

The West Wing Weekly  
7.16: "Election Day, Part 1"  
Guests: Lauren Schmidt Hissrich and Michael Hissrich

[Intro Music]

JOSH: You're listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. This is Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And this is Hrishikesh Hirway. Today we're talking about episode 16 from season 7, "Election Day, Part 1."

JOSH: It was directed by Mimi Leder. It was written by Lauren Schmidt and it first aired on April 2, 2006.

HRISHI: Lauren Schmidt is now Lauren Schmidt Hissrich as she is married to *West Wing* line producer Michael Hissrich and the two of them are our guests on this episode. Later today we'll hear from both of them.

JOSH: Huzzah. And Mimi Leder, who directed this episode, directed the pilot of Apple TV+'s new *The Morning Show*.

HRISHI: Oh, really?

JOSH: Have you seen that yet?

HRISHI: I have not.

JOSH: Nor have I, though I'm really looking forward to it.

HRISHI: Well, Mimi Leder was nominated for Best Directing Emmy for this season of *The West Wing* based in part on this episode.

JOSH: Yeah, she's terrific. Very talented. I think she deserves a lot of credit. I enjoyed this episode as a sort of kind of ambient experience—if that's the English I want to use. It feels to me like we've reached a place that we've earned by watching and experiencing and living in the entire season—it feels like Election Day.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And the sort of simultaneous excitement and adrenaline rush and also exhaustion. And it's just interesting to see where all the characters are, and I kind of feel like I've really taken...I think it's a tribute also to the entire season as well as Mimi's direction in this episode, that I feel like I've been on an incredible ride and I've arrived at an important moment.

HRISHI: Yeah. You may have noticed that I did not do a synopsis for this episode and that's because I think the title really takes care of everything. "Election Day, Part 1." You know what's happening and you know that the story isn't going to be over by the end. This is the onset, and I think it really beautifully captures this sort of pregnant pause where you can't really do anything. This is an episode that I think is about sort of balancing hope and dread, and one's ability to affect anything at this late stage of the game and also the knowledge that you can't really, and just trying to like manage your anxiety and your free time and your passivity.

JOSH: Yeah, maybe that's why I identified with this episode. Because those are, I feel, like on a daily basis, I'm managing hope and dread, and anxiety, and [exasperated laugh] trying to get through the day. Every day for me is "Election Day, Part 1."

[laughter]

HRISHI: Yeah, I think this is an episode that is just about not being in control of your own fate. You know, Josh has been working for ages to try and shape the world and his candidate and the fate of the nation into a vision that he sees for it as best as he can. And now, that they are actually on the day of reckoning, there's very little shaping that he can actually do. And he just has to sort of watch as it unfolds.

JOSH: Yeah, this is an interesting episode, I think, for Josh Lyman. He is, arguably, it's star, and central point and I found myself, overall, feeling sorry for him. He's got some real issues. I think, in one way, he doesn't come across great in this episode at multiple moments. He's incapable of kicking back with his crew, he's incapable of thanking the large cadre of campaign staff, he is perpetually unhappy and tense. The result at the end, was that I kind of felt bad for him.

HRISHI: I think he's under so much stress that he has nothing to really give. He doesn't have the option of being the generous leader that people might want him to be. Because he just has no capacity for it, just trying to manage everything that's going on in his head.

JOSH: Yeah, that doesn't make me like him more, though.

[laughter]

JOSH: You know, the best I could do is sort of feel a deep pity for him.

HRISHI: Yeah, I think Brad is phenomenal in this episode. There are so many weird things that Josh does and so many moments of great delivery and little performance touches—I was tickled and delighted by all of them.

JOSH: That's interesting, I'm not tickled or delighted by him, although I thought it was, I agree that it's a great performance, I think one of the things I like about his performance is that he doesn't really try to be likable. He's just human.

HRISHI: Oh, yeah, I think it's less...again, not tickled and delighted necessarily by the character but by the performance choices.

JOSH: Oh, okay, fair enough. I agree with you there then.

HRISHI: If I were to have a synopsis of this episode, to expand beyond "Election Day, Part 1," I might just add this is *West Wing After Dark: Hanky-Panky Edition*.

JOSH: No kidding! Yeah that, what did I write down? "Election Day, Part 1," or "Voting Makes You Horny."

[laughter]

HRISHI: That's even better!

JOSH: Um, yeah, that is certainly a strong undercurrent of sexual tension.

HRISHI: They have one sticker that says, "I voted," and they get another sticker that says, "I hooked up with someone."

JOSH: [laughter] That's very funny.

HRISHI: And if that were the case, pretty much everybody would be wearing the second sticker.

JOSH: Yeah, pretty much. I love the sort of sprawling opening scene. I will say this: Lou would not make a great cocktail waitress. I don't know if you noticed, but in the delivery of the seven glasses and the bottle of scotch, she manages to put her fingers in to all seven glasses.

[laughter]

HRISHI: I think as we've established in many other episodes, but certainly in this one, delicacy is not really one of Lou's strengths or character traits at all.

JOSH: That is a good point. It's a great actor's choice, rather than to carry the cups as a professional might, she just sticks her fingers into all of them and pop them down on the table. You're right.

HRISHI: So we start with this big group scene, and eventually the different campaign team-members head off in pairs, and I like how there was this sense of sort of casual sneakiness that would be undertaken by half of the pairs and then whoever was following them would be completely obvious. Like, it starts off with Lester saying, "Well, it's bedtime for me," and he goes off and it just seems like everything's normal and he's leaving and then Edie—I don't know if she's attempting any kind of poker face—just in a complete give away is like...

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*EDIE: Yeah, you know, I think that's it for me too. So, I'll send out an email about L.A. later.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: ...and then they you know do their little waiting for the elevator dance. And then the same thing happens with Lou and Otto, which by the way, that's hilarious.

JOSH: I agree.

HRISHI: But, Lou gets up and she leaves, and again, it doesn't seem like she's doing anything but heading away and then Otto, you know, has this like determined look on his eyes as he like stares at her as she walks away and he's like, [really quickly] "Yeah, me too."

JOSH: Well it's funny, it speaks to a little bit of a pet peeve that I have frequently in television acting. Lester leaves for the elevators and then Edie is going to follow shortly thereafter and cover for the fact that she's going to be with him at the hook-up. And often, I think there's an intentional direction or choice on the actor's part to show that you're covering up this thing. Like that it's important for the audience to see. And it seems to me that's the opposite of what you want to do, where when you're covering something up, you don't show it. You just go, "Yeah, you know, I'm tired too." I think there's no reason at all to have—I mean unless it's a choice, where it's like okay, "She's bad at this." and they just can't hide it, or it's new love and they're so excited that it bubbles—but a lot of the time I feel like it's just a director wanting to make sure that the audience knows something that that shouldn't know, and that if you were covering it up, there would be no sign of it. Do you know what I mean?

HRISHI: Yeah, absolutely, I know what you mean. And I think that it is a little bit of both. I think there is you know certainly some of that for our benefit—to be like, "Ow, look what's about to happen..." You know, it's *The West Wing's* equivalent of bowchicawowwow. And also, I think there is a little bit of exuberance on the part of this sort of campaign fling. I also think that there might be some element of power dynamic that gets exposed in it as well. You know, the person who leaves and says, "Okay, I'm heading to bed." and does it subtly—Lester in one case and Lou in the other case—and then the person who's like, "Oh, that's my cue, I better go. The person who I'm looking forward to hooking up with just left, so I gotta make my move too."

JOSH: Yeah, I think you're right. And I think also if it is if it's telling us something more about their relationship or about the dynamic or about the state of affairs between them so to speak, that's great. Sometimes I think it's something else and it's just a mistake. It's later in the episode too,

there's a moment between Will and Kate, where he mentions possibly going back to California and to me, it's like there's just too much of a moment where like, "Ooh, this didn't sit right with Kate."

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*WILL: I'm actually feeling a little sentimental about California.*

*KATE: California?*

*WILL: The local political work. There's something romantic about it really.*

*KATE: Romantic?*

*WILL: Over seeing a mayoral race in a city that needs a breath of fresh air.*

*KATE: Sounds nice.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I don't know I just kind of feel like sometimes interpersonal relationships are a little subtler than we see them on TV.

HRISHI: Mm hm.

JOSH: Like was something wrong before? Yeah of course didn't you see her face fell? And then she was like "Oh uh no nothing." You know, I don't like that "Uh, uh, I'll see you later" moment that you get too often on TV.

HRISHI: Uh huh.

JOSH: But I'm nitpicking. And I feel like I've had that I guess also maybe this is just personal. I feel like I've had that direction multiple times where the director is like "I'm not seeing that you weren't thrilled with what she said." And I was like "Right, because the character doesn't want her to know that she's not thrilled with what you said." He's like "Okay well you know can you split the difference?" In other words it's just to make sure that you are seeing the thing I'm hiding.

HRISHI: You're like "Can you split the difference so we know that you're bad at doing that thing that you're trying to do?"

JOSH: Right. Exactly.

HRISHI: Yeah. And you want characters to be able to effectively mask their emotions when the time calls for it.

JOSH: Yeah. Not that everyone is equally good or bad, I think it might be because I'm so good at it, because I was just recently in a situation with my wife, the lovely Melissa, and somebody else who was telling us something that we knew already but weren't supposed to know, and later she was like "That was chilling." And I said "What?" And she goes "You even did a little like surprise thing, like, you so convincingly didn't seem to know what we were being told that I now question all our interactions."

[laughter]

JOSH: And I was like "Yeah, I'm an actor for a living, like I'm good at it!"

HRISHI: [Laughs] Good on Melissa for questioning the integrity of the entire union.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: But not only are you a good actor, you are also a good poker player from what I understand, and I imagine you know that's a little bit of acting right there, maintaining a poker face is some element of performance.

JOSH: I think you've put your finger on it exactly. And I think it is because I'm a poker player and I would like to think a good one and it's that when you're a good poker player it's not that you seem like you have a good hand when you don't have a good one and you seem like you don't have a good hand when you have a good one it's that you don't give away anything ever. And so I think I am so trained to do that that I maybe I project that. I feel like other people should be good at it too.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Just don't give anything away.

HRISHI: Right, I think it's a fair gripe but I think you're gripe-o-meter in this particular regard might be especially sensitive because of the background you have.

JOSH: Yeah. I think you nailed it. There it is.

HRISHI: Lester and Lou though, you can't really, I don't think find any fault there they're quite subtle in their departures.

JOSH: Yes. I agree.

HRISHI: And then Edie and Otto not subtle at all.

JOSH: And then Ronna, who knew?

HRISHI: Apparently not Josh.

JOSH: And she's not trying to conceal anything, nor should she, but then how did he never I mean it's like I understand okay, Josh has got other things on his mind or whatever and has not picked up on all these secret liaisons that are happening but hers isn't even secret. Or at least at that moment, who knows what has happened, what has transpired previously, but, it's funny.

HRISHI: Yeah she doesn't play it like it's a secret at all. I love Karis Campbell's performance throughout this whole episode actually.

JOSH: Me too.

HRISHI: She really makes Ronna come alive and I really love that character, this is one of my favorite Ronna episodes.

JOSH: Yeah and a great and again I've said it before but I'm always impressed when these wonderful actors that are in the smaller roles are really able to make something beyond the real estate they're given in the script. It's fantastic. And a tough ask.

HRISHI: The tone that she has with Josh as she gives him basically a "Yeah duh"

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*RONNA: You might have had an easier year of it if you had come on board.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Is great. Like I just I understand that she really she gets Josh. She knows everything that's going on and she's she has sort of a level of I think pity and sympathy and kind of kindness in the way that she tells him about, like, breaks the news to him.

JOSH: Hm hm. I agree.

HRISHI: So Josh didn't know that any of this was happening. Donna knew that all of this was happening and we kind of saw that previously with Josh's complete lack of awareness around Annabeth and Leo.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: And how Donna and Ronna and Helen instantly knew what was going on. So Josh's you know this is not his strong suit and I think everybody knows it except for maybe Josh but Donna is in charge here. She is the one calling the shots. She's the one who's gonna make this thing happen and it's really it's just up to Josh to not mess things up.

JOSH: That's right. I even liked that there's this sort of subtle thing where he asks her, once they're left alone in the bar he asks her:

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*JOSH: Do you want another drink?*

*DONNA: No.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's like "I don't need that." And then he, then she walks off, he decides to follow, and he finishes his drink. It's kind of like well he does.

HRISHI: He needs some liquid courage.

JOSH: Apparently.

HRISHI: Really there are a lot of moments between the two of them where I was just on tenterhooks hoping that Josh wasn't going to screw things up and he comes so close so often.

JOSH: I feel the same way too, as much as I enjoyed watching it and seeing them sort of kind of slowly get there so to speak I felt sad for them in a way that there wasn't more to it. In terms of what we see they never have that moment of "Oh my God, it's been so many years." And you know not that it has to be "I love you." But we don't see much of the good stuff.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That you want for them.

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah. I do love after the cold open, Snuffy's music that comes in.

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*Quiet music plays.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, I do too.

HRISHI: It's that moment of post-coital awkwardness or we certainly, like certainly the music lets us know-this is awkward. And we've got the camera angle on Josh, you know, sideways, and it's funny you know we haven't had many maybe we've had zero moments of comedic scoring, in *The West Wing* and certainly no romantic comedy scoring.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And here it is and it's a chance to let Snuffy explore a whole new mode. It is always remarkable to me how like in just a few notes you can set a tone.

JOSH: Yeah, it was just right.

HRISHI: Yeah. And then Josh is just again, just coming so close to messing things up even after-the-fact. It's like "Alright, you got there, look at this, it happened! It finally happened." And yet he's still somehow possibly gonna screw things up.

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*JOSH: You don't have to leave.*

*DONNA: I know.*

*JOSH: I mean you don't have to sneak out.*

*DONNA: I wasn't.*

*JOSH: You don't have to worry, a lot of people are gonna be doing the walk of shame today. Not that what we did was shameful or is shameful that's not what I meant.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah well I mean that's why I kind of felt bad for him, this guy's I don't know this whole thing should be more joyous, there's something in him that is preventing it. He's a little bit barked up.

HRISHI: Yeah. Maybe he's in a little bit of disbelief. I think he probably is.

JOSH: Hmm.

HRISHI: So here's one of the things that I love about this episode in terms of you know the weird performance moves, like the little Josh ticks. I have never seen anything as weird when it comes to brushing teeth as what Josh does with the tube of toothpaste, what is happening?

JOSH: I wrote down, literally, I'm looking at my notes: "Most disturbing element of the episode."

[laughter]

JOSH: Who eats toothpaste?

HRISHI: I know and just like squeezes it out of the, puts his mouth on the tube and squeezes a little in his mouth and then just eats it.

JOSH: Yeah. No. There's no, I've done the finger brush in similar situations, I've gotten creative when I needed to but I, it never would occur to me to, there's no even attempt particularly that I could detect to swish it around his teeth. He's just eating toothpaste. Like a second grader eats paste. It's very upsetting.

HRISHI: But what I love is that it is so weird and so unusual that it feels extremely realistic. You know sometimes a choice like that would go the other way around but it's too weird to not feel like a specific thing that like a- some weird person really does. And that weird person happens to be Josh Lyman.

JOSH: Yeah, I, believe me I spent more time probably than I should have pondering and re-watching this moment in thinking "Did he do this in rehearsal? And they're like uh O.K., props we need to mock up a tube of toothpaste with honey in it." Or something like? Or is he really just eating toothpaste, really, I wanted to see the "making of" for the that scene, for that moment.

HRISHI: Well. Yeah.

JOSH: I guess you know it's occurring to me as you point that out, I thought that the physical consummation of their relationship would get them sort of leaps and bounds beyond where it actually does in their relationship.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: They're not kind of talking about the things I thought they would talk about. I thought it would kind of open them up and this multi-year simmering romance between them would just be blooming and blossoming now that they've been together. But it's sad that they really have that, it's almost, it feels a little bit like a hook-up between two people who just met.

HRISHI: Yeah. You know what I like about you Josh?

JOSH: What's that?

HRISHI: You're a hopeless romantic.

JOSH: Don't tell anyone else.

HRISHI: No that's what everybody knows about you, you are just a sucker for a happy ending and a nice love story.

JOSH: I'm a hopeless romantic with a great poker face, ultimately.

HRISHI: Exactly. I know we're talking about Josh a lot here but I just wanted to also give a shout out now to the all-time worst thank you speech.

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*JOSH: Uh it's a special day. A high point in your young impressionable lives. So go. Take a few minutes to enjoy it. And then call your family and friends, make sure they voted. Actually ask them about the lines at their polling precincts so we know if our "get out the vote" is working.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Hey, I wrote "worst thank you ever" this is great.

HRISHI: But before he even gets to the speech, again, just a great moment, he gets up on this swivel chair to deliver it and as he does it the chair starts to turn away from the people and he has to catch himself on the light fixture and turn him back around. I just think that's great.

JOSH: Loved it. Loved it. Great little piece of physical comedy, unexpected moment. A little...

HRISHI: Cheap thrill.

JOSH: Cheap thrill. Yeah. Exactly. I really liked that.



HRISHI: Yeah. The part that really absolutely cracked me up though is the moment right after the thank you speech when Louise says:

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*LOUISE: You might want to work the phrase "thank you" in there somewhere.*

*JOSH: Thank you! Appreciate it.*

*LOUISE: [sighing] Okey dokey.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Perfect. Nailed it.

HRISHI: Yeah, couldn't do it better. You know and Louise is on her own little jag here like trying to manage her own anxiety around today. Like it's not only Josh. Some people are quite calm and collected. Josh is absolutely not and I think Louise gets the second prize you know and part of the way she's channeling her anxiety is coming up with ideas for contingency speech after contingency speech and then assigning them to poor Otto.

JOSH: To poor Otto, yes.

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*OTTO: So let me make sure we have this. We need one if he wins, one if he loses. One if he loses the Latino vote, one if he wins the electoral vote but loses the popular vote, one if he loses the electoral vote but wins the popular vote, and one if he loses his home state.*

*LOUISE: Right.*

*OTTO: What if two of those things happen simultaneously? I mean what if he loses his home state and the Latino vote and still wins?*

*LOUISE: That too then.*

*JOSH: What are we talking about?*

*OTTO: Uh, the speeches.*

*JOSH: Yeah we should have one in case the race is too close to call.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But since they, based on their dynamic all the other times in this episode and previous ones and the fact that they are hooking up, I was wondering: Does this count as a kink?

JOSH: Yeah this is a real niche kink.

HRISHI: Ah. Poor guy. And yet, you know, we talked a little bit about the powerlessness of this episode but Lou still has a move or two and we see it in this little strategic move of when she's scheduled Santos to cast his vote which is later than you would expect. It's at 9am Texas time and you see the Vinick campaign being surprised by the timing of it because it seems like he's missed the early morning coverage but we see that the news stations cut away from Vinick California stories and go to Santos.

JOSH: Yeah, I wondered if that was a standard political play.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It seems very clever.

HRISHI: It seems very clever. Yeah. And I do love that even at this point people are still trying to figure out ways to gain an inch here or there. It just underscores how this is an election where it really matters. You know, some elections are more or less decided before the day of the election but here it's like yeah you need to scrape every single couple thousands of votes in one state or another towards your candidate however you can.

JOSH: Yeah it was interesting to see how they deployed their resources on this election day but one thing that I didn't quite understand is that they send staffers or people on the campaign to go out and to do what they're calling spin and much of it seems to be going on to the political shows and telling people how well things are going. That seems kinds of counter to what you want to tell your potential voters. You don't want to go, you know, Donna at one point we see on a screen within our screen saying that they're up in North Carolina, in South Carolina and don't you wanna tell your voters like "This isn't in the bag. You need to go out. Numbers are down." I don't know why you wanna tell people "Hey things are going great." Like what that seems counterproductive spin.

HRISHI: Yeah it is really funny because we get later in the episode a couple of lines from Josh and Teddy saying exactly what you're saying.

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*JOSH: Last thing we want, Democrats in Oregon and California thinking they don't need to go to the polls because Santos already has it in the bag.*

*TEDDY: Yeah or Vinick's supporters turning out in droves for some last ditch resurgence.*

*LOUISE: Will you please.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But then to balance that you also have to make it sound like your person is really in it so that people feel excited about voting for a winner maybe?

JOSH: Yeah well I guess you make a good point and I recognize that later in the episode Josh did say those things but earlier in the episode I was writing down myself and wondering "Why is this happening?" cause I guess what you wanna do is balance the message. You don't want people to give up and say "Hey, we're out of this." anywhere at any time. But I guess I didn't feel like that's what they were doing. It felt like they were, I felt too much like they were giving both sides which sort of just trying to give a rosy picture of how things were going.

HRISHI: It's true.

JOSH: But you're right of course there's a balance there where you don't want people to get complacent but you don't want people to get depressed and figure it's over anywhere you want them to go out you know to the polls.

HRISHI: Yeah that's really where I think these twin poles (p-o-l-e-s) of hope and dread kind of emerge in this episode because you have this kind of public facing message of "Hey things are going great and look at how well our candidate is doing." and then internally both campaigns are talking about what's gonna happen if their candidate loses in really serious terms you know not with a measure of fatalism but like a real with a realistic kind of sense of "Okay well if this doesn't go our way." You know there's a fair degree of pessimism I think on both sides.

JOSH: I agree.

HRISHI: One of the ways that I love how they tell that part of the story is that like every time there's some good news towards the end as the states start getting called both in this episode and the next episode, one of the things I really like in these "Election Day" episodes is that usually they'll call a state for a candidate and it's immediately followed by the opposing side's reaction to the news. We don't get a lot of "And this state goes to this person." and everybody cheers. It's really the opposite.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: They're really highlighting the sort of negative feelings around all of these pieces of news.

JOSH: Yeah, that's right.

HRISHI: I like that. To me it justifies the sort of two-parter aspect of the episode because you know as they say in the end at the end of this "It's gonna be a very long night." You know it really sets this up that everyone is I think in both campaigns they are each feeling the bad news much more potently than they're feeling the good news.

HRISHI: THIS IS HRISHI JUMPING IN HERE, FROM THE FUTURE TO SAY THAT THIS IS THE MOMENT WHERE JOSH'S RECORDER FALLS ON THE GROUND AND SWITCHES TO THE OTHER INPUT, THE OTHER MICROPHONE, SO FOR THE NEXT FEW MINUTES IT'S GONNA SOUND A LITTLE BIT WEIRD BUT WE FIX IT LATER ON.

HRISHI: They are each feeling the bad news much more potently than they are feeling the good news.

JOSH: Yeah. And there's even a kneejerk reaction to anybody who seems to be anticipating anything good happening. There are all these superstitious kind of everything just short of a going poopoo.

HRISHI: Right, exactly, yeah, they don't wanna tempt the wrath of the whatever from high atop the thing.

JOSH: Exactly. They don't talk about what poster you're gonna put up in your office, don't do any of these things.

HRISHI: Yeah. And there's something strange going on with the exit polls. I just realized I started to quote *Ghostbusters*. But there is something strange going on in these neighborhoods.

JOSH: Duh dunt dunt duh.

HRISHI: And who are they gonna call? Precinct captains.

JOSH: Boom.

HRISHI: And I think Josh is reading those tea leaves, cause that's really what exit polls are as not some sort of reassurance that things are going well but rather that something is very wrong with the way that this data is being collected and it like it almost seems like he takes it at like a foreboding omen.

JOSH: Hm mm. I liked Josh's Foo Fighters "The Foo Fighters" moment.

HRISHI: Oh yeah.

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

JOSH: *Is that The Foo Fighters?*

DREW: Um, Foo Fighters.

JOSH: Yeah.

DREW: Well it's not "The" Foo Fighters. Yeah, that is them. We've actually got nine performers doing...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I kind of wanted him to get an "Okay Boomer."

HRISHI: [laughter]

JOSH: It kind of felt like, there are several times in the episode where it felt like he was maybe owed one and none more so than this moment.

HRISHI: I wanted them to go cut to a flashback between Dave Grohl and Justin Timberlake as Sean Parker turning to Dave Grohl and saying "Drop the "The" just "Foo Fighters" it's cleaner."

[*The Social Network* excerpt]

SEAN PARKER: Drop the "The" just "Facebook" it's cleaner.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right. Exact. I used to make a joke it always I always thought it was something emblematic of, or characteristic of older Jewish people to add an extraneous "the" and I used to say that my Dad you the band "The The"? My Dad used to call them "The 'The The'."

[laughter]

JOSH: Like that's the worst iteration ever of that particular problem.

HRISHI: That's great. Yeah how 'bout that just Foo Fighters casually being in the episode?

JOSH: Yes. Yeah that's a pretty impressive, and not overused, I liked that they didn't flaunt the fact that they had booked these guys. They're there just enough to add credibility to the idea that this in fact a presidential campaign party being planned.

HRISHI: Well said. It feels like when they're walking away from an enormous plane that says you know "United States of America" and you're like "Wow" that's some production value.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: That's exactly what it feels like. It feels like they are in an extremely expensive part of production design.

JOSH: Yes. Yes.

HRISHI: I'm so happy that yeah Dave Grohl does not have any lines.

JOSH: Yes. Good call. I think after the Bon Jovi debacle they knew better.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's true. I was just thinking well like what if Dave Grohl's thing was environmental clean-up and he wore a t-shirt that said "Green is the new black" and then I thought "No, that would have been better."

JOSH: [Laughs] It would have.

HRISHI: That would be a legitimate slogan.

JOSH: Yeah, that's usable.

HRISHI: Sierra Club you can have that one.

JOSH: That's a freebie right there.

HRISHI: While they're looking at the exit polling they say military voters are going for Santos, which I love as a set-up for Kate's little curveball that she actually voted for Vinick.

JOSH: Yes, that's a quite a good moment.

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*WILL: You keep saying that, "The next President, whoever he is..."*

*KATE: Yeah, well, the NSC's a non-partisan...*

*WILL: Did you vote for Vinick? You voted for Arnold Vinick?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And there's no clear resolution to that scene in terms of figuring out what that ultimately means to Will and the future of their relationship.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think it's awesome. I think it's such an awesome detail because I almost kind of wish that we didn't have the line from Kate right before that where she says:

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*KATE: I'm not like you. I don't live and die with The Democratic Party. I want to see the next President through this crisis in Kazakhstan whoever he is.*

*WILL: You keep saying that, the next President...*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Because it's a little bit of a telegraph later on. Like I like the subtle set-up of "military voters are going for Vinick" and we know that he's been pressing on his credentials to enforce a confidence in national security as the reason why people ought to vote for him. We have all of that and that I think it enough. I didn't need that last little bit.

JOSH: Yeah. I think I agree with you. I like also Mary's, I like Mary McCormack's just facial, her response to Will's asking.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Whether she voted for Vinick.

HRISHI: I really like the Kate and Will stuff. Your misgivings about the lack of poker face is noted and I completely understand but I didn't mind, like there I didn't think that it was such a big deal that she wasn't doing a good job hiding her emotions. I think she was just hit by the sudden surprise, I think she was probably surprised herself a little bit about her own reaction to Will's musings about maybe moving to California. You know his speculation was sort of like it might the end of the two of them together and it seems like it hasn't been something that's so serious on paper but it's a nice way to lead them both to acknowledging that actually this thing does mean more to them than they've acknowledged.

JOSH: Finding out in the moment.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah that's a good point. Point taken.

HRISHI: I do love the Kate/Will chemistry and again I like their high functioning dynamic. They're a couple with like pretty good communication skills and their ability to sort of like have an issue, discuss it, resolve it and move on.

JOSH: Yeah. I thought Will might have been a little bit quicker on the uptake and gotten to it in that first scene.

HRISHI: Yeah but he makes up for it I think.

JOSH: Yeah. I agree. I think he does the right and mature thing to kind of take it on at least and bring it up later. But I would have liked him to have gotten there in the moment. I mean I guess ultimately I blame Lauren and not Will.

HRISHI: I like imagining that in my head, in your head, you're going through this episode just wanting yelling at the screen at everyone "Just say I love you!"

JOSH: [Laughs] Well you know me.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Exactly.

JOSH: Incurable romantic.

HRISHI: The closest thing to an "I love you" we really do get is a pretty good one I think and that is from a non-romantic relationship in this episode, Charlie and C.J.

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*C.J.: Why are we still talking about this?*

*CHARLIE: Honestly?*

*C.J.: Yeah!*

*CHARLIE: You're a smart and savvy woman who could easily consider world domination as a next career move. (long pause) And I'd like to continue working with you, if that's a possibility.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh, very nice point. I did love the, cause you know this was another one where like "Oh you got me." because I'd spent a couple times through it being slightly annoyed by Charlie's working on C.J.'s potential next job on tax-payer dime. I kind of thought "This doesn't feel right to me, is this what he should be spending his time on?" and then with the resolution that "Look, I wanna keep working for you." I thought that was actually very sweet and I liked it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I liked I liked how they both played the scene and that C.J. is like "Okay, you could maybe pack up a couple of these for me."

HRISHI: Yeah. Here's a tip from this episode for anybody who needs to compliment a woman, you might want to keep this one in your back pocket. "You're a smart and savvy woman who could easily consider world domination as a next career move."

JOSH: Not bad.

HRISHI: Pretty good.

JOSH: I was going to say I wasn't thrilled with how Will pronounces the word "mayoral."

HRISHI: Oh yeah?

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: You know the actor in that scene was you?

JOSH: Right. That's right. I want to distance myself from that guy. [Hrishi laughs] At one point I say something about a "mayoral"...

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*WILL: Overseeing a mayoral race in a city that needs a...*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I then went to the internet and the internet convinced me that that is an acceptable pronunciation but I think nowadays it would have, I would have had him say "may-OR-al."

[laughter]

HRISHI: That's great. There's a great podcast out there that's just you talking to yourself switching between first and third person as you review performances of yourself.

JOSH: [Laughs] I think there might be a limited audience for this podcast.

HRISHI: Well sign me up!

JOSH: In addition to talking to myself about myself I would also be the only person listening. [Hrishi laughs] And that's a problem in terms of monetizing it.

HRISHI: I would never miss an episode.

JOSH: Alright that's two listeners right there.

HRISHI: That's great, yeah.

JOSH: I will be looking for a job soon [Hrishi laughs] so we can talk about this off mic.

HRISHI: You're like Charlie Kaufman-esque you have self-examination and criticism and the dialogue is really just between clips of your performances and you speaking in real time. I'm tickled. I don't know if anybody else is enjoying this idea but I'm having a great time.

JOSH: Alright folks, keep up here out, after *The West Wing Weekly* wraps up keep an ear out for the new, keep an eye out for the new podcast *He Sucks*.

HRISHI: [Laughs] By the way, now that we're close to finish with the podcast I think I've finally landed on the subtitle for it: "I Don't Know If Anybody Else Is Enjoying This But I'm Having A Great Time."

JOSH: [Laughs] Yeah. That's kind of our credo.

HRISHI: [Laughs] You know one of the moments that I really like from Ronna and Edie also but I love Ronna's sort of almost non-reaction reaction to discovering Josh and Donna in Josh's hotel together after they go for Round 2.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: She's just looking for Donna, she's just trying to get work done and then Edie comes over and she's like "Is that happening?" and she's like "Yeah, yeah it is." and you know again they don't make a big deal out of it and it's great. They just sort of acknowledge it, they get a little bit of joy from it and they move on. One of my other favorite Josh and Donna moments is this little exchange where he's reading the exit polls and Donna says "You're face is frozen in an odd way." And Josh without trying to move his face says...

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*JOSH: Unattractively?*

*DONNA: Not entirely.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [Laughs] Yeah, I like that moment too. It was getting a little playful and romantic there.

HRISHI: [Laughs] They're so close!

JOSH: So close.

HRISHI: So close to giving you what you want.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: I really love when Donna has some anxiety of her own, she says:

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*DONNA: I was looking at some of the county data earlier in Dakota County, Republicans have a 16% edge in registered voters but the exit polls show us leading by 8%. I wonder if the law is affecting the accuracy of the numbers we're getting? Am I just being paranoid? I'm just being paranoid, forget it.*

*MAN ON PHONE: Hello.*

*JOSH: Hey, can you pull all the numbers coming out of Minnesota? Thanks.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And this for me is actually the most exciting moment of consummation I think because it is Donna having earned her place as a campaign advisor. You know, she has the specific detail, she has understood the political landscape, the media landscape, the how it all might play into the room when they're reading the results and she says this to the Campaign Manager who reacts. You know there's, they've come so far and now there is they just get to have this sort of professional interaction that to me is I think my favorite bit of their relationship in this whole thing. "Doing it" aside.

JOSH: There you go. That's a *West Wing* relationship.

HRISHI: Yeah. There's another kind of very *West Wing* relationship that I am less excited about but it also connects to a little bit of continuity. A little nitpick that I have. Towards the end of the episode as they're again reading the exit polls on the Vinick campaign, Bob is talking about how they don't make sense and he says:

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*BRUNO: The numbers are wrong.*



*BOB: Look we're also losing in North Dakota, a state that's gone Republican for the last 40 years.*

*BRUNO: And that doesn't...*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But we know that that not's true. We know that President Bartlet took the Dakotas because he bragged about it to Abbey in "Process Stories" in Season Four after that election.

[*The West Wing* Episode 4.08 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: I don't want to intimidate you but it turns out I'm the first Democrat in 20 years to make a clean sweep of the Plains States and I'm not just talking about Iowa and Nebraska.*

*ABBEY: Are you trying to turn me on now?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Yeah.*

*ABBEY: Alright.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: I won The Dakotas, The Badlands, The Black Hills.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Of course we know that Hrish. What have we not been paying attention all these years?

HRISHI: Exactly! I remember it especially because of that fun little meta moment where Martin Sheen says "The Badlands."

JOSH: Ah. Good movie.

HRISHI: And then cut to the moment where Justin Timberlake tells Terrence Malick to drop the "the" just call it "Badlands." [Josh laughs] "It's cleaner."

JOSH: Well done. And I remember it because you just told me.

HRISHI: And then, continuing on from that, in that same episode from Season Four, it's really not even the only time that The Dakotas are used in the pursuit of wooing a woman. Bruno has this conversation with a young woman.

[*The West Wing* Episode 4.08 excerpt]

*ASHLEY: You realize you won all the Plains States but the Dakotas?*

*BRUNO: We won the Dakotas.*

*ASHLEY: I didn't even realize that.*

*BRUNO: Yeah. We won the Dakotas tonight. The Badlands.*

*C.J.: Bruno.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then C.J. comes in and he says "This is uh, Ashley, assistant to Jane Zalaznick at the Women's Leadership Coalition." setting up back in Season Four this character detail about Bruno that he pursues much younger women.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: And then it comes back in this episode when we see him with this Yale grad, almost Yale grad, as Bruno says, Carrie.

JOSH: Ick.

HRISHI: In case you thought that Bruno's pageboy haircut was like the only creepy thing about him.

JOSH. [Laughs] Wow. It's gonna be like that. Yeah. No. And then, even worse well he also first of all he makes a very I think rookie faux pas for a would-be Lothario and he introduces someone giving their full name not realizing that he doesn't know the last name of the woman he's with. So like, dude, bad move.

HRISHI: Yes. Yeah.

JOSH: And then we also, it's revealed later that this is like an icky superstitious thing he does on election nights. I mean, woof, if that's your thing, maybe keep it to yourself.

HRISHI: Yeah. I feel a twinge of sympathy for Congressman Santos for all the different ways that his name has been pronounced throughout this series.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: You know we had, Sahn-tose, versus San-tose and which one is right? And then on the news they call him "San-ose" [cross talk] like the T is barely there [Josh laughs]. Anyway, I feel for you man. So in the race to 270 electoral votes by the end of this episode at least, it looks like it's 24 Vinick to 29 Santos, at least according to the Vinick calculations. Although when we last check in with the Santos it's still 24-0. And I again I might just not be following the moves correctly or the board correctly but it feels to me like the Vinick campaign is already tabulating states for Santos that the Santos campaign themselves have not counted for themselves.

JOSH: [cross talk] Right, right.

JOSH: They're being a little stricter.

HRISHI: Yeah, I like that. I like the cautiousness bordering on pessimism.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And then we have to talk about this of course in the final minute of the episode just this, the gut punch.

JOSH: Yeah. Yeah. This is a tough one. It's a weird, weird thing also to meld the real life passing of John Spencer and the need to dramatize it on the show. You know I watched the episode with a certain amount of dread knowing it was leading up to this and then it's just weird. It's a weird experience to watch Kristin Chenoweth having to go through this moment. It's just weird to dramatize something that of course was real and horrendous and such a loss. But we have to sort of I guess respond to it as viewers of the show and for what was a you know very unpleasant difficult task I thought they did a good job of weaving it into the story line of the show.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's an unbelievably difficult dance to choreograph and I think they handled it admirably. There are a couple of details that I really like in the scene even as it's executed. One is that Leo has a suit and tie laid out on a wooden valet. I love that. You know there is this a little bit of a set-up earlier:

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*ANNABETH: I just gotta get him cleaned up for the party. He's been threatening to wear his robe.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And so it gives you an excuse to be able to see Leo's wardrobe laid out without him in it. And as a result it's a great stand-in for his presence. You know even though we never see him obviously we never see him in this episode, it's a way to dress the room that really lets you feel Leo. You see his suit and tie there.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: And it's also an incredibly accurate character detail because of all of our characters, all the times when we've seen characters show up to the White House on a Sunday or something like that wearing a sweatshirt or whatever their casual work clothes were, Leo never did. The most casual we ever saw him get was without a tie.

JOSH: Yeah. That was his uniform.

HRISHI: Yeah. And so the idea that he employs a valet you know to lay out his clothes, just felt like so at home with the sort of with the kind of sartorial fastidiousness that I imagine that character had.

JOSH: Well said.

HRISHI: The other thing that I love, and this is something that I'm crediting Mimi Leder for, in the very final shot, the way that the camera, as the Secret Service rushes in, the camera backs out of the room, backs out of the hotel room, and down out of the hallway, in reverse. And to me it really affected me, that moment, that way to end the episode. I think there were maybe two things that it conjured for me, one was almost a sense of like what's happening is almost too awful to bear, you have to just escape it. But it also brought to mind the question of like whose perspective it was in that moment, and all I could think of was the idea of like a ghost leaving it's body and departing from it's physical counterpart and drifting away and that that was Leo's perspective in that moment.

JOSH: Wow, that's an interesting interpretation. I felt the same way you did in terms of the first point you made. I kind of was I felt like we were going in the direction I wanted to go in which was kind of running from the room.

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah.

JOSH: That's a really interesting take.

HRISHI: It's an incredibly powerful nonverbal moment of filmmaking that I thought couldn't have been chosen better.

JOSH: It was the right touch.

HRISHI: Well, the episode leaves us in a hard place and I guess we leave our discussion in this place as well but we can turn to lighter matters now and go to our interview with Lauren and Michael Hissrich.

JOSH: Tell me Hrishi, tell me I'm going finally to get my unabashed dose of romance.

HRISHI: I'm happy to tell you you are.

JOSH: Yes! We're going to take a break now for some ads and when we come back we'll have Hrishi's interview with Lauren and Michael.

[Ad break]

HRISHI: And now back to the show.

LAUREN: Hi, I'm Lauren Hissrich. I was a story editor on *The West Wing*.

MICHAEL: Hi, I'm Michael Hissrich. I was the Line Producer of *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: So, in one of our first conversations Lauren you suggested that when we get to Season 7 and especially when we get further into the Josh and Donna story line that you and Mike would need to come on the podcast together. I don't actually know what the story is so I'm gonna just let you two take it from here.

[laughter]

LAUREN: Okay. Well, spoiler, Mike and I have been married for right over 10 years, so it's a happily ever after story, but we met the very first year of the show. I was an intern on *The West Wing* and Mike, what were you then?

MICHAEL: I was overseeing post-production. I was a producer that oversaw the editing and sound mixing and all of the aspects of post-production.

HRISHI: And Mike, we've heard Lauren's origin story of how she ended up on the show but could you just give us briefly a little intro of how you ended up in that position.

MICHAEL: Uh, sure. I met a guy named John Wells at Carnegie Mellon University 30-some years ago and I've been working pretty much with John Wells almost for 30 years now so I was on *China Beach* and a number of pilots then we started *E.R.* and *The West Wing* and I'm currently wrapping up Season 10 as an Executive Producer on *Shameless*.

HRISHI: Wow. So tell me about the first time you two met. The first time you remember meeting each other. Maybe it might not be the same day.

[laughter]

LAUREN: Mike actually helped get me my job on *The West Wing* or my internship. He basically had offered our mutual friends, who were my, this is so confusing, ah who were my aunts, they said "Oh our niece is coming out and she's visiting L.A." and Mike had said "Well if she ever gets bored she could come and answers phones you know at the office of this show that I just started called *The West Wing*. *The West Wing* was nothing yet. It was a pilot that had been picked up, that was it. So I went that summer and started answering phones and Mike and I met in person then for the first time.

[The West Wing Episode 2.02 excerpt]

JOSH: *Who are you?*

DONNA: *I'm Donna Moss. I came in to volunteer and the woman assigned me to you.*

JOSH: *Which woman?*

DONNA: *Betsy.*

JOSH: *You mean Margaret?*

DONNA: *Yes.*

JOSH: *Who are you?*

DONNA: *I'm Donna Moss. I'll be working as your assistant.*

JOSH: *I gotta talk to Margaret.*

DONNA: *Actually Josh when I said I was assigned to you...*

JOSH: *Yeah?*

DONNA: *I may have been overstating it a little.*

[end excerpt]

LAUREN: And then we were friends. Mike left the show for two years, left for seasons four and five and went off to do some other stuff and actually rejoined the show as a Line Producer in season six. And we a little bit in to the season started dating and the funny thing was is that we didn't tell anyone, which is sort of the origin of the Josh and Donna story as well. We dated for, God, it has to have been six months or so without telling anyone in the office. We would sneak around and of course when we finally did tell people during the body of season seven, that we were dating, all of our colleagues were like "Okay thank God, we don't have to pretend that we don't notice."

[laughter]

LAUREN: We can all just actually admit that we know that you're dating and I think John Wells saw us together at the Emmys that year and it was the first time he realized we were dating.

[laughter]

MICHAEL: So why are those two people holding hands at the Emmys? That seems weird to me.

LAUREN: Um, so you know so when we started writing the Josh and Donna relationship you know the "will-they-or-won't-they" over six years of the show it was really fun for me to start working on "Election Day, Part 1" and to be able to bring their relationship to fruition because I was living the same exact thing.

HRISHI: Tell me about the parallels that you see between them and the two of you.

LAUREN: Well there's a ton. I mean first of all I mean obviously when we started Mike was much further up in the show than I was. He had a lot more experience, he's a little bit older than me. He had a lot more experience in television. I had started with no knowledge of television whatsoever and I really sort of found my sea legs at *The West Wing* and realized this is what I wanted to do for my career and also that I was pretty good at it. And it's one of the things that I loved watching in the Donna character the most and then I think there's this interesting thing that happens where you are attracted to someone but you're working with them and do we just have a cool vibe? And the realization for me and Mike that he was feeling the same way and can we work together? I would, when I would get mad at him I would call him my boss which he technically was not but it was it was a good way kind of to jab at him. And yeah you know I think the feeling too that we were we were afraid of people finding out when of course *The West Wing* was a huge family by then and people were just happy for us to be happy together.

HRISHI: Mike can you explain what a Line Producer does and how that role is explicitly not the boss of a writer?

MICHAEL: I like to say that uh the best way to explain it is I am in charge of all aspects of putting the television show on the screen once the writers have written it. Even in my job today, the writers hand me a script from there to the time it's delivered falls under my purview. The group of people

I don't hire and I don't oversee every day is the writers. And then once that script is handed off to us that writer usually comes with it and helps us with the tone of each scene and helps us in production as to "What exactly did you mean here?" and it's actually one of the great kind of turning points in our relationship was the first script that Lauren wrote you know was me having to say "Yeah we can't do that."

[laughter]

MICHAEL: This is a fantastic episode and it's great, we can't afford this. It's not happening. Instead of being a jerk about that, which maybe I could have been, I had to learn to go to Lauren and say "Look, here is the four things in this script, I'm really thinking we can only afford two of them. So let's talk about each one. Which one's really important to you? Which do you think really is the most impact both visually and structurally and let's talk about how to do those and then the two that we can't do let's figure out what efficient and economic way we can tell that story. And I think it made me a better producer and Lauren a much more production savvy writer.

HRISHI: Can you tell me a little bit about how those two roles intersected in this episode specifically? Because it is a pretty ambitious episode. I mean you have Dave Grohl and Foo Fighters in the episode.

[laughter]

LAUREN: Yes. Yes. It's funny because it's um I think in a lot of shows especially you know sort of rewinding our brains back fifteen years when we were pumping out twenty-two episodes a season. You know it was a constant, constant race to get episodes out. And it was very easy to get a sense that writers just wanted to write whatever came to our brains and it didn't matter if we could do it or not you know it was just every thought. Let's put it on the page. And I think writers often in shows like that start to feel like the producers are just the ones the people in Mike's position are just there to say no. Like, just crush our dreams. And I think you know people in Mike's position think "Well you guys are just writing whatever you want and you're never thinking about what we can do. And it really for us through dating and through lots of arguments and debates about it we realized oh we both just want to make a great television show. And like there is a place to compromise in the middle. So this episode is one of those things and Mike's right, we both learned a lot. The episode opens up on an eight page scene in a hotel bar, with like nine cast members.

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*LOU: So, who's planned out the future for the rest of their lives?*

*EDIE: Oh I want a meal that doesn't consist of Cheetos and a Diet Sprite.*

*RONNA: I want a pedicure.*

*OTTO: I want a job as a White House speech writer.*

*RONNA: Don't say that out loud!*

*EDIE: No!*

*LESTER: Bad karma man.*

*OTTO: Oh, then the Cheetos thing sounds good.*

*DONNA: I'd settle for more than...*

[end excerpt]

LAUREN: It was one of my first scripts that I'd ever written and you know Mike can tell you an eight page scene will take an entire day to shoot, especially the more people that you add in to it the more coverage that you have to get, the more times that it has to be done and we literally shot that scene at a hotel bar and it took twelve hours to do it beginning to end. I will never write an eight page scene with nine people again. Because it's really it's really hard on production, hard on everyone. I also knew that I wanted to a musical act and it seemed crazy to try to pull that off. But that's something I know that I basically just said I don't care who it is, let's find a group that is really politically active, that is really big fans of the show and Ann Kline our Music Supervisor sort of came in with a list and Foo Fighters were our top choice. But then it was up to Mike to sort of figure out what that looks like because we're basically now filming a rock concert which is not what we normally do on *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: Right.

MICHAEL: And then you asked Dave and the guys to come to a warehouse in Santa Clarita at 10pm on a Friday night. But they showed up at 10pm to start filming the day and kept us entertained and played between takes and could not have been nicer and more excited to be there and it was really special.

HRISHI: That's great. Mike can you tell me a little bit from your perspective what it was like to see Lauren's role evolve over the years on *The West Wing*? Correct me if I'm wrong but I don't think that anybody else had as big of an arc individually throughout the series as she did.

MICHAEL: No, I can confirm that. She literally came from "I'm bored. I have nothing..." and when we say she was an intern, you know in terms nowadays there's paperwork and insurance and approvals. She came and sat a desk and answered phones for free cause she was bored. That that was basically how that started and because she's a wonderful human being and super smart everybody loved her and kept... you know it's what we tell people who are starting in the business now: "Get in the door. Get in the door. Get the job. Be really smart at that and keep taking on more and more responsibility and people will give you more to do. And you will find yourself moving up very quickly." And it's exactly what happened.

HRISHI: Mike, how do you feel in the parallel of your stories about being maybe the Josh Lyman to Lauren's Donna?

[laughter]

MICHAEL: I wear that as a badge of honor. Humbly I will say I think there's a few parallels. I do work ridiculously hard and I do think I do my job really well, but outside of work and outside of knowing exactly what the budget is and what the schedule is and who's coming and who's going and how to do this and how to do that. The rest of my life is kind of, happens around me and I'm sure Lauren will smile when I say that much like Donna, Lauren keeps our lives pointed in the right direction.

[The West Wing Episode 1.19 excerpt]

DONNA: *Josh.*

JOSH: *Yeah.*

DONNA: *Six pages on English as the National Language.*

JOSH: *Is it good?*

DONNA: *I gave you some good stuff on James Madison and the...*

*JOSH: James Madison?*

*DONNA: And the...*

*JOSH: I didn't ask for a damn Social Studies paper. I...*

*DONNA: Don't snap at me Josh.*

*JOSH: Donna.*

*DONNA: Look at the memo. I gave you what you asked for. Don't snap at me.*

[end excerpt]

MICHAEL: A big thing of mine is "Have you seen my?" or "Where is my?" and Lauren always knows whatever I'm looking for and where it is and kind of keeps me in my place no matter how full of myself I get. So I think it's not as much about me being Josh as her being Donna. That makes this work.

LAUREN: Well I think that is you know Mike's job is very, very hard. It's a job that I mean I would never ever want and could never do and the amount of stuff that he has to keep in his head at any given point, there's a singular focus to it. Which is what I would say. Mike is a completely capable adult man who can find things of his own, but when you're in work mode you're in work mode and there's not... you know *The West Wing* is a really, really difficult show to produce and you know Mike would be working sixteen, seventeen hours a day and then sleeping the other few and starting over again the next day and you know there's a lot of our friends who know us well I was just reading back through the episode and there's a couple of jabs in there about Donna where Donna's making fun of Josh for never leaving his Blackberry which was very much Mike.

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*JOSH: Do you mind if I turn on the T.V. to see if there's any news?*

*DONNA: Please.*

*JOSH: At least I didn't bring my Blackberry to bed. It could be worse. Less romantic I mean.*

[end excerpt]

LAUREN: I would say that Donna loosened Josh up a little bit. I mean that's what this episode is about right? It's about the acceptance of being out of control. You've done the work at that point and you just have to sit back and wait for the results. And there's something that I think that very early on I tried to bring to Mike's life which was just a sense of like "You've done all you can. You actually get to enjoy this life you've built a little bit. You actually get to enjoy things now." And you know I do think Mike is a lot like Josh which is he's excellent at his job but he needed shaking around a little bit to show that there was life outside that job.

HRISHI: Is it fair to say that this episode, which is your final "Written by" on screen credit for the show, did this feel like the culmination of all those seven years?

LAUREN: Absolutely. It's really funny. It was the first episode that I felt one that I fully wrote by myself and two wasn't rewritten by anyone else, which is a big thing for a writer. It was a very hard script to write. It was because it was pulling a lot from my personal life it was really fun. It also feels a little bit different than most *West Wing* episodes. There's a lot of relationships in it and a lot of sort of romance and as I said in a show that's about doing doing doing, it was an odd pause and a break for the characters. So it was a really challenging script to write and I cried a lot. I ate a lot of potato chips. I would sit on my couch in my office with my legs up on it and just



write and write and write and then I would stomp in to Mike's office and say "I can't do this!" and he would say "You can." And push me back to the office and I would keep going. And at the very end of (To Michael: Do you remember this hun?) At the very end of the two weeks I turned the script in and Lawrence O'Donnell came to my door, knocked, and stood in my door frame, and he said Lauren, he was like "This script is fantastic." And he said "So whatever your process was, like however you got this, that's your process from here on out. And I was like "No! I can't do that! I cannot cry that much! I can't eat that many potato chips!" Thank God it's gotten easier over the last you know fifteen years. But yeah it was I would say it really was a culmination and it was really hard work but I felt really good about the episode.

HRISHI: That's great. A question for both of you: do you have a favorite scene from this episode?

LAUREN: You know I really- I really love the eight page bar scene at the beginning.

[Michael laughs]

LAUREN: I do. There was something really fun about writing Donna in this episode as the character at like, Josh was kind of the clueless one, you know, Donna basically says like "Yes, all of them are sleeping together and now you're going to come and sleep with me." And he was like "Wait, what? What's happening?"

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*JOSH: Wow, Cindy? Did you know that?*

*DONNA: About Ronna and Cindy?*

*JOSH: Any of 'em.*

*DONNA: Yes.*

*JOSH: Which one?*

*DONNA: All of them.*

[end excerpt]

LAUREN: It was an interesting power shift for them and so that was absolutely one of my favorite scenes to write. And I think it's really I think it's really great in the episode.

HRISHI: How about you Mike?

MICHAEL: I would have said that uh that same scene for a couple of different reasons which are production-wise it was a monster. I think we had three cameras there, Mimi Leder directed it and every time you start a new shot you go from Scene One: Apple, Baker, Charlie and you go all the way through the alphabet and I'm pretty sure we went all the way through the alphabet once and about halfway through the second time of the alphabet. Which means we probably did like forty pieces of coverage that night. It was a monster scene and it came out wonderfully and I do think she captured every little glance from person to person and long shot of somebody walking out of the door and picked up the little subtleties of you know Karis leaving following a woman out the door and little discoveries that we made. Um that last season of *The West Wing* had so many monster set pieces in it. We were moving jumbo jets around for the show. So again when it's midnight and you're freezing in Santa Clarita 'cause there's no heat and the Foo Fighters are you know not only doing their songs but other they're doing Beatles songs and stuff up there between takes those are the moments that you kinda look back and go "Wow, how did we get to do that? How did we, we were so lucky." And Lauren wore a short little skirt for Dave Grohl.

[laughter]

LAUREN: I was just gonna say “Do you remember?” So this is how young and naïve I was: is that I was like “Oh, we’re going to shoot the Foo Fighters performing so obviously I must look cute.” I wore like a little tiny mini skirt and like little boots and it was so freaking cold there and of course everyone else is dressed in normal set clothes and I’m the idiot who actually thinks I’m at a rock concert, not shooting a night of television.

[Hrishi laughs]

LAUREN: Um yeah. That’s me. I was twenty-five. You know.

HRISHI: Um, just as an aside, I’m curious, with this discovery that Ronna dates women, that’s a surprise not only to Josh but to I think to all of us to get that detail about her character, was that something that you came up with for this episode, or was that something that you had discussed earlier in the creation of that character? I’m just wondering how that detail made its way in to this episode.

LAUREN: It’s a great question. ‘Cause it actually was um was created for this particular episode. But the reason that was is that so often in this show we don’t delve into people, especially secondary characters, we never delve into their personal lives because it’s all about the jobs they’re doing. You know and so it was really fun to get to do an episode where there’s no work to be done. For one night, there’s nothing to do and that’s why I loved playing the surprise, like Josh’s surprise that that Ronna dates women. Because of course it’s a surprise, ‘cause he’s never paid attention to her as a human before or a woman or anything other than a staffer who works for him. So there were all of these sort of little delicious moments in the episode where you got to you got to actually make sort of big character discoveries that didn’t feel like we’d just thrown it last minute because we were with characters who’d never paid attention to the other people in the room before.

HRISHI: I wonder if you look at this episode and feel differently or feel a different kind of kinship with some of the relationships that are depicted in it just because you’re in a different time in your life. You know what your life looks like now is probably more akin to something like the Santos’ marriage than the initial romance between Josh and Donna. Does that sound right to you?

LAUREN: It does sound right. You know it’s funny I actually really love that scene too between the Santos’ where they’re sitting on the edge of the bed and they’re talking about what does tomorrow look like.

[The West Wing Episode 7.16 excerpt]

*HELEN: Where are you?*

*MATT: Why?*

*HELEN: In your head. Where’d ya go?*

*MATT: Just thinking about what I’m gonna do tomorrow.*

*HELEN: Take the kids to school, then go out for breakfast. Bacon and pancakes. Backyard needs raking.*

[end excerpt]

LAUREN: Because that’s it right? I mean, I remember you know Mike and I were on *The West Wing* for so long and I remember we wrapped on a Friday and wrapped the season, wrapped the

show, and on Monday morning waking up Mike and I kind of looking at each other saying like “What do we do now?” We’ll get up and we’ll make pancakes and bacon for breakfast. Um that line is actually written because that’s mine and Mike’s favorite breakfast, that’s what we would make together on a Saturday morning. So yeah no, it’s a really great question because it’s not you know when you first start dating yeah it’s a really hot romance and then as life evolves you settle into a place that I actually think is quite a bit better.

HRISHI: Just to delve back into the personal for a second, at what point did you know that what you two had was something more than just, in the parlance of this episode, you know, a campaign fling and actually something really meaningful? Was it before the show was over?

LAUREN: Absolutely. I mean I think and Mike can give his own point-of-view here too, but I think when Mike and I started dating we basically knew we would get married. I think especially when you’re in, doing a workplace romance and especially when you decide to out yourselves to your colleagues, you do that with a with a seriousness you know. We had to continue working together. So there was no breaking up you know, there was no there were no big fights, you couldn’t let things explode like we had to love each other and also come to work and collaborate on a daily basis. So I knew very early, I pretend that I don’t know Mike’s answer, Mike knew very early too and there was kind of never a question that we would be together, at all.

MICHAEL: You know when it’s right it’s right, you know that.

LAUREN: Yeah.

HRISHI: Lauren, at what point did you start to feel like you were identifying with Donna and Josh? Was it before you and Michael even started dating?

LAUREN: Well, you know I always felt like I could contribute to Donna um because I felt very much like that person on the staff anyway. I was kind of wide-eyed and naïve and much, much younger than anyone else there and I had no experience in this field whatsoever. I hadn’t gone to film school, I hadn’t gone to an Ivy League college. It was just like “How did I get here? How did this you know, what happened?” And I remember Aaron Sorkin actually when he promoted me and I got to be in the writers’ room and not just you know getting coffees and stuff, him saying like “You are Donna, like so bring your life, bring your life into this.” And it’s one of those great things about writers’ rooms anyway which is you do identify with all the different characters and you peel back through your own life and find funny stories and examples that can bring those characters to life.

[The West Wing Episode 2.19 excerpt]

*DONNA: Josh.*

*JOSH: You just lurk there in the shadows like...*

*DONNA: Whatever.*

*JOSH: What are you doing?*

*DONNA: I’m doing things, things with paper.*

*JOSH: Can you do them later?*

*DONNA: Why?*

*JOSH: So you’re not doing them now.*

*DONNA: Actually, I had a couple of questions, if you don’t mind?*

JOSH: About what?

DONNA: *The Mexico bailout.*

[end excerpt]

LAUREN: The Josh and Donna romance has existed for all of time, you know, the will-they-or-won't-they between two people who clearly are made for each other but also can't stand each other at times. So, no, to me it became much more specific when Mike and I started dating 'cos it was it basically was what happens between two people who are so attracted to one another and feel like something should happen but aren't sure it's appropriate, aren't sure what to do with it next and aren't sure who to tell or who to trust. And so I would say at that point then I I started relating a little bit more to their relationship and that's a later episode, I won't discuss that, but there's some stuff coming up that is directly pulled from mine and Mike's life and conversations that we've had and things about the future and yeah, yeah.

HRISHI: Thank you both so much for talking to me about this and being willing to tell your story on our podcast.

LAUREN: Of course.

MICHAEL: Thank you.

LAUREN: It's so much fun, it's a story that we kind of well we obviously love and you know when we got married in 2009, "What would you say Mike?" about, 30 percent of our wedding was people from *The West Wing*.

MICHAEL: Absolutely.

LAUREN: These were our family.

JOSH: And that does it for another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*, thanks for listening.

HRISHI: Thanks so much to Lauren Schmidt Hissrich and Michael Hissrich for being our guests and telling their fantastic, sweet story on our podcast.

JOSH: That was a great interview. Thanks also to Margaret Miller and Zach McNees.

HRISHI: And thanks to Radiotopia from PRX, a collective of independent podcasts of which we are a part and you can find out about all of those shows at Radiotopia.FM.

JOSH: Thank you for listening. Thank you for patronizing our fabulous sponsors, thank you for following us because I know you will or have on Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and other social media sites.

HRISHI: I keep thinking about when the show ends how everybody's gonna unfollow me and I realize that there's some kind of index that I have to imagine in my social media following that I have to adjust for *West Wing Weekly* inflation. I don't actually have that kind of reach, it's just you know while this podcast is going on people have followed me so that they can tell me ways we've screwed things up.

JOSH: I think you're absolutely wrong though, I don't think you'll lose an appreciable number of *West Wing Weekly* listeners. I think they're lifers, or at least inertia will have kicked in and they won't bother to try to find you to unfollow you, or me.

HRISHI: That's right.

JOSH: That's what I'm hoping.

HRISHI: Folks, follow your inertia, don't unfollow us.

JOSH: That's right no you wanna you gotta continue to follow us for news about the reboot.

HRISHI: Right. Exactly.

JOSH: I don't even know what that means or what I'm referring to but you're gonna want to hang in there.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

LAUREN and MICHAEL: What's next?

[Outro Music]