

The West Wing Weekly
7.21: "Institutional Memory"
Guest: Janet Ashikaga

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You are listening to *The West Wing Weekly*. I am Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And I am Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today we are talking about Episode 21 from Season 7: "Institutional Memory."

JOSH: This episode was written by Debora Cahn. It was directed by Lesli Linka Glatter, and it first aired on May 7, 2006.

HRISHI: And in this episode, as the Bartlet administration reaches its final days, Will, Kate, and C.J. all say, "Ok. What's next?"

JOSH: That's right. And I think the final phrase of this episode is...

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

DANNY: What else?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughs] I was like, Danny, oooh, so close.

HRISHI: So close... [both laugh]

JOSH: It's like it was a trademark issue [both laugh]. Had to say something substantially different even if it's in the same vein.

HRISHI: Right. [laughs]

JOSH: Ahh...This is so much like the end of a TV show where you start obsessing, trying to relish things. In a way, you really can't, but it's hard not to go yeah, it's the last time I'll do this. We are going to do our last "What's Next" in about an hour and a half.

HRISHI: Uh-huh. Well, that's one thing that I was thinking about while watching this episode. It's really nice that the show knew that it was ending and made these moves to have closure for the series itself. Because it means that while we are doing the final episodes of our podcast, some of the feelings that they're talking about and exploring in the show mirror things that I am feeling about the end of *this* show. That wouldn't happen necessarily with a TV show that got canceled or ended more unexpectedly.

JOSH: Right. You are absolutely right. We are wrapping up a podcast about a television show that itself was wrapping up that depicted the wrapping up of an administration.

HRISHI: [laughs] Exactly.

JOSH: [laughs] It's getting very meta here.

HRISHI: Yeah, it is. I want our episode to start with an epigraph. I guess it's too late for that, but let's imagine the beginning of our episode discussing this episode with a quote from Ainsley Hayes.

[West Wing Episode 2.05 excerpt]

AINSLEY: They're all about duty.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Hmm...

HRISHI: I kept thinking about that while watching this episode, especially with C.J. and her sense of competing duties.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: But then I thought, that's really what all of the episodes of *The West Wing* are about.

JOSH: Yeah, I think so. If you're going to boil it down, that's as good a brief description as any.

HRISHI: That's how I started to think about this. I was like, oh, this is really about duty. And then I immediately remembered Ainsley's voice saying, "They're all about duty."

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: It's a beautiful episode and incredibly sharply written dialogue from Debora Cahn.

JOSH: I thought the same thing too. The writing is great.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's a beautiful episode that's only a little bit undercut, as some of these final episodes have been, by the flash forward from the beginning of this season—the first scene of Season 7, Episode 1—that flashes forward three years into the future.

JOSH: Yeah, but who remembers that?

HRISHI: [laughs] Unfortunately, I do.

JOSH: You and everybody who listens to our podcast.

HRISHI: Some of the great questions that are posed by the scenarios in this episode...we already know the outcomes!

JOSH: Outcome.

HRISHI: Or the outcome. [laughs] You know there is this wonderful thread about what's going to happen with C.J. and Danny. But all I could think was they'll be fine. We know they have a baby together. They live in Santa Monica.

HRISHI: As I was watching this I also thought, Oh, C.J. and Danny live in Santa Monica. Maybe we'll go swing by their house before dinner tonight because you and I are going to have dinner in Santa Monica after we finish.

JOSH: That is true.

HRISHI: This question of Will and what he's going to do next... He's going to go visit the D triple C. What ends up happening is that this episode feels more like an origin story.

JOSH: How did they get there?

HRISHI: Yeah. Because we already know what the answer is so, as opposed to setting something up where we get to savor and wonder and leave with a kind of ellipsis at the end of the paragraph being like...

JOSH: Did it appreciably affect your enjoyment of this episode to know the outcome of these stories?

HRISHI: That's a good question because I did enjoy it so much.

JOSH: It may be unanswerable because you can only experience it for the first time one way.

HRISHI: Right...

JOSH: It's all conjecture.

HRISHI: The thing is, I like knowing the answer of what happened to Will? That, in fact, he did go on to run and win and become a congressman. And I do like knowing that C.J. and Danny go together and they worked it out. But I'm not sure that I liked knowing while this was playing out.

JOSH: I think I'm split on that one—with those two specific examples. To me there was something kind of painful, but beautiful, in watching the Will and Kate scene. We know where it's going to go, and it made me even more honed in on Kate's decision to encourage Will to do this thing that they're both kind of slowly coming to on their own their own at the same time...and to actively encourage him to do something that is not only likely, but we know will lead to the breakup of their relationship.

HRISHI: Ahhh! Well, see, this is the thing...this is why I love this part of the episode the most. Specifically, I love it because we don't know what's going to happen with the two of them.

JOSH: That's true.

HRISHI: But that conversation that they have, I thought, oh, how sad that you know and how beautiful and kind of how noble that those quick lines between the two of them were. You know they already talked about their potential future, and they both were excited about that idea.

JOSH: Right. Exactly. Explicitly we've heard them.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And they exchange a sweet smile about it.

HRISHI: Yeah. And you feel excited for their future and then she says...

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

WILL: I'm not moving to Oregon for one thing.

KATE: Of course you are.

WILL: No, I'm not. We're...

KATE: ...we're what? You'll win. You should run.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought, oh she's sort of sacrificing their relationship for his career goals. But then I thought, if Will does win and becomes a congressman, he's going to be spending a lot of time in DC.

JOSH: Back in D.C. That's true.

HRISHI: ...and Kate might be there still. And I went back and looked at that first scene—that flash forward scene from Season 7—and they're both there. Will's a Congressman and Kate has written a book. And the thing is, they aren't standing next to each other, and they aren't acting like a couple.

JOSH: They don't seem to be together.

HRISHI: But! I also think that these two people, especially in that context, with that group of people, wouldn't really act like a couple anyway. Even if they were together, I wouldn't expect them to necessarily act very lovey-dovey to each other. So, I like that it's open-ended. In my mind, I think they might have a shot.

JOSH: Okay. I'll admit that there's maybe, at least, a little potential there...

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...that there's still something a little going on, or still could be subsequent to that scene. Maybe. But then for the C.J./Danny storyline, which I still very much enjoyed—terrific writing, wonderful acting—it was so good that if I hadn't known—there is a point in this episode when I would have thought, it's the scene where they go to lunch on the corner for a hot dog or they are headed there—it really seems like it's over at that point.

HRISHI: Yes. Yeah.

JOSH: And you see in Danny's eyes. He says,

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

DANNY: Thank you. That's useful information.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It really does seem like it's over. It doesn't necessarily feel to me like a setup for them to come back in the big turnaround.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: So, I think that storyline was slightly diminished for me by my knowing how they end up.

HRISHI: Yes. I agree. By the end of the episode, even if we didn't know anything about the future—about three years from the future—the way that it ends and resolves with the two of them making a plan, trying to make a plan, it feels so good to have gotten there...just the journey over this episode. But the fact that we go into it with this kind of sense of predestination, yeah, just watered it down a tiny bit.

JOSH: Yeah. A slight bit.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Should we talk a little bit more about the fact that this is the last time that we are going to record an episode of our podcast this way. We have one more, we have the finale coming up at the theater at the Ace Hotel. We are going to have a lot of guests. It's going to be great. But this is the last time we are going to hop on FaceTime and gaze deeply into each other's eyes and discuss an episode of *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: I know. It doesn't feel like that. I think I'm still so caught up in making sure we've got all the... I'm feeling a little bit like C.J. where I am just trying to make sure that all our transition memos are written and all the T's are crossed and all the buttons that need to be buttoned are buttoned, that I haven't stopped to have any kind of emotional reaction to anything that's going on.

JOSH: Right. I fight that stuff because you do everything. I've had more time to ponder. [both laugh] I sat down to prepare for and re-watch this episode and take notes and I thought, Oh! I'm going to miss writing with a pen.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Not that I'll never do it, but certainly the great majority of time that I've spent writing by hand in the last four years has been taking notes for our discussions. And [laughs] so I am starting to obsess about every little thing that's going to change.

HRISHI: [laughs] The beginning of the cold open ends with C.J. looking in her office and seeing all these boxes and she realizes that...

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

C.J.: (deep sigh) *You're not filing. You're packing.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: ...and we hear that most of that is going into the archive. And that hit me yesterday because I just archived a bunch of our episodes. I love Danny's nesting instincts. At the beginning of this episode, C.J. and Danny are having a little "morning after" and I like Danny's attempts to kind of build something more out of what they've got.

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

DANNY: My sister's in town tomorrow night, you wanna meet us?

C.J.: We are finalizing the budget.

DANNY: Well, she's here Thursday too.

C.J.: Intelligence review.

DANNY: Alright. I'm bailing on dinner.

C.J.: I'm sorry! This week is just...

DANNY: ...no worries!

C.J.: I feel bad. I'd love to meet your sister.

DANNY: You would. She's like me but with bigger teeth. It's something.

C.J.: This week is just...

DANNY: No is a perfectly acceptable answer.

C.J.: [sighs]

DANNY: You gotta be able to ask, right?

C.J.: I just feel bad...(scene fades)

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He's also incredibly accommodating. He manages to both ask for more from C.J. but also completely accepts that he's not always going to get it.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: I'm so impressed by Danny's emotional intelligence in this episode. He is so emotionally evolved as a human being. It's really incredible.

JOSH: I agree.

HRISHI: And C.J. really is not. [both laugh]

JOSH: No, no. It's one of the enjoyable things about seeing this all play out. She is emotionally barked up in a way where he's really reached a place we wanna see her get closer to.

HRISHI: Yeah. They're talking and C.J.'s, and Danny's trying to get her to spend more time with him and she can't commit to anything. And he makes, you know, he makes a joke. And she says, "you know what? It's way too early for this". She gets, I loved "barked up," I don't know that term, but that's great.

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

C.J.: (deep sigh) You know what? It's way too early for this.

DANNY: What?

C.J.: It's 6:45 AM

DANNY: Hey. I'm kidding.

C.J.: Are you?

DANNY: Yeah. Everybody, take a breath.

C.J.: Okay. I'm sorry.

DANNY: There's nothing to be sorry about.

C.J.: You're right. This will all be easier in two weeks. It really will.

[they kiss]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: C.J. kind of—her blood goes up—and Danny immediately de-escalates the thing and tries to make it not a conflict. And then, even when she apologizes, he de-escalates that. He's like there's nothing actually to apologize for. He's so good at bringing the temperature back down.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. I also think it's refreshing it's not earth shatteringly new to see this kind of interpersonal dynamic play out, but it is refreshing to see it with the gender roles reversed from how it is usually presented in TV and films.

HRISHI: Right, yeah. But there's a little bit of a trap here that C.J. lays for herself. She says, "This will all be easier in two weeks," once everything is over. But that's really to Danny, and I think that reasonably sounds like an implicit promise.

JOSH: Uh-huh.

HRISHI: So, later when Santos asks her for two years to be the institutional memory of his administration and to help them get their agendas set and get their first pieces of legislation passed and she's thinking about it, later, to jump way ahead, when she tells Danny that news, he is so hurt and you can see he feels betrayed and I think it's completely understandable.

JOSH: Absolutely. I agree. Well, I felt, for lack of a better phrase, at different times to be on a different character's side.

HRISHI: Yeah...

JOSH: Which is just to say that it was well-written and well-acted. So, it wasn't clear that there's ambivalence. I sort of, I definitely, understood Danny being hurt that he wouldn't have been consulted or she wouldn't have even at least mentioned the professional quandary that she's pondering—whether or not to take this kind of job that certainly would affect the type of relationship they could have together. Wouldn't even mention it to him. And then I also understand when she gets her back up saying all of a sudden "Oh, you think we have the kind of relationship where you weigh in on my career decisions?" I like the back and forth. It wasn't a black and white scenario as I watched it. But I certainly understood, again, as you say, after what she explicitly said in that first scene between the two of them, why he might be hurt by the current situation, finding out that she appears to have made the decision to take a job that's going to preclude them from having a closer relationship or a relationship where they spend more time together. I also particularly liked when he said,

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

DANNY: We're not twenty-five anymore. At our age you can't date a little and screw a little and wait around to see if you get sentimental at Christmas. You have to decide you're going to make another person a part of your life. A partner.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love that line, and it hit really hard right now because there's a project that I've been working on for a little while, a podcast that I am actually starting next month. A lot of people have been asking us what we might do next, and in the short term, one thing that I've been working on is this eight-episode season of a podcast called "Partners." It's going to be interviews with two noteworthy partners talking about their relationship and how they made it work.

JOSH: It's a spectacular idea. I've heard enough to give it my hearty recommendation. For sure, everybody should listen to this next project. And you're being modest. This is part of what's next for you. You have many, many irons in the fire and exciting projects coming up.

HRISHI: Thanks, Josh. It comes out February 5th.

JOSH: Is there a trailer we can listen to HrishI?

HRISHI: (laughing) There is, in fact.

[Partners Podcast Trailer excerpt]

HRISHI: This episode really is about these wonderful partnerships, I think. And I have to say I really, really love your performance in this episode.

JOSH: Oh, thank you. I appreciate that.

HRISHI: You really, really killed it. And the scene between Will and Kate in Will's office is just, it's so excellent. And there are a couple of lines, just a few words, that you deliver, that I think you knocked out of the park.

HRISHI: Kate comes in, and we find out that maybe part of the reason why she hasn't written a transition memo for C.J. is because she's been actually holding out for what her future is gonna be. She actually really wants a job in the next administration, and it turns out they've offered it to someone else.

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

KATE: The Santos people offered National Security Advisor to Glen.

WILL: Really?

KATE: Yeah.

WILL: And he's saying yes?

KATE: Yeah.

WILL: Damn

KATE: I know. I know...[clip fades]

[end of excerpt]

HRISHI: You say, "Really?" and then you say "Damn." Those two words—I don't know—felt incredibly real. And again, huge credit to Deborah Cahn for having written a scene that just feels so well-realized.

JOSH: Yeah. I'm with you, and one of the things she wrote for Will, which made me like the character more, was just the line "That sucks."

HRISHI: Yes! Exactly.

JOSH: Because sometimes you just need to hear that.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I know it's hard for me to leave it at that sometimes, if somebody has bad news, because I so want to bring them back up. And I want to put a positive spin on it or explain why it's really better this way because something else is gonna...and I like that he just left it at that. Somedays that's what you wanna hear. Right? Doesn't that suck?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Isn't what I'm telling you terrible?

HRISHI: I think there's a tendency to get a little gender-stereotypy. I think there's sometimes a tendency for men to hear about a complaint from a woman and then have the response be to

offer advice. What I have heard is that in those cases often the only response needed is just like, man, that sucks! This is what Kate needs at this moment.

JOSH: Hmm....

HRISHI: Meanwhile, Will's uncertain future has a lot of exciting possibilities.

JOSH: That is true.

HRISHI: I mean, certainly Kate is gonna have exciting opportunities come her way, but for right now, she's one person who has...

JOSH: ...we know exactly what she was hoping for...

HRISHI: Yeah. And she didn't get it. And she's the one person who has a very clear expectation that isn't met.

JOSH: Right. And it went to somebody who's not going to bring her on.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Glen.

HRISHI: Will has an invitation to talk to the DCCC—the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee—and you can understand he's a great choice for it, which Kate enumerates in their scene together.

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

KATE: God knows you know all there is to know about policy and campaigning. I mean, you could probably push a monkey through the process, between your Washington experience and your local politics experience.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It makes sense. And he likes the idea of being able to get his hands in a bunch of different races without also having to have the torture of just one. It seems like a great, great fit. And I love that he hears about it, and he immediately gets to work. It's just like his brain...he hasn't even accepted the job, but he's already thinking about it. I feel like I do this all the time. And someone will be like what do you think of this? and I'll be in the middle of something else and I'll be like, well, let me stop the thing that I'm supposed to be doing. Let me stop my actual work and be like how about this and what if we could do it like...I love that.

JOSH: And I love playing characters like that because my own mind just goes baaahhh.

[both laugh]

JOSH: I'm good at playing the other guy. But that's not who I am.

HRISHI: And so Will has this conversation, and they're looking at the map and the potential races, and the one that seems to be the trickiest is this congressional race in Oregon. And he's

getting the layout of the whole thing. And I wanted to point out this very unusual edit that happens in the episode. As that conversation ends, it cuts to C.J. walking away from her own meeting from Hollis—she’s had a meeting with billionaire Hollis at this point—and she’s walking back to her office, but the audio, the dialogue from Will and the guy at the DCCC, continues while we see her in the hallway.

JOSH: Don’t remember that.

HRISHI: For a while. Like a full line. It’s basically the same kind of editing technique that happens with the flentyl...

JOSH: Hmm...

HRISHI: ...where we go to the black screen, the executive producer credit and the audio from the previous...

JOSH: ...the audio carries on...

HRISHI: ...the audio carries on. But I can’t think of many instances, none right now. I am sure there’s maybe one or two. It’s very unusual in *The West Wing* to have this kind of thing where a piece of dialogue is carrying on and we see something else. And I thought it was really interesting. And editing is something we’ve talked about here and there, but we haven’t actually had the chance to talk to an editor throughout this whole series, until now.

JOSH: Huzzah!

HRISHI: The editor of this episode, and many episodes previously, was Janet Ashikaga. She won four Emmys for editing *Seinfeld*. She edited *Sports Night*, and she’s one of the few editors on *The West Wing*. And Josh, you interviewed her.

JOSH: Yes, I did.

HRISHI: Let’s do a little editing of our own and drop that interview in right here.

JOSH: Right on.

[INTERVIEW BETWEEN JOSH AND JANET]

JOSH: It’s my pleasure now to welcome Janet Ashikaga to the program. Janet is the editor of some forty episodes of *The West Wing* as well as *Sports Night*. Janet is also a five-time Emmy winner, as well as winner of the Career Achievement Award from the American Cinema Editors of the United States. So, actually, let’s start at the beginning. I guess even before you got involved with *Sports Night* and *Aaron and Tommy* or *The West Wing*. How did you get into editing?

Janet: It was just pretty much luck. I started out as a philosophy major in college and came out to California looking for a job. Got one and actually, just started that way. It was just like a slow grind. And I worked for a show that so many people in California did, or Los Angeles did. It was called *This Is the Life*. It was done for Lutheran television. And the number of people that got their SAG cards working on that show is shocking. And I remember when I got an interview to do *Seinfeld*, I thought well, there’s just not a chance in hell that I’m ever gonna get that job

because I knew so many people that I was up against. I had a really fun interview with Larry David. And suddenly I was offered the job. And I thought are you kidding me? [laughs]

JOSH: That's wild!

JANET: Yeah! And I got my first Emmy on that show. And it was the Subway episode.

JOSH: That's incredible.

JANET: And then, later on when I left that show and I met Tommy Schlamme and I got an interview for I think it was *Ink*, Tommy said, "What was it like working for Larry David?" And I said, "Well, to tell you the truth, he was my first genius." And Tommy looked at me and he said, "Well you know, he's my best friend." And I thought, well, kudos! [laughs]

JOSH: [laughs] That's interesting. It sounds like you had immediate success. What skillset do you think you brought that made you such a good editor and hit the ground running?

JANET: I think it's one of the things that somebody says, "What is an editor?" or "What do you do?" and I said your job is to make everybody look good. And so, you take the acting, you take the director of photography, you take whatever skills somebody else has, and you're the funnel. Where you get all those pieces, and you really work on making sure that everybody can shine. And I think it's part of that, of just allowing myself to listen and try to not put my ego out there as kind of the thing that would get in my way. And I guess that actors have to do that too. You have to drop yourself and have a level of honesty that comes out. So, it's not your ego that's performing, it's something else inside of you. And I think for any artist, there's probably an element of that, where you're dropping your self-consciousness and you're going to another place. Does that make sense?

JOSH: That definitely makes sense. But it also makes me think that, we've spoken to a lot of actors who work on *The West Wing*, what you just said is a good articulation of my approach to acting. And I also feel like I am just part of the machine that is telling the story. But there are other sorts of people who take a more proactive approach. Richard would get a script and he would have a lot to say about the script and where the story should go and what his character might do. And it's just different approach. Are there editors who take a more proactive approach? Would you ever say, "I think you're making a mistake, and this is the way we ought to tell the story" or...

JANET: Well, I think one of the things that I learned—and remind me to talk about Richard because he was a really important element for me on *The West Wing*—but I think one of the things I learned was pretty much how I deal with being married. You don't take a frontal approach, and you don't say "That's a stupid idea" or "That will never work." You ask a question, such as "Do you think if we do this, that it'll be a problem?" So often in the editing room I wouldn't be aggressive to a director or a producer. I would ask a question. So that, in essence, either they were making the decision or we were making it together. And so I never tried to be confrontational. I might see something, or I might ask a leading question that would open up the dialogue about why I was thinking a certain way, but I think I tried to make the assumption that everybody had a good idea. And I remember even when we would get notes from the network, I finally said to somebody—because we hated getting notes from the network—I would say, "Inside every note is a good idea." But just make the assumption that you could fix it and make it better.

JOSH: Yeah. That makes sense. I think our listeners would be interested to know how the process works for you. Does the conversation for you begin with your receiving all the material? Do you ever discuss how something will be shot beforehand?

JANET: Most of the time I would say that editors are not consulted on how things are going to be shot. You have to fix the mistakes that were made in production. And there are a bunch. People will say, "Oh, we'll dub it later" or "We'll do this" or "We'll do that." But you pretty much have to fix what you're given. Unless it's some extraordinary situation, you're not really consulted on how to shoot something. You're consulted on how to fix something. This is the other thing: If you are an editor that is your screen. You don't know what happened off-camera. You don't know where the pressures that were behind you that mandated something get done within a time frame. You don't know what the limitations were. You just know that this is your frame. And you have to work with that. Which is also good because a lot of times you don't know what the problem was. You don't know if somebody had a bad hair day or if the lighting was off or something. If it works for you in the editing room, it's going to work for other viewers. You don't have any of that prior information. So, if it's something that visually works, the viewers at home will usually buy it as well.

JOSH: So, as an editor are you privy to tone meetings? We've heard about discussions of the tone of a scene. Are you not hearing what the director and producers are thinking until you get the material?

JANET: We do go to the tone meetings as much as possible. And you go to the table reads. You do have a lot of information up front. And one of the big things about *The West Wing*—and I think it's very much what the difference was after Aaron left—was frequently you would go into a tone meeting, or you would go into a table read, and afterward you would say "Okay, so what is the episode *really* about?" Because you might think that it's about picking the Supreme Court Justice, but there might be an undertone that you think is maybe the is the "B" story that actually, as you start watching the show evolve, it's kind of like, "Oh, wow, that's not actually the story itself. Aaron is trying to tell another story." And I think that was one of the things that was so extraordinary about his writing. He would take you on a journey that wasn't obvious at first, but it became obvious when you took the journey with him. And so, at the end of a lot of episodes, everybody used to talk about how there would be this great exhale because the whole show built up to something, as opposed to, "Okay, show's over." And I think that was his magic was you wanted the show to keep going.

JOSH: That's interesting. So, your relationship with Aaron and with Tommy started with *Sports Night* and you guys, I'm guessing, immediately clicked. You stayed on for the entire run of *Sports Night* and then worked on *The West Wing*. Can you talk to me about how you guys all worked together?

JANET: Well, *Sports Night* was magic. And I think you could remember what it was like when we would all walk onto Stage 6. Stage 6 was several stories high. You had offices, and then you had the stage and all of that. But Tommy and Aaron never saw the stage as their limitation. They saw the building as a limitation. You could literally open a door and find yourself in the middle of a scene. You would try to get on the elevator and would be told, "Sorry, you can't use it because they're shooting in there."

JOSH: That's right.

JANET: The other magical part was Aaron Sorkin's office was right opposite my room. And Aaron would very often just run in my room and just lie down on the sofa and say, "Okay, show me something." And we would just chat, or if I had a question for him, I could just run in his room. And so, I would go into his room and say, "Okay, Aaron, do a line reading on this." Or I would say to him, "this actor did the dialogue so it was just a straight delivery or they were angry, which one?" and he would say, "Let the words be the anger." Then when I worked on *The West Wing*, it was completely different because Aaron was now in another building. It was a very corporate structured environment. So, it was so different. And it took a long a lot of time to get used to it.

JOSH: Oh, that's interesting. So, on *West Wing* was he less often collaborating with you? Did he have less time and an inability to cover the distance and get in the editing room?

JANET: Right. It was much more the traditional format for doing a TV show. Where everybody has their structured time and all of that. On *Sports Night*, a lot of the people were wondering Why are we shooting this much because, for a multi-cam show, we were probably shooting five times the normal. And then when people finally saw the cut, they totally understood what we we're doing. And I think even on *The West Wing*, Aaron's writing was so different that people really had to learn a new technique for editing. They literally had overlap, sometimes just a few words or a few syllables, in order to make his thematic work.

JOSH: How about we talk about the work you did on the *The West Wing* after Tommy and Aaron's involvement.

JANET: Right.

JOSH: So, what was that like for you? That transition.

JANET: It was interesting because...you asked me to look at one particular episode. And I think that episode is a good illustration of what the difference was. I think that story was very much a story where you're wrapping up things. And it didn't have a lot of subtle subtext in the same way that an Aaron Sorkin episode would. I looked at it, and to tell you the truth, my first reaction to it—not having seen it in a number of years—was, wow, that's a really white show! [Josh laughs] And it came across as (Josh: Huh), right? But if you think about it, it's like, wow, we had Dulé. And I remember one time saying we don't have many minorities. Nobody thought that what I was referring to was Asians or Hispanics or anybody else. It has been really interesting watching how our world television-wise has changed. But the one thing that I will say is—that goes back to a conversation that I had with Aaron on *Sports Night*—about Jeremy and Natalie and their love affair. And there was a scene where Jeremy had to tell Natalie that his father had had an affair for twenty years since his marriage. And Aaron said to me, "Don't let either of them lose eye contact". Well, for somebody to tell a story like that and look somebody dead in the eye, that has got to be one of the hardest things in the entire world. And I thought, wow, there's a level of honesty and vulnerability that it takes for an actor to be able to do that. So, I had amazing respect for both of you. But it also really changed the way that I edited. And if you look at the scene where C.J. comes to see Toby, for the longest time in that scene, Toby does not make eye contact with C.J. And I thought that's one of the things about Richard that I really like. Everything he does is for a reason. And so, Richard for me one day said, "Everything I do has a before and an after." And I thought, huh, okay. And the thing that's great about him, and young actors should really take this to heart, is even if he had one line in a scene, he was present and acting in the entire scene. He was my hub. I could always cut to Toby because Toby would allow me to say, "I've got it" because he was processing the scene, the dialogue, and the

reasons for the scene, all the time. And people told me later that they could tell which episodes that I did by the way that I used Toby. And he, to me, was just somebody that was just so very helpful because of the way that he did things.

JOSH: That's very intriguing. And I, and I, completely agree in terms of the kind of presence and actor that Richard is. Any other specific memories about working on the show or specific actors?

JANET: I think one of the people that everybody—and I mean everybody—loved was John Spencer. And the thing that is amazing, was amazing, about John, was that his acting ability was just profound. But the thing that was so great about him was that he knew how to act with his entire body. On the episode where he had the heart attack, the thing that was so great about him was he wore his suit jacket so that the top button was buttoned, so he looked a little bit more caved in or vulnerable. He would occasionally, and I think it's when you have a heart attack, you'll pump your hand. So, there were times when you would want to cut to that full shot of him to show just how fragile he was. With a lot of the other actors, I don't know they would have taken the time to say, "My whole body is telling the story." A lot of times, young actors get lost in trying to remember their lines and think "Oh, I'll be in the close up." No. An editor will love to use a wide shot. Unless otherwise directed, we would love to be able to use wide shots now and then, to allow the audience to breath and to resettle themselves so they know where they are in that place in the scene. And I think that Allison Janney... I remember one time she did a line reading of something really simple. "Sit down." I think somebody had come in. It might have been Danny Concannon coming into her office, I forget who it was, but it was just a simple line like that. And she did it four or five different times and every one of those line readings was a different line reading, to the point where it was like "Oh, my God! Which one do I use? Can I use all of them? Back to back?"

JOSH: [Laughs] That's interesting. So, here's just a question about fundamentals. You, as the editor, would make the initial choice of which take to choose when you were assembling a first cut.

JANET: Correct.

JOSH: In a situation like that, would you make sure to say to Tommy and Aaron, "By the way, you've got four other choices on this line that really change the tone here."

JANET: If it was that big of a deal, yes, I would. That's because a lot of times the director also will indicate what take they preferred. But that doesn't mean for every single line in the scene or something. But there are sometimes where you just need to say, "Hey, I just wanna show you something, how great something was." Sometimes you'll just put together a little clip and say, "Is there one that you like better?" or something. And a lot of times what you do also is you take line readings and see which ones they prefer. So, you might just edit them into little clips so they can see all of them and eliminate the ones they don't like and make choices that way.

JOSH: I see. And often takes will come to you starred already, as suggestions of what the director thinks was the best, most useable take?

JANET: Yes. But this is the other place that drove our script supervisor crazy sometimes. Because I would often tell Richard Schiff, "Tell me which one you prefer." But one person that was a whole lot of fun to work with was Chris Misiano. That's because Chris started out as a cameraman, I believe [JOSH: Yeah], and so his dailies were always a lot of fun. And we talked about it one time and I said to him, "You give me the dailies that okay, this is what we need, or

these are the line readings that I really like, or I saw this really great shot, maybe you could use it, or I did it this way: go play.” There’s one scene in one episode—I don’t remember which one it is—where you’re playing cards. It’s a poker scene, right?

JOSH: That’s right, yes.

JANET: And he did it two different ways, where it was just your standard coverage, over the shoulder, wide shot, close ups, all of that. Shots through the hands. And then he did it another way where it was just a Steadicam around the entire table. And it was, “Which one do you like better?” And so, editing wise, you really got to do a whole lot where he would just give you footage and where it’s like, “Here, go play and see if you could use this.” and all of that. So, for me, he was one of my favorite directors because just the visuals that he would, he would give you.

JOSH: Oh, that’s great.

JANET: I think a lot of the people on the show were just phenomenal to work with. And, you know, you just can’t help but miss them. [JOSH: Yeah] And I wish them all well.

JOSH: Yeah. It was a special experience. Well, it’s mutual admiration. You were spoken of very fondly, constantly. And it’s one of the reasons we wanted to make sure—before we finished this podcast, which is coming up soon—that we finally got to talk to you. So, I’m glad that we got to have this conversation.

JANET: Well, I do remember though that we did one episode—it was when John Goodman was going to take over as president and everybody was saying goodbye in the oval office—and I remember going to Aaron and saying, “Every time somebody is saying goodbye to Bartlet, it’s a little piece of me saying goodbye to you.” And he said, “Oh, I am going to cry.” And I said, “You’re meant to cry.” [Josh laughs]

JOSH: That’s beautiful, Janet. Thank you so much.

HRISHI: And now we’re going to take a quick break.

[Ad break]

JOSH: Can we shoot straight to minutia and then go back to things of importance?

HRISHI: Sure.

JOSH: First of all, I’m called upon, and I think fail spectacularly, to pronounce the name of the second month, in this episode.

HRISHI: That’s right!

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

WILL: I thought about hiking the Appalachian Trail, which I’ve always wanted to do, but don’t really wanna do it in February.”

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And I listened to it over and over and I was like, nope, [cross talk] didn't quite get it.
[both laugh]

HRISHI: [cross talk] Didn't get it.

JOSH: And then, worse than that, and I think the onus is on me, the Republican Congressman that the Democrats are hoping to unseat is variously pronounced as Heffinger (emphasis on hard GER, sounds like GRR) and Heffinger (emphasis on GER together with G sounding like a J).

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

WILL: You think he gets anywhere in a race against John Heffinger (first pronunciation)?

WILL: D triple C thinks John Heffinger's (second pronunciation) seat in the Oregon fourth is un-gettable.

[end excerpt]

[both laugh]

HRISHI: I didn't realize there was a Heffinger (first pronunciation). I thought it was only Heffinger (second pronunciation).

JOSH: No. And here's what happened, I think. The first time Will Bailey says it is in that scene—part of which was shot on a sound stage in Burbank and part which was shot weeks, if not, and more likely, months earlier—when C.J. and Will step outside into the cold [HRISHI: Right] and she says, "You don't have a jacket. You're going to be cold." [HRISHI: Yeah] And that's where Will first says Heffinger (first pronunciation). And I think months later, when we shot the other scenes where I said it, somehow we all decided his name would be pronounced Heffinger (second pronunciation) and no one seemed to remember that we had already established in an earlier scene (Hrishi laughs) that it was going to be a hard G.

HRISHI: That's great.

JOSH: And that drove me crazy. Because that is, I think, inexplicable outside of going, Oh my God. Tese guys are on a TV show... [Hrishi laughs] ...and they made a mistake.

HRISHI: I mean, people's names get mispronounced all the time on TV.

JOSH: I suppose, but I mean, Will Bailey is clearly very familiar with this guy. Why is he saying his name two different ways?

HRISHI: [laughs] I mean, you know, I remember being in England at some point and watching the news and watching people in the same program talking about the President at the time as Barack (Bah-rock) Obama and also Barack (Bear-rick) Obama... [JOSH: Ooof] ...in the same conversation with one another. So, I think it's fine.

JOSH: Okay. Alright. Maybe it isn't a TV show. [Hrishi laughs] But I think it's a TV show... Also, Hollis. You mentioned the character Hollis and this is a nice example of, possibly, Shonda

Rhimes having been inspired to use the name in *Scandal* because there is a significant character named Hollis Doyle, played by Greg Henry. And of course, we've seen this before, where Shonda has borrowed names [HRISHI: Uh-huh] like Toby's son, named Huck [Hrishi laughs] and he's a major character in *Scandal*. [HRISHI: Yep]

HRISHI: And that's the only other example.

JOSH: Right. Yeah. These two.

HRISHI: Franklin Hollis has come to the White House, much to everyone's surprise, for C.J. It's only a surprise, because he himself came. C.J. expects that it's another one in a long line of suitors, who are trying to woo her with some kind of cushy job. Similar to the offers that Vinick was getting in the previous episode, there are these sort of honorary positions that come with real, actual cash. And she's not interested in any of them.

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

C.J.: I like to work for a living. Is that odd?

KATE: I get it.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But this suddenly feels different because it's not a headhunter. It's the man himself, and everyone's excited. Everyone's a little star struck, even though we don't know who he is, and that's fine. And when she describes the thing that she's expecting, he's like, "Well, that doesn't sound good for you."

JOSH: Mm hmm.

HRISHI: So, already we know this is going to be interesting.

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

C.J.: Blanket the continent with highways and then maybe get started on plumbing?

FRANKLIN HOLLIS: Well, if you think that's what needs fixing, I'll give you 10 billion dollars to fix it.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah. I was like, maybe take that offer in the room. [both laugh] That's an astonishing offer. [HRISHI: Yeah] Yeah, I like the storyline. I also like the portrayal of Franklin Hollis with subtle bravado, by Xander Berkeley, a friend of mine, and I think a tremendously great actor. Whom I first got to know in 1994 when I did a one-act play with him in 1994 in Los Angeles called "Snuff," written by Frank Pugliese.

HRISHI: Oh, it's a biopic of the composer of *The West Wing*?

JOSH: Ha ha!

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Yes, yes, exactly. It was a one-act play about Snuffy Walden (Hrishi laughs) and his young, Jewish assistant. No, it was a much darker play than that. But it was fun acting on stage with Xander. He's a great actor. He's done a million things. He has died so many times on screen that he put out on Facebook—and I have a feeling I'll be able to link to it on our website—a reel just of his deaths. (Hrishi laughs) It's pretty fun. He's a great actor and a terrific guy.

HRISHI: Just to go back to your acting for a second here, there are a couple of lines—it is the combination of you and Debra Cahn—that are some really funny bits. I actually cackled out loud – COL at a few things.

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

WILL: I think there's some mistakes in the budget draft that went out?

C.J.: You read it already?

WILL: Yeah.

C.J.: It's 800 pages.

WILL: Okay, I didn't.

[end of excerpt]

[both laugh]

JOSH: Yeah, there are a couple of things there. Uh yeah.

HRISHI: And then right after that, they continue the conversation...

JOSH: ...the shingles?

HRISHI: Yeah. The shingles.

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

C.J.: The shingles doesn't force a man into retirement?

WILL: Tax fraud is, I think, the real story. Shingles is a cover.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: First of all, I'm just going to pause the clip right there. "Tax fraud is, I think, the real story" is just the best of kind of line that a writer could write for Josh Malina to deliver.

JOSH: [laughs] Why is that? That's funny.

HRISHI: It's just – there is something about, the kinda like, conspiratorial aside of it, you know? And, even just the cadence of the “tax fraud” is, I think, the real story. You know, that pause in the middle. Like the kind of...you immediately tell just from this one line: the character's smart, they're letting you in on something that they know that maybe you aren't supposed to know, and it's really funny.

JOSH: That's great. I love that. Without analyzing it on a molecular level as you did, I did watch this episode both being impressed by Debra's writing altogether, well, I am a big fan of hers, but I'm also having the same thought, 'wow, she wrote really well for me'.

HRISHI: She really did.

JOSH: I really didn't think too deeply why I felt that way. But I did have that thought watching it.

HRISHI: Yeah. And then it goes on – “shingles is a cover”. “Well, if I am in the market for a cover, I think I'd pick something that's not - viral?”

JOSH: Viral?

HRISHI: [laughs] It's so good. And then to continue with C.J. and Will – he then poses the question to her about this idea of who to run against Heffinger/Heffinger (both pronunciations). And they're talking about some ideas. And Will says he's considering Ina Horton. And for a second, I was like – wait, is that the widow of the guy that he ran in California? I was like, no, no no. Okay, that was Horton Wilde. But still, it's like, Will, he's...

JOSH: [laughing] Yeah, there's some DNA there.

HRISHI: He's Wilde for people named Horton. [laughs]

JOSH: It should've been another name. It should've been, like uh, Levine or Levine (two different pronunciations: LeVENE or LeVINE). We should run against him run LeVENE against him. We about running LeVINE against him. We'll run LeVENE against HeffinGER and LeVINE against HeffinJER. That's all I got.

HRISHI: [laughs] That's alright. All I had was [laughing], 'he's Wilde for Hortons'.

JOSH: [laughs] Oh, I think there's also a “Horton Hears a Who” joke in there somewhere...

HRISHI: Exactly. It's like Will hears a Horton and he's like “Who?” [JOSH: Who?]

[both laugh]

JOSH: See, I'm also gonna miss this. [Hrishi laughs] There's nobody, nobody, who will put up with this kind of, whatever it is at my house.

HRISHI: [laughs] Same. Oh, same.

JOSH: If I think of a horrendous “dad joke” or pun, I'm still, I reserve the right to hit you up on FaceTime, even though we're not recording the podcast.

HRISHI: Absolutely! Any time! Please do. Lindsey saw me writing this down in my notes (both laugh – JOSH: she shook her head) She was, we were watching together and she looked over as I wrote “he’s Wilde for Hortons”. And I looked at her to see what her reaction was. Nothing.

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah. That’s what I get at my house on a good day.

HRISHI: [laughs] Yeah. I love the disrespect that C.J. has to deal with from the Santos office. First of all, Margaret tells her that they want a CV, which is hilarious. But then, oh, the contempt that NiCole Robinson dredges up for...

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

MARGARET: Should I send them a list of references?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughs] Ha ha ha, yes!

HRISHI: So good.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: And then she goes to the actual office and the receptionist doesn’t know who she is. And the look that C.J. gives her. She’s like “Your name?” It’s really funny.

JOSH: Yeah. It’s cutting.

HRISHI: Although apparently, I got some information just yesterday...

JOSH: ...yes?

HRISHI: ...from someone that works at a pretty high level on an actual campaign. Someone who would not let me reveal their name, or which campaign they work for...

JOSH: ...really?

HRISHI: ...but I will quote them, “You’d be shocked by the number of kids working on campaigns now, who just have like, no idea, what “The West Wing” is”.

JOSH: Huh

HRISHI: And I am shocked. Shocked, I say.

JOSH: I’m with you! Yeah.

HRISHI: To find out there’s no “West Wing” in those establishments.

JOSH: Hmm...

HRISHI: Speaking of shock – there’s a great moment of shock when C.J. finds out from Santos that he offered Arnold Vinick Secretary of State.

JOSH: Yes. I loved Allison's reaction. [HRISHI: yeah]. There's a lot going on there.

HRISHI: It's really fantastic. Similarly later when Toby learns the same thing. It's just a great bit of like, driving home this idea of how radical that idea really is.

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

TOBY: Wow. That might be the smartest thing he's ever done.

C.J.: Impressive, huh?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I first wanted to talk about another great scene with C.J., with just her and Kate. I love their relationship throughout this season and the previous. I feel like we've watched them become friends. And now, in this episode, you really, like you can sense the depth and realness and closeness of their relationship. They can talk about relationship stuff but they can also talk about work stuff in all kinds of context. And C.J. can also get mad at Kate, you know, and say like...

JOSH: ...yeah, she really snaps at her. [HRISHI: She really does] Badly.

HRISHI: Yeah. And Kate was like, "Alright! You'll have it!" You know, but that also, doesn't like, ruin their friendship.

JOSH: No. And in fact their able to sort of get past it without an explicit apology.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: You know, as I was watching it I was thinking I felt Kate was owed one, but they're better friends than that [HRISHI: Yeah]. Where there can be a silent moment and Kate can take a step forward and say, "Are you okay?" [HRISHI: Yeah] They understand each other better than to get super bent out of shape about how they talk to each other.

HRISHI: I also think, at least certainly in the context of this episode, and the depiction of C.J., she's maybe not the kind of person who would be good at giving an apology. Even when one is needed.

JOSH: Yeah, you're probably right.

HRISHI: Given the way that she acts with Danny, I think, you know, she's just so overburdened with professional responsibility that maybe some sense of caring about other people's feelings has been pushed aside a bit.

JOSH: Mm hm.

HRISHI: I like that. I think it's a great detail. I think it's also really interesting evolution for someone who professionally had to be essentially the face of the White House. Like, in a way being the Press Secretary means managing what other people think of you. "You" being the institution.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: But now she's gotten into a place professionally as Chief of Staff where she really cannot think about that stuff. Like everything else has to come first. And then what people are going to do with it, that has to be managed by other people.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: I also love that Kate is absolutely her own person. With her own values and her own opinions, that sometimes diverge from the rest of the team.

JOSH: That's right. No apology for that.

HRISHI: Yeah. We saw earlier, you know, that she voted for Vinick in the election. [JOSH: Mm hm] But this idea when C.J. asks about Toby, I think all of us in our hearts are probably, you know, like *West Wing* fans, are like, yeah, you can't send Toby to jail. He really, you know – we buy the argument that Andrea presents. He was trying to save the lives of three Astronauts and if that meant sacrificing the plans to weaponize Space, you know, so be it.

JOSH: Well, one of the things that I thought was interesting when she said that, uh, he was trying to save these three lives, is that she didn't – I mean, I guess understandably she didn't say he also wanted to expose a program that could be very, very bad for the country and for the world – but, that was what was going through my mind. We don't know the full extent of what Toby – he plays everything so close to the vest – we don't know his full motivations.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I mean we, you know if you talk to Richard we also don't know that he didn't do it...

HRISHI: [laughing] Right!

JOSH: ...so those are loaded issues altogether.

HRISHI: She didn't avoid it, she said,

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

ANDY: A lot of people who think it's time for Bartlet to come home to his base and acknowledge the fact that carpeting the heavens with nukes is a crappy idea.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, but to me, the way it is phrased and articulated...

HRISHI: Oh, I see.

JOSH: ...that's her talking.

HRISHI: And that's a side effect of saving these people's lives.

JOSH: Yeah. Whether not we believe that she believes that, I think she's smart enough to sort of make the case for bringing up the potential pardon to Bartlet based solely on 'look there were 3 lives'.

HRISHI: Right. But Kate does not have that opinion. She says "he goes to jail".

JOSH: Uh, huh. It's an understandable take coming from someone with her job.

HRISHI: Yeah. Mary McCormack just, again, like all of you in this episode, just knocks it out of the park. It really is one of my favorite episodes, I think, from these three principles – from Kate and Will and C.J. And Danny, of course too.

JOSH: Yeah, it's great stuff for those two and that relationship. It's something we needed for those characters, I think.

HRISHI: Meanwhile, C.J.'s argument that she's waging through the budget is a funny one. We haven't talked about it yet. But she has gotten the President to approve an idea that she has – which is to call for a fifty cent Federal tax on gasoline. Which is not just a drastic move, it's off the charts. [JOSH: Mm hm] Just for context, the Federal tax on gasoline has not been raised since 1993. It is currently 18.4 cents per gallon and it does not go up with inflation. So, it is essentially less and less powerful, of a revenue generating instrument every year. And so, um, here she is saying like, "Okay, we're going to add 50 cents to it". And then she talks about all the benefits that this would have, you know, all the benefits on air quality and all of the money that could be raised from it. But, as Santos points out, it would hammer poor people. You know, people who in many previous episodes, the President has said he wants to fight for. But that is a, you know, that's a regressive tax.

JOSH: That's exactly right. Yeah. It's going to take a higher percentage of people to lower income.

HRISHI: Yeah. And the sheer amount makes it – it's basically like a, it's almost like a big block of cheese level proposal. But the call is coming from inside the house.

[both laughing]

JOSH: Well, said.

HRISHI: And then it turns out the wackiness is actually the point. She's like "yeah, but I'll do this crazy thing and then meanwhile when you propose a five cent tax, it will be a lot more palatable".

JOSH: Right. Well, it's the gas tax version of what Santos and Bartlet cooked up with Kazakhstan.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Which is why I kind of thought, you know, C.J.'s kind of burying the lead in that conversation she has early on with Santos before she goes "Oh, we've done this before!"

HRISHI: Right!

JOSH: [laughs] Good cop, bad cop.

HRISHI: Yeah. But it's more like, "what the hell are you talking about" cop.

JOSH: Right. Yes. I think Will Bailey thinks it's a typo at some point...

HRISHI: [laughs] Right...

JOSH: He's like, wait a minute. This can't be real.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's like, okay, if you'd gone for a 15 cent and then you go to....anyway, it does seem, um, beyond the pale. Like it's too ridiculous to work as a stratagem.

HRISHI: Let's talk about the C.J./Toby scene.

JOSH: Let's finally do it.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's a whopper.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's epic. It's terrific.

HRISHI: C.J. goes to visit him in his apartment...

JOSH: ...and we know that they've not spoken since the whole affair has blown up.

HRISHI: That's a kind of a shocker, right? To find out that she has not had any contact with him.

JOSH: Yeah. And even that little, uh, interchange with Kate and C.J. when Kate asks her, C.J.'s response is almost as if she has to think about it. I like it. It's loaded.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It's fraught emotionally, her response.

HRISHI: Yeah. I wonder if Toby knew that she was going to show up. We certainly don't know that's where she's going. But I wonder if he had any heads up. I kind of like to think that he didn't. He just, he hears the knock on the door, he opens it and he sees Secret Service, and is just like, well, sure, come on in.

JOSH: Well, that's another thing. Toby is so cryptic, as played by Richard Schiff, that even just his expression at the door is interesting and intriguing, but it's not obvious.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah.

JOSH: You don't get an answer to that question that you posed.

HRISHI: Yeah. I'd like to think that there is certainly a version where he has no idea this is happening. But at the same time, he's like well, what else do I have going on today? Like it's not an intrusion. I'm just here. So, sure, come on in.

JOSH: Yeah, and they have to go and do a little check. I don't know, I just love, as I always do with Richard, how there's so much going on [HRISHI: Yeah] in his face, without his feeling like he's doing a lot. There's sort of defiance there. There's humiliation. I just see so much from Toby, in his face.

HRISHI: There's something too, about the depiction and in the writing that presents a man who has a changed perspective. You know, from the Toby Ziegler that we've known. The, the, really fiery person who will argue any principle at the top of his lungs. Here, there's almost like you have this sense that he has accepted that he is going to prison. Low security, whatever. But it has changed him in a way that he has – kinda like he's taking things in stride in a way that I think a previous incarnation would not.

JOSH: That's true. I agree.

HRISHI: I love the exchange between the two of them when C.J. says,

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

C.J.: You don't want to consider what this will do to Molly and Huck?

TOBY: You think I haven't?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: What about the comma in the constitution? [laughing] Toby's found an inconsistent comma.

JOSH: I love that. I love that it could be a comma, it could be a smudge, and it does make a difference legally. He has, uh, he's consulted with an expert. And, uh, this is what he's spending his time doing.

HRISHI: Yeah. He name checks the expert and then he name checks is Tom Merrill, who is actually a real person who is an actual expert on the Takings Clause.

JOSH: Nice. How about that!

HRISHI: Yeah. And if anybody would like to get way too deep in this, we will have a link on our web site to testimony that Tom Merrill gave to the Senate Judiciary Committee in 2005, about interpretations of the Takings Clause.

JOSH: Nice. Or the Takesing Clause, as I call it.

HRISHI: Oh, right, right. [laughs] I like that C.J., speaking of calling things by the wrong thing, I like that C.J. calls it a ski chair.

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah. Very cute.

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

C.J.: I think that would be soothing. Be a ski bum. Operate the ski chair for 6 months. Clear my head.

TOBY: It's a chair lift.

C.J.: Well, first I'd learn the lingo. Take it from there.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's a very well-written scene.

HRISHI: It's so good.

JOSH: One of the most intriguing elements to their scene, [HRISHI: Hmmm] is that there's a [HRISHI: Uh huh] reference - oblique reference - between them to their attraction [HRISHI: Yeah] to each other.

HRISHI: Uh, huh. Yeah. It's been there around the edges, here and there, in the series. This is the most explicitly it's ever been invoked.

JOSH: Yeah. And I, and I love it. I thought it was done very subtly and in a very, nonetheless, real way between the two characters. And I think it's Toby who first sort of makes it manifest in the conversation and suggests that maybe that's what she's there for.

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

C.J.: Which has what to do with anything?

TOBY: Wow. Maybe you didn't need to date. You had Josh and Sam and me and 180 reporters flirting with you day in and day out.

C.J.: Come on.

TOBY: It's a lot of positive male attention. Now you're slotting in Matt Santos? Maybe Frank Hollis?

C.J.: So what? You think this is all some sort of Freudian temper tantrum?

TOBY: You showed up here at 8 o'clock at night with a bottle of wine asking me about a pardon we both know is out of the question. Telling me about a man who's crowding you. I think a lot of things.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's that line – "I think a lot of things".

JOSH: "I think a lot of things". Yeah. I was like "Go Toby!" I think that's also sort of a new side of Toby. He's in a new predicament and he's not gonna be – he's less shy, he's less awkward, he's more apt to just say what it is, because who knows what his future holds. I just, it felt real to

me and it felt like it made sense for this to be said explicitly, perhaps for the first time between these two. [HRISHI: yeah] And, uh, I liked it. I also liked when he said maybe you should stop bouncing. Pick something.

HRISHI: Yeah. Yep. It also enriches, for me, the relationship that he has with Andrea.

JOSH: Hmm...

HRISHI: Because at first I was like, whoa, Toby, hey! You're a married man. I was like, no wait, you're not married. You are, in fact, single. [JOSH: That's right] You're divorced. And I thought about the loyalty and love from Andrea in the moment that she goes to fight for him. Again, they are still partners even though they are not together. She's fighting for someone who she loves and who's the father of her children so...

JOSH: ...Yeah, I was going to say too, for the kids, sure.

HRISHI: Oh, by the way, when Toby says,

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

TOBY: I missed you.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Ooohhh!

JOSH: Hmm...

HRISHI: There are little things. I love the love language of Toby when he is expressing, like, his closest feelings for her. Apart from saying, actually, I missed you. When he's talking about how to make the chicken? You know, like their voices get so quiet. And he says,

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

C.J.: I'd like to learn to make a chicken like that.

Toby: Stick a lemon up it and throw on some rosemary.

C.J.: Yeah?

TOBY: A little salt.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He gets so intimate in his delivery and it's great. Like he finds an even quieter place to go while still being audible while delivering those lines. It's, it's so good. And I like that Toby looks out the window to see her go after.

JOSH: Yeah. There's some exquisite acting there. And there's some just, uh, big ole close-ups of them at the end there, where their having that "I missed you" exchange. And their just so

vulnerable to each other. [HRISHI: Yeah] And happy to have reached this moment together. [HRISHI: Yep] After what had been clearly an impasse.

HRISHI: I like that the scene lingers on Toby, so he can watch her as she goes. Because there's this extension of the question that he's asked her about what she's gonna do. She has to make a decision. And he gets to watch her wrestling with the question. You know, the driver's asking where does she wanna go? And she sits there and we see her, like, finger's tapping on the side of the door. She's trying to make up her mind.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: What did you think about the title?

JOSH: Hmm. That's a fair question. When they finally said the title in the episode, I went 'Eh'. [laughs]

HRISHI: Right? Yeah, Santos says, institutional memory is an important thing in the White House and C.J. has it. And yeah, I agree there's something kind of weak sauce about that. Which made me think [JOSH: Yeah] that in fact that's not the institutional memory that this episode is actually about in terms of deserving the title.

JOSH: Yes. But what is?

HRISHI: What do you think?

JOSH: Ahhhh...I was hoping it wouldn't be a quiz. I was hoping I could get you to just say it. [Hrishi laughs] I gotta think about it?

HRISHI: Well, I have my theory. But I was wondering if you had one.

JOSH: The special, special memories that our listeners will take from the podcast [Hrishi laughs] and our trip through the institutions of State. [HRISHI: Mm hm] [Josh laughs]

HRISHI: No, it's a reference to the time that she was institutionalized and she doesn't remember it. [both laugh]

JOSH: Wow! Oh, what a, what a spin-off that could have been setting up. Oh man! If they had only done that.

HRISHI: I think in terms of that kind of institutional memory – what Santos is talking about – has a real distinct opposite in the offer that Hollis' is making her. He's saying, start this thing. I don't know what it is. You get to decide. You take this money. You get to fix this problem. She's already got ideas. It's not sexy. It's not something that people can really have a telethon around. Which means there's an opportunity to create an institution that has no memory. (JOSH: Hmm!) You know, it would be something entirely new and these are the two choices that she has to face. Like carry on this thing that she's been doing for a whole lot of her life and that extends for centuries before her or abandon that entirely.

JOSH: Hmm...I like it.

HRISHI: The other side of the institutional memory, I think is, this question about what she's going to do with Danny and whether or not she can figure it out. I don't know if this feels right to you, but if you could apply the idea of an institution to your own life – what C.J. has been living is a life of a person who has put duty to her country and duty to her work, essentially, above her [JOSH: Personal] her personal life. [JOSH: Certainly.] For so long, that when the opportunity comes to keep doing that, like it's easy for her to go there, that's the institutional memory that she has. It's just, you know, being a career-driven woman, who sacrifices her personal life for these other things. And when it comes to the institution of partnership or couple hood, she just doesn't have it. And so, when she says 'I think I might have missed my shot at it', she hasn't had access to that. You know? She's looking at it from the outside and saying like, 'all these people know how to do this thing'. 'They learned it somewhere along the way and now they've known. And I am at an age, where I, I guess I should have already learned it, but I never did'.

JOSH: She doesn't have it. Yeah.

HRISHI: I don't know if that relates to institutional memory, but it's something that I was thinking about while thinking about the title.

JOSH: Yeah. That works for me. I like it.

HRISHI: I love the way that she and Danny talk to each other in this last scene. I feel like Danny must be somebody who has gone to a lot of therapy.

JOSH: Yes. He seems to have.

HRISHI: And C.J. has gone to none.

JOSH: She could use some.

HRISHI: [laughs] Again, it really made me laugh when she says,

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

C.J.: This is who I am. I'm good at my job Danny. I'm good at working. I'm not good at this.

DANNY: You're right. You suck at it. You're going to need a tremendous amount of training.

C.J.: [laughing] You're not gonna...

DANNY: ...I am actually.

C.J.: Train me!?

DANNY: Well, I'll call it something else, that sounds bad. But we'll deal with it.

[end excerpt]

(Josh and Hrishi laughing)

HRISHI: That's really great. And it continues to make me laugh too, then when C.J. tries, when she says "okay, which job do you want me to take?" You know, she like, she still can't get it right

even when she's trying to engage on the terms that she thinks he wants. And then we get this really terrific set of lines –

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

DANNY: I want us to talk like we're gonna figure it out together. I want us to talk because I like the sound of your voice. I just wanna talk!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think in all of these conversations about duty, one of the duties that has been traditionally left out in this show is duty to what one wants for their own life.

JOSH: To self, sure. Yeah, you're right. There's not a lot of self-care, exhibited in this, uh, the course of this series.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I like that we have this moment in the series where one character breaks off from that, you know. Usually the line that Santos gives her, "I'm the President-elect and I'm calling upon you". Like, that's the thing. You know, that's the thing that's worked on so many people over the last 7 seasons.

JOSH: Yeah, and he's really trying to leverage her, uh, emotionally. He's brutal.

HRISHI: Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 7.21 excerpt]

SANTOS: I'd love to talk to you more about this but, uh, they kinda got me on a sprint today. So, I see I'm going to have to make this fast and dirty. I'm President-elect of the United States. I'm asking you to help your country, so I'm probably not going to take no for an answer. So, you go home and you think about it and call me back with a yes.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He cuts short his meeting, so it's like, I'm not going to give you any more substance as to why you should do this or more to think about. I'm just going to leave in the middle of what is our very brief conversation and tell you that you're going to go home, decide to do this and call me tomorrow. [HRISHI: Right.] And it's like, that is, it's a sort of emotionally brutal hard sell.

HRISHI: And she hears it as an offer she can't refuse.

JOSH: Correct. Yeah.

HRISHI: But then with Danny's help, she gets to make the choice that her heart actually wants.

JOSH: Right, exactly. And I think it's one of the nice things about this episode is that we don't see him make the decision for her. We get to see what a good partner he is for her and helping her arrive at what seems to be the best decision for her.

HRISHI: Yeah. It just happens to be that it also works out for Danny's plans. [laughs]

JOSH: True.

HRISHI: But that's what we were talking about recently. That it's a win-win.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Josh, that's the end of my notes but I don't wanna, I don't wanna, I don't wannaaaa...
[Josh laughs] wrap things up yet.

JOSH: How do we keep this going? Look, we've got a live event. We've got dinner later. But this, you know, I'm sure I'll talk about it at the live event because that's the actual finale, but I'm not good at the ends of things. And even acknowledging how I'm feeling about them (HRISHI: laughing). You know, you have this as an actor, often. Because, uh, you know, if you're lucky you get lots of jobs [HRISHI: uh huh] that begin, sometimes they end a couple of weeks later, a week later, a couple of months, if you're lucky you get a run like a *West Wing* or a *Scandal* that lasts years. And so, you're constantly dealing with these painful, not breakups, but separations with people you've become very close to. [HRISHI: Mm hm] And I always, or I tend to do the same thing, which is try to sneak out the back. [Hrishi laughs] And I kinda, pretty much did it with *Scandal*. Pretty much did it with *The West Wing* and we'll talk about the actual final days, I'm sure, with all sorts of people at the live event. But, uh, this one we still have our friendship. We will see each other. What I won't get to do, is have these – you know we likened it early on almost as a joke- this podcast to a book club [HRISHI: Mm hm] among thousands of people but only two of them get to speak [HRISHI: Right] or something like that. And I've never been in a book club, but I get it now. The idea, meeting with you, once a week generally, for four years to discuss a piece of art that is intriguing and provocative and that we both like and are taken by, has been very stimulating. I'm gonna miss that from my life. Meeting with somebody that I love to discuss something that I love.

HRISHI: Yeah. And I really, I'm grateful for the fact that you agreed to do this, because we had this external structure that forced us to hang out on a regular basis. And it had this, you know, mission and this thing to talk about, but really, all the stuff that came out of it was so much fun. It was really nice to be able to, get to impose, [laughs] impose on you the duty [laughs] to hang out with me.

JOSH: [laughs] They're all about duty.

HRISHI: [laughs] They're all about duty.

JOSH: But you know it wasn't an imposition. You know that. You know this was a great, uh – this has been a wonderful series of dates.

JOSH: That does it for another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*. Thank you for listening. Thank you to Zach McNees and Margaret Miller for helping us make the show.

HRISHI: For all these years.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Thanks to Radiotopia, also, for all of these years, being our network. You can learn about all of the great podcasts that fall under the Radiotopia umbrella at Radiotopia.fm.

JOSH: And now, more than ever, if you need another podcast to move onto, make it a Radiotopia podcast. Go check them out if you haven't yet.

HRISHI: There's "Song Exploder", if you haven't heard that. [JOSH: Certainly that.] And *Partners* coming in February.

JOSH: Right. And my house, you can drive by, if you like. [Hrishi laughs] Anytime.

HRISHI: Just in case in the chaos of next week, we don't get a chance to say so, our sincere thanks to everyone who has ever been a guest on this podcast. Not just from the cast and the crew of the show, but everyone from all walks of life and all manner of institutions and countries and you know, this has been an education for me. And I'm so grateful for it. I feel like I have learned so much, far beyond, just the making of a TV show. It's really been an incredible curriculum.

JOSH: Here! Here! And a special thanks to our Dads. [both laugh] They were maybe, my favorite guests.

HRISHI: Maybe they should have a podcast.

JOSH: Not a terrible idea.

HRISHI: My dad would definitely do it.

JOSH: Dads! I think mine would too. [both laugh]

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

JANET: What's next?

[Outro Music]