I felt that way with their initial conversation about the fruit flies and their potential son-in-law and it was just a weird conversation. It felt written.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Our daughter's getting engaged to the fruit fly guy.*

*ABBEY: He is a research scientist. Stop making him sound like something out of a horror film. Did you know that fruit flies reproduce at a prodigious rate?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: You've been whining about more grandchildren.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Abbey says, "She is one's daughter, and wants her to be happy in whatever", it's not even English. They are sort of sometimes, I don't know, over written mock Shakespearean conversation just sometimes doesn't work for me. They don't sound like just a married couple chatting sometimes.

HRISHI: I agree. But I also felt like that the substance of what they were saying, not just the style, was a little bit strange. The president says, "Well you have been whining about more grandchildren", you know like he's making this joke that weirdly ties into what they learn, which is that Ellie is pregnant. I mean it is a strange kind of foreshadowing or something that actually ends up lessening the impact of the surprise or something. The discussion of grandchildren has already been brought up. I don't know.

JOSH: I agree with you. It is also just a weird ... I wanted her to say "no, I am not saying he's a fruit fly, I am saying, he studies them". So already the jump to the joke is clunky. It is like "What are you saying?"

HRISHI: Thank you. [laughing] That was also something I thought and was trying to also say but my complaints were too layered to get to that one. And they keep going. Abbey says, "They make bunnies look dysfunctional prudes" and the President says, "That's our daughter you are talking about." No, its not! Neither the bunny nor the fruit fly.

JOSH: [laughing] Right, "You're just not tracking the conversation, honey." [laughing] It doesn't make sense and then they have a weird moment where they talk around the fact that they both suspected that Ellie might be gay.

HRISHI: Uh huh

JOSH: Which is also an odd moment and they might have had this conversation prior to the engagement announcement when, I guess, she started dating him. If this is really what they thought about their daughter, you would think they would have broached it between themselves earlier.

HRISHI: Yeah. And Abbey says

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*ABBEY: May God herself strike me dead, it is not to be denied that I am not unhappy that my daughter is straight after all.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which is a strange sentence in its combination of both feminism and also heteronormativity.

JOSH: Sure. Yes. God is a woman but thank God my daughter isn't gay.

HRISHI: But thank god she made my daughter straight.

JOSH: I don't object to the substance of it, in the sense that these are human beings and they are having a private conversation and maybe we are seeing the slightly less appealing side of them, like ok, they're human and they're admitting something that is maybe not so nice, but it is also strange the way it comes out and the way that the writing is so turgid.

HRISHI: Yes. I wish someone had pressed her just to get a little bit more.

JOSH: You would have liked one of the Secret Service agents to walk over and say, "Ma'am, I couldn't help overhearing and I am a little bit offended by what you had to say."

HRISHI: Uh huh. And then there's just the disappointment of the character of the fruit fly guy himself.

JOSH: Oh, he looks so uncomfortable throughout that entire scene. [laughing] Which I think, I guess is appropriate, he knows what information is going to be exchanged during this scene, and as the fiancé, is not looking forward to this conversation.

HRISHI: I had to look up what this word actually meant, but when I was watching him, the word heffalumf came into my head.

JOSH: Wait, isn't that something from Winnie the Pooh?

HRISHI: A heffalump is the Winnie the Pooh version of an elephant in dream sequences.

JOSH: I know that "Heffalumps and Woozles are very confusels".

[excerpt of the song Heffalumps and Woozles]

*A Heffalump or Woozle is very confusel  
A Heffalump or Woozle's very sly (sly) (sly)*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's the sum total of my knowledge about heffalumps.

HRISHI: Well you have more knowledge than I did. But I guess just, if you could somehow describe that guys body language and overall demeanour onomatopoeically, I came up with 'heffalumf' and I stand by it.

JOSH: I like it. I am going to try and start working that into my everyday conversation.

HRISHI: Then I looked up a heffalump and they seem a lot more fun than Vic is himself.

JOSH: They're pretty cute.

HRISHI: Yeah. So, we find out that Ellie is pregnant, and they are going to have the wedding sooner than later.

JOSH: I liked the coda on that scene very much, because it was bothering me that Ellie was holding a glass of champagne and I was delighted when Dr. Bartlet took it out of her hand at the end of the scene.

HRISHI: I didn't notice that.

JOSH: Yeah, they make a little moment of it where she takes it away like, "Now that I know, I will take this thank you."

HRISHI: Another moment that was really satisfying to me was C.J. slapping down Hutchinson in the situation room. I said out loud I said "Finally! Fi.Nal.Ly" because that guy is the worst and I am so here for C.J.'s lack of patience with him and his condescension.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*HUTCHINSON: Commander Harper has been entertaining us – well, given the hour, I'm not sure entertaining is the right word – with her theory on this assassination in Kazakhstan.*

*C.J.: Mr. Secretary, through no fault of your own, your customary default acerbity, which some might characterise as snide, but which I never fail to find delightful, is perhaps not the right tone for my particular mood this particular evening.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, that was great.

HRISHI: It was great. It was like, about time!

JOSH: I did wonder, as this assemblage discusses what could very well be the prelude to World War III, why the president wasn't in the Sit Room.

HRISHI: Maybe they are waiting for things to simmer a little longer?

JOSH: Perhaps so. Perhaps they felt it was too soon, but I felt like he ought to have been there.

HRISHI: Yeah. I guess it just, it's still theoretical at this point, right?

JOSH: I guess so, but there have been two assassinations and I don't know, I think he would have, I thought he would have shown up for that meeting. Like "Where are we, what have we got, what are we thinking?"

HRISHI: Yeah. I think that's reasonable. But I am glad that he didn't so that C.J. could provide us with this smack down.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: God, I hate Hutchinson. He is just the worst. I am so sick of that character. It's one thing to have an antagonist but just to like, I've had to suffer through too much of that character.

JOSH: Everything he says, he is just consistently aggravating.

HRISHI: Yeah. I would love for that character to have another dimension because I am, frankly, rather sick of him. I feel like we could go through the whole episode and point out all the incredible shots, all the sort of beautiful rack focus moments, where one character is in focus and it slowly shifts to another character. There is a shot of Josh sleeping while everyone else is having a conversation, Josh is in the foreground and there is so much beautiful work, but I think some of my favorite stuff is at the end, after Toby gets fired by the president. We hear the president's address after that, telling the country that he fired Toby, but we don't see the president. We see his face again, in a reflection of the TV broadcast as Toby starts to exit, and then he turns the corner, and we get another shot, a different shot of a different TV and that TV is really close in the foreground. It's so close up that we only get to see the bottom of the screen which shows just the president's hands as he is speaking. And then as Toby gets closer to the exit, we get closer to the president, but the drone of the music gets louder and the president's voice fades out and so when we finally see his face, we can't hear him anymore, and it's in black and white. It's the monitor for the camera that is filming him, and I love all of these moves.

JOSH: As do I.

HRISHI: I think this is one of my favorite episodes in terms of the direction and cinematography.

JOSH: Yeah. It is a visual feast this episode and there are lots of little moments, you mention rack focus shots, little moments that I never would have come up with. I've had many opportunities, as actors often do, to direct episodes or to possibly get into that aspect of the business and I would very much have liked to do that, because it makes sense for an actor who works intermittently to develop a parallel career, but I don't, I just don't have the visual vocabulary or sense. There are things I would never think to come up with. There's a very simple scene early on, I guess in the Roosevelt Room before Toby picks up the phone and calls his lawyer, and it starts, he is kind of just blurry. It starts out of focus, and then there is that kind of rack focus, and he picks up the phone and I can't even articulate why there's something compelling about it. I don't know if it is just sort of inching along, it's telling with visuals what's going on, as the clarity of what Toby has to deal with comes into, I don't know if it is that. There is just something ineffable about it that makes the scene more powerful and I don't know how a great director like Alex and a DP like Michael Mayer, come up with these things.

HRISHI: That's exactly how I interpreted that scene too. That just Toby is sort of lost in thought, as he is out of focus, and as he decides to finally take action, the focus comes together.

JOSH: Stuff like that is so great. It really enhances what otherwise is a simple scene of a guy picking up the phone and calling his lawyer. It elevates what we are seeing.

HRISHI: If I had to pick a single favourite shot in the episode it might be a scene in the Roosevelt Room where Babish is debriefing Toby, it is sort of earlier on and we see the back of Toby's head, Babish is speaking, but he is out of focus, further back. Toby is closer to us, but we just see the back of his head, and that is in focus. The composition is beautiful. The lighting is beautiful. I just loved it. It would work as a still photograph.



JOSH: Right, and we are not hearing what they are saying, what Babish is saying right?

HRISHI: No, in that scene you are. He is talking and Toby is just listening, and it really makes it, even though Babish is the one speaking and we don't see Toby's face, it really is – the scene is all about Toby taking in all this information. It's so smart.

JOSH: I was just going to say, because these scenes where the camera is outside of the room and we cannot hear the audio, are my least favourite scenes to film because they required the actor to come up with something to say [laughs] and I am usually standing there going, "Oh god this is awful, I can't stand doing this, oh my god what would I actually be saying? This probably isn't very professional; I should say something in character, right?" and I watch the other actors as they are like, "What is wrong with this guy?"

HRISHI: [laughs] But as a viewer they are terrific. Like in this episode when Babish and C.J. go to tell the president the news of what Toby has done, that scene is shot through the distorted glass from the Oval Office door, and from there we don't hear them speaking and again, we just get dark drone from Snuffy and again, we are deprived of the entire story. We don't get all of the information. I feel like someone could write an entire Media Studies paper about this episode and how information is doled out to us in these little bits and how we never get to, we are never given the satisfaction of like, a complete resolved sound and image pairing.

JOSH: Yes, I do love that as a viewer.

HRISHI: And then, finally, because I knew you were in this episode cause you were in the opening credits, Will comes back. With Toby gone, Will now has to get the job of White House Communications Director. I love the moment when you learn that Toby is the one who confessed to the leak, just the way you just say, "Toby" and it is great.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*C.J.: I am offering... well, um, not so much offering as dragooning you to be the new White House Communications Director, starting immediately. Congratulations. I'll smooth things over with the V.P., but first, you should know the president is making a statement in, oh, three or so minutes in which he will announce that Toby Ziegler has been fired for an egregious national security violation.*

*WILL: [whispers] Toby.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I was very pleased with that moment, if that is not obnoxious to say and with this scene all together and Allison of course, great in this scene. I also liked the blocking which may have just been Alex's suggestion or often, one of the discussions is "When do you move in a scene? What sort of incites movement?", and I like that when called upon, he has just has the briefest moment of processing and realizing that it was Toby and I think, in there I can see a little bit that he had considered that before,

HRISHI: Right

JOSH: that this might be the case and then Will stands and puts his jacket on. He is ready. He is being called upon, dragooned as C.J. puts it and he is immediately ready, "Shall I draft

a statement?" I am going to stand; I am going to put on my jacket. It is just such a human reaction.

HRISHI: Right. And what a dutiful one. This guy, he knows what has to happen. He knows that something has to happen. I thought dragooning is such a great word, that I wanted to talk about it just for a second. Dragoon means to coerce, and it comes from the name of French infantry divisions, who used a kind of gun, a 'dragon', which is the handgun version of a type of a gun with another great word for its name ... a 'blunderbuss'.

JOSH: Blunderbuss. That is a great word.

HRISHI: Which comes from the Dutch 'dunderbuss' which literally means 'thunder gun'.

JOSH: That is a great bit of dialogue and language and there is another weird one, Kate in the Sit Room

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*BOB: When they announced this alliance, they took pains to stress it wasn't directed against any third party.*

*KATE: Doth protesting perhaps a bit much.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: She kind of misuses it. Not as the present tense, third person singular that 'doth' suggests. It's just weird – doth protesting – that is not English. Yes, we get it, you read *Hamlet* in seventh grade.

HRISHI: [laughing] I like it. I like it because I like the mangling of it. It felt real.

JOSH: Well, I did write that down too. I might be being unfair, because people do stuff like that all the time.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah. I think you are exactly right. As opposed to, the weird arch language of the president and the First Lady, it does feel like someone who read *Hamlet* in seventh grade and now, 25 years later is trying to make a point

JOSH: [laughing] Yeah

HRISHI: By like sort of waving vaguely at this allusion.

JOSH: [laughing] All right, you have turned me around on it. I like it!

HRISHI: [laughing] Ok, Good. Great. See I doth protested just enough.

JOSH: Yes, you doth. [laughs] You know we are not talking in a way thus far, about the greater substantive issue here and just the fact that Toby was the leak and there is such a tension between loyalty to the team, and he has let down everyone around him, and the fact as he puts it in this episode, that he was anticipating the weaponization of space and trying to do what he could do to prevent it. There is some major themes and questions being addressed in this episode. I know we are going to talk to Richard, and he is very unhappy with the choice of Toby as the source of the leak and I won't put words in his mouth, but as a

viewer, I didn't bump on it in this episode. I mean I anticipate agreeing and understanding with what Richard is going to say or what I believe he is going to tell us. But I sort of, I got it. I understood what Toby was doing.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I understood even in this episode, even as he doesn't tell us what he's feeling, moment by moment, I understand that Toby still maybe stands behind his decision. He's going to go down for it and he seems to be willing to accept it. But what he was trying to do as a leaker, or a whistle-blower, was significant. I understand why Toby might do what he did.

HRISHI: I love the moment when the president learns and says, "Is it possible to be astonished and at the same time not surprised?". Which is how I feel about this storyline developing too. I know some people really hate it, but I don't and the fact that it is Toby, I don't think is beyond the realm of credibility.

JOSH: Yeah. Nor do I. I almost feel that there is an incredible amount of value in the choice of Toby because it is so uncomfortable, and because we have come to love Toby so much and we know how loyal and how much he cares about his job and how much he respects and loves, even if he is not going to state it, these people that he works with and for. And so somehow having Toby do it gets you right in the kishkes, like "Oh! It's Toby", and you feel, it's a very uncomfortable, confusing, emotional fact to deal with and that's valuable, even if it is not the most enjoyable thing to watch play out.

HRISHI: On that note, let's take a break and when we come back, we will speak with Richard Schiff.

JOSH: Oh, doth we?

HRISHI: [laughing]

[Ad break]

HRISHI: Joining us now is Richard Schiff. Richard thanks so much for joining us again.

RICHARD: It's my pleasure, but it is becoming way too much of a habit. I'm glad we are on season seven now.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Ha ha ha!

HRISHI: We've got a spare room over here...so let me start here. Do you remember filming this episode?

RICHARD: I remember two scenes and I watched it again, and it's the first time I have seen it and it's the first time I have seen anything other than podcasts I have done with you after season four.

HRISHI: Wow.

RICHARD: So, um, and I didn't watch a whole lot of season four either actually. But um, it was the first time, it was a very painful episode to shoot. And a very painful episode, storyline, to live with. And I still find it hard to live with because I would say no less than five times a week, someone tweets "What did they do to Toby in season seven?", you know, "I don't buy it". I am always reminded of it. I remember shooting the scenes with Allison, in which I said that I was the leak. And I remember shooting the scene with the president and I remember a little bit of the scene with the lawyers, Oliver Platt and that lovely actress, and she was so great. I loved working with her. I remember those three scenes, and I am not sure there is a whole lot more than that in the episode.

JOSH: How about backing up. At what point did you find out how the storyline was going to play out?

RICHARD: Well interestingly Alex Graves let slip "We have got a really great story for you coming up" and this was obviously in season six. And I thought this episode was the last episode of season six. I remember that summer the writers called me to ask me "Why do you think Toby was the leak, why did he do it?" and I said, "He wouldn't do it". "Well if he did it ...". They called me from their retreat in Hawaii cause they got themselves in a corner, writing something that made no sense, and wanted me to make sense out of it. So, I said "It makes no sense". "Well, if he did it, what would...why would he do it?" So, I came up with my reasons for something that was ludicrous to me. So I remember Alex Graves came to me and said "There is a great storyline coming for you" and I said "What is it?" and he stumbled and said "I shouldn't tell you" and I said "Why shouldn't you tell me?" and he said "Well because I don't want actors to play the result of the story coming". So, I knew it was bad, despite that he said it was a great storyline, because he didn't want to tell me. You don't not tell an actor the story, so um, I knew it was bad.

JOSH: Especially when it's information that Toby would know.

RICHARD: Right. Exactly.

HRISHI: You should play into knowing the information.

RICHARD: Yeah, so I think it started in the end of season six, cause that is when, I watched it again and this leak comes up, right? And they have shots of me looking very guilty and if that didn't give it away to people, I don't know what did. And there were bad feelings going around with me in the last couple of seasons.

HRISHI: Outside of this plotline?

RICHARD: Yeah, there was just some difficulties. I exploded on a producer at one point. I have a funny feeling that this storyline was not unintentional to kind of disparage the actor.

JOSH: It was personal, you felt?

RICHARD: I think kind of, probably not consciously, but they probably felt about Toby what they were beginning to feel about me. Which of course is a mistake. I'm guessing. I have no idea. Maybe somebody thought it was a great story. It's just weird to me watching it. I don't remember how I felt when I was doing it. But I did, of course it's Allison Janney so if you are going to have to act with someone silently for, I don't know how many seconds it lasted, I am guessing you guys counted. [Josh and Hrishu laugh] How long?

HRISHI: I know the entire scene was a minute and forty seconds, that opening scene. But I don't know how long the silences were.

RICHARD: It felt a lot more intense in shooting it than it read to me when I watched it. But I love the fact that I had to do that with Allison, as always, she just brings out the best. But it's interesting, a couple of years later I was in England, doing a play. And um, Eli Attie had a friend who was a writer at *The Guardian*, and they asked me to come over for dinner on my night off, which I did, and both he and his wife, were *West Wing* fanatics and they said, "Ok, we decided that with your left eye you were telling C.J. that it really wasn't you who did it."

JOSH and HRISHI: [laughing]

RICHARD: And I went, "That's specific!"

JOSH: Left Eye Schiff

RICHARD: Actually, when I watched it, I go "Which eye were they thinking of, was it the left or the right?" and I think I decided one of those eyes, that's what I was doing in that scene. I was pretty much trying to communicate silently that this is not me. That I am doing it for someone else. Because I still don't believe that I did it.

JOSH: Ha!

RICHARD: So, in the future, whenever it came up, "Why did you do it?", except for this episode, because I had to say something to my lawyer, something about:

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*TOBY: I believe in an open society. You debate these things in the light of day, that's what is supposed to happen in a democracy.*

*ALANA: Yes.*

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: In the future, when they wrote "I did it because...", I said "Don't ever write that because I am not going to say it, because I didn't do it."

HRISHI: Wow

JOSH: Wow

RICHARD: So, they had to skirt around that every time there was a scene with me, and they started it with "I did it because..."

JOSH: But to clarify, with laser like focus, am I correct that you don't necessarily object to the possibility that Toby would do something like this to prevent the weaponization of space

RICHARD: No.

JOSH: but that there's no chance he would have done it sub rosa, secretly and leaked without explicitly discussing it with the president and explaining that-

RICHARD: Without a battle beforehand, and a serious battle, and it would have been a great episode, but I think they wanted to leap to that conclusion for whatever their reasons, and I also noticed in watching this that there was a real effort to create a severance, a separation of the family. Where Josh and Will were in battles, for obvious reasons, but when they came to the White House to ask for whatever they did, I gleefully said no, you know, "You get screwed, we are going to go after this education bill with a Republican" and that was weird. I thought that was weird and so being a conspiracy theorist; I have to think that somewhere in their thinking, in writing these episodes, there was a desire to create a separation with the audience to the characters they have loved or so long. So that if the series were to continue, because Jimmy Smits comes across as if he is already wearing wings, and he is the one character that seems to be aloof of all undercutting of other people. Even though his speech at the Convention, when he decides to say "It's up to the voters, it's up to the delegates" was the most opportunistic undercutting of them all and yet, because of the way it was written, and because they wrote people responding so positively to it, you don't seem to notice the fact that that was nasty politics.

HRISHI: That was Josh's reaction was. He was, "Oh, he just threw Josh and Leo under the bus."

RICHARD: Under the bus.

JOSH: Completely.

HRISHI: On live television.

JOSH: Completely.

RICHARD: After making a deal that he was going to yield his delegates and give up the race, and that's why he got the microphone.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Exactly

RICHARD: And everyone reacts like "Oh what a great speech, he is our guy!". It was a bunch of crap [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] Not everyone! Not !!

RICHARD: It's a bunch of crap.

JOSH: I'm intrigued by the concept, the possibility that there was a personal element in the writing of the show. Can you speak at all about what your conflict was or what was happening behind the scenes?

RICHARD: Season six, a couple of things happened. I think that was season six when I found out that one of the producers, who I won't mention, lied to my agent about something and I called him, and they said he was busy. And I said, "Get him on the phone!" and I proceeded to scream bloody murder. I mean I can go zero to a hundred really fast, at least in those days, and called them out for lying. It's the one thing I can't take. You can fire me. You can write really bad stuff for me but don't lie to me. I can't stand it. I can't take it. So, I probably overreacted a lot, but I screamed bloody murder at him, and it turned out he was in a meeting with John Wells and everybody else and he held up the phone so that they could

hear it. So, that was one event and I was just pretty unhappy with the way that Toby was being written generally anyway in those last two or three years. And then John Wells sat down, as he did with everybody, about his plans for season seven, and I said, "I'm ok if you don't want to use me, I am fine with that, but please tell me one way or the other, because I am about to buy a house."

JOSH: Fair enough.

RICHARD: "I will not buy it if I'm..." cause I figure, it's season seven of a show that they know is going to end and that is when you reduce costs as much as you can so, it was a fair question. And he said the following quote, "I believe that people who are part of making something out of nothing should be rewarded, this is going to be our victory lap" and then they proceeded to offer me four shows, for the final season.

JOSH: Huh!

RICHARD: So, I said no, and I was going to walk away, and that offer got changed. Everyone got some reduced episodes, but Martin and I were offered four. Martin was fine with it because he had made a ton of money, and because the storyline was shifting and I am fine with that too, but don't tell me you are going to give me a victory lap and then get me out. So, that was another thing that was bothering me, and I had no problem with walking away and I would have done four episodes and been happy, very happy, if you had said that that was what was going to happen. So, there was a bunch of stuff.

HRISHI: And maybe if in those four episodes the way Toby was handled was different.

RICHARD: That would have been a plus, but I had already come to grips with the fact that they didn't get this character, since Aaron left and there was a couple of writers who did; Debora Cahn and Eli Attie and maybe a little, Lawrence but overall I don't think they understood him.

JOSH: Did you ever try to explicitly try to talk them out of the storyline or?

RICHARD: I didn't at that time, interestingly enough, because I think I was caving to the ill feelings, I guess. I probably should have.

HRISHI: After having watched it for the first time now, what did you think about the way the episode played out? Given your feelings about the actual content?

RICHARD: Well you had great actors doing this stuff, you know? I loved the most, what sticks with me the most, is Allison, is C.J.'s reaction. She was so disturbed by it, in her other scenes. And it was beautifully shot, as always, by Alex, because there was this one scene where she is clearly just off kilter, off the plot, but the entire scene was shot from outside her room, on Margaret, and you don't even see C.J. and that was brilliant. I thought that was brilliant, because you got off of her reaction, how weird and how seriously wrong something was. Similarly, he shot one scene with Oliver completely out of focus on him, focusing on the back of my neck and my hair and I thought that shot maybe lasted a little too long.

HRISHI: That is my favorite shot of the episode though.

RICHARD: It was just remarkable and even some shots of Janeane Garofalo, through the armpits of somebody, was it on the airplane? You know, because something was seriously off and something was wrong and he shot it that way, in a way that you don't see on network

television, ever, and I thought it was kind of brilliant. So, I loved the scene with Allison, just in terms of the way we did it, and the scene with Martin was very tough to shoot. There is not much that Toby could have said, but it was poignantly played out and Martin was great.

HRISHI: Yeah, I think the direction in this episode is so surprising because it's so unlike, not just other episodes of the *West Wing* but like you said, it is so unlike anything and I thought it was such a smart way to reinforce the discombobulation.

JOSH: The off-kilter nature.

RICHARD: Here's some more things that I object to, which I know you love so much.

JOSH: Absolutely. Bring it.

RICHARD: The president's reaction, this was really hurtful to me personally, not to Toby.

[West Wing Episode 7.05 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: The one thought that hits the hardest that this was somehow inevitable. That you've always been heading for this sort of crash and burn, that self-righteous superiority. Not that you were smarter than everyone. That you were purer, morally superior.*

[end excerpt]

RICHARD: Again, I think it is the producer's feelings about me that kind of slipped in cause I could understand how they would think that about me. I possibly come across that way to them, because I fight for stuff and sometimes too hard and too much, for things that might be too little to fight for in their minds. So, I get that. But Toby is not that and the fact that the president thought that about me, and they said it out loud was very hurtful.

JOSH: At the risk of trying to make you feel better about something that has aggravated you for a couple of decades. I do, I think...

RICHARD: It's only been 14 years.

JOSH: Yeah, fair enough. I think your performance throughout this series, and in this episode, and the Toby that we have come to know and love, even when I hear the president berate you in that scene and then say he is astonished and yet, not surprised, to me that even reads in part as his acknowledging that he understands that you came from an ethical place and why you did it [cross talk]. I didn't see it or hear it or experience it as a complete negative or casting aspersions on your character. It is almost the way which you just described yourself, which is "Maybe I go too far but what I am fighting for is the truth or something good or something worth fighting for, and something principled", that's how I saw Toby's story play out; and it's uncomfortable, and it is painful but there is also, it doesn't ultimately damage my respect for Toby as a viewer. I understand what he did.

RICHARD: [cross talk] Oh ok.

HRISHI: I agree completely.

RICHARD: Huh! Well I am just psychologically [in New York accent] 'disturbed'.



HRISHI: No, I think, because these are the two things that are at odd [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] “Hey Officer Krupke...”

RICHARD: “Hey Officer Krupke...” [laughs]

HRISHI: These are the two things that are at odds and they don't draw it out, like you said, there isn't a big battle about it but it is the morality of saving, they have the option to save these people, in space, but they are hemmed in by the secrecy and the potential of the political fallout from revealing to other countries that they have this space shuttle, and Toby sees it as 'well actually the other countries already know, it is only a secret on paper and meanwhile there are actual lives at stake'.

RICHARD: Right. And again, I don't have anything wrong with the actual story, but to not have that discussion over a period of time, where it just keeps bothering me and I keep bringing it up to the president, and I can't take it anymore and I reach a brink and then do what I am accused of doing, makes sense. But obviously I take this stuff serious, it is important to me to have a 'logical', for lack of a better word, dramatic progression. To have seeds planted so that things happen and then you go 'oh my God, of course he did that, he had no choice'. Rather than having to wonder why or explain it with a very brief little 'it saves lives and democracy', whatever that little speech was to the lawyer and that's all. It is not asking too much I don't think.

HRISHI: It's an interesting balance, I think and one that Josh and I talk about a lot. What the show asks viewers to infer, what dots they are willing to connect for you and which dots they want you to connect for yourselves. And I felt like after so many years with Toby and such a rich portrait of his character and his motivations that, I bought it. I understood. I understood why he did it. I understood the complexity of it. There was a time factor of these astronauts were going to die in a matter of days or hours because of lack of oxygen and it was a case where I didn't feel like I needed it spelled out in order to, certainly in order to follow along, and feel some sense of justification. I don't think that Toby comes across as a villain in any of this.

RICHARD: Yeah, but don't forget the fight between Josh and Toby where he also accused me of similar characteristics that the president, and it just seems like there was a progression of effort to separate Toby from the rest.

HRISHI: Yeah, I think that's true. I think there is also part of it that goes with an idea that Toby does maybe see himself as being the only person who followed true north on the compass, and Josh gets distracted by this idea of another candidate, instead of finishing out the term, and Leo leaves and things within the White House are changed quite significantly too, and I think there are some episodes where it feels like Toby is looking around like 'where did everybody go, we were all on this path together and now I am the only one left'.

RICHARD: Yeah. Maybe because I was so aware of the other things playing out that I took it too personally but that's what you do as an actor. You take these things personally, that's what our job is.

JOSH: How much has this whole thing, how much did it affect your, the series coming to an end, your feeling about the show, and the legacy of it since. Was the end of the show, which I remember being bittersweet but celebratory and loving each other and all, did you feel any...?

RICHARD: No. I mean, I chose not to be in the final episode.

JOSH: Right.

RICHARD: John Wells and other people came for my last scene which thankfully was with Allison again and it was a beautiful scene actually, but they came to toast me, and I just said. "Excuse me, I just don't want any part of this.", I didn't even say anything, I just kind of stood there and nodded by head and walked out as fast as I could and I think one tear was shed, walking down the alley way. And it was with the B crew, it wasn't even with the A crew, so there was people I didn't really know were applauding and all that. I did not have a happy feeling about the show for quite a while, so I was glad that it was over and I also knew that it was a phase of my life that was really important but it started about three or four years later, and a lot of the negative stuff starts to fall away and more the positive memories come back, which has been the case every time I've come back and reviewed shows with you guys, and yet you had to drag me into this painful episode; but overall I feel really great about the years and I feel really lucky and I thought our work together, all of us, was beautiful and while I might be a little unhappy with the way the character turned in the last three years, the first four years were phenomenal. And the last three years is still better than probably anything that I have worked on since on television. So, there's that. I have said this before but, when you have the potential to hit the ceiling with brilliance, all the time, which was what the first four years was for us, and sometimes even in the last three years, it gets even a little bit more frustrating. I have thrown my clubs when I am playing golf, when I am playing really well, not when I am playing badly. It is so frustrating because you are playing so well. And that is what this is like when it is not, when you have the potential, so I saw that storyline as great potential, even though I didn't like it and yet, they didn't write it. So that was, that's what gets frustrating, so I have to put it in perspective and remember that it's because the ceiling was so high that the frustrations became as high as that.

HRISHI: Again, it feels like a mirror of Toby, where Toby sees what's possible.

RICHARD: Well Toby and I, especially during that time, melded certainly after a while and Aaron certainly modeled a lot of the writing of Toby based on what he saw coming from me and how important stuff was to me. And there is no doubt about that, just the way he wrote for Brad, someone who was an [expletive deleted]. No, I'm kidding.

HRISHI: [laughs]

RICHARD: Someone who was kind of [crosstalk]

JOSH: [crosstalk] I am glad you said it!

RICHARD: kind of cocky and frivolous, you know, and he wrote to that.

HRISHI: You talked a little bit about this already, but even before you came in, knowing how you felt about this, I was wondering, if you feel like it's an asset or a hindrance, as an actor to feel so personally connected to the material? You said, just a few minutes ago, that that's actually the job. The job of the actor is to take it personally and I wonder if that's true. If you think that that's what everyone who acts should do? Or if it's just your path and do you get frustrated by other actors who don't seem to take the material personally?

RICHARD: I don't worry too much about other actors, as much as I might have in the past. If you wanna come and play, I am there to play and I've learned that if you are not there really to play on a baseball field, then I will play fungo. I'm good. I'll go catch it, I will go, I will run the bases, I'll do it all. You just stay there and be a statue. I don't care. A lot of people who have been associated with being difficult over the years, are people who care quote unquote "too much." Right? You have your Dustin Hoffmans and some others and Phillip Seymour,

speaking of Hoffmans, was, you know, *Death of a Salesman*, he felt like it was killing him to do that show every night, and you could tell from his work, he goes very, very deep. There are some actors who can do that, and it doesn't cost them and that's where I think where I am now. It doesn't cost you as much. I started acting late, I was in my 30s when I started acting, so it took me longer to get to that place. So now it's just, I am more practiced at it and it doesn't cost me so much. I used to get up at five in the morning and work out for an hour and a half, every day, every day that we worked, and then do 15 hour days on set and at three in the morning I was like 'let's not stop, let's keep going' and running lines with my assistant at the time or with whoever would do it; constantly, always and sometimes being concerned about whether I was shot first or second, or last because I wanted to work off what the other actor was doing. And some actors don't give you off camera what they give on camera and so, if I go first and then they change something, I would have wanted to change it and I would ask, "I've got to do it again, based on what he did." and now it is like 'I am going to throw it out there and you do what you want with it' and I don't watch, so I don't have to see what they did with it.

JOSH: Now we are getting to my approach.

RICHARD: [laughs]

JOSH: Did you start to feel the weight lift as soon as *The West Wing* was over?

RICHARD: No, it took a while to disembody myself from that character and plus, I would get offered roles that were Toby-esque and it wasn't until I started getting roles that were very different from Toby that I really felt I could break out of it.

HRISHI: That's fascinating. Is there anything, this is really, I want you to feel free to just let anything fly, that we haven't discussed yet because I think there is no better time than now. So, if there is anything else that you want to say about any of this stuff

RICHARD: Well I would talk a little bit more about Josh, but I don't want to embarrass him.

JOSH: Oh, that delighted me.

RICHARD: I said one of my favorite scenes of all time is a scene between you and us, you and me in the cafeteria, that John David Coles directed, and it was really one of the first scenes we did together.

JOSH: That's right.

RICHARD: And it was such a great oppositional pairing, much more rewarding for me, I won't say anything else, clearly a different style of not only acting, but of the characters just came from things in a very different place, and the way he reacted to my Toby-isms, was just priceless. So no, it was a pleasure to work with you. I hope we don't have to do it again, but it was a pleasure that one time.

JOSH: [laughing] To be genuine, that means the world to me Richard, and for somebody who doesn't have a very good memory, that being me, although I think it applies to you as well, I remember exactly the feeling before I stepped in front of the camera for that scene with you, because I felt like I was stepping into the ring with a heavyweight and it was mainly, really, really exciting and I can just absolutely feel that moment as if it were yesterday.

RICHARD: That was one of my favorite scenes. I have to say. Yeah, what else can I say? I am probably not coming back.

HRISHI: This might be a series wrap for Richard Schiff. Thank you so much.

JOSH: This was awesome, thanks Richard.

HRISHI: It was great!

RICHARD: You are welcome. It should re-ruin my career to reveal all this stuff again [Hrishi laughs] One thing I noticed about the last few episodes, that I watched, that I was the one that, my voice was used quite a bit for "Next, on *The West Wing*"

HRISHI: Yes!

JOSH: Right

RICHARD: And I was like, why?

HRISHI: I noticed that too and I even said to Josh, I said "even in the 'previously on *The West Wing*', you can tell that Toby is not into it."

RICHARD: [laughing] Oh my God!

JOSH: Well that does it for another incredibly great episode of *The West Wing Weekly*.

HRISHI: [laughing] I won't go that far.

JOSH: Doth you agree?

HRISHI: I will say it was an incredibly great episode of *The West Wing* and it was a lot of fun to discuss it with you. This is the kind of episode that makes me so happy that we have this podcast because I would watch that and all I would want to do is talk about all these things and, yeah, that was a lot of fun. Thank you for listening. Josh thanks for talking to me again. You can leave a comment for us

JOSH: Thanks for having me.

HRISHI: [laughing] Thanks for listening and if you want talk to us about your thoughts on this episode, or anything that we said, you can tweet at us, you can leave a comment on Instagram or Facebook or on our website [thewestwingweekly.com](http://thewestwingweekly.com)

JOSH: We remain a proud member of Radiotopia, a collection of hard hitting, cutting edge, fascinating podcasts. You can check out those other podcasts at [Radiotopia.fm](http://Radiotopia.fm).

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: What, No? What did I do? What doth I do?

HRISHI: [laughing] Exactly!

JOSH: That was not English?

HRISHI: I think maybe there was one thing in there that tweaked it just slightly outside of English.

JOSH: Oh well.

HRISHI: You might have actually been right, and you just lost me in the labyrinth of your sentence.

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: Thanks to Margaret Miller for unlabyrinthing, unlabyrinthinging the maze of sentences that sometimes come out of our mouths. Mostly me! And also, to Nick Song, for his work as our research assistant and to Zach McNees for his work as our editor, mixer and really just postproduction supervisor guy who gets us home.

JOSH: That's right. He takes this [expletive deleted] and makes it into a podcast.

HRISHI: A job that I am so grateful not to have to do anymore myself. [Josh and Hrishu laugh]

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

RICHARD: And for the last time. What's next?

[Outro Music]