

The West Wing Weekly  
7.17: "Election Day, Part 2"  
Guest: Jimmy Smits

[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 17 from season seven. It's *Election Day, Part 2* but

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Before we even get into part two, we have an addendum to Part 1.

JOSH: Indeed, we do.

HRISHI: This comes to us from Bradley Whitford. We've had it in our pocket for a while, and it was definitely not a mistake that we didn't include it in the last episode.

JOSH: No, no.

HRISHI: In fact, it was intentional.

JOSH: You're right, of course. It would have been too obvious to include material that relates to last episode *in* last episode.

HRISHI: No, no. We wanted to save it and see what kind of response that episode got without us mentioning it.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: And now we played for you here. Take a listen.

[excerpt from Josh and Hrishi's conversation with Brad during the taping of the discussion of *Election Day, Part 1*]

*BRAD: I just want to point out that we finished shooting and I'm in bed with her without a shirt on, and then we finished shooting and I said, I ran up, I think it was (Chris) Misiano and I said. "I got shot in the chest a couple of years ago."*

*HRISH: Ohh*

*JOSH: Oh, good point.*

*BRAD: We didn't have time to do anything, and with everybody's fetishistic obsession with the show, it always cracks me up that nobody has ever brought it up, ever.*

*HRISH: That's so funny. Everybody's too blinded by the glow.*

BRAD: They're blinded by the glow of love, I guess.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: That's incredible, and I think Aaron had originally had you shot to avoid a potential shirtless scene.

BRAD: [laughing] Ah, yeah, I think so

JOSH: He had the foresight and then they didn't honor it.

BRAD: Yes, yes, exactly.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That sucked.

HRISHI: And now onto this episode, we're talking about episode 17 from season seven, it's *Election Day, Part 2*.

JOSH: This episode was written by Eli Attie and John Wells and directed by Christopher Misiano. It first aired on April 9th, 2006. Election Day - Foo Two. That's what I wrote down because you get another little tasty heap of the *Foo Fighters*, not *the Foo Fighters*, dammit, *Foo Fighters*. There it is. I can't, there's no escaping the middle-aged year that you are. I knew not to say it and I said it.

HRISHI: Joining us later in this episode, we've got a very special guest.

JIMMY: Hi, I'm Jimmy Smits and I played Congressman Matt Santos – President-Elect Matt Santos.

HRISHI: This is it folks. This is the culmination of two seasons of story, and it's also the one where the world learns about the death of Leo McGarry. I think it's a really exceptional episode and really well handled and beautifully made.

JOSH: I think so too. And I think it was a tall order to do this well and respectfully and for it to land emotionally with us without feeling that we were played or that it was either overly sentimental or that we were manipulated, and when you know what happened in real life, it makes it that much more difficult to dramatize in a way that's done tastefully, and I think Eli and John and Christopher and cast did very well.

HRISHI: Yeah. They could have done a big thing badly and they didn't. They did a big thing really well.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: The episode begins on a lighter note with Josh and Bruno having these dueling TV appearances, putting out the kind of optimism that we talked about last week.

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*JOSH: We feel great about California. Polls are still open out west, the whole country's at stake*

*BRUNO: We're very optimistic about Texas and we'll win the state of California.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: But really the main competition I'm interested in is who has the best hasty earpiece removal.

JOSH: [laughs] That's funny. I actually slightly bumped on that as well cause it was such a parallel, like "we get it, we get it" – they're both in the same mode. That's very funny.

HRISHI: So, let's turn to the judges. What do you think? Who wins? I'll give you some points to consider.

JOSH: Please do.

HRISHI: Personally, I like Josh's deadpan expression as he tears his off immediately, there's a power and forcefulness, but on the other hand, I can't decide if Bruno gains or loses points for the way that his page boy haircut flips as he pulled his off.

JOSH: It affects everything. That's true.

HRISHI: [laughing] It's true.

JOSH: I want it to see a Peckinpah redo where one of their ear actually comes off cause blood starts spurting out horribly, "Oh, I should have done that more carefully." The one thing I thought with Josh too is that, he was not at all concerned that anybody involved in recording his interview would observe that he went from "Everything's fine" to, "Okay, oh my God, what are we going to do?" Well done. Further considerations about the earpiece, is there anything, nuances, I missed?

HRISHI: [laughing] I think that's everything.

JOSH: I gave the tip to Josh just cause, because he went first.

HRISHI: Sure. I mean...

JOSH: So, I think he had an unfair advantage.

HRISHI: Yeah. Is that a known bias or do we coin the term here?

JOSH: What's that?

HRISHI: I don't know. Like "Go-ey – First-ey" bias.

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah, that's a keeper.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah.

JOSH: I feel that way when you, we've been alternating, but I think in the bulk of episodes, you've introduced yourself before I have, and I'm always like [expletive deleted] "Go-ey – First-ey" syndrome.

HRISHI: Yeah. You think that I've affected listeners...

JOSH: That's why everyone thinks he's so much better than I am. [Hrishi laughs] It's the "Go-ey – First" thing. That's all it is.

HRISHI: Yup.

JOSH: I'm "lose-y – last-y"

HRISHI: [laughing] So Josh is doing his thing. He makes his appearance and then he goes to fight with some Democratic strategists who want input on a victory speech. Apparently, they too, are not concerned about tempting the wrath of the thing from high upon the whatever.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: The election has not been called. But that's kind of the last moment of the sort of excitement and fun frenzy of the campaign. It subsides almost immediately because then Donna comes in, because right after that conversation, he sees Donna and she tells him the news about Leo.

JOSH: Yes. Which we've been waiting for, as viewers, from the top of the show. We know that the previous episode, *Part 1*, ended with Annabeth's discovery of Leo unconscious.

HRISHI: This is an echo of, *In the Shadow of Two Gunmen*, in *Part II* of that season two opener, in the flashback, there's a scene where they call the Illinois primary for then Governor Bartlet, they're in a hotel just like they are now, and they're celebrating the victory

[West Wing Episode 2.02 excerpt]

*JOSH: Leo, we got to replace this music! We gotta replace it with some Doobie Brothers!*

*DONNA: Josh...*

*JOSH: You gotta get happy Donna, you just won the Illinois Primary.*

*DONNA: No, Josh...*

*JOSH: Come, dance with me.*

*DONNA: No, Josh, your father died.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: There are a couple of moments in this episode where I felt some flashbacks to earlier moments of *The West Wing*, and this one felt like a very poignant one, that in these giant career moments for Josh, they've been beset with tragedy.

JOSH: Yes. And that's also part of the experience of watching the show and knowing, I guess, as everyone did, by this point, that John had died, there's like a meta level to watching that. I feel like I've always praised the episodes where they juxtapose the micro and the macro and what's happening on a personal level against what's happening, what's playing out at national events, and now there's this extra layer of seeing an episode that's about that and seeing it acted by people who have a personal experience of having lost a friend and then seeing them act out the experience. It's odd.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And powerful. I mean, it adds a power to the episode.

HRISHI: Yeah. I can't imagine what watching this episode for you is like. Having watched it multiple times in the past and now in preparation for our conversation, the last viewing, as I was taking my notes for our discussion, I don't know what was happening. I was, I found myself moved to the point of tears at many points during this episode. Again, I knew all the beats that were coming. I knew every line that was going to be said, and even when I had the show on pause and I'm writing my notes, there were moments where I could feel myself kind of getting hit with a wave of emotion.

JOSH: That's interesting. If I'm to be candid, and I want to make sure this comes out the right way but, I don't have the experience watching the episode. I get it still, I'll admire it, and I like it and I do find it moving, either because I'm generally dead inside or because I have to, I think maybe intentionally, put up a wall between watching a show about what happened in the fictional universe and knowing what happened to the real universe. I somehow, I think that's probably part of what it is. There's an element of watching the show that is affected by my having been part of it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Always.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And I think it has a sort of end result of removing me a little bit from what I want to be pulled into. If I watch an episode of something else, it's probably easier for that episode to pull me in than something that I've worked on because they're just nine different things, sort of stimuli that are pinging in my head that you don't have as a regular viewer and in this one I feel myself, I think almost putting up a little bit of a wall, maybe not allowing myself fully to be drawn into the, I don't know, it almost feels like a betrayal to be, even though I understand this is what the show had to do, and I think the show found as good a way as possible of writing John's passing into the show and it's really nice for them to have allowed it to land for all the characters/actors around the show. I was glad that Margaret had her moment.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: It's an unspoken moment, but it was in, its own subtle, small way, beautifully acted, and allowed us as viewers who know what their relationship was, to have a little closure, or at least I have a moment of emotion.

HRISHI: Acknowledgement.

JOSH: Yeah. I think every little thing was handled very well and the performances are great.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think you having actually been friends with John Spencer, there's no way for you to feel the kind of stakes that someone who didn't know him can feel in this episode because it is essentially a handling in a fictional context of-

JOSH: Right, so in a sense, it's counter intuitive. When you said, I can't imagine you're watching the episode, like it should affect me more deeply, and I think it probably should, but then I think there's something I put up a little bit because it does feel on a small level, like an emotional betrayal [crosstalk]

HRISH: [crosstalk] Right.

JOSH: To allow myself to be pulled in entirely by C.J. and Josh's and Margaret's reactions to Leo's death.

HRISHI: Right. Like I said, I couldn't imagine it and I, I guess I was right.

JOSH: Yeah, there you go.

HRISHI: I completely agree with you about Margaret in this episode. NiCole Robinson's performance is so beautiful and the moment for Margaret is really subtle and incredibly well done. You know, after the credits, we go to Leo's old home, his old office where C.J. has just gotten off the phone, and because Margaret is Margaret, she knows already and she comes in, she gets C.J., and she says,

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*MARGARET: Should I get Will?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Because she knows that they're going to have to make a statement, but even as she's trying to sort of be professional and move things forward, you can see that her eyes are glimmering with tears and it seems like she's fighting to keep it together. There are a lot of moments of performance in this episode where I think people do an incredible amount of work in just a flash.

JOSH: I agree completely.

HRISHI: In the Santos campaign, there's a debate going on internally about whether or not to make a statement, and Santos wants to say something, but Lou is urging him to wait actually, because a story about Leo's health, while the election is still so close, could have a negative impact while they wait for the polls to close in the West.

And she's being brutally pragmatic, I think. The brutal part of it for me really hit with this line,

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*LOU: Congressman, this is still a campaign, and there's only two kinds: the pitiless and the dead.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Even though in the context of what she's talking about and everything, there's nothing actually wrong with it, but I was still a little bit aghast about the idea of putting that kind of line in the character's mouth. But then she brings it back almost immediately,

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*LOU: but we can't be sentimental about this, or we will have a Republican president, who will gut education, he will auction off social security and cut taxes until we're bleeding red ink. And when Leo wakes up, he will kick your ass for letting that happen, you know he will.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah. I love that piece of writing.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: The whole bit.

HRISHI: Yeah. At the core of what seems like this brutal pragmatism, there is still this genuine optimism and love for Leo in it, because she's acting on what she knows his wishes would be.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Okay. And so, then I like the sort of the scoreboard tally that we have to kind of do as things go back and forth, and we find out that the key state of Ohio goes to Vinick and their campaign is cheering, but they don't know anything about Leo yet. The press doesn't have it and so they don't know and certainly the Santos campaign doesn't want anybody to know yet, but I love the cut from that sort of moment of jubilation to Josh and Donna running down this like silent white corridor of the hospital. I also like they're rushing to get to Leo, but then they have to get slowed down by an elevator, you can't speed the elevator up no matter what and just that little brief moment as they wait to get to the next floor where they can start running again. They're stuck there and they have to listen to the muzak in the elevator. I don't know if you could hear when you listen, but the muzak was playing Stevie Wonder.

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*Elevator muzak playing My Cherie Amour*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: No, no, I didn't notice that

HRISHI: It was playing "My Cherie Amour" and the fact that just a couple of episodes ago they had Stevie Wonder opening for the event in St. Louis, it just made me feel like there was this little subtext of the idea that the campaign is suffused everywhere, and you just, no matter what's happening in life or what else is going on, you can't get away from it.

JOSH: I like that a lot. That's attention to detail. That's, that's intentional.

HRISHI: But they didn't go for the more obvious connection, which would have been to actually play "For Once in My Life" to play the song that Annabeth had been singing in that episode. That would have been too on the nose.

JOSH: Yeah. Good restraint. Or say to have Stevie Wonder, for some reason, to be in the elevator himself and humming one of the songs.

HRISHI: A different kind of restraint.

JOSH: Yeah. Which is what I would have done.

HRISHI: [laughing] Throughout this episode, we've got Foo Fighters playing in the ballroom, and so we, we have bits and pieces of their music

JOSH: Playing in ballroom.

HRISHI: What did I say?

JOSH: You said *the* ballroom.

HRISHI: [laughing] Oh, I say ballroom. Okay. Yes.

JOSH: Foo Fighters playing in ballroom

HRISHI: Foo Fighters playing in ballroom. We're going to have to do the rest of this episode without any definite articles.

JOSH: I think we got to give it a shot.

HRISHI: We got to give it shot.

JOSH: If I know us.

HRISHI: Definite and indefinite articles

JOSH: Well done. Oh, [expletive deleted]

HRISHI: [laughing] Let's take them out. Okay? I'm not even gonna try. Foo Fighters could have picked song

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: Or rather, writers could have picked Foo Fighters song that was more obviously on nose for what was happening in episode, which is: "My Hero".

[*Foo Fighters: My Hero* excerpt]

*DAVE GROHL: There goes my hero, watch him as he goes*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That would have been certainly-

JOSH: On nose

HRISHI: Appropriate, but on nose

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: [laughing] Okay. I think we

JOSH: [laughing] [crosstalk] Think that's out of system.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] We finished, right?

JOSH: Alright

HRISHI: There's a moment later where Santos asks for the writers to give him a speech that has no frilly language. And I feel like that was also a note that they took themselves in the making of this episode. Even here in the moment when we find out that Leo's gone, they rush to the room, Annabeth is there, there is no kind of long period of waiting to find out or anything, they just find out,

[*West Wing* Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*ANNABETH: He died, Josh. [crying]*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And you know, having spoken to Kristin recently, and been reminded again of her deep connection to John and her love for him, that was painful to watch. She looks stricken. It must have been a difficult scene to act.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: She did it in a beautiful way,

HRISHI: and I really appreciate the way that they handle the relay of information from that point on. So, we know now and then it really just kind of goes unsaid. They don't have to be explicit about it. In a lesser show, they certainly would have handled this differently, I think. And here it is so subtly just passed from character to character.

JOSH: Right, without being, sentimentally indulgent and giving us this jolt of grief over and over in a less sensitive way, and I think that would have been handled differently by lesser shows.

HRISHI: Yeah. Ham handled.

JOSH: Exactly

HRISHI: As opposed to what we get here, which is Bram handled.

JOSH: Bram handled? Nice.

HRISHI: He gets a phone call from Josh and he leaves their little control center room and he takes it to Santos. Santos listens and we don't even hear Josh's side of the call, we just see Santos take Helen's hand and that's-

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Everything that we need to know because we already have the news and even, we see that Bram knows what it means, and then they just move on. They go to the White House.

JOSH: Yeah. That's one of those great little touches that I just wonder whether it was in the script, in the stage directions, or a Christopher Misiano suggestion, but it was just the way he took her hand, and that was very, moving.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Or maybe it's just one of those great acting choices on Jimmy Smit's part

HRISHI: In the White House, we see C.J. coming in from her office to the Oval Office where the President's speaking to the First Lady, and it's clear from what he's saying that he doesn't know yet, but then he looks up to see C.J.'s face, which is streaked with tears and again, he knows and he tells Abbey to hold on, and he just asks her when,

JOSH: When, yeah,

HRISHI: yeah, and then gives C.J. a hug, and then you can hear his voice is thick with tears when he goes back to the First Lady and he says,

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Sweetheart, I'm sorry, I have some very bad news.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah. All the moments are handled with admirable restraint.

HRISHI: Yup. Vinick finds out from a phone call from Santos, and again, we don't hear Santos deliver the news. We don't even see Vinick take in the news. It goes immediately then, just back to the Santos who's thanking Vinick for his words on the other side of the line, and then they go and just, I didn't know, that exchange from

Annabeth to Bram to Santos to C.J. to...it's a relatively short amount of time and I just, I was so impressed by that. I actually just stopped at that moment in the road just like, they've done such a good job here. And also, I think it's really well engineered the way they turn it back to the story of the election. Everyone in the West Wing is watching the news as the anchors are giving a kind of obituary for Leo but then they ended with one of the anchors saying

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*NEWSANCHOR: More than one Democratic operative might be saying, with the loss of this party eminence and elder, what now for the Santos campaign with McGarry's name still stamped on every ballot?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Which, if you'll allow me, and this may be another vibe kill, but there is a, there were more closed caption hijinks at that moment.

HRISHI: Oh yeah.

JOSH: Yes, as it said, "that with McGarry's name's still stamped on every ballot."  
[HRISHI: laughing] I thought that was kind of beautiful.

HRISHI: I think that might be a little too much Josh. It might be a little "tutu" much.

JOSH: Nicely done. Well, it's a real "Balanchine" act.

HRISHI: god, "plie-ase"

JOSH: Boom. My God, we've still got it. We're bad as ever we were. "Plie-ase."

HRISHI: Yes. Okay. So back in the hotel, Santos is now asking what his options are, and there's some DNC folks saying that he should put forward another name, but he says, if I win, he wins, and I feel like Will Bailey would surely approve.

JOSH: Sure, absolutely. That's his bread and butter. They should be, they should be bringing, willing.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: To close the deal here

HRISHI: With 90 minutes left, we've got just the guy. Although there's this question of now, is it going to be a matter of 90 minutes or in fact, does each side have to get ready for this like protracted legal battle? Actually, they do have just the guy for this, they brought in Eli Attie.

JOSH: That's right. Well, how happens to be fascinating, that's why I thought it was an interesting mix, even in this episode where they're dealing with the loss of a major character and of course, and a beloved actor. The plot is pretty intriguing.

HRISHI: Yeah. You have both sort of the suspense plot, the adrenaline part of the plot, where states are being called and you can see the numbers going up for each

side, and then you have this much more cerebral part of the plot of like, well, what happens. If this becomes too close to call or...

JOSH: Procedurally,

HRISHI: Yeah, the procedural part. And then on top of that, you have this incredibly emotional part and yeah, that triple decker sandwich is incredible. One of the things I really like is how Jane in the Vinick conversation says something horribly insensitive about what the statement is that they're going to make.

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*JANE: They're probably still trying to figure out what to say. "Hey, sorry, thought he had a few thousand more miles in him. Oops."*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's something that you would absolutely, you could absolutely imagine from a diehard political opponent in that situation. She doesn't know him. She doesn't...but because this is *The West Wing* and therefore a world that's better than our own, she immediately gets chastened by a look from Vinick.

JOSH: Yeah, you're right. She buys it back with it, with an expression.

HRISHI: Yeah. Yeah. Bruno isn't saying anything in the entire conversation, and then Vinick notices.

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*VINICK: You're quiet all of a sudden.*

*BRUNO: Yeah.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I just think Ron Silver does so much with that one word, in that bit. You know, the way he's sitting, the way he delivers it, and like, I feel like he had managed to imbue that one word with, "yeah, I'm quiet because remember I worked with this guy, we won a presidential election together." Leo is the one who brought Bruno in to begin with in season three, it was his call, so it felt like this acknowledgement of this deep history that they had together in just this one word, and I thought that was great. This episode does so much for me to just remember how much we love Vinick and why we're supposed to and why there was a chance that he could win with a 50-state strategy.

JOSH: Yeah. I thought the same thing too, and that was trying to work towards this moment.

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*SHEILA: We have to be very careful. We could create a backlash for ourselves.*

VINICK: *How about creating a conscience for ourselves? I've known Leo for 20 years. Can we please not use him as a step stool?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yeah. It's so great.

JOSH: It's a great, great piece of dialogue and a great delivery and a particularly, this is also one of those moments, I guess it's a Trump ai-yi-yi moment where you imagine if only such a Republican existed when you have, the Republican legislators are standing by just the worst kind of behavior that were happening from the other party, they would just denounce.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Howlingly

HRISHI: I remember in 2008 watching McCain give his concession speech and I thought, yeah, this was a guy who for a long time, I really believed in and I had felt so disappointed by him and his campaign for so many months prior to that I had felt like he had really lost a lot of the glow that had surrounded him for so many years, that it's rounded his sort of public persona. And it had been so long that I'd kind of forgotten and then when he gave this concession speech, it was so beautifully said and so beautifully rendered

[Senator John McCain's 2008 concession speech excerpt]

*SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN: Tonight, more than any night, I hold in my heart nothing but love for this country and for all its citizens, whether they supported me or Senator Obama, I wish godspeed to the man who was my former opponent and will be my president.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He just was respectful and conscientious and sounded like a patriot and McCain in that moment and Vinick in this moment, they feel like a particular kind of Republican. I instantly remembered why years prior I had thought John McCain would probably make a great president, which was a thought that I had had.

JOSH: Well. Yeah. It's interesting too. We don't get Vinick's actual moment. We don't get his concession phone call, nor do we get his concession speech, but we get a situation where the act of concession itself is a form of sort of political grace on his part.

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: I respect this in you that you hope for, I guess the finest nominee in the opposing party. Whereas I'm hoping, at least in the past, that somebody so grossly awful, that will be unelectable will be the candidate choice. That's all changed for me now, but...

HRISHI: Right, right. Now that you got your wish,

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: I mean, I don't know if we've talked about this, I am not actually a member of any political party.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: And so there is a thought in my head of like, well, who would actually be right for this moment, right now? and maybe that person could come from anywhere. It's maybe a naive idea, but I don't know. At the time...

JOSH: [crosstalk] I was an Independent for a while, then I was like [expletive deleted] it, who am I kidding?

HRISHI: [laughing] I think there's something about the principle of it that I still hang on to.

JOSH: I get it. Yeah. I ultimately just wanted to vote in the primaries.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I can do a quick hit on pronunciations.

HRISHI: Hit me.

JOSH: Two great States, Nevada and Oregon take a beating in this episode.

HRISHI: Oh yeah!

JOSH: So, we've got a couple doozies from Lou who likes to say OR-e-gone, and then on the Nev-AH-da/Nev-AD-a, with the latter being apparently the one correct way to pronounce that state's name. We've got a Sheila, Bruno, Vinick, Kagan, Josh, Bram, Santos, and a couple of news anchors.

HRISHI: Oh wait, isn't there a moment where someone says, "They counted?". In this episode, am I thinking [laughs]?

JOSH: [laughs] Drop it in

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*BRUCE: The Congressman mentioned burden sharing less than 15 times in the campaign.*

*JOSH: You counted?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] Oh, fantastic. That's a good drop in right there. Yes, I counted, or I kept track anyway, I don't have a number on it. I guess in part because, and of course I would never, I've mispronounced things myself and I've pointed it out even on the show, those are the kinds of things should be caught, and I think in the world

of politics, you would think candidates and their staff and journalists would be meticulous about pronouncing a state's name correctly.

HRISHI: You would think, especially, when you're traveling there and you're courting their vote and clearly, it's going to be an important one.

JOSH: Yeah. Somebody would have pulled Santos aside and said, "Congressman, it's Nev-AH-da."

HRISHI: Yep. But I think, maybe this is another moment where if you're from the state and you've grown up with people pronouncing it one way, you are automatically indoctrinated and if you grew up somewhere further away, and you heard people saying it another way. It's another example of "Go-ey – First-ey" bias at work.

JOSH: There it is. That's what it is. Oh, and to sort of tie it all up from Bob Mayer, or is it Meyer? Anyway, Bob says, when he's suggesting that he and Bruno go into business together post-election, you said like ying and yang. Ying and yang.

HRISHI: Ying and yang. Yeah.

JOSH: Yes. Which may be actually his character would say, so I'm not sure if that's a meta mistake or just a mistake.

HRISHI: Right, right. Or maybe he was talking about being like the Ying Yang Twins

JOSH: Also, possible,

HRISHI: And he just wants to put out whisper [laughing] whisper song rip offs. [music playing, then whispers] "*Wait till they see our strategy.*"

JOSH: [laughing with a snort]

HRISHI: I wanted to give a little shout out to a man named Gus Brandt, who is the actual tour manager for Foo Fighters in real life, who gets a little cameo in this episode.

JOSH: Really?

HRISHI: Yeah. When the Congressman comes in to make a statement about Leo, Foo Fighters are still playing and Lou whispers in someone's ear who goes up on stage and whispers in Dave Grohl's ear, maybe he's whispering, "wait till they see my strategy"

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: But in any case, that person is the actual *Foo Fighters* tour manager who I was told was delighted to have the cameo.

JOSH: Oh, that's very cool.

HRISHI: And then Santos gives his speech.

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*SANTOS: America has lost a giant tonight, and I've lost a friend. Leo McGarry dedicated his life to public service. To the notion that every citizen is responsible for making this country a better place. That we have a sacred duty to participate in our democracy. To leave America stronger for the next generation. If I win this election, the country will be worse off, because Leo McGarry will not be there to help me run it, but I don't want anyone to vote for or against me because of Leo McGarry.*

*This race wasn't about him, and it isn't about me. It's a vision for America that will outlast Leo and outlast me. There's an America that's bigger than any of us. And for those of you who have not yet voted, it is the only thing that should matter when you go to the polls tonight. Thank you.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think that maybe, and I kind of like this detail in the show, that Matt Santos is not a gifted speaker the way that President Bartlet is. President Bartlet has been described as a gifted public speaker, even by Republicans. You might remember from when he delivers his State of the Union and C.J.'s on TV, and the guy says,

[West Wing Episode 2.13 excerpt]

*HENRY SHALLICK: Well, C.J.'s right. The president is a gifted public speaker. We've always known that, and it's an admirable quality... not unlike juggling.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Even though this episode is co-written by a speech writer, there's been far less of an emphasis on speeches and speech writing in the entire Santos/Vinick storyline than there ever was in the first four seasons of the Bartlet administration.

JOSH: Yeah, I think that's true.

HRISHI: Santos has Otto, who is young and kind of green. He is not Toby, he's not Sam, and he's not Will Bailey. So, while I think the speech is good and it does what it needs to do, it doesn't have that kind of Bartlet-esque character to me.

JOSH: No, I think I agree with you. I thought, I don't know if I would articulate it exactly the same way, but I had a similar feeling as I was watching it. I think ultimately for me, the takeaway, at least on this one moment, although I think you're making a good greater point with which I would agree. I felt like he didn't seize the moment the way he might have in a more selfish way. The remarks were brief. They were not florid. He didn't really try to gild the lily, he said what he had to say in a sort of simple way, that left you thinking more about Leo than Santos

HRISHI: And maybe that was the right way, and maybe my comments here are unfair. I don't think of it as a criticism. I think of it as more as just a contrast between these two different characters who ran for president. That some candidates have some strengths and some candidates have other strengths. And we've heard time and time again about the power of President Bartlet's oration and delivery and also, we talked so much about the gifts that Toby and Sam had as well, and that really just hasn't been an emphasis here, which is interesting. I think it's neat.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree.

HRISHI: Same is true for Vinick. And again, you've got Jimmy Smit's, you've got Alan Alda, you've got these incredible veterans of acting doing this, so it's really a, I'd like to think of it as a character choice, and it's one that I think I dig.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: There's a small scene in this episode that I really love, which is between C.J. and the president, when she asks him,

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*C.J.: Would you run again if you could?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: I think Mrs. Bartlet might've had something to say about that, don't you?*

*C.J.: Well, the electorate can be very persuasive when they want something badly enough.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: In the service of two mistresses, these past eight years. That's been my fate. Thank God for the 22nd amendment. I'm spared that particular conversation with Abbey. (chuckles)*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love this. He's not immune to the lure of keeping the job.

JOSH: No, clearly, clearly, he would have run again.

HRISHI: I think so much has said, and rightly so, about the incredible gesture that George Washington did by leaving the presidency after two terms and setting things up for this system of that was later codified by the 22nd amendment. This idea that, that presidents aren't kings and that we have a peaceful transfer of power every four or eight years. And President Bartlet is this paragon of American idealism and yet even he feels this tug of like, he never says no, "if it weren't for Mrs. Bartlet and the 22nd amendment" he probably would have run again.

JOSH: How come C.J. isn't "it's Dr. Bartlet."

HRISHI: Wow. Yeah. Who knows?

JOSH: Yeah. I like that moment too.

HRISHI: And then after that moment between C.J. and the president, we're back in the throes of the back and forth. Vermont, Iowa, and Maine all go to Vinick and that's 14 electoral votes, which is obviously a big setback for the Santos campaign. But then Texas goes their way

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*STAFF: (whooping and cheering)*

*BRAM: Hook 'em horns!*

RONNA: 34 electoral votes.

STAFF: (singing) *Down in the heart of Texas.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And it feels like it's, there's finally something significant for the Santos campaign to celebrate and they need it so badly with the news of Leo and losing so many states in a row and losing states that were key battleground states, they finally get to have a moment of celebration and they kind of over celebrate.

JOSH: Yes. They have quite the impromptu hallway party.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I also wrote the balls on them to sing, "Deep in The Heart of Texas" given that the greatest cinematic iteration of it was in *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*. Do you not remember that moment or have you not seen that movie?

HRISHI: I haven't seen that movie because the Large Marge scene was too scary.

JOSH: What? You've never seen *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*?

HRISHI: I'm really overdue to go back as a huge Tim Burton fan.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: I need to go but when the movie came out, I was too scared of it.

JOSH: Wow.

HRISHI: People would just talk about the Large Marge scene. I didn't even see it, but people at the school, kids at school would talk about it and I was like, that sounds terrifying.

[Pee-wee's Big Adventure excerpt]

*LARGE MARGE: And when they finally pulled the driver's body from the twisted, burning wreck, it looked like this.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I'm not sure exactly what year it was, but I was in college and went to the movie theaters in Milford, exit 39B, and went to try to go to opening night of *Back to the Future*, and having not arranged tickets beforehand, I don't know if you could, even in those days – it was sold out. And so, I was like, oh my God, we've got to go to the movies, and we had a look. I was like, what is hell is *Pee-wee's Big Adventure*? That sounds ridiculous. And we went to see it, and it was an utter revelation, so much so that we went back the next night, not to see *Back to the Future*, but to see *Pee-wee's Big Adventure* for the second night in a row.

HRISHI: [laughing] And have you seen it since then, those two nights?

JOSH: I have seen it since then and it holds up. I do think it is a classic, but of course, I know every moment, and when I'm referring to, there's a moment where Pee-wee is on his big adventure and he's in Texas and he's calling from a phone booth and he's telling his sort of kind of girlfriend, Dottie, that he's in Texas.

[Pee-wee's Big Adventure excerpt]

*PEE-WEE: Hello Dottie. It's me, Pee-wee.*

*DOTTIE: Well, where are you calling from?*

*PEE-WEE: Texas.*

*DOTTIE: Where?*

*PEE-WEE: Honest. Listen, I'll prove it. [sings] The stars at night are big and bright*

*TOWNSFOLK: (clap, clap, clap, clap) [sings] Deep in the heart of Texas.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] Like you can do that at a moment's notice in Texas, and that'll be the response.

HRISHI: Right? Like, I imagine you can go into Maryland and just shout

[West Wing Episode 4.08 excerpt]

*ANDY: Maryland!*

*STAFF: Maryland!*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Exactly. Exactly right. Same thing.

HRISHI: Yeah. Well then maybe you can tell me. How scary is the Large Marge scene and do you think that I can handle it?

JOSH: The Large Marge scene has traumatized more than a few young people. That said, I think you've reached an age where you can safely watch the movie.

HRISHI: Okay. Don't overestimate me, as I said this- I [indistinguishable] several times during this episode, I'm a delicate flower, Josh.

JOSH: Fair enough. I know, I know that.

HRISHI: There is reason to celebrate, even if they don't end up winning the election because this is a significant win for their guy because there's at least a possible future at the state level. Maybe as a Governor, maybe as a Senator, he has won a key state, his home state on the biggest stage possible. But Josh isn't there.

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: He's in Leo's hotel room having a moment of grief, and I think the line that killed me most in this entire episode is Donna coming in and talking to him and she says

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*DONNA: He was so proud of you Josh.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That was where I kind of lost a little,

JOSH: A very compelling moment. Yeah. That was very moving.

HRISHI: I suddenly had a little flashback through seven seasons of the relationship of those two characters, and "I've been in this hole before", and "as long as I got a job, you got a job" and every other moment between the two of them kind of just flipped by like, like a deck of cards being riffled. So, at that point, if they were to win California it would put the Santos campaign over, but despite the nuclear disaster in San Andreo, Vinick also wins his own home state. And so now we're at 260 to 266

JOSH: That's a nail biter.

HRISHI: Yeah and either Oregon or Nevada would get Vinick the win, but Santos needs both. And it's interesting, as they're both so close to winning, we get both candidates kind of also prepared to concede. I also want to give a shout out to my absolute favorite moment of exposition news network. In the entire series, just the best thing we've ever heard on the news, I think.

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*NEWSANCHOR: Once again, to remind our viewers that the red states are Vinick's states and blue states are Santos' states.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh my God. I didn't, major eye roll at that moment.

HRISHI: [laughing] That was great. I love that they put that in there, just how dumb it gets on election day as networks are just trying to fill the minutes and hours.

JOSH: Right. We got to say something.

HRISHI: [laughing] It's just great. Okay, and then Oregon goes for Santos, and so it does all come down to Nevada. I love what Josh says to Santos about the idea of contesting a possible loss.

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*JOSH: I think you're young, smart, the party's presumptive nominee four years from now, win or lose. You take it to court, you're the guy who screams at the ump cause they don't like the call at the plate. Nobody votes for that guy again.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And Vinick says much the same thing. He's, he's also against a legal battle. He says,

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*VINICK: I'll be a winner, or I'll be a loser. I won't be a sore loser.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I don't know what is, I love the way that Alan Alda delivers that line.

JOSH: Yeah, I do too. Well, I mean, also there's the slight distinction between what's being said between Josh and Santos, and what Vinick is saying is that Vinick we don't think is looking to run again and Josh is saying, he's implying it's the right thing to do, but he's also saying, if you end up losing and you want to run again and you should, this is going to jeopardize that.

HRISHI: Yeah. They definitely have different reasons for contesting or not contesting and Vinick, the stakes are higher because this is the last shot for him.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: And then again, they, I think, deliver the news in a wonderfully understated way, when they finally call the election results, it's neither of the campaigns. C.J. comes in, wakes the president. He says,

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Do we have a winner?*

*C.J.: Yes, sir, we do.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And again, you can just tell from her expression, we know what the answer is.

JOSH: Exactly. Which I thought it was interesting too. I liked that. I liked that they didn't do that thing or to try to super milk this cliffhanger like, okay, great. I like that. Just on the downbeat of the scene, she walks in and you can see in her face with the answers. I love that.

HRISHI: Yeah. I loved it too. To take it away from either side, like it's a smart move because in some ways to try and dramatize that moment for either side, it's a potential trap. Either the celebration or the disappointment. It's an extremely hard thing to write and perform, I think in a way that doesn't feel too big or too small.

JOSH: I also think somehow, maybe I'm over reading this into it, but it's almost like an acknowledgement of that something bigger has happened in this episode, which is the passing of Leo and John, and not trying to somehow try to top that in emotional stakes by making the reveal of who won the election somehow greater or more amped up.

HRISHI: I absolutely agree, and I think that it also does a good job in raising the stakes in terms of the political level, but when the decision is finally called, they aren't in a hotel room somewhere, but it's actually in the seat of power. It is in the White House and that is what they've ultimately been fighting for so where a better place to break the news?

JOSH: Well said.

HRISHI: The rest of the episode is kind of epilogue from here, but it doesn't feel like a waste of time or anything like that because we still have this question of are, they going to challenge the election results or not? Well, first there are these two great physical moments. Josh's reaction, the slow arm raise over his head when they get the final results is just so wonderful and thrilling and kind of cathartic to see. But on the other side, there's a great little thing that Alan Alda does and his last discussion, he says,

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*VINICK: You really think it's a counting error? Anybody know how many Hispanics live in Nevada now.*

*BOB: Yeah. But how many of them are illegal?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Again, I appreciate it that they put this in, even though it is, even though it's wrong, it's a debunked myth that Republicans have often used as a way to try and suppress the votes of marginalized communities. The idea that there are swathes of undocumented immigrants who are trying to cast votes illegally is not true. And in some ways, it's almost like in response to what Bob says, and maybe I'm wrong about that, but in any case, the thing that I love is, Vinick puts his hands behind his head, behind the shirt collar and kind of like sighs and rubs his neck and then says,

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*VINICK: Get the president-elect on the phone. I want to congratulate him.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That little physical move that goes along with that line, I thought it was a beautiful depiction of kind of resignation and finality.

JOSH: Yeah, I like it too, and we get a Bram moment towards the end, at the very end of the episode, that I found very reminiscent of an earlier moment,

HRISHI: And I think I know what you're gonna say.

JOSH: What do you think?

HRISHI: I think you're talking about the moment where Bram says to the congressmen now, president-elect

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*SANTOS: Thanks Bram. For everything.*

*BRAM: This is the best thing I've ever done in my life.*

*SANTOS: I think we may find a way to top it.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think you're going to say that this reminds you so much of Charlie's first episode.

JOSH: Yeah, of course exactly that. So much so that unlike my usual approach to these things, I wouldn't have even minded if Santos' response had been a little bit more on the nose and somehow mirrored it never goes away or it doesn't go away.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I love the moment. It's still had that sort of goose pimply moment of everything that's great about *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: Yeah, absolutely. It's so neat to see such a parallel in the hands of two completely different characters.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: I think there's something so beautiful about that. It is so familiar, but that story and that idea, I mean that that is a really *West Wing-y* kind of thought, right? That that kind of excitement and that the core of what the show is about is not about an individual person or individual administration. It's about what you can do and public service and it's really beautiful.

JOSH: Absolutely. Yeah. I felt a circle, a circle closing and a new one being drawn, and it also made me feel like I could see, this show really could have continued

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: For all the reasons you just said that it's greater than even our initial gang of heroes and everything that worked about the show really could have found life in a new iteration.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think that's a beautiful image that you just invoked of a circle being closed and another one starting, and I imagine it, the new circle traces the exact same line of the other cycle. And in some ways, I feel the opposite that because of that and because of how beautifully that's done, you don't need to go any further than just beyond the start/end of the circle to show that this is the thing that's going to continue and continue.

JOSH: Okay. Well, I come at from point of view as an actor on a TV show. Draw another circle. For the love of god, draw another circle.

HRISHI: Then Santos gives his victory speech, and he's very gracious to Senator Vinick.

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*SANTOS: First, I want to say a special word of thanks to Senator Vinick, and I ask you all to join me in applauding his lifetime of service. Arnie Vinick made this a better campaign, and he's made this a better country for all of us.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I think that that is not just lip service. I mean, the fact that we had the live debate and what the debate actually was, that came directly from the two of them talking face to face, and I think it was not only a highlight for the series, but a highlight for this storyline.

JOSH: Yeah and as he was saying this, I think it was intercut with Vinick watching it or overhearing it on TV. And I loved this, was sort of inscrutable a little bit what was going on in Vinick's face. Did he appreciate it? Was he kind of rolling his eyes at, this is what you always have to say? I liked that it was, it wasn't entirely clear how he was processing the moment.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. We don't get a shot of Alan Alda puts his hands on his hips and smiles.

JOSH: Right, right. Exactly.

HRISHI: But again, if for this moment, this actual moment of the victory speech, Josh isn't there, Donna goes looking for him and she finds him back in that main mini hotel headquarters, and he's getting the last numbers up on the board, putting the period on the sentence

JOSH: Right?

HRISHI: And then as he finishes with that, he turns and he sees a collage of photos from the campaign, and we end on this shot of Leo. And he says,

[West Wing Episode 7.17 excerpt]

*JOSH: Thanks boss.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: well done.

HRISHI: Yeah. And with that, we'll take a quick break, and when we come back, we'll be joined by Jimmy Smits.

HRISHI: And now back to the show and our interview with Emmy award winner, SAG award winner, Golden Globe winner Jimmy Smits. Do you remember what was going on in your life just before you started on *The West Wing*?

JIMMY: I was doing a play in New York that summer. I was working at the Delacorte Theater, doing Shakespeare in the Park, when John came to see the show a number of nights,

JOSH: What were you doing?

JIMMY: It was *Twelfth Night*, I was doing *Twelfth Night*, and we had a dinner and he talked about wanting to explore a storyline in terms of the show with regards to a campaign. And it was kind of just like broad stoke stuff. I had to go to a job, I had to do a, like a marathon. While I was working on a job, I did this marathon, I had tapes sent to me. Cause I had seen the show, but I wasn't like you know...I keep up with shows, but uh-

HRISH: Yeah.

JIMMY: While I was doing that job in London, at night I was watching

JOSH: Deep dive into *The West Wing*.

JIMMY: Deep dive into *The West Wing*.

JOSH: Did you like it? Were you sold?

JIMMY: Well, I mean was sold. What struck me and what continually, during the time that I got to work on the show had that privilege, and what I hear from people talking about afterwards, was the strength of that ensemble. And like before coming here, I kind of like looked back at the names just to refresh myself. Not, not, not only the cast names, but like the people that were involved that were significant in terms of the writing staff. And it's just like, it's fricking deep bench to the max in terms of people that wanted to work on that show and participated in really great ways.

JOSH: Yeah. Do you remember how much of a sketch John Wells originally gave you about Santos? Was it, former mayor of Houston, Congressperson potential?

JIMMY: No, we didn't. It was broad strokes just about campaign. About what a campaign that he really wanted to go through kind of explore the ins and outs of what happens in a campaign. And of course, it talked about a feeling that the country was ready to kind of like explore and deal with candidates who were outside the box.

HRISHI: When did you feel like you understood what the character was that you were going to be stepping into? Did you feel like the character came to you pretty fully formed by the first episode?

JIMMY: No, no, it would, because again, we were talking more about brush strokes of what the campaign could possibly be and not the specifics. When I said that it wasn't like just toes in the water, that that I would love to participate that the different character elements were talked about. And I'm involved in a group in Washington DC that deals with educational scholarships. So, I'm back and forth to Washington quite often during the year and talk to a bunch of politicians, people just to kind of like...

JOSH: Get you in the mindset.

JIMMY: Yeah, get me into mindset.

HRISHI: What was the first day on set like for you? Or maybe there's a table read or something like that.

JIMMY: The first day on set, it was a table read. I love the fact that they had table reads the way that they did. It was great.

JOSH: They were pretty special. Yeah, they're were great. It was kind of an announcement of intent and a seriousness of purpose that we would have these huge, everybody was there-

JIMMY: Everybody was there

JOSH: Took the material seriously. We'd give it a good strong first read and get us all on the same page even as we were going to scurry up and work, not necessarily all with each other, but it got us all literally on the same page,

JIMMY: I think that's the important part, and that's something that I've carried with me on other jobs to kind of, when I had the ability to kind of say this is like a good thing to do. It's basically what Josh is saying is like to get everybody on the same page in terms of what you're doing that episode. And that first read-through was little, it was a little intimidating, but I, you know, Spence for me was, it helped so much that Spencer was there because invariably you have, you're going from one ensemble to another and it's another fast moving train and you always try to find like like-minded or something, some kind of touchstone that you can relate to and Spencer, God bless him, he was, we had worked on LA law before, so I don't know if he vetted me or... 'He's okay'.

JOSH: [laughing] Seal of approval.

JIMMY: [laughing] "He can come into the playground."

HRISHI: Yeah. I hadn't thought about, of course, I knew that somewhere in the back of my head while I've been watching that, that you both were on there, but somehow that has not entered my mind as we've gotten into the episodes where the two of you became running mates.

JIMMY: Right.

HRISHI: Did that make that dynamic easier for the two of you to find the fact that you had that prior history?

JIMMY: Yeah. I mean, of course it helped, but we didn't have a lot of scenes together, even though we were running mates. It was like the candidacy that happened there was, it wasn't independent of the storylines, but it was operating on another, there were like different lanes that were happening during the show and I think that's what John wanted to explore with that.

HRISHI: It's true. It is almost like an entirely new show was created and you had both of them happening at the same time. The ensemble that you were talking about really

wasn't your ensemble. You had a separate ensemble with Bradley Whitford and Janeane Garofalo and Teri Polo and everybody on the Santos campaign staff, which also worked and had fantastic dynamics.

JIMMY: Yeah, but the show, it didn't operate independent because we were all, there was always touchstones with the Bartlet campaign. It was like another limb on this beautiful tree.

HRISHI: Yeah. Do you remember the time when it really started to feel like this was your home?

JIMMY: So it's not the first time that I've kind of like, maybe that was one of the reasons why John came to me and talked to me is that to kind of jump on this train that's, that's moving and kind of blend in and still keep a sense of what you want to do. I mean that was all part of it as well. I always felt very positive in terms of being on board.

JOSH: It was that kind of ensemble. You just, it was all about the work and you kind of just got to, it is when, as soon as you're there,

JIMMY: And again, the deep bench, I mentioned the fact that so many actors that wanted to come and work on that show.

JOSH: Yeah. We remark on that all the time. It's one scene here or two scenes there, and the guest cast is insane. It's really kind of incredible because it was, people wanted to be involved.

JIMMY: The thing for me was that I always felt like, wow, they had the Aaron, there was talk of the Sorkin days and I would always feel like, Oh, I'm not, I wasn't part of that part of the show. But I mean, certainly one of the really cool things that I felt was that Wells was always like secure enough to kind of let people flourish so that you see Bradley writing scripts and people moving and

JOSH: Yeah.

JIMMY: One of our first ADs, Andrew Bernstein wound up directing and there was an inclusion of terms of women directors that were on the set. It just felt like, damn, man, this is, this is cool.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. It was a shift maybe in a way from Aaron's in the, not that he directed or anything, but that he was kind of an auteur approach and John having the competence, first of all, to take over from Aaron and to keep the show running the way he did and to more of a collaborative open up the doors approach.

JIMMY: Yeah.

HRISHI: I wanted to show you this picture and ask you about it. This photo of you and the young Barack Obama. Can you tell us about that?

JIMMY: That particular photo was at the scholarship event that I was hosting, but I actually met him in Chicago at an, this was like after that conversation with John and after I got back from London, I was at an AFSCME, the American Federation of something Employees, convention that he was speaking at, but we were in the

holding area together prior to going into this convention. It was just like me and him in this like tent and I talked about a little bit about the show, and of course he was aware, he was definitely aware of the show, and he hadn't made that convention speech yet. He started talking about how he felt his family was going to have to deal with this decision that he was thinking about making because it's not a decision that you do alone this, this affects your whole family and changes so much, right? And that was something that kind of like stayed with me and I talked to John about that afterwards, and I think that worked its way in with Teri's character. I also had conversations with people, like Xavier Becerra, who I still think is like a rising star in the Democratic party.

HRISHI: My former Congressman.

JIMMY: Yeah. Had a conversation with the then, Attorney General of the Bush administration just to find out about, how dealings in those offices were.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's an incredibly serendipitous photo that this happened before you started taking on the character of Matt Santos and before he became the Barack Obama that everybody knew because you mentioned that you missed out on the Sorkin years but I feel like even though most of *The West Wing* during the Sorkin years aired during the Bush era, there's something inextricably linked to the Clinton administration in that show, and in the time when you joined, the sixth and seventh seasons, somehow prefigured Barack Obama and are inextricably linked to that administration, even though the administration hadn't begun yet.

JOSH: Although we know from Eli Attie that Obama was on his radar, and that was a bit of an inspiration for Santos, at least his input on the character, of creating it.

HRISHI: Yeah. After having met him, were you surprised at what his political fortune turned out to be?

JIMMY: Not at all.

HRISHI: Really.

JIMMY: No. No, not at all. He was, it was like an arrow man.

HRISHI: One of the things that the character of Matt Santos talks about throughout the series is the weight of responsibility of being a Latino candidate and I was wondering if any of that responsibility was felt by you, even just portraying a Latino candidate on a show like *The West Wing*, given what the stakes were and who was watching and how many people were watching.

JIMMY: I felt honored that John was considering using this character to forward that type of idea of an out of the box candidate, person of color, man, woman, that all of that was in the mix and that the country was ready to kind of like think that way, but much has been in terms of the characters that I've done, you gotta be able to show that he's good at what he does, not who he is first and foremost, and then those other kinds of layers you can paint in.

JOSH: That sounds similar to what Santos himself was concerned with.

[West Wing Episode 7.03 excerpt]

SANTOS: *I don't want to just be the brown candidate. I want to be the American candidate.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Did you have a lot of discussions with the writers? Are you that kind of, would you give them feedback when something was written?

JIMMY: Yeah, there were conversations that we had prior to and during, because you're in the middle of the season, so I mean, things are happening in different writers of writing and...I always thought that like the doors were open, that there was a back and forth and that it wasn't only dealing with John, that Eli, you would talk to Eli or Debbie Cahn or Lawrence

JOSH: [crosstalk] Lawrence O'Donnell sure

JIMMY: [crosstalk] Whoever was writing and that there was a kind of open back and forth in terms of, what are you trying to say here? And maybe not bend it, but how else can we clarify it?

JOSH: Yeah. Well, how about the debate episode and what a monster of a task, at least that's how it appeared to me. I remember feeling very relieved that I wasn't involved, even though it seemed like a very exciting thing of like, you know what? I'm looking forward to watching this. I mean, you were right there in the spotlight. Did you have a lot of input into what would be said? What was that whole experience like?

JIMMY: First of all, it was one of the greatest experiences that I've had in my life working on television.

JOSH: It's an amazing piece of television. I re-watched it today.

JIMMY: The fact that they were able to do this and that it ran concurrent to the shooting schedule amazed me, as did a lot of things that amazed me in terms of what these guys were able to do, I mean, we went to Canada and shot scenes in Canada to kind of give the feel of a winter in Iowa and in the different campaign places. When we had the convention and rallies, it was just like these guys would go to Warner Brothers and just say, we're going to do this, and then they would wind up doing it. It was amazing that we were afforded the opportunity to kind of treat the debate episode concurrent to what they would, cause they were shooting another episode at the time, as if it was an independent, like it was a play.

JOSH: And you were on board from the get-go? From the conception?

JIMMY: Oh yeah. Big time. I think *ER* had done a live episode

JOSH: [crosstalk] That's right

JIMMY: prior and the fact that it was going to be done live was daunting, but you could get tingling with excitement and we, you know, Lawrence O'Donnell wrote that episode, Alex Graves directed that one and we rehearsed it, like if we were doing a play and, Alan, have you had Alan on?

JOSH: We did speak to Alan yeah.

JIMMY: I mean he's talked about that too. It's like, it makes me verklempt. We did two shows, an East coast and a West coast feed, and it was like doing a play.

HRISHI: Did the process bring the two of you together, you and Alan Alda.

JIMMY: As actors?

HRISHI: As people, I think really, I mean, to be thrust in that situation and have, that's a unique television experience and really, the weight was really on just the two of you.

JIMMY: It was a partnership. It was like what being in a true ensemble was the way I've always perceived it.

JOSH: Have you watched it anytime recently?

JIMMY: It's like a blur to me. Lawrence occasionally plays clips on his MSNBC show.

JOSH: Yeah.

JIMMY: It was an exciting moment and I think it resonated really well for the show and it just, I really kind of feel like we accomplished what John wanted to do in terms of showing a campaign and all of that. It was exciting.

HRISHI: I also really loved the partnership on screen that you and Teri Polo had found the Santos marriage so believable from the first moment

[West Wing Episode 6.10 excerpt]

*SANTOS: Told him no.*

*HELEN: You told him no.*

*SANTOS: I told him no.*

*HELEN: And what did he say?*

*SANTOS: He said that I was right, that it was a stupid idea and that I made the right decision.*

*HELEN: Man of conviction right there.*

*SANTOS: He's got it all figured out. He's got this nine-point plan. It's pretty interesting, actually.*

*HELEN: Nine point?*

*SANTOS: Uh-huh.*

*HELEN: Why not seven or three or...?*

*SANTOS: I don't know.*

*HELEN: And this plan is supposed to make you...*

*SANTOS: Win.*

*HELEN: Oh my God, you are thinking about this.*

*SANTOS: I told him no.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: We talked about it when we were discussing that episode, that just, it felt like a lived in marriage and gave such a good foundation for all the episodes where later you feel the pressure of a campaign on a couple, there was a strong enough foundation of a relationship there to weather that stuff.

JIMMY: Yeah. Those things were really kind of brush strokes that were really well-written, Teri did a great job. As well as the relationship between Santos and Josh and I think about when I look at what we did in that, and I'm not really sure about the way it went down in the Obama campaign, but I think about those players, Axelrod and a bunch of those people and how they were like instrumental in terms of getting him to another more accessible kind of level. I, yeah, I think we were on the right track. I was always wondering, in terms of Santos, there were discussions that I had that I felt like sometimes that I was being handled, that the character was being handled a little bit too, that the rein was, and I was wondering if that was like more of a character thing because Brad's character had been there before.

JOSH: But that's one of the interesting things I think about that dynamic is that he is at times, Josh is, brusque and does try to handle Santos, and there are times where he'll sort of let it happen and other times where he'll finally put his foot down and explain how it's going to go as the candidate. So...

JIMMY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HRISHI: I'm curious what the dynamic was between you, yourself and Bradley Whitford.

JOSH: You didn't like him, right? That was my sense.

JIMMY: [laughing] That was another, that was another partnership that developed and I think kind of flourished and blossomed. Are you going to tell them, tell about our little...?

JOSH: I was going to say I'd be remiss. We've talked about it before, but now that I have you here, just want to remind you about and ask whether I've been officially forgiven for the infamous Valentine's Day bouquet of flowers, which was early in your, uh...

JIMMY: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

HRISHI: Will you tell the story from your perspective? How do you remember this going?

JIMMY: That it was Valentine's Day and I got this beautiful, in my trailer, this beautiful Valentine's bouquet, who I actually you thought was from another Brad that I-

JOSH: Huh? There's someone else I don't know,

JIMMY: [laughing] Somebody else that I was working with at the time, and I thought that that was like the most beautiful ensemble kind of partnership thing that somebody could do, and I came on set and gave Brad a hug.

JOSH: Brad had no idea.

HRISHI: Do you remember...?

JIMMY: [laughing] Brad had no idea?

JOSH: [laughing] No!

JIMMY: Janel was the one that knew

JOSH: Janel, I want to say, even though I'm the fall guy, and I admit my participation certainly

JIMMY: [laughing incredulously] Your participation?!

JOSH: Well, I stole the Bradley Whitford stationery. That was months earlier and I figured this will come in handy at some point. My memory is, I want to say Janel was the mastermind, she said I know what we can do with that stationery you have. I think it was her idea. I knew we pooled resources. It's a very expensive prank. Those are some nice flowers.

JIMMY: They were nice flowers.

JOSH: And then also my memory is that Brad, of course, after feeling awkward, having placed him in that situation knew that I was involved immediately. Apparently, you did not, although I assume to kind of, everyone knew. I feel like months later I was kind of chuckling about it and reminiscing and you turned to me and said it, "That was you?" [laughing]

JIMMY: [laughing] I didn't, I didn't know. I didn't know. And didn't know that there were levels of pranks that were going on for-

JOSH: [crosstalk] I think you should have made that connection

JIMMY: [crosstalk] season after season after season.

JOSH: It's also worth noting that you got your, I got my comeuppance and you got your revenge, when we finally all went on The Ellen Show, subsequent to the shows wrapping or before the finale showed and in the closing credits, you can even see them online, you lean over to Richard, I believe you offered him his significant amount of money to charity if he would smash a cake in my face, and then I was hunted down like an animal by the entire ensemble. There's an ensemble that worked together beautifully and it happened.

ALL: [laughter]

HRISHI: I think the way that Josh told it to me that the letter from Brad that accompanied the flowers, he tried to make it as

JOSH: [crosstalk] I walked a line

HRISHI: [crosstalk] uncomfortably romantic.

JIMMY: [laughing] It was. It was. It was romantic. It was. It was.

JOSH: Yeah, I can write.

ALL: [laughing]

HRISHI: Was that a good icebreaker or did that just make things more awkward?

JIMMY: It may, it was, that day was very awkward.

JOSH: [crosstalk] It was an ice creator

JIMMY: I was very, I was very effusive about my reciprocity for that gift.

ALL: [laughing]

JOSH: I went back today and watched your first scene together. That's from "Liftoff" and Josh Lyman has been sent to you to kind of talk you into, I guess not retiring from the House and running for reelection, and it's fun to see how much is there in that original scene between you.

[West Wing Episode 6.10 excerpt]

*SANTOS: So, would this be a package deal?*

*JOSH: The budget?*

*SANTOS: No. I've been thinking about your nine-point plan.*

*JOSH: Really?*

*SANTOS: Yeah. But I would like to add a tenth.*

*JOSH: What's that?*

*SANTOS: You. The filing deadline's next Thursday. I'm in, if you're in with me.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: There's a mutual respect. You kind of get in some digs about his not having been chosen as Chief of Staff.

JIMMY: Right.

JOSH: But you also seem suggest an understanding as to why he might do better in another role, and it's cool to just see, it's good acting and good writing that so much is there, just from the downbeat of your relationship.

HRISHI: Right now in our re-watch, we're at the election episodes. So, in terms of the storyline, Leo, is found by Annabeth at the end of the first part and then in the second part we find out that Santos has won the presidency. Could you tell us about those weeks making those two episodes?

JIMMY: So now I'm delving into territory that I'm not sure how much I can talk about,

JOSH: Yay.

JIMMY: The Vinick character that Alan Alda played was a centrist Republican, and I don't know about all of this, about how much is true about this, maybe ask some of the writers, but there was a real debate in terms of who was going to actually win the election. So have people talked about that?

HRISHI: Yeah, Lawrence has talked to us about it and Eli as well.

JIMMY: Yeah.

JOSH: What did you think was going to happen? Was it...they never told you what the plan was, or were they always keeping it a little bit up in the air or playing it close to the vest?

JIMMY: They were playing close to the vest, but one of the things that I was, with regards to the character, is that we were not going to go through this campaign to have this particular character lose. That was a conditional kind of thing that we had...

JOSH: From the beginning?

JIMMY: A writer there, yeah, and that kind of changed and there was a conversation that happened because Vinick's character was more centrist and we had taken hits about liberalism, and that it kind of made sense. That's what I was hearing, that it kind of made sense and that there was a big debate in the writers room about how that would all play out. And that changed when, when Spence passed as well.

JOSH: Hmm. Well, so were you part of this conversation going, guys, this was preordained, but this was part of your, I mean, that's interesting to me. That's the first I've heard.

JIMMY: Yeah, I was involved in the conversation.

JOSH: I'll bet.

JIMMY: And then it was like, it's off the table because we have to deal with this in another way.

HRISHI: Right. I can understand the thinking behind signaling a real sea change for the show by having a Republican win the presidency, but it would be too cruel to put on television, like a loss of Leo and the loss of the presidency together.

JIMMY: Right. And I think that's, that was the thinking, but the Vinick character was a very centrist political human character and if that would have happened that way, I think it would have been more about building bridges and, which happened with Santos as well.

JOSH: Yeah, and they dished up an extremely close election, at least in terms of the credibility of it could go either way. They definitely teed that up nicely. What was your understanding- because I remember at the time I was very interested in whether I was going to continue to have a job, and I remember there was a sense of, towards the end, whether the show was going to continue or not and whether it was going to be like a Santos administration that I was hoping Will Bailey might serve in. Were you talking about the future of the show or your future involvement, even as they were making or mulling over this decision?

HRISHI: Season eight?

JIMMY: My recollection was that we were going to go out like that.

HRISHI: Is there a day from the set that you remember being, I guess maybe the most exciting or the happiest that you'd been while making the show.

JIMMY: I got excited offset because I was at a political thing in Philly and Bon Jovi was playing, and I was doing an introduction, one of these bridges that happened between musical acts, and then I was invited to go and talk to Mr. Bon Jovi and found out how much of a fan this guy, that he was following the show and following the campaign, and his tour manager was talking about it and he pulled out, I don't know, they have a silk screen machine or something like that, but he had a Santos t-shirt, Santos for President t-shirt that they had made, that the tour guy pulled it up from the bus

JOSH: That's fantastic.

JIMMY: Holy [expletive deleted] and they participated, that wanted to participate on the show, when that was kind of relayed, that information was relayed,

HRISH: [crosstalk] Yeah, is that how it happened

JOSH: [crosstalk] He made it. You made it happen! Sounds it.

JIMMY: [crosstalk] I don't think I'd have made it happen, but,

HRISHI: [crosstalk] But the fact that he was a fan,

JIMMY: [crosstalk] that there was an awareness.

HRISHI: Yeah. You said that the table read was the kind of thing that you like to take with you now and projects that came after *The West Wing*. Were there other things from your time on the show that you felt like you've carried on since?

JIMMY: You know, I've been lucky with regards to my forays into television to be part of some strong ensembles, but what *The West Wing* had was really special. Was really special that any given day, Allison knows that she's holding the door for somebody and then she's going to have this great storyline. I feel privileged to have

been part of that and those last couple of episodes that there was a kind of finality to it where

JOSH: [crosstalk] everybody was still relishing it.

JIMMY: [crosstalk] Yeah, they were relishing it. They were on set for everybody's last scenes and...

HRISHI: That's great. Thank you so much.

JOSH: That was fantastic.

JIMMY: Oh, thank you guys.

JOSH: That's it for this episode of *The West Wing Weekly*.

HRISHI: I have to say that finishing this storyline really feels like we are close to the end.

JOSH: It sure does.

HRISHI: It did not feel that way so much. I knew of course, where we were in the series, but still we hadn't discussed it and it just, it feels different now.

JOSH: Yeah, but also it was watching and considering this episode and then also just now discussing it with you. Also, as I've been reading through some of the responses to our small block of cheese day request.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: The whole thing is starting to hit me.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I'm really, I'm touched by what people are writing about how much the podcast has meant to them. So, it's very sweet and it's almost also kind of mind boggling.

HRISHI: Yeah. I'm very grateful and if you're listening to this episode, the week that it comes out, Happy Thanksgiving, and I'm very thankful that we've gotten to do this.

JOSH: As am I. And I'm thankful for you, Hrishi.

HRISHI: Thankful for you, Josh.

JOSH: Thanks for Zach McNees and Margaret Miller for their help putting the show together.

HRISHI: This next week is going to be a break from our regular season. We're going to work on this small block of cheese day episode. As Josh said, thanks to so many of you who have written in, it's been incredibly overwhelming.

JOSH: Yeah. Just in the volume and more specifically in the substance of what people are writing, I'm blown away by people's candor and their appreciation for the series and for the podcast. Thank you to everyone who actually took the time to put your thoughts and your feelings down. It means a lot to us.

HRISHI: Yeah. So that'll come out not on our normally scheduled day, we're going to take a little bit of time to spend Thanksgiving with our families and have a few days off, so it'll come out later in the week. It'll be our small block of cheese day, and then we'll be back the following week. So, until then, as always, we are a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of independent, creative podcasts made possible by listeners like you. You can find out more about all of our shows at [Radiotopia.fm](http://Radiotopia.fm).

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

JIMMY: What's next?

[Outro Music]