

The West Wing Weekly  
7.15: "Welcome to Wherever You Are"

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today we're talking about episode 15 from season 7. It's called "Welcome to Wherever You Are".

JOSH: It was directed by Matia Karrell, I hope I'm pronouncing that correctly. It was written by [enunciating] Josh Singer, I hope I'm pronouncing that correctly, and it first aired on March 26<sup>th</sup>, 2006. Interesting note, or perhaps not interesting, but a note nonetheless, I decided to look up Matia Karrell to see what else she had done, and I inadvertently typed in or maybe my autocorrect put in the name of an actress on IMDB, Maria Karel. And I noticed that, you know there are rankings on IMDB?

HRISHI: Yeah. The star meter?

JOSH: Right, star meter, exactly. And I guess if you pay [laughs] this is what I'm always pondering like, "do I want to pay to more closely track how unpopular I've become?" And the answer is no.

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: But [laughs] with the free version of IMDB, you get some information. You don't get your exact ranking, but I noticed that Maria Karel is up two million three hundred and eighty-one thousand six hundred and fifty-four places this week.

HRISHI: Hmm.

JOSH: So, I don't know. Maybe she robbed a bank? Or she's starring in a movie that's not listed on IMDB but she's having a heck of a week. That said, Matia Karrell, the director of this week's episode, she slipped forty-seven thousand nine hundred and fifty-six places this week.

HRISHI: Well Josh, you are up three thousand one hundred and sixty-two places this week.

JOSH: Yes, that is no doubt attributable to my appearance on *The Good Doctor*.

HRISHI: Mhm.

JOSH: People [mumbles] "who's that guy?"

[Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: I – I do have a paid account, so if you ever want some intel, just let me know.

JOSH: You do?

HRISHI: I do.

JOSH: Interesting. So why do you have Pro IMDB?

HRISHI: Well for this podcast, actually. There are times when we wanna book somebody and I'll ask you if you have contact info for them and you might not, it might not be somebody that you have been in touch with recently, and so I'll go on there and, with the paid version,

you can find sometimes who their agent is, who their publicist is, and it's been, you know with mixed results, sometimes the way that we've gotten some of our guests.

JOSH: Wow. So just one more facet to how you are better at doing this podcast [both laughing] than I am. That never even occurred to me.

HRISHI: Josh, welcome to behind the scenes of your own podcast.

[Laughing]

JOSH: It's really interesting behind the curtain.

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: I've always wanted to meet the man. I guess I sort of instinctively knew that you were the man behind the curtain, but it's good to – it's good in this final – in the in the waning days of this podcast to finally confirm that. Can you tell me then, what is my, in the universe of Hollywood, what is my current ranking?

HRISHI: You are at two thousand seventy-eight, which is really quite good.

JOSH: That's not bad.

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: That's not bad. There are only two thousand seventy-seven more successful actors than I this week.

HRISHI: [laughing] Right, exactly [laughing]

JOSH: And if I thought of every actor I could possibly name, it would probably be about a hundred and seventy-five.

HRISHI: Mhm.

[Laughing]

HRISHI: And so in this episode, we're just gonna look up all one hundred and seventy-five of them and compare.

JOSH: Yeah. And since we have the contact info, we'll invite them on.

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: Anyway, I'm sorry I derailed us so early.

HRISHI: No [laughing] it, it was a, it was a good derailing. The title of this episode, "Welcome to Wherever You Are", is apt for this moment in the, our story where the Santos campaign in its last five days is travelling to so many places across the country that the congressman can't even keep track of which city he's in. But, special bonus meaning, this is also the name of a Jon Bon Jovi song, "Welcome to Wherever You Are". And Jon Bon Jovi himself is a guest star in this episode.

JOSH: Right. And actually that is such a rock star thing I think, to be like, "Hello, whatever city I'm in".

[Laughing]

JOSH: Like rock stars not really knowing or writing it on their hand or – it's a very rock thing. And I think we do actually have a specific moment or more than one where Santos is being told where he is?

HRISHI: Yeah. Not only that, we even have a specific moment where the song "Welcome to Wherever You Are" makes an appearance in the episode. At one point the Santos children are on the bus and their daughter says -

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

MIRANDA: *Play it again, play it again.*

BON JOVI: *Alright [guitar chords]*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh, that's the song.

HRISHI: It's the opening to "Welcome to Wherever You Are".

[Intro to "Welcome to Wherever You Are" by Bon Jovi plays]

JOSH: Where'd you learn that, IMDB Pro?

HRISHI: [laughing] Amateur Google.

JOSH: I see. By the way, I wrote down, sorry to do it but, in terms of that young actress's performance, I wrote down: "Play it again, play it again, I don't buy it".

[Laughing]

JOSH: And I don't know if it was her performance or just the contrived moment [cross talk] but I didn't buy it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

JOSH: Also I - you know I forgot one bit of bookkeeping that has been pointed out to me by multiple people that the reason that there was such a long break in airings of *The West Wing* [cross talk] I mentioned that the dreaded second [inaudible] the reason was of course because of the Winter Olympics in Torino I guess?

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes.

HRISHI: Yep.

JOSH: Do you skip the recaps and or the intros? I think we might have touched on this before.

HRISHI: I don't.

JOSH: Of course you don't [laughs]. I of course do. And I saw a very funny Facebook post from my old friend Julian Fleisher, great singer performer, he wrote on his Facebook page: "after seven seasons of *The Great British Baking Show*, my drag name is definitely Skip Intro".

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: Which I thought was a very funny line. And today is Julian's birthday so, maybe everybody follow him on Twitter. He's @JulianFlei - f l e i - and it would be funny if 300,000 people followed him and he doesn't know why.

HRISHI: [laughs] Well, to continue this digression a little bit, and also go again behind the curtain, the reason why I don't skip the intro for the *West Wing* episode that we're about to watch is because I want to see if there's anything especially from the last moment of the previously on that leads into our front. Sometimes they'll make a move where they'll do something clever in the editing or unusual and I just wanna make sure if there's something to note – or if there's just, you know, especially early in the, in the show when the previously on would just be a montage of people introducing themselves. Basically, I do it for the sake of trying to have as comprehensive of an understanding of the episode before we start talking about it, but normally, I will skip that sort of thing, the previously on, because I feel like it telegraphs what the episode might be about. And as I think we've also discussed, I like to go into a story that I'm seeing for the first time with no spoilers at all, so I don't watch trailers, I don't read reviews, and it's almost like a little bit of a mini trailer to say, "Hey these are the things we're cueing up".

JOSH: I agree. I avoid it because I like to protect the sacrosanct nature of my initial viewing [cross talk] but I've noticed Netflix imposes a little penalty and even if you skip the intro you get like the last line of the recap [cross talk] [laughs] and so it's always always like, "And that's why I'm going" [laughs] or something. So I was always like, "Okay okay, you gave me the button".

HRISHI: [cross talk] Mhm.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Mhm.

HRISHI: Oh that classic, classic *West Wing* line [laughs].

JOSH: Yes. I really should've written for the show.

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: "And that's why I'm going." [laughs]

HRISHI: And the last note on this particular digression, you namechecked *The Great British Baking Show* [cross talk] which of course is called *The Great British Bake Off* in its native country and in other places, and I tweeted this the other day but I don't know how many people noticed [laughs] or just don't care about what I tweet, but, but the reason why it's called *The Great British Baking Show* in America is because there is a registered trademark by Pillsbury, The Pillsbury Bake Off [cross talk] it's Pillsbury Bake Off, it's a registered trademark, and that's why they can't call the show *The Great British Bake Off* in America.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yes.

JOSH: [cross talk] Oh.

JOSH: That's right, and interestingly in Britain, it's The Pillsbury Bake Show. I think.

[Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: Just pure anarchy over there, anarchy in the UK.

[Intro to *Anarchy in the UK* by The Sex Pistols plays]

JOSH: Yes, exactly.

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: By the way, while we're still completely off [laughs] anything really legitimately to do with *The West Wing*, but I think I can bounce off this from Twitter – you did a reading of a

poem that's up on Twitter, or I guess it's on YouTube, but I saw it mentioned on Twitter, a-a poem called 'One Art', and I thought you did a heck of a job, it's fantastic.

HRISHI: Oh, thanks a lot.

JOSH: How did that come about? What is that whole project?

HRISHI: It's a project called *Ours Poetica* that's about poetry and they are asking a few people, poets and poetry lovers to just, you know, select a poem and read it - it was really up to me to choose whatever I wanted, I chose two, the one by Elizabeth Bishop and then another one by Yeats, and then, yeah, read it and I told a little story about why I chose it.

JOSH: Well that's fantastic, I love the story, I love the poem. Your reading is beautiful and there's something as in everything you do Hrish, there's something meticulous and kind of gorgeous about the video and we see your hands opening the book and you've bookmarked the poem.

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: [laughs] The whole thing, the whole thing – I feel like I was like, "Is- is Hrish in charge of this entire project, is he producing all of this?" [cross talk] it's - it's perfect.

HRISHI: [cross talk] No.

HRISHI: [laughing] Oh tha- I'm so happy you thought so. No, I can't take credit for any of that, it's- you know I went to the YouTube studio where they were making the show and they had everything set up and the whole thing is really nice.

JOSH: It's beautiful, yeah. If you wanna check them out on Twitter anyway, their handle is @ourspoeticashow. And if you can put in a good word, I'd love to read *'There Was An Old Man from Nantucket'*.

HRISHI: [laughing] Noted. It's just [youtube.com/ourspoetica](https://www.youtube.com/ourspoetica).

JOSH: Onto our show.

HRISHI: Onto our show. It's not a poem, but this episode does begin with verse, we get Annabeth singing *'For Once in My Life'* by Stevie Wonder.

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

*Annabeth singing 'For Once in My Life' throughout.*

*HELEN: That was a rally.*

*DONNA: Thirty thousand people.*

*SANTOS: One hell of an opening act. You know he was 17 when he recorded that?*

*HELEN: That's kinda hot.*

*SANTOS: You partial to young achievers?*

*HELEN: Musicians, really.*

*DONNA: Okay, easy there, Stevie.*

*HELEN: Hey, if you can't boogie to the man –*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I really liked that opening – there [inaudible] it's the kind of thing that, handled differently might bug me, like, "We happen to have an incredibly great singer in this show that isn't about singing and so we're gonna have her do her thing". But here it felt organic and she's giving such this kind of low key, it sounds like she's kind of just amusing herself and enjoying herself, but nonetheless you can tell what an amazing singer Kristin Chenoweth is. I [laughs] kind of, I just liked the whole bit.

HRISHI: I have actually a personal little gripe about the set-up of this moment, that has less to do with the content, although it's related. It's something that I take great pains to avoid in *Song Exploder*, which is that I don't like when music with vocals overlaps with spoken dialogue. If you ever listen to an episode of *Song Exploder*, the idea is you're not supposed to notice it, but I'll make an instrumental edit so that when someone is speaking, you never hear someone singing and someone speaking at the same time, because I find it hard to focus on either. Personally, I want to listen to the song and the lyrics, but then I know I'm also supposed to be paying attention to the dialogue, and I just get distracted and I feel like neither land the way that I want them to.

JOSH: That makes sense, sure.

HRISHI: So I- I had to watch that scene a few times to be like, "Wait, what's happening?" in order to sort of get used to Kristin Chenoweth's performance so that I could kind of tune it out and pay attention to what the dialogue was.

JOSH: Hm.

HRISHI: That said, she can sing.

JOSH: She can sing.

HRISHI: It is a little bit like, "Oh" [laughs] "hey, turns out your staffer is a award-winning level singer" [laughs]

JOSH: I know. You a little bit wanted someone to pull her aside and say, "What are you doing with your life?"

[Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: But it sets up this idea in reaction to her singing, you know, the note from Donna passed on to Helen that, "I think she's singing about Leo".

JOSH: Mhm.

HRISHI: And, throughout the episode there are a few references to this idea that this romance that we've talked about, this kind of potential romance really, more of a of a something that's kind of simmering in the background, is maybe not so much in the background for Annabeth, even though she had previously said she was trying to squash it.

JOSH: Yeah. He makes her sing.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Speaking of Leo, if I may [cross talk] a few people pointed out that two episodes ago, I guess "The Cold" [cross talk] that, as we did a deep dive and fetishized [laughs] Josh and Donna's first contact, that we glossed over, we gave short shrift, maybe we gave no shrift, we shriftlessly skipped over the fact that John Spencer's final scene in the show is in that episode. He's ushered, I think, kind of cleverly [laughs] by Fiderer in front of Vinick and staff in to the Oval [cross talk] as- as both campaigns are kind of waiting to get a security briefing,

Leo's ushered in to the Oval to and Bartlet and he have a conversation and Bartlet really kind of picks his brain about what Leo might advise in terms of this situation in Kazakhstan.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Mhm.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*LEO: I'd be surprised if either Russia or China actually wanted a real battle.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Maybe. That or we're stuck between two million-man armies, spoiling for a fight.*

*LEO: You don't know 'til you're in it.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: You think I should be sending another negotiating team?*

*LEO: Armies are already on the ground. Nobody's gonna agree to a cease-fire until they know you're serious about getting involved.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And it is a great scene.

HRISHI: It is a great scene. And I think part of the reason why I didn't bring it up is because this part of the series is still relatively new to me, you know I've now only watched it three times, and yet I think because we feel Leo's presence in moments like these where Annabeth is singing, it hadn't actually occurred to me, even as we were discussing that episode, that that was in fact the last time that we would see John Spencer on screen. But there's something so beautiful about the idea that the final scene between Leo and the president is really like a return to their relationship all along. Obviously, there was no way for them to predict that that would be how this was going to play out but there's something really beautiful and unsaid about that he gets to advise his best friend again, in a moment when he needs some counsel.

JOSH: Yeah, I absolutely agree. I was also – again, I did not realize at the time until it was pointed out to me that that was their final scene, or that was John's final scene either, and when I went back to watch it again, and the original time, I was touched by the discussion of legacy as well [cross talk] it's hard not to extrapolate from the *West Wing* universe into the real universe and, you know, in the scene Bartlet is sort of musing about what his legacy might be in terms of this.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Hmm.

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: This is what they'll remember fifty years from now.*

*LEO: About your presidency?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Got us into a big mess, left it for someone else to clean up.*

*LEO: Oh, come on. They'll remember eight years of strong leadership, growth, a Commander in Chief they could trust.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: You know what probably happens? It goes badly, I get the blame. It goes well, the next guy gets the credit.*

*LEO: Sounds about right.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And something just about- just the discussion about legacy and what a legacy John Spencer has – that’s where kind of where my mind went from that scene.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Once I re-watched it, knowing this was the end for him.

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah. It totally colors the text.

JOSH: Yes, exactly. I mean, and- and what a legacy John left with his work altogether, and particularly on this show.

HRISHI: Yeah. And we’re gonna get into that more in a few episodes.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: For now, let’s go back to this idea of the romance between the two of them, just one last thing that I liked about this little part of the episode is how the information sort of just travels extremely quickly between Helen and Donna and Louise and, meanwhile, Josh and Santos have no idea what any of them are talking about. Like, they aren’t speaking in code and yet, the mere idea of what’s going on, you know, the romance between the two of them, or the feelings that Annabeth might have, they all sort of understand and recognize so quickly. They’re like, “What’s happening? Oh, this is happening. Oh okay.” And the whole circuit completes just as Josh is sort of like, waking up and he’s like, “Wait, what are you guys talking about?”

JOSH: Yeah [laughs]

HRISHI: One of the things that I like in this scene is actually kind of a mistake, I think [cross talk] I don’t know if it’s a mistake, but Santos says, you know in his first sort of misunderstanding of where they are -

JOSH: [cross talk] What’s that?

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

*SANTOS: Chicago, we hardly knew ye.*

*DONNA: We’re in St. Louis.*

*SANTOS: Really? We should hit the town, try some of that fresh frozen custard.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Just strange. I don’t know if something can be both fresh and frozen.

JOSH: [laughs] That’s a good point.

HRISHI: But, I like the kind of nonsense that he’s spouting because it reinforces how tired and semi-delirious he is [cross talk] from lack of sleep, yeah. Even the way he like delivers it feels like he’s just saying some nonsense [laughs].

JOSH: [cross talk] Punchy.



JOSH: And then we get – we get Josh and Lou checking out the map and planning out the Senator’s schedule.

HRISHI: I like the detail in that map, even though it’s just sort of a background prop, you can actually see the path that these three different principals are supposed to take, and it corresponds with what they say in the episode, you know, where everybody has to go.

JOSH: Yeah. They did this pretty meticulously [cross talk] the props people.

HRISHI: [cross talk] [laughs] Yeah.

HRISHI: It’s a gruelling schedule – I mean, it’s kind of unbelievable to think that this is what life is like in the final days of campaigns. I’m sure this is accurate.

JOSH: Right. Multiple states a day.

HRISHI: Yeah. Five states a day for the last five days.

JOSH: Yeah, that seems crazy.

HRISHI: So, a little bit of geographical disorientation has to be accounted for. And Santos, whenever he- he’s going to these different places, they show this sort of like, recurring motif where the press will ask him at the end –

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

*REPORTER: Who do you like in the game this weekend?*

*SANTOS: Uh, Philly and New York? Both strong teams, should be a great game.*

[end of excerpt]

HRISHI: And he says it you know, twice and it works and then of course- and then on the third time, he says it and Donna’s like, “We’re in Ohio”.

JOSH: Go Buckeyes.

HRISHI: Go Buckeyes.

[Josh laughs]

HRISHI: That part reminded me of one of my favourite bits from *The I.T. Crowd*, where there’s a little bit of advice for how to talk like you know about sports [laughs] you know, with some generic level of discourse, and I think about it all the time.

[The I.T. Crowd Episode 3.02 excerpt]

*HARRY: There you go, Moss.*

*MOSS: [cockney accent] Awright, Harry? Did you see that ludicrous display last night?*

*HARRY: What was Wenger thinking, sending Walcott on that early?*

*MOSS: Thing about Arsenal is, they always try and walk it in.*

*HARRY: That is true. See you later, Moss.*

*MOSS: Mind how you go.*

*ROY: What was that?*

MOSS: *[normal voice]* What?

ROY: *You were saying football things, in a football voice! How do you know about football things?*

MOSS: *Oh, it's this new site. It basically sends you a list of football phrases that you can use in normal conversation, updated daily. It's great, I only use it so I can say something to the postman. It's got a pronunciation guide – or [cockney accent] pronunciation guide.*

ROY: *Oh.*

COMPUTER: *[automated tone]* Did you see that ludicrous display last night?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughs] That's hilarious.

HRISHI: So that's my go-to automated response and I encourage Matt Santos and everyone else to incorporate it too.

JOSH: Yeah, why not.

HRISHI: I have to say, I feel – my apologies to anyone who loves this episode, but it feels a little bit like a placeholder to me.

JOSH: I felt similarly, it's funny. It's anything, you know, it's a day in the campaign that's anything but a placeholder for them, but the episode somehow – the impact of the episode somehow feels less vital than what we're seeing on screen. It doesn't add up to much, I think.

HRISHI: It's a little bit odd because the momentum has been building and we've seen this kind of back and forth between the campaigns as one gets a little further ahead, and then the other one out maneuvers them, and then the other one has some good luck – you know, and- and we've kind of gone back and forth and, you know, in the last episode we were fourteen days from the election and I guess you just – you know, it's a weekly show, you need one more before you get to the actual election, but that's kind of what it feels like. I- I appreciate the depiction of how crazy the last few days of the campaign are, but some of the other parts of the story, including the sort of like, Helen Santos subplot, felt a little bit uncrucial, if that's a word.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree with you. This felt like an episode in search of an A plot, and as I watched it, I pondered whether the Toby story might have been the launching point for a deeper dive. We've seen him – Richard and Toby – very fleetingly over the last, I guess, really, several many episodes. He's usually on the phone talking to Josh, we get a little glimpse of him – you know, I miss Toby and I feel like what's going on with – in terms of what he's done, and how it's going to be prosecuted, is very intriguing and – you know, I almost wonder if it was Richard's disenchantment with his storyline that led it to be, you know, more trivialized than it ought to have been.

HRISHI: Yeah, it could've been the entire episode.

JOSH: Sure. By the way, also, as I continue to watch, I feel as I always have that I don't have some sort of huge disappointment or the scales have fallen from my eyes and Toby Ziegler is somebody different from who I thought he was. Everything feels very in keeping with Toby. He's stubborn, he's principled, even if his actions are criminal, I don't judge him, there's still something noble about how he's approaching his own predicament.

HRISHI: One thing I was thinking about while watching this is what Richard said to us which is that he always maintained that Toby didn't actually leak the information and in fact he's covering for somebody else, and as I watched this episode, you can completely buy that!

JOSH: Yes. I thought the same thing too, it's – he's- he's dug in in a way that could be interpreted as, you know, he's gonna take the fall, he's going down with it and that's a decision he's made and he's not gonna move off of it.

HRISHI: But he's protecting somebody else, and who he's actually protecting, we don't know. He says that C.J. wasn't the source of the information, he says Leo wasn't the source of his information, he says his brother wasn't his source of his information. By the end of the episode, we don't know who it is. We still don't know, and he's still not gonna reveal who it is. And, maybe he's lying about one of them, although I really don't think that he is.

JOSH: I just don't know, it's really, really hard to know, I- and also, I thought one of the most intriguing scenes of the entire episode was between Toby and Andy where she's suggesting kind of a way out [cross talk] regardless of the truth.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: Yes.

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

*ANDY: What the hell's the matter with you? Just tell them it was your brother.*

*TOBY: Okay [laughs]*

*ANDY: Look, David's dead. And even if he were alive, he'd tell you –*

*TOBY: What if it wasn't David?*

*ANDY: [sighs] Only you.*

*TOBY: What?*

*ANDY: A Republican hasn't won the Maryland Eighth in forty years. I'm running neck and neck. My campaign manager wants to make "that's why I divorced him" buttons. Just tell the U.S. Attorney it was David and this will all be over.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's a very interesting, almost questionable thing to suggest to him that he – you know, his brother who has passed away and who – you know, to paraphrase, would've wanted it this way – just shunt the blame over to him regardless of whether he was the leak.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's a great scene.

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

*ANDY: It's what he would've wanted you to do.*

*TOBY: Don't tell me what my brother would have wanted. He did nothing wrong, and I will not consider for one second defaming his reputation over something he had absolutely nothing to do with.*

*ANDY: Is that what you're gonna tell the kids?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And one of the ways that I think this episode sort of connects but doesn't fully, is in the moment later- Santos is talking about the rights of ex-convicts [cross talk] to vote. And I think the two storylines could've been pulled together a little bit more. The idea of Toby sacrificing himself- he is going to be a felon, he's gonna be disenfranchised from participating in democracy, this thing that he has like dedicated his life to, and then there's this question of, what are the voting rights of ex-convicts and at what point can people be allowed back into full participation of society. I think we just see it sort of internally with Richard but it- I think it could've been interesting to overlap those stories a little bit more.

JOSH: [cross talk] Mhm.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree with you. You know, yeah, my mind drifted to that too. Toby's gonna be an ex-con one day, will he- will this guy who, you know, gave it all for democracy at least from his point of view, will he not be able to vote in the future, and I wonder whether- I don't know, I wonder whether the answer was better served with our minds drifting there on our own or whether a direct connection might've been made.

HRISHI: Yeah. Yeah, I mean I could see an argument made for leaving it implicit, but I think if that part's gonna be unspoken I just want more and more and more around it. That said, I think the episode is fine. Actually, the two things that I don't like in this episode, sort of explicitly, actually come from external sources. Look, the pieces of writing that I'm most iffy on aren't really from Josh Singer, although he included it. The first is this thing about the crossword clue. Toby's going on and on about doing the crossword at the beginning, he's trying to talk to Josh and he's like, "Oh, you should do the crossword, it's good for you" [cross talk] yeah [laughs] but then he's stuck on this one clue – blowhard, or blow hard. It's unclear whether it's one word or two, and it's a five letter word, and he's like, "Oh" he's trying to find the answer and it leads to sort of a dramatic moment from the U.S. Attorney who gets to tell him, "I think the word you're looking for is storm".

JOSH: [cross talk] It's good for your mind.

[Josh laughs]

HRISHI: And to me, the entire power of this potential moment, or the potential power of this moment is lost, because it's just not a good clue!

JOSH: I completely agree.

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

*TOBY: You're gonna sabotage a national election over this?*

*U.S. ATTORNEY: No, you are. [clears throat] Oh, and by the way, it's 'storm'.*

*TOBY: Excuse me?*

*U.S. ATTORNEY: "Five letters for blow hard"? Storm. Pretty sure it's the word you're looking for.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I spoke to a couple of crossword experts [cross talk] [laughs] about this. As someone who loves crosswords myself, I thought, "Is it just me? Am I really the only one who's gonna have a problem with this?" The first person I wrote to was Robyn Weintraub, who is a *West Wing Weekly* listener herself, as well as a crossword puzzle constructor whose work has appeared in *The New York Times* often. In fact, actually, by the time this

episode comes out, this will all already have happened so it's not so much of a spoiler but, in the November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2019 puzzle, Friday puzzle, there is a clue that she put in for a four-letter word. The clue is: "post hoc, [blank] propter hoc".

JOSH: [cross talk] [laughs] Of course you did.

JOSH: Really?

HRISHI: Yeah. So that's pretty great. So I asked Robyn what she thought, and she said that she thought it was a perfectly fine clue that employs a little amusing word play, but she said that she doesn't really buy that Toby would get stuck on such a relatively easy, early week clue. In fact, we know it's an early week clue because, check this out – the reason why I think this is in the episode at all, is because in- on November 9<sup>th</sup>, 2005, this exact clue and answer was in *The New York Times* crossword.

JOSH: What?!

HRISHI: Mhm. It's from a Wednesday puzzle, which means -

JOSH: That's funny, I had the thought during this scene like, "It must be Monday".

[Laughing]

HRISHI: It's from a Wednesday puzzle, and so Robyn said that I- you know, she didn't really think that- that Toby would struggle with it quite so much where he's asking, you know, multiple times what the answer is. And I thought that was some valuable insight, but she didn't seem to share the same frustration that I had with this. I also asked Ben Tausig who is the creator of *The American Values Club* crossword. He was the editor of the crossword when it was at *The AV Club*, he's a veteran of the game, and not only a constructor but he's also an editor. And, I was happy [laughs] to find out that he shared my frustration. Here's what he said: "No matter how you parse it, that clue doesn't work, at least for me. If it's blowhard – one word, noun – that just isn't a synonym for storm in any sense of the word, so we can rule out the single word theory. Thus, the clue has to be two words – blow hard, which gets closer to working, but although the word storm can be either a noun or a verb, the term 'blow hard' as two words only makes sense as a verb. But to me though, storm-ing typically implies more than just strong wind but also rain or some other kind of precipitation and or lightning. You can do a substitution test here; is" – and I love this, we're getting the real mind of a crossword editor [cross talk] – he says: "You can do a substitution test here; is [quote] will it storm today equal to will it blow hard today? The second sentence, aside from it being awkward, refers narrowly to wind which, by itself, doesn't imply a storm." He says: "I suppose I could see other editors disagreeing, but I would call that clue strained at best".

JOSH: [cross talk] This is fantastic.

JOSH: Nice analysis. I have to say, certainly far better articulation [laughing] than I could ever offer, but that's roughly where my mind went, like it doesn't quite work.

HRISHI: Yeah. And the fact that it gets such a meaty moment is really what bothered me about it.

JOSH: [laughs] Well that's – that's ultimately, the most major bump of the scene is they have this inelegant clue and answer and the import of it as the final word of the scene is, nothing, anyway?

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: It's like – you know, it's – you know, like, it somehow should have been, like, “convicted” would be [laughs] something like, something that really put Toby in his place, or made him feel bad, or was somehow relevant but what it – what exactly is this guy saying? [cross talk] There's a storm- there's a storm a-brewing? Like, what- why go so far into left field to have this moment that doesn't really land? [laughs]

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh yeah.

HRISHI: Oh, you're – you're absolutely right. No that's a- that would have been a great way to do it. Say Toby was like, “What's a ten-letter word for belief?” Right? [cross talk] He's looking for a ten-letter word for belief, and then the guy says, “I think the word you're looking for is conviction”.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah.

JOSH: Mm, very nicely done. There you go, you just re-wrote an Oscar winner very effectively, and you did it on the fly in forty-five seconds.

[Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: Then you'd get it to be the tipping point between what Toby believes in and what the stakes are for believing in those things.

JOSH: Yes.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: Alright, and then my other gripe is [laughs] this line from Jon Bon Jovi, where he says –

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

*BON JOVI: When you get a sec, I'd like to pitch you some ideas on service. You know, on volunteerism on the national level. We've been really working hard to try to make it hip again.*

*MAN: Volunteerism is the new black.*

*BON JOVI: Right. Well, actually, that's our slogan.*

*MAN: Yeah, I saw it on Oprah.*

*BON JOVI: Great.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [exhales, laughs] Yeah, that's a rough interchange!

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Rough exchange, I should say. Yeah, that can't be their slogan.

[Laughing]

HRISHI: That's not from Josh Singer either. That is actually directly from Jon Bon Jovi. It's something that he said at the National Conference in Volunteering and Service in August of 2005, so the thing that is true is that Jon Bon Jovi is a big believer in volunteerism and, at this National Conference on Volunteering and Service, he spoke about this and he said – I'll just read from the transcript of his actual comments. He says: “As you know, I was asked to

speak to you today on volunteerism, and I believe that volunteerism is, in fact, the cornerstone of community". And then, towards the end of the speech, he says: "What I hope to do is get the word out there that volunteerism is hip. In fact, I'm going to start a saying. I want volunteerism to be the new black."

JOSH: Wow. [laughs] Wow, nice detective work and, just wow, I'm flabbergasted. That never really caught on, did it?

HRISHI: I don't think so. I've never heard it before or since.

[Laughing]

JOSH: So do you think when they were negotiating with Bon Jovi to appear in this episode, he was like, "Okay, but I have to say this"?

HRISHI: It's possible.

JOSH: It feels like it now. Now- now that all the evidence is in, he was like, "Alright, I'll do it, but I gotta get my catchphrase in there".

HRISHI: It's true. I mean, he says in the speech, he's trying to get it going, and so, maybe that was [laughs] that was the deal. Hey, no better way to get it going than putting it on this very popular TV show.

JOSH: "Volunteerism is the new storm" would've been better.

[Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: Alright.

JOSH: There's a [inaudible] strong C plot of the potential of seeing Santos in tights.

[HRISHI laughs]

HRISHI: Is that a C plot? I think that counts as a D plot. If you know what I mean.

JOSH: Mm, very nice [cross talk] [laughs] Now I get it, alright, I get it.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Vitamin D [laughs]

JOSH: I feel like we should have either ultimately seen him in tights [Hrishi laughs] or the gang should've been pitching funnier alternate sketches to be done.

[Hrishi laughs]

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

*DONNA: Okay, Leno puts on a Vinick mask, steals a bag of Halloween candy. Then the Congressman comes in wearing a police uniform and arrests him. Not funny at all, huh?*

*ANNABETH: Maybe we should go back to the clarinet.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I wonder how true that is, that it falls on the campaign staff to come up with funny bits.

JOSH: I can't imagine any professional writing staff wants to defer to any professional campaign staff [laughs] [cross talk] but I suppose maybe they just wanted to say, "We're not

gonna do this, but how about this?" Like they might be able to pitch them something that the writing staff would then make funnier.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Worth mentioning that U.S. Attorney Blake is played by Matt Letscher, a great actor who played Billy Chambers on *Scandal*.

HRISHI: That's where I know him from!

JOSH: Yes, I got to work with him quite a bit on *Scandal*.

HRISHI: That's right. Billy Chambers!

JOSH: Great guy, terrific actor.

HRISHI: And what did you think? I mean I – I thought it was suspenseful, the end of this storyline, Toby trying to call his bluff, or what he thinks is a bluff, although the- the U.S. Attorney himself hasn't given any indication as far as I can tell that he might even be bluffing. To me, it seems like he's very ready to actually serve the second indictment.

JOSH: Absolutely, it felt like a big misread on Toby's part to me.

HRISHI: And yet, you know – the fact is it isn't treated as the A plot, even though it's the most interesting thing, because if it were, that would be how the episode would end. I mean, that is kind of the cliff-hanger moment – he's basically staring him down, saying: "If you do this, what you're threatening to do, you are going to" – and I had such an ai-yi-yi moment, right? Then suddenly, the Justice Department is going to derail an entire election.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And Toby says –

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

*TOBY: I don't think derailing a presidential election is part of your job description.*

[end excerpt]

[Josh laughs]

HRISHI: [exhales]

JOSH: Ooph-ty. Yeah.

HRISHI: How is that not the big moment to end this episode on?

JOSH: Seems like it ought to have been.

HRISHI: Yeah. I- I suppose, like, we're trying to create continuity for the election in the next episode, they're gonna, you know, actually get into the election but, that's all I really cared about was, "What is this U.S. Attorney actually gonna decide to do?" While Toby is trying to call his bluff, he says -

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]



*TOBY: "A citizen's safety lies in the prosecutor who approaches his task with humility."  
Justice Robert Jackson. Your position is of such independence and importance that while  
being diligent, strict and vigorous in law enforcement, you can also afford to be just.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: One of the wonderful things about this podcast is we sometimes get emails from people who know what's coming and have some kind of- I just, I love the way the different tendrils of the show reach out into the world, and the way that we get to sort of connect with them sometimes. We got an email from Kristan McMahon who's the President of the Robert H. Jackson Center in Jamestown, New York, and she wrote to us about this moment where Toby quotes Supreme Court Justice Jackson. It turns out Toby is quoting from a 1940 address called 'The Federal Prosecutor', and we'll put a link up to the speech, as you can read it on the [roberthjackson.org](http://roberthjackson.org) site. It turns out Justice Jackson was chosen by President Truman to be the Chief U.S. Prosecutor for the Nuremberg Trials in 1945. He's also the only person in U.S. history to have served as Solicitor General, Attorney General, and Supreme Court Justice.

JOSH: Boom.

HRISHI: So, thanks to Kristan McMahon for writing into us. Okay, along the same lines, a little bit more distant here, another email that we got was from Darren Tindale, and I'm just gonna read from the email [cross talk] – "In 2016, my second year of undergrad at McGill University, I took U.S. Politics 1 and 2 with Professor Harold Waller. I forget the context, but he once brought up an anecdote about how he was featured on an episode of *The West Wing*. A family friend was a writer and wanted his expert opinion on a hypothetical Israeli-Palestinian conflict plotline that the show was considering, and whether Waller thought it was a plausible scenario. And, as it turned out, I believe Waller said that they ended up ignoring his advice." [laughs] "They weren't able to pay Waller for his time, but they did write his name into the script, and so Josh references a scheduled call with Harold, sometimes called Hal, Waller throughout the episode.

JOSH: [cross talk] Sure.

JOSH: Yeah. That said, he cancels the call [Hrishi laughs] unceremoniously [laughs]

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

*ADVISOR: I've got a conference call with Hal Waller at nine.*

*SANTOS: You really think that's the best use of my time?*

*JOSH: It's alright, I cancelled the Waller call.*

*SANTOS: Excuse me?*

*JOSH: The Waller call. I cancelled it.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I guess, in fiction as in life [laughs].

JOSH: Yeah. Which I also thought was another peek into Josh's sometimes poor or brusque management style, which he cancels a call that the candidate thinks is quite important, and does it without telling him.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's true, but I think that this episode really reinforces this idea of how little the candidate is in control of their own life, throughout their campaign, but especially at the end. There's a moment early on, I think in the teaser, when Donna says to Helen –

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

*DONNA: We'll get him to sleep just as soon as we go over the five-day schedule.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Like he's a child and they're the adults in charge of his sleep schedule [laughs]

JOSH: Yeah. I was struck by that too. And it's also – there's an interesting vein throughout the episode of Santos's wanting very badly to have some security discussions and some time with Nancy McNally, and then in an interesting turn, in the scene with Josh, it kind of finally- it feels to me like the real concern comes out and he just says to Josh, "Do you think I'm gonna win?" [laughs] It's almost like that moment played like of him pretending, "I'm important, I'm worried about all this security stuff and the situation I'm gonna deal with in Kazakhstan but really, can you just reassure me that I'm gonna win?"

HRISHI: Right [laughs]

JOSH: [laughs] "Here's what's really on my mind." [Hrishi laughs] I mean, maybe I'm not being fair but it kind of felt that way to me like, for most of the episode, I'm thinking like, "Okay", you know, everyone else is trying to keep his eye on the prize and do the things, silly as they may seem, that are good optics for the campaign in these final days, and he wants to get into the meat of a potential international conflagration, and I kind of admired him for that, but then it kind of- some of the air came out of the balloon when he said, "Do you think I'm gonna win?" [laughs] "That's really kind of what's bothering me." And, all that said, I did- I liked very much Josh's response. Just, it's very subtle, facially, what he's doing, there's just like a little bit of a smile, and a kind of a little bit of a sense that, yeah, Josh really does. And then he says it explicitly, but it's- I like the way the moment is handled.

HRISHI: Yeah. But [sighs] even that moment, I didn't- I didn't like it for some reason.

JOSH: Well, tell me why.

HRISHI: I do like the idea of cutting through everything and getting the candidate to just lay his true feelings bare. But, I think – it's not Bradley Whitford's fault [cross talk] but [laughs] but it feels like they make too much of a meal out of his response.

JOSH: [cross talk] Well, maybe it is.

JOSH: Hmm. I don't know, that's funny, that's funny. I kind of liked it. What I didn't like – it's funny, I had, I guess the inverse of your reaction – I kind of didn't like that the candidate, to whom I was giving great [cross talk] credit throughout the episode for keeping his mind on things more substantive than just winning the race, ultimately kind of seems like a kid and [cross talk] asks, "Hey, is it gonna work out?" [cross talk] And I liked, I guess I liked that he didn't do the Josh Lyman kind of, "Yeah!" [gargling noises] [laughs] [cross talk] You know, it was a very reserved- and I kind of could, I would understand too why you wouldn't want to be overly positive, like this thing is in the bag. Like he's- they've still gotta work for it and he doesn't want to be- but I like that he subtly gave him the nod, like, "Yeah, I think- I think this is happening".

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right, right, right.

HRISHI: Yeah. The problem is really, just with the set-up of the whole thing. I'm just like, "What am I really getting from that moment? What does anybody expect Josh to say in that moment, other than what he says?" Like, what is he supposed to say to the candidate? I don't know.

JOSH: Well then- maybe then I do agree with you, because- I do agree with you overall, like, "What do we get out of this?" I guess I already had the sense that Santos is feeling very confident and he's trying to look into the future and the international situation that's gonna wind up in his lap. So, it was almost like a back-pedal [cross talk] it's like, let's take two steps backwards in terms of Santos's thinking.

HRISHI: [cross talk] That's right, yeah.

HRISHI: Right. And where Josh is saying, "Hey, let's not get ahead of ourselves. Let's focus on actually winning, so that hopefully this horrible problem will be a problem that you'll have to handle".

JOSH: I think it speaks to- there's a greater problem overall, I think we're finding with this episode. It feels a little bit unfocused – not that every episode has to have a sort of be all, end all *raison d'être*, but I don't know what we're supposed to take away particularly from this episode that we didn't already have.

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah.

JOSH: And I guess is- which is your way of saying it's a placeholder.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Which is my way of saying what you said, which is that it's a placeholder.

[Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: It's nice how this episode and our watching is landing very close to our own timeline [cross talk] Halloween, yeah, and you just reminded me of one of my favorite Halloween candies: *raison d'être*s.

JOSH: [cross talk] Halloween.

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah. You're such a goober.

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: The other thing that did occur to me during this episode is that Santos's son- the Santos's son, [cross talk] with his parents and sister, are trick or treating. He's eaten too much candy – obviously, some insane woman who has put razorblades into caramel apples [both laughing] offers- I mean, if somebody gave me some big tray of unwrapped homemade treats, I would run screaming so fast, but the kid sees them and vomits. Helen and Matt are not too concerned [laughs] I mean, I would be appalled if my kid vomited on someone's doorstep – they don't make much of a scene of it. It's kind of like, "Uh oh, here we go". And then the other thought I had is that, that video would've gone viral and probably helped them. It would've been like a [cross talk] cute, funny, kid vomits video.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yes.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right [laughs] yeah.

HRISHI: That poor kid. It's- really, it's Bon Jovi's fault.

JOSH: Ultimately.

HRISHI: Ultimately, he was the one who was chaperoning the kids. It's a really- it takes a village to make that kid throw up [Josh laughs] and he ate ice cream, he's eaten too much candy, he's overstimulated, over- over Halloweened.

JOSH: That's exactly right. But, letting a rock star babysit your kids is the new black.

[Laughing]

HRISHI: The son is Peter, the daughter is Miranda, and I will say, just based with her interactions with Bon Jovi on the bus, she is such a Miranda.

[Josh laughs]

JOSH: That is true.

HRISHI: Is that true? I have no idea what I'm saying.

JOSH: Nor do I [both laugh] but I know it's from that show.

HRISHI: Speaking of kids, we get to see Huck and Molly for the first time in ages, and they're, like, walking, talking people.

JOSH: Right. They're walking, talking Orioles players, much to Toby's chagrin.

HRISHI: Mhm. What happened to the Mets stuff that he got them?

[Josh laughs]

JOSH: Very funny.

HRISHI: I mean, sorry, Yankees [fake laugh] [cross talk] sorry sorry sorry sorry. No no no.

JOSH: [cross talk] I know. You're pulling my leg.

JOSH: Toby, like Richard, is a huge Yankees fan [cross talk]

HRISHI: [cross talk] Sorry.

HRISHI: Did you see that ludicrous display last night?

JOSH: [laughs] Well done.

[Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: I meant – I was thinking about your Mets fandom and I misplaced my New York allegiances. [cross talk] My bad. Yeah, Toby got them Yankees stuff -

JOSH: [cross talk] Yes.

[West Wing Episode 7.15 excerpt]

*MOLLY: I'm a baseball player.*

*TOBY: I can see that. She's an Oriole.*

ANDY: Yeah.

TOBY: What happened to all the Yankees stuff I bought?

ANDY: She likes the little bird.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You know, come on Toby. You know your wife is a Congresswoman from Maryland.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Even if the kids didn't like the Orioles, even if Molly didn't like the little bird, which I thought was adorable [cross talk] she's kind of politically bound to have to wear something-whatever the state level version of patriotic is.

JOSH: [cross talk] Yeah.

[Josh laughs]

HRISHI: State-riotic.

JOSH: Exactly, very good. There was a subtle little moment too where it becomes clear that Toby doesn't know his kids' preschool schedule [Hrishi laughs] and I thought that was sort of [laughs] no [laughs] I didn't really mean that as a joke, I thought it was kind of sad, like, he's-Toby's a little bit out of the familial loop these days.

HRISHI: Yeah, he definitely is. I'm glad we got to see the kids again. I mean, I've been wondering how they have figured into this. You know, by choosing to protect somebody [cross talk] what is he actually sacrificing? Not just of his own freedom but of the upbringing that his kids have. [cross talk] When he decided to leak, or confess, how much were his kids on his mind?

JOSH: [cross talk] Right.

JOSH: [cross talk] Mhm.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: So, ultimately, a really good Toby episode that didn't get to fully become itself, and, somewhat of a placeholder episode for the campaign, even though it really feels like it ought to have had the most momentum yet at this point. It felt a little bit like a, like the stakes were a little bit lower.

JOSH: Right. And yet, in a kind of satisfying way, another stunning episode of our podcast.

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: That's the beautiful thing.

HRISHI: On that note, thanks so much to everyone for listening to this episode. Thank you, Josh.

JOSH: Oh, thank you, Hrishi, and thank you to Margaret Miller and Zach McNees.

HRISHI: *The West Wing Weekly* is part of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of independent podcasts made by independent podcast creators – or, in some cases, slightly dependent, co-dependent, podcasters.

JOSH: Mhm.

HRISHI: You can find out about all of our shows at radiotopia.fm.

JOSH: You can follow us on Instagram, you can leave us a message on our website, you can follow my friend Julian Fleisher as a gag, and make him wonder why he suddenly has thousands of new followers at @julianfleish – j-u-l-i-a-n-f-l-e-i – let's do it, it's his birthday, come on people.

HRISHI: Many thanks to Robyn Weintraub and Ben Tausig. Check out their fabulous work – if you are a crossword enthusiast like myself, look for their great puzzles.

JOSH: I will look early in the week.

HRISHI: [laughs] You don't do a Saturday puzzle?

JOSH: No occasionally, but, I'm not a master.

HRISHI: It's alright, you can use Amateur Crossword. You don't have to pay for Crossword Pro. [Josh laughs] Although I do – I do pay for my crossword subscription.

JOSH: Of course you do.

HRISHI: Yeah. I pay- I have two crossword subscriptions: *The American Values* crossword and *The New York Times* crossword.

JOSH: You must make more money than I do.

HRISHI: I also backed *The Inkubator* crossword by Laura Braunstein, which is a crossword puzzle collection by women. Cis women, trans women and women aligned constructors, and have been enjoying those puzzles as well.

JOSH: Right on.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

BOTH: What's next?

[Outro Music]