

The West Wing Weekly
6.22: "2162 Votes" (Live)
Guests: Mary McCormack and Lawrence O'Donnell

Editor's note: Due to the nature of the live show and the attempt to accurately portray the dialogue through the transcript notation, audience reactions will be notated with round parentheses (reaction) while reactions from those on stage/the speaker and other directions will be notated with square braces [reaction].

HRISHI: Hey, one disclaimer before we start this show. Though we try and avoid spoilers on our podcast, there are some spoilers that come up in our discussion of this episode.

JOSH: So if you haven't seen Season 7 of *The West Wing* yet and you don't know what happens, and you want to watch it spoiler-free, you might want to skip this episode of the podcast for now and then come back to it. It'll be waiting for you when you're ready.

[Intro Music]

(cheers)

HRISHI: Live from the Warner Theatre in Washington, D.C., it's *The West Wing Weekly*.

(cheers and applause)

JOSH: You know, this show is set in D.C. *(laughter)* We're going to dive even deeper soon enough.

HRISHI: I'm Hrishikesh Hirway. *(cheers)*

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina. *(cheers and boos)*

HRISHI: Today we're talking about episode 6.22. It's called "2162 Votes".

JOSH: It was written by John Wells. It was directed by Alex Graves. And it first aired on April 6th, 2005. *(cheers)*

HRISHI: A lot of April 6, 2005 fans.

JOSH: Very popular date.

HRISHI: Yes. In this episode, we've got three Democratic candidates fighting for 2,162 votes.

JOSH: We've got three astronauts fighting for a few hours of oxygen.

HRISHI: We've got two White House officials trying to find whoever leaked the information about a top-secret military space shuttle.

JOSH: We've got two special guests tonight. (*cheers*)

HRISHI: And we've got one episode left in Season 6.

JOSH: That's all coming up on *Sports Night*. (*laughter*)

HRISHI: Live from CSC.

(*laughter and cheers*)

HRISHI: I told Josh a while ago that whenever I'm writing the synopses, that's actually the thing that I have in my head, is the way that they would tease the show at the beginning of every episode of *Sports Night*. And that's always what I'm trying to aim for. It's rare that I get the chance to actually split it up with Josh so we can actually do it.

JOSH: That was fun.

HRISHI: This is very exciting for us. This is our biggest show ever - live show. (*cheers and applause*) And we're so thrilled to be joined by two very special guests. Please give a very warm welcome to Mary McCormack and Lawrence O'Donnell.

(*applause and cheers*)

HRISHI: Before we get started with this episode--

JOSH: Oh yeah.

HRISHI: We're going to do a quick pick-up on a previous episode.

JOSH: That's because when we finished with Mary doing the live show in San Francisco, we walked out and you immediately had regret that you hadn't mentioned what it was like working with me initially. (*laughter*) I wanted to give you the opportunity to address that.

MARY: Thank you. Thank you. I mean, we talked a little bit about how horrible it was. (*laughter*) But I don't think I-- I mean, there's one story that I think was worth telling that I didn't tell, and I'll tell now.

JOSH: Please do.

MARY: Just by way of-- you know, I mean I think probably you all know that he loves to prank people and it's like an illness though. It's not like "Ooh, fun" like we're pranking each other. It's like, people end up crying and-- (*laughter*) you know, like really hating him. I mean, it's weird and he can't help himself. He has to do it. And then people will go [*chastising*] "Josh, too much, too much" and he's like-- [*nonverbal gesture*]

(*laughter*)

MARY: It's like it's coming through him somehow. But the episode where we were in Camp David - I think I was six months pregnant and we were shooting here. And it was hot, and we were racing because we were trying to wrap that set before the cicadas came out of the earth. (*laughter*) The 17 year cicadas.

JOSH: They know.

MARY: [*retching noise*] Like, I've never in my life. And they are-- I mean, I don't know if you've-- well, you've all seen them I guess. First of all, I hate bugs. Like, I hate little bugs. But these are this big, white, wet, and have red eyes. I mean, what is worse? And the first day we saw-- you know, you'd see one. And I was like [*disgusted noise*] "I can deal with it. I'm alright. I'm okay." And then maybe by the end of the next day, the whole tree would just be moving. So to get from my trailer to the set, I'd have like two umbrellas. And they would just be like [*thwacking noises*]. You could feel them hitting you. And then I got to set, and I was working, and I'd just-- all of a sudden I would feel this. [*nonverbal gesture*]

LAWRENCE: Ahhhhhh. (*laughter*)

JOSH: Like a little twig. [*cross talk*] Very effective.

MARY [*cross talk*]: So horrible. And pregnant!

JOSH [*cross talk*]: My memory is that you did cry.

MARY [*cross talk*]: Really pregnant.

MARY: And I was-- I looked at, I remember looking at you and being like-- as I, like I was crying. Because I thought for sure, one had crawled into my ear and was going to eat my brain with its red eyes. (*laughter*) And I remember crying. And being like [*wailing noises*] "I'm pregnant."

JOSH: I should have factored that in. (*laughter*) I had forgotten that--

MARY: That's not what you said at the time. He was like... [*nonverbal gesture*] (*laughter*)

MARY [*cross talk*]: I just thought "oh, this is a new level".

JOSH [*cross talk*]: Sorry? Is it too late? It's never too late to say you're sorry.

MARY: [*laughs*] Sometimes too late to receive it.

JOSH: Fair enough.

(*laughter and applause*)

MARY: Anyways. That's just a-- I just wanted to be clear about the level of it. It's an illness.

JOSH: Mm-hm. And then, I thought you were going to mention possibly paper slapping.
[*cross talk*] Because I brought a holy relic, I'll show it after you--

MARY [*cross talk*]: Oh I'm happy to. I'm happy to.

MARY: So another thing that we always did on set.

JOSH: We may have chatted about this before, I'm not sure.

MARY: I think we did. So should I not?

JOSH: No, please do. Because I brought an object.

MARY: Oh great! So we had this thing where-- well, Josh probably started it but then it infected everybody where you're holding your--

JOSH: I helped popularize this. I don't think I-- I would like to say I invented it.

MARY [*aside*]: Let me hold these for--

JOSH: I'll be the victim.

MARY: Okay, copy that. So he's looking at his lines, and I go [*slaps papers out of Josh's hands*] like that.

JOSH: That's all. (*laughter*) [*cross talk*] That's money in the bank. That's funny.

MARY [*cross talk*]: It's annoying. The first time, you're like "Oh, you got me. It's annoying, whatever." And you pick it up, and then you know, they forget. And you do it again - he does it again. And again. And sometimes people are like, "Seriously, pal. It's enough now. Like, I gotta learn these lines." And he just can't stop. (*laughter*)

JOSH: I have two funny things about that. One is, I think I got this from someone else who worked on a Nickelodeon show and so they used to do it all the time. Then a production assistant left that show and got a big job on a movie. And his first day, someone was walking down the hall carrying a stack of scripts and he went *WHAM!* (*laughter*) In your face! And it was one of the producers of the movie, who fired him. (*laughter*) Instantaneously. And it's like "Wow, there's a very different sort of [*cross talk*] vibe on this--"

MARY [*cross talk*]: Yeah. I try it now, I try it on other sets and people are like... [*nonverbal gesture*]. You know, you don't realize that. It was-- I now hold sides, which are--

JOSH [*cross talk*]: White-knuckle.

MARY: I white-knuckle them. Instinctively, like on any set, I hold my sides like this. Like with a death grip.

JOSH: Anyways, this won't read to the home audience. So you're really getting top-dollar value. *(laughter)* But one of our great production assistants on *The West Wing* - not the one who later got fired from a movie - was Holli Strickland. Later became a dear friend and a babysitter to my kids. And her mother created for me a canvas holster for holding my script that is kind of bedazzled and says my name. And it says "Super actor. Super paper slapper."

(laughter, cheers, and applause)

JOSH: I've had it for sixteen years. *(laughter)* Should we get to the episode?

HRISHI: Let's do it. *(cheers)* I've read a quote from John Wells about this episode saying that "the Democratic convention on *West Wing* will be more reminiscent of Chicago" - meaning, 1968 in Chicago - "but not in terms of violence. There's going to be a convention, but not a slickly produced television show." The 1968 Chicago convention had, you know, a lot of protests, a lot of arrests. And it ended up generating Hubert Humphrey who got crushed by Nixon.

LAWRENCE: Hubert Humphrey lost by less than one percent of the vote.

JOSH: *[gasps]*

LAWRENCE: Just for the record. *(laughter and applause)*

JOSH: Well, I was going to point out that the last multi-ballot convention occurred in '52. Democrats ultimately nominating Stevenson, who was not even initially a candidate. I thought maybe that was the basis for some of this episode. Perhaps not. He gave the welcoming speech at the convention, Estes Kefauver? Is that how you pronounce it?

LAWRENCE: Mm-hm. Yeah, yes.

JOSH: Richard "Bingo" Russell. I'm kidding about the "Bingo". But Richard Russell and Averell Harriman were the other candidates, and it took three ballots finally to nominate Adlai Stevenson. Who was shellacked by Eisenhower, though probably it was less than one percent of the vote. *(laughter)*

LAWRENCE: Yeah, well you know the news media has been yearning for that kind of convention because it's just so much more fun, the multi-ballot thing. And you know after '68, they just became increasingly produced television shows where it was really like Super Bowl halftime shows where every single minute was mapped out. So the media's always wanted that. I *guarantee* you, you will hear people saying "Are we going to have a so-called 'brokered convention'?" Meaning a convention where you go in without a nominee *[cross talk]* and you-

JOSH *[cross talk]*: In 2020.

LAWRENCE: -this time because you have 400 people running for the nomination. *(laughter)* And that's usually what creates this kind of thing.

JOSH: Well, there's an interesting dynamic in this episode I noticed where Leo is trying to kind of convince the network bigwig to stay with the convention, where I would have thought that they'd be eating it up. Like, this kind of mayhem is fantastic.

LAWRENCE: Well, that was-- a certain amount of that was coming from me to John. Because the truth inside networks at the time, once you got into the early 21st century, is they started to realize how boring this TV show was. And the audience was ahead of them on that, you know. And they were wondering about "Why are we spending all this money covering these conventions when we know what happens?" So there was, in those days, already a kind of creeping executive-think about "Maybe we should pull back the amount of our coverage" especially in primetime at CBS, ABC, NBC. Cable of course they were going to stay with it. But it was really about the big ones, and so that was a dynamic that existed in the world. And then what we ended up playing in the episode was "Yes, everyone expects conventions to be boring. But in this one, all hell breaks loose and everybody watches."

JOSH: Mm-hm.

HRISHI: The element of having an underdog seems to be something that *The West Wing* just could never get away from. It was always trying to set up our characters to be an underdog no matter what the situation was. So was that part of the idea here that, by having Vinick sort of take the Republican nomination so easily, that regardless of whoever was going to come out of the Democratic convention - although we kind of all sort of sensed who it might be - they would ultimately be placed in an underdog position before we even start Season 7?

LAWRENCE: Well, this was an incredibly challenging dynamic for *The West Wing*, because-- well, first of all, drama likes underdogs. So that's the first appeal of the underdog. You're just going to get a better drama out of it. When you watch this episode - which I have to say, I think is great. I haven't watched it since it was on TV and I watched it yesterday, and I just think it's fabulous. I want to begin with worship of Alex Graves as a director of this episode.

(cheers and applause)

LAWRENCE: I mean, he took what was on paper and made it magic, and John Wells delivered a brilliant script I think. So this underdog thing was a big difficulty for us. In most dramas, the challenge that you have with your underdog is your underdog, of course, is the big movie star in the piece. The underdog in casting is always you know, the star. And so you somehow have to weaken that person's position so that it seems like there is a realistic challenge in front of them. And so I think the character with the biggest challenge in *The West Wing* as we got into those last two years was Alan Alda. Because everybody knew this *West Wing* is not going to elect a Republican president. So the challenge there began with casting. You know, John already cast Jimmy Smits as-- and, we knew we are writing the next nominee, and we believed at the time we were writing the next president and there would be no doubt about that. But then there-- a doubt did come into it in the final season. And so the challenge for Alan Alda was how does this character even seem credible in *The West Wing* as a possible winner? And all of the credit goes to Alan Alda. Not least because Alan is a giant star. So you had two giant TV stars. Jimmy Smits, Alan Alda. and anybody looking at TV could imagine one of them in effect taking over that show. So it was very much

a casting issue, and then it had to go into the writing which was challeng-- I had to do pretty much all of the Alan Alda writing, I introduced him into the series and all that. And I had-- I think we had Alan booked for four out of the 22 that year? And Jimmy was booked for about 14 of them? *[laughs]* And I somehow had to make this guy with four episodes a threat to this guy. And I think that was pulled off reasonably successfully. And then what John was able to do going into this convention and creating a "You don't know what's going to happen next" drama - and let me just say as I was watching it yesterday, I didn't know what was going to happen next. *(laughter)* I did not know.

JOSH *[cross talk]*: Oh, that's awesome.

LAWRENCE: I did not remember "Oh, they..." "Oh, and then he came in." And then "he decided not to do VP and he went for the top of the ticket."

JOSH: So you've reached that age.

LAWRENCE: Yeah. Yes! *(laughter)* No, it's the-- John is a master of suspense.

JOSH: It *is* pretty exciting. When you said the character with the biggest challenge, I was hoping you were going to say Will at this point. *(laughter)* Because, here at the end--

LAWRENCE: Well, the credibility challenge for Will was constant. *(laughter)* *[cross talk]* It never went away.

JOSH *[cross talk]*: That's just the *actor* with the biggest challenge. I was going to say character with the biggest challenge, because he's reduced in this end of Season 6 to lines like "A coin has two sides." *(laughter)*

HRISHI: Let's talk about the coin having two sides for a second.

JOSH: Let's.

HRISHI: So at the beginning of the episode, Leo's got a meeting in the convention and they're trying to hash out the specifics with representatives from the three major campaigns. We've got Josh for the Santos campaign, Will for Russell... and other guy for Hoynes. *(laughter)* And then, and Leo asks about the speaking order before the first ballot and chaos ensues. And Leo says this.

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

LEO: *Enough. We'll flip a coin.*

WILL: *Well, there are three of us, a coin only has two--*

LEO *[interrupting]*: *Draw straws, pick a number out of a hat, I don't care.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But so after Will's reasonable objection, they-- (*laughter*)

JOSH: It *is* a valid point.

HRISHI: It is! This is what Leo decides.

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

LEO: Okay. The speaking order? Rock, paper, scissors, on three. One, two, three.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: What?! (*laughter*)

HRISHI: Okay. So Leo's been - Leo is the guy who they bring in to try and rein in the organizational challenge that is the DNC. But after this, I don't trust Leo with organizing anything. (*laughter*)

MARY: Yeah, right.

JOSH: By the way-

MARY: You can't have a three-way Rock, Paper, Scissors, right? [*cross talk*] Like there is no-

JOSH [*cross talk*]: And he earlier said, "draw straws, pick a number out of a hat" - two very reasonable things. (*laughter*)

MARY [*cross talk*]: Right, straws work. Yes! Straws work. They've always worked, yeah.

JOSH [*cross talk*]: To resolve this...

HRISHI: There is no way for one round of rock, paper, scissors to determine anything in a three-way process. (*laughter*)

MARY: Right. It has to be like a round robin sort of situation.

HRISHI: Yes. Whatever, I mean-- you have to whittle it down.

JOSH: They should've done one of those chyrons: "Two and a half hours later..." (*laughter*)

LAWRENCE: There was exactly one person in *The West Wing* writers' room who had no idea what Rock, Paper, Scissors meant.

(*laughter*)

MARY: No. What?!

JOSH [*laughing*]: Oh, really?

LAWRENCE: Had never heard of it.

JOSH and MARY: Really?!

MARY [*cross talk*]: You'd heard of it, you didn't know what it was. You'd heard of it.

LAWRENCE [*cross talk*]: We used-- we used guns and knives in my neighborhood. (*laughter*) It was different. It was different.

HRISHI: In this scene, Leo also says that everyone has to have their speeches approved by Annabeth. I spoke to Jennifer Palmieri, who was the Communications Director for Hillary Clinton's campaign. And she told me that that situation and that position, the leading podium operations, is absolutely a real job and a huge one. She said that that person has to manage which speaker comes on and what they're saying, and how long they're going to speak for. And then their remarks have to get signed off on. And then she was telling me a little about the 2016 convention and what people get to do.

[pre-recorded interview excerpt]

JENNIFER: It's not as if you don't have the ability to write your own speech, but you definitely are going to have help editing it. For example Khizr Khan, he wrote his own speech, but he worked on it with the team that was there in Philadelphia. And he said "I have a Constitution with me - what do you think if I pull it out?", and they were like "Great! Yeah, you should do that." And it was one of the most memorable moments.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That was this moment in the convention.

[2016 Democratic National Convention excerpt]

KHIZR: Donald Trump, you're asking Americans to trust you with their future. Let me ask you: have you even read the United States Constitution? (cheers and applause) I will gladly lend you my copy.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It was good TV. But it had to go through, you know-- had to get signed off on. It was good America too, but... (*laughter*)

JOSH: Mm-hm. (*cheers and applause*)

JOSH: So, a left-leaning audience? (*laughter*) We love you all.

HRISHI: Back in the White House, it's a bit of a ghost town. Or as Charlie puts it, he says "it's weird out there, it's like we had a fire drill and everybody's still out on the lawn." And that makes sense, but then this part didn't make as much sense to me. Toby says:

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

TOBY: A convention - fire drill without the fire.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But I thought, by definition, don't all fire drills lack a fire? *(laughter)*

JOSH: No, sometimes they're real.

HRISHI: But then it's not a drill.

MARY: Then it's not a drill.

(laughter)

JOSH *[pauses]*: You know what? He's right! *(laughter)*

HRISHI: There's a feeling in this episode about the delegates that's not very kind.

JOSH: Not very respectful of their job.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean the episode is named after their votes but there's a sense that there's not a lot of respect there. We get a version of the telladonna here, we get a tella"ronna" *(laughter)* where Ronna asks Josh about the delegates and this is what he says.

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

JOSH: They're only here to grunt and cheer and stomp their feet at every cheap applause line. They're completely out of step with the voters we need in the fall.

RONNA: Well, they're going to pick our nominee.

JOSH: Four years ago, two thirds of the delegates wanted to cut defense spending. Even Democratic voters don't want us to touch it. Delegates were split on the death penalty. Democrats favor it two to one.

RONNA: You don't think they're qualified to do the job.

JOSH: The job as previously constituted was to clap and wave noisemakers for five hours straight.

RONNA: So, the delegates' sole purpose is to pick our party's nominee?

JOSH: Yeah, if you're leaving out the part about the little foam hats in the shape of the Hoover Dam, yes.

RONNA: And we selected them with no regard for their ability to perform that job?

JOSH: Did I mention that we have a-- [audio fade out]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I just want to focus on that last line - "we selected them with no regard for their ability to perform that job". Is that--

JOSH [*interrupting*]: That's how I got the job. (*laughter*)

HRISHI: Lawrence, can you shed any light on this? Is this--?

LAWRENCE: That's-- that's John Wells. And he's right in that period of time that it was very common for the delegates in a convention - for Democrats especially - to not reflect Democratic voters. The primary system was invented to try to solve that problem. And it has taken many, many decades to get closer and closer and closer to representing what Democratic voters are actually thinking. But it's [*sic*] always been a struggle, that fit of a world that includes superdelegates and people who are automatically seated as delegates in a convention, and people who get there through the voting system. And the people who end up as delegates through the voting system can be absolute first-time political tourists who've never been involved in any way in any of it. Some of them can be old-line political hacks, depending on which candidacy, which campaign they're there for. And so I think it's a less interesting or accurate statement now than it was then, but it was a pretty good representation of the way it could feel.

HRISHI: What's changed? Why is it different now?

LAWRENCE: Because as we move through time, the truth of it is that the delegates in the convention more and more and more resemble the Democratic electorate.

HRISHI: Is this primary situation - the primary system and the delegate system and everything - dumb? (*laughter*)

LAWRENCE: It's-- no, it's probably the best we have. Of the dumb choices, it's probably the best we have.

HRISHI: Fair enough. So, Josh goes back to Hoynes--

JOSH [*interrupting and mocking pronunciation*]: Hoynes? (*laughter*)

HRISHI [*laughing*]: --in the beginning of this episode.

JOSH: I'm a little OCD, I *have* to do that.

HRISHI: As we're starting to triangulate and he tries once more to see if he can talk some sense into him and get him to back Santos. And when he sees him, Hoynes has some strong words for Russell. Russell's out there trying to make some moves about the Vice President. This is what Hoynes says.

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

HOYNES: Guy's got a hell of a nerve floating VPs before he has the nomination. Hubris. Ask Odysseus how that worked out.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So as you know, we always like to try and go a little deeper on this show. So I *did* ask Odysseus (*laughter*) how that worked out, and this is what he said.

[pre-taped skit audio excerpt]

ODYSSEUS: So... I blinded the Cyclops and I was escaping with my men, and I probably should have just left it at that. But-- you know, I got hubris you know? So I yelled at him and said that it was Odysseus who did it you know, and I had a good laugh. But the Cyclops' dad is Poseidon so he cursed me. I didn't get home for like 10 years and all my men died. So yeah. Hoynes is right. Hubris, it's not-- it's not great. What's next?

[end excerpt]

(laughter and applause)

JOSH: *That is a get!*

HRISHI: His publicist was tough to work with. (*laughter*)

JOSH: I'll bet.

HRISHI: Odysseus tempted the wrath of the whatever from high atop the thing. (*laughter and applause*) But then Josh has a really rough conversation with a guy who used to be his boss, and he really doesn't put any kind of-- he doesn't sugarcoat it at all, as Hoynes says. He says this.

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

JOSH: Your political life is over. It was over the day you resigned the Vice Presidency. I don't care what they're saying to Larry King.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's a good scene.

HRISHI: Yeah. It gets brutal though. This whole episode is really, I think there are--

LAWRENCE [*interrupting*]: Well, it's not as brutal as it sounds. I mean, the guy had been caught in this [*cross talk*] gigantic scandal--

JOSH [*cross talk*]: Yeah, it's not inaccurate.

LAWRENCE: --and resigned the Vice Presidency. It's not a big newsflash that you have a hopeless political future in front of you by Episode 22 of Season 6. (*laughter*)

HRISHI [*laughing*]: That's true.

LAWRENCE: It's why when you see it played, you know if you just read it on a page not knowing any previous context, you'd go "Whoa. That's really... that's harsh." But if you understand all the story that ramped up to that, you notice Hoynes doesn't object to that. He doesn't-- [*mocking*] "that's outrageous!". He's not, he kind of-- he's halfway there, he kind of gets it.

HRISHI: He seems to be the only person for whom this is news. But he needs to hear the news.

LAWRENCE: No, I think what-- the other thing I love about it is that the last person to really know that a politician's career is absolutely, hopelessly over is the politician. [*light applause*] And so this was our guy in this story who was showing you how much they are trying to hang on by their fingernails, no matter what happens. Just, you know... because Hoynes has no right being in this story, he's got no right being near this campaign, running for this nomination. But the voters - and in this case, the convention delegates - are going to have to convince him of that because a politician can never convince himself of that.

HRISHI: I liked the symmetry of this conversation with you know, a moment that we get really before our story starts when Hoynes and Josh go running and he says:

[West Wing Episode 1.22 excerpt]

HOYNES: You know something Josh, sometimes I wonder if I'd listened to you two years ago, would I be president right now? Do you ever wonder that?

JOSH: No sir, I know it for sure.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Josh is kind of bookending these two moments, where if he had listened to Josh, he could have been the president. And now, if only he listens to Josh, he could realize that things are over for him. He just has this kind of moment on either side of the guy's career. I thought that was nicely-- [*cross talk*] nicely done.

LAWRENCE [*cross talk*]: Yeah.

HRISHI: Just to finish with Hoynes--

JOSH [*interrupting and mocking pronunciation*]: Hoynes! (*laughter*)

HRISHI: --since he was so close to being finished. Jumping ahead, we'll come back. But later, after the second ballot, Hoynes is down to 102 votes. He starts here with I think 900 or so and then he gets down to 102 votes. Baker's come into the race. And Leo comes in and asks them for some sense of decorum. They have another meeting and then everybody gets up and they leave, and Hoynes is just sitting there by himself and it's really sad! As though like-- the 100-- it starts to finally sink in. Do you know the meme of Ben Affleck (*laughter*) where he and Henry Cavill--

JOSH: Oh, he just stares off in the...

HRISHI: He and Henry Cavill are doing press for *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice*.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: And I think the person who's doing the press junket, the interviewer asks them how they're feeling about the reviews being pretty bad. (*laughter*) And--

JOSH: Which is an awkward question.

HRISHI: Yeah! And Henry Cavill starts to answer you know, earnestly. And Ben Affleck, in the meme, just stares into space and they start playing-- well, it goes like this.

[Sad Affleck meme excerpt]

TOM (interviewer): I just wondered whether that-- how that makes you guys feel and whether it'll even affect the film as such.

HENRY: Well, the interesting thing is that--

[interview fades out, replaced by The Sound of Silence by Simon and Garfunkel]

[sung] Hello darkness my old friend...

[end excerpt]

(*laughter*)

HRISHI: And that was all I could think of when I watched Hoynes taking in the news.

LAWRENCE: But the nice thing about that moment is when Tim is silent-- when Hoynes is silent and taking that in, he's looking straight into Josh's eyes. And that I think is the moment where Hoynes realizes "I'm going to have to make a deal with Josh". And this episode takes that opportunity away from him because Bartlet comes in and takes the opportunity away from him. So Hoynes was actually on the verge of being the kingmaker here and finally, in

his final act, doing a version of the right thing by handing the crown to the right person and he doesn't even get to do that.

JOSH: I want to play a clip that happens right at this moment where Josh is making his pitch for "take the mantle of elder statesman [*cross talk*] and party uniter"--

LAWRENCE [*cross talk*]: Yes, yes! Yes.

JOSH: But also, maybe-- if you listen closely as Lawrence suggests, you'll see why it particularly landed for me.

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

JOSH: You've had a long and distinguished career, sir. Wouldn't you like to see your name just one more time in the history books without the word "scandal" after it?

[end excerpt]

(laughter, cheers, and applause)

JOSH: That really hit home for me. I would like my obituary to be something other than *Scandal*. Not that I'm not proud of it - I just need another job. *(laughter)* And while we're at it, there was one other clip from this episode that also really landed for me.

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

DONNA: How much longer?

WILL: Maybe 30 minutes.

DONNA: Then what?

WILL: Then they start the second ballot and my hairline recedes about three inches.

[end excerpt]

(laughter)

LAWRENCE: Ha-ha!

JOSH: That happened. That's one of my personal hits.

LAWRENCE: By the way, can I just say how much I loved your interaction with Donna throughout this part of the campaign, and this episode in particular? *(applause and cheers)* [*cross talk*] It's really great.

JOSH [*cross talk*]: Thank you. I appreciate that.

LAWRENCE: And in a series, it's so fascinating to see that shift because we'd only seen Donna working with Josh for all those years and then to see her, in effect on her own. It was just fascinating to watch how beautifully she transitioned into that and she grew into another character. And I loved the way you worked with her, it was just great.

JOSH: I appreciate that. Yeah, I-- we've tried to make the argument that Will has given her a little more [*cross talk*] room to blossom.

LAWRENCE [*cross talk*]: Oh, you absolutely did! And that's-- I really love that! Will saw and used more of her potential than anyone else.

HRISHI: I think in the tally of winners and losers, if Hoynes-- we've got Hoynes at the bottom as ultimate loser because he's even lost the chance to make this deal where he's the kingmaker. I do think that Donna's maybe the ultimate winner of this season. [*cross talk*] I think that the arc for her was good. (*applause*)

LAWRENCE [*cross talk*]: Mm-hm. Yeah. Janel Moloney, ladies and gentlemen!

(*cheers and applause*)

JOSH: Later. She's hanging with Alan Alda and Hubert Humphrey. (*laughter*) In the green room. Well, he is green. Because he's dead.

(*laughter, groans, and boos*)

JOSH: You're not wrong.

HRISHI: Speaking of Will, it's really always--

LAWRENCE [*interrupting*]: Do we have to? (*laughter*)

HRISHI: It's always so nice when Toby gives anyone a compliment, as paltry as the compliments might be like this one.

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

KATE: *You hear Russell's speech?*

TOBY: *Yeah.*

KATE: *It was pretty good.*

TOBY: *Russell has a few teeth left in his head.*

[end excerpt]

(*laughter*)

HRISHI: That also came true. You do still have teeth in your head.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Invisalign! Let's get to Mary's subplot finally.

HRISHI: Well, speaking of chemistry. (*cheers and applause*) I really kind of like-- I like the kind of non-chemistry that exists between Kate and Toby. Seriously, Kate has a great rapport with C.J., and it seems like those two characters sort of instantly fell in with each other and kind of figured it out. And in some ways I could see this show being tempted to try and make Kate Harper suddenly just immediately part of the gang. You know, just really bring her in. But two things in this episode. One, having her take on this role of an inquisitor. And then also this slightly cold dynamic between Kate and Toby. You get the sense that Kate's still reminded every day that she's not part of the OG crew.

MARY: Yeah, that's how it felt. (*laughter*) No, that's not how it felt. That's not how it felt. No, Richard and I were really, really close and I enjoyed working with him so much. But yeah, that was, I thought he-- I mean, that was well-gauged, that. Because she *is* an outsider, and she is put in charge of this investigation and someone's looking at 10 years, and... I don't know, yeah. I mean, I think it was well-paced by the writers.

LAWRENCE: But Kate was always the adult in the room. I mean, remember, she came in to occupy a jurisdiction in the show that didn't exist at that level of prominence in the cast which is national security. She came in with this national security brief. And to all those people who are speechwriters and press secretaries and the assistants that we saw at play there - except for the White House chief of staff - no matter where their rank is technically, they all feel at some lower level of play than Kate all the time.

HRISHI: Right.

LAWRENCE: 100% of the time. She knows stuff that they don't know and will never know. (*cheers and applause*) And she knows that, and they know that.

JOSH: Also, she's been married so many more times-- (*laughter*) [*cross talk*] than anyone else.

MARY [*cross talk*]: So many husbands. How many, how many? It's a lot, right?

JOSH: Innumerable.

MARY: I forget how many.

HRISHI: Twice - you've been twice married and twice divorced.

MARY [*cross talk*]: Thank you.

JOSH [*cross talk*]: Minimum twice. (*laughter*)

MARY: I should know that.

HRISHI: Actually Josh always brings up-- every time there's a scene between Kate and really anyone, you keep on suspecting that there's something between-- (*laughter*) you're like, "What's the subtext here? They seem to have something going on between..."

MARY [*cross talk*]: Jealous. Jealous.

JOSH [*cross talk*]: I guess it's you.

HRISHI: Which is another reason why I thought this non-chemistry between Kate and Toby was really nice. (*laughter*)

JOSH: She turned it off for one scene.

HRISHI: Let me ask a question here to everyone before we wade a little further. Some people, like my parents who are here tonight are-- (*cheers and applause*) So my parents I know are watching the TV show in synchronicity with the-- [*aside*] in synchronicity? [*cross talk*] That doesn't make sense.

JOSH [*cross talk*]: It was beautiful. You're about to-- it's going to be poetry. Go for it. (*laughter*) In synchronicity with... In synchronicity with...

HRISHI [*cross talk*] [*giggling*]: They're watching the television show in sync with the podcast.

JOSH: Beautiful.

HRISHI: And so they have not seen past the end of Season 6 yet. Are there other people here who have not yet seen any of Season 7? (*cheers*) I see one hand--

LAWRENCE [*cross talk*]: Right there. Yeah, make some noise.

JOSH [*cross talk*]: Trying to decide whether to break with convention and indulge in spoilers

MARY [*cross talk*]: One hand, two hands.

HRISHI: Yes, we don't like to spoil anything before we've gotten to that episode. But there are some things about the making of this episode that were going on, and we're wondering if we can talk about that. Is it okay if we--

JOSH: If you don't know who the mole is yet, the leak? (*cheers*) If you don't know that it's [*two-note "sad trombone - Womp Womp" sound*]. (*laughter*) Yep, that's right. Two syllables. (*laughter*)

HRISHI: When I watched this episode, the question of who the leak was had been spoiled so thoroughly that I didn't have any kind of suspense around that. But for the viewers, we don't

know who it is yet and they're playing this for suspense. But I couldn't actually absorb it because I already knew. So instead, I was reading the episode even the first time I saw it with a level of "What are the clues that they're giving me for the answer that I know is going to eventually come?". And you all making it, you already knew-- Mary, you already knew who the leak was.

MARY: I knew, yeah.

HRISHI: Even though your character did not yet.

MARY: Are we saying who?

JOSH: Did Richard know? *(laughter)*

MARY: Okay. So Richard did know. He knew who the leak was.

JOSH: And how did he feel about it?

MARY: He was not happy about it. At all. But not just not happy, he was livid. And it was hard because-- *(applause)*

JOSH: Let's clap for lividity. *(laughter)*

MARY: It was hard. I mean, it was awkward for me because I was the new kid. I mean, I still - even though I'd been there for a little while, I was relatively new. And you know, I love Richard. And it was hard to see him that unhappy and angry.

HRISHI: In between scenes, as-- I mean, luckily Toby is also unhappy and angry in the... *(laughter)* well, everything.

MARY: Yes. It aligned. But yes, between scenes, and-- he really was wanting to vent. And there was a lot of "If Aaron were here, this would never happen". I was like "I don't know".

JOSH: Lawrence, I'm imagining he probably voiced his opinion to the powers that be.

LAWRENCE [*hesitantly*]: Well-- so this is complicated. *(laughter)* To put it mildly. It began simply with the germ of an idea as so many things do in the writers' room - what about a special prosecutor? And so that's where it begins because, you know, these White Houses recently had been getting special prosecutors.

JOSH [*interrupting*]: We all know that goes nowhere. *(laughter)*

LAWRENCE: Eventually.

MARY: 37 indictments, I won't hear a bad word about Mueller.

(cheers and applause)

MARY: 37.

LAWRENCE: So that was where it started - how do we get a special prosecutor, what could it be, what could it... And I have to say my mind wandered when people were zeroing in on this space shuttle stuff and all of this stuff because some people had to go look up technical junk and all that. And I was just much more concerned with the dynamics of it. And ultimately the most difficult choice about it, which is not so much what they will be investigating - as it turns out, it's a military thing - but *who*. Who will they be investigating and then, so much more importantly for us, who *should* they be investigating? And then we were stuck as dramatists with this question of "Is the person they're investigating guilty?". And so the softest TV version of this is, of course, "No." None of our wonderful TV series heroes are guilty. And we, with reasonable consistency, always chose the opposite thing. Beginning in Season 1 with the death penalty episode, and we gave ourselves - and Aaron took - the much more difficult writing challenge. Of doing the opposite thing and having a good and decent person do that opposite thing. This to me is similar. Very, very similar. It's that challenge of "we're going to go in here with a special prosecutor" and "what is he going to find?". And the most powerful thing dramatically that he can find is guilt. And guilt in one of the gods of *The West Wing*. You know, one of the people who's been here from the pilot and who, you know, we all love and America loves. Then it literally [*laughs*] in the writers' room-- I mean, every name was mentioned. You know, it wasn't like "Oh, Richard for sure." You know, "Let's do Richard."

JOSH: I would've done it. (*laughter*)

LAWRENCE: Yeah, it wasn't-- we went through all sorts of deliberations about who that would be. And Richard's completely right. So Richard had the feeling that his character would not do that. And I-- I think that's 100% valid. It could be-- (*applause and cheers*) it could be a failure of us as writers that we didn't come up with something else for some other character that we could get unanimity where everybody agreed "Yes. Pushed into this corner, this person would do this." But this is what we got. And I think it's as valid to say that Toby would do this as it is valid to say Toby would not do this. And they were of absolutely equal validity. I personally respect actors' views of their characters more than anyone else, including - and this is heresy in the Writers Guild of America - including the creator of the character. We thought we were going pretty deep, but actors always go deeper. And by the time you're into six years of Richard-- the end of the sixth year of Richard living with, being this character? His feeling about what this character would and wouldn't do is very, very, very well earned.

HRISHI: That being said. (*laughter*)

JOSH [*gleefully*]: He did it! (*laughter*)

HRISHI: I think that there are a lot of breadcrumbs that the writers did leave to get to this point, and I think the connection-- again, going way back to the beginning of *The West Wing*, knowing that Toby has a brother who was up in space--

LAWRENCE: By the way, no one had any idea that would be used in any interesting way down the road *ever*. Never.

HRISHI: To connect that, and his brother committed suicide. And then just the extremely long game of Toby's relationship with the president, and everything with Ricky Rafferty. Like, he's getting torn apart. He lost Josh. He's angrier than ever. And so, maybe there's a certain point at which you say, "Yes, I can't go with this leap that the character would do this." But I think that it was pretty well set up. And for me, the line in the episode that both spoils it - that it's like, oh, well, obviously now we must know who this is - and also, justifies it is one from the president where he says "I want to know who it is in this administration that thinks their opinion of how I should handle this situation matters more than mine." (*applause and cheers*) There's only one answer! And it feels like a believable take on the character too.

JOSH: Mm-hm. I think so. We'll certainly talk to Richard about this as well.

MARY: I can't wait. I want to hear that. (*laughter and cheers*)

HRISHI: Should we turn to less fraught matters, get back to the--

LAWRENCE: Well can I just ask, Mary. In *this* episode, when you're playing it in *this* episode, where really none of the cards are being turned over about Toby. Was Richard at that time [*cross talk*] in this episode having issues?

MARY [*cross talk*]: Yes. Yes.

LAWRENCE: Because I gotta say, you could shoot this episode this way and if necessary, during the summer, we could come up with another guilty person if we had to.

MARY [*cross talk*]: But he had been told--

LAWRENCE [*cross talk*]: We weren't that far down the road that we were absolutely stuck.

MARY: But I mean-- and I think I'm remembering it correctly, he was clear on it at this point.

LAWRENCE: Yeah.

MARY: And the last line of the episode where I say:

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

KATE: The FBI thinks it came from inside the West Wing. They have a theory. One you're not gonna like.

[end excerpt]

MARY: He's *not* happy about it. (*laughter*) [*cross talk*] In real life, I mean that was like--

JOSH [*cross talk*]: *Richard* was not happy about it.

MARY: Richard was not happy about it.

LAWRENCE: And this to me makes his performance all the more wonderful because it's just a flawless piece of work in this episode. And when you know that he's complaining to Mary about it between shots, it's much more interesting to watch. *(laughter)*

JOSH: I remember him-- I mean, I remember him being inconsolable. *[cross talk]* Talking about possibly not wanting to even finish out on the show. I mean, it was-- it struck deep to him.

MARY *[cross talk]*: Oh, yeah. He was furious. Yeah, he felt really betrayed.

HRISHI: It's funny, that last scene where Kate comes in and says, "You're not going to be happy about it." I thought that it was-- that was an attempt much like the end of the episode right before to misdirect us into thinking that it was C.J.

MARY *[cross talk]*: Really. Wow

LAWRENCE *[cross talk]*: Right, yeah.

HRISHI: Because in the-- at the end of the very last episode, they're talking about the leak and we get a shot of C.J. at her desk by herself, looking--

LAWRENCE: That's what we were hoping for. Thank you for falling for that. *(laughter)*

MARY: I guess I didn't have that experience because I had him in my head the whole time, so I can't watch it without that.

HRISHI: Right, exactly. That's why I'm so curious what it would be like for someone who's watching this *[cross talk]* for the-- without this...

MARY *[cross talk]*: Without all this knowledge, yeah.

JOSH: Raise your hand if we just ruined the show for you. *(laughter)*

MARY: Sorry. So sorry.

HRISHI: Thank you for coming.

JOSH: Would you like an olive?

LAWRENCE: Mary, what's the thing you had to do in *The West Wing* that you thought was most wrong for your character?

JOSH: Have a romance with Will.

(laughter, cheers, and applause)

JOSH: I'm just going to say it before she does. That was the greatest setup of all time, and I'm not going to let her whack that one out of the park.

MARY: Oh, I bought that. I bought that.

JOSH: Alright, thank you.

MARY: I don't know, I'd have to think about that. I'd have to think about that. But no, I bought our relationship.

JOSH: Appreciate it.

MARY: I do remember Alex coming into the hair and makeup trailer - Alex Graves - coming into the hair and makeup trailer and going like, "We're going to hook you up with somebody" and sort of laughing. (*laughter*)

JOSH: That sounds like Alex.

MARY: He was really happy, he thought I was going to be like "NO!". It was funny.

JOSH: Alex-- I don't know if I've told this before, but Alex is one of the all-time great prank inappropriate retaliators. I did a couple small things to him-- I can't even remember, I did something on *Sports Night* where I rearranged the furniture in his dressing room or something, and then I'm walking downstairs to the set and all of a sudden somebody is emptying a fire extinguisher on me. (*laughter*)

MARY [*laughing*] [*cross talk*]: Too far, too far. Yeah, too far.

JOSH [*cross talk*]: I was like-- dude, there's pranks. You can put your furniture back. I have to go change now, I'm at work.

MARY [*cross talk*]: I love it, I love it. That is so funny.

JOSH: And then another time I took his iPod and I reset the settings to Mandarin Chinese. (*laughter*) [*cross talk*] Which is very annoying.

MARY [*cross talk*]: Super annoying.

JOSH: Because you have to know Mandarin to set it back to English. And then he just punched me in the groin. (*laughter and applause*)

MARY: Good. I love it.

JOSH: I was like, dude there's a difference. One thing is a prank, the other thing is assault. (*laughter*) You assaulted me.

HRISHI: What is the virtue of a proportional response?

(cheers and applause)

LAWRENCE: There is one audience in the world that would get that. (laughter)

JOSH: Hooray, dorks! (cheers and applause)

LAWRENCE: Wow, wow.

JOSH: It's like *Game of Thrones*, the House of Dork. (laughter)

HRISHI: I was thinking about *Game of Thrones* when I was watching this, because it does feel a little bit like mismatched consequences. In *Game of Thrones*, there's all these sort of political battles. Who's going to sit on the Iron Throne, infighting... Meanwhile, there's zombie dead people coming to wipe out all of humanity. (laughter) And in this episode, we're trying to figure out who's going to-- you know, 95% of it is trying to figure out who's going to be the person to run against Alan Alda. And meanwhile, there's an *actual* life and death situation happening in space. Which is the B plot. (laughter)

LAWRENCE [laughs]: Yeah.

JOSH: You know, that storyline really landed for me watching it in the last couple days. There's a Bartlet clip that we didn't pull where he says:

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Dammit, C.J. I've got three men up there trying to take very, very shallow breaths.

[end excerpt]

LAWRENCE: I loved that line.

JOSH: And I'm very aware-- I've been reading about what's been going on the top of Everest, and I think at least 11 people have died because of the incredible-- or in part because of the incredible traffic trying to get to the summit of Everest. And with that having happened in the last week or so, that really kind of informed my watching of this subplot. And it *is* a very intense and palpable storyline that, you're right, is in a secondary position but is this life-and-death struggle that's happening.

HRISHI: So with that, let's get back to the convention. (laughter) Because Al Bundy shows up!

JOSH: Let's get back to a guy juggling on stilts!

HRISHI: We get Governor Baker. He turns down the vice presidential spot that he had sort of tacitly agreed to for Russell. And he's going to take a path that feels more similar to what maybe Hoynes had imagined. That there was going to be another way besides all of these declared candidates, and he's going to try and get nominated from the floor. And they

actually already have “Draft Baker” signs ready to hand out. Which means that in the moments between him saying “let’s have that drink” with Russell and him saying “oh, we need to talk,” he must have immediately come back and said “I’m not going to say yes to this guy. Let’s try and do this ourselves.” That nobody’s going to win it so I’ve got a shot.

JOSH: I like that Russell immediately knows too. When he says “let’s sleep on it and connect again in the morning”, Russell knows exactly what’s happening. He’s going to try to get the nomination on the floor.

HRISHI: Yeah. Mm-hm. And then we get a shot of-- we see the president, we see POTUS. And then FLOTUS comes out. And even they’re surprised by how fast things are moving.

[West Wing Episode 6.02 excerpt]

ABBEY: Baker? Eric Baker. When did he get into this?

PRESIDENT BARTLET: About two hours ago. It’s a free-for-all. I think Aaron Burr has got 20 votes.

[end excerpt]

(laughter)

HRISHI: You know, on this show we like to go deeper. *(laughter)* And so I asked Aaron Burr how he felt with only 20 votes because it felt like it might be a long road to get the nomination, and he said:

[“Wait for It” from *Hamilton: An American Musical* excerpt]

BURR [sung]: I’m willing to wait for it... I’m willing to wait for it...

[end excerpt]

(laughter, cheers, and applause)

JOSH: You know, I was a little disappointed in Dr. Bartlet that she didn’t stay up and watch the convention. *(laughter)* I thought she’d be more invested.

HRISHI: Her political life is also-- she’s also ready for retirement.

JOSH: Yeah, I guess so.

HRISHI: Yeah. By the way, a side note about “POTUS” and “FLOTUS” that ties into our esteemed guest Mr. O’Donnell here. I was reading about how those terms got popularized. “POTUS” was first mentioned in the Phillips Code which was compiled in 1879 by Walter Phillips who was a wire service manager who worked for the AP and UPI. And I was reading about this in an article in *The New York Times* that said “POTUS”-- so the term had been around since 1879 but it was popularized in a White House novel from 1977 called *Full*

Disclosure. Which is the name of an episode that Lawrence wrote. One thing that was not fully disclosed in this article though, is the person who wrote the article is also the person who wrote that book. *(laughter)*

JOSH: Just trying to move copies.

HRISHI: Yeah. It was William Safire, who wrote that book and he had also written that article. But he didn't mention that "By the way, that's my book." *(laughter)*

MARY: That's funny.

LAWRENCE: William Safire was a White House speechwriter for Richard Nixon, so he knew what he was talking about.

HRISHI: And was the title of that book at all an influence on naming Hoynes's book *Full Disclosure*?

LAWRENCE: I'm learning of the existence of the book right now. *(laughter)* I did not know that.

HRISHI: Well there it is. *Full Disclosure*.

JOSH: Full disclosure... that's all. *(laughter)* Just felt like it needed to be said like that.

HRISHI: I also really love just the poetry of the one shot of somebody throwing away a bunch of Hoynes signs.

JOSH: As his-- isn't that his campaign guy also lying prone on the table? *(laughter)*

HRISHI [*laughing*]: Yeah.

JOSH: Like, that guy's done.

LAWRENCE: That's very real. If you've ever been on a convention floor at the end of the night, it's just littered with all of the signs from that day.

JOSH: We have a clip from another great, apparently wild, chaotic convention. DNC 2004. Josh mentions a hell of a balloon drop. And in 2004, DNC I guess it's Kerry-Edwards? The balloon drop did not go well and Don Mischer, the director and producer of the event, can be heard obviously unbeknownst to him. His feed was carrying to the television audience and it's kind of fun to listen to.

HRISHI: Yeah, CNN did not mean to be carrying the control room audio, but they were and so--

JOSH: This is what the audience heard at home.

[CNN 2004 DNC Convention television coverage excerpt]

[“Dreams” by Van Halen playing in background]

DON: Go balloons. Balloons. What’s happening balloons, there’s not enough coming down.
[pause] ALL BALLOONS. Where the hell, there’s nothing falling. What the [expletive deleted]
are you guys doing up there?!

[end excerpt]

(laughter)

JOSH: “All balloons, what the hell, there’s nothing falling. What the [expletive deleted] are
you guys doing up there?” (laughter and applause) I have left specific directives for that to be
played at my funeral. (laughter) I think it’s going to be hilarious. “Where are the balloons?!
What the [expletive deleted]?”

HRISHI: I thought you just wanted Van Halen played at your funeral.

JOSH: No, the audio-- the dialogue.

HRISHI [laughing]: That’s great.

MARY: [involuntary snort]

(laughter)

JOSH: That was real. House Dork.

HRISHI: How about a little math?

JOSH: Oh yeah! Give me a little *West Wing* math.

HRISH: Okay. I’ll start with the first part of the equation. Will says this:

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

WILL: I feel like I just re-recorded Rod Stewart’s back catalog.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Right? Then Josh later says this.

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

JOSH: You think none of the Young Turks working on our campaign staff are doing it
because they want jobs?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And those two add up to this.

["Young Turks" by Rod Stewart audio excerpt]

[sung]

Young hearts be free tonight.

Time is on your side.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Did anybody get that? Anybody get that joke? (*cheers and applause*)

JOSH: The woman for whom we ruined the show got it.

HRISHI: Oh okay, good. Welcome back. (*laughter*) That was "Young Turks" by Rod Stewart.

JOSH: Worth it. (*laughter*)

HRISHI: Math, it always does well.

JOSH: I have another little weird equation for this. Before-- we're going to I think get to soon the subplot about Baker and the information. So here's what I wanted to do.

HRISHI: Why don't you-- let's introduce the subplot.

JOSH: Sure. Subplot, audience. Audience, subplot about Baker. (*laughter*) In synchronicity with our podcast. (*laughter and cheers*) I don't know what's happening anymore. Well, first I want to play a clip.

["Moments in the Woods" from *Into the Woods* (1987 Original Broadway Cast recording) audio excerpt]

[sung]

Was that me? Was that him?

Did a prince really kiss me?

And kiss me and kiss me?

And did I kiss him back?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: This of course is Joanna Gleason, who played Jordan Kendall (*cheers and applause*) on *The West Wing* who won a Tony for her role in *Into the Woods* playing...?

MARY and AUDIENCE MEMBERS: Baker's wife!

JOSH: The baker's wife! Now we can talk about...

JOSH and HRISHI: Baker's wife.

(laughter, cheers, and applause)

JOSH: Ah, you like that better than the Rod Stewart.

HRISHI [*disgustedly*]: Musicals! *(laughter)*

JOSH: Foiled again.

HRISHI: What did you think about having a character facing depression--

JOSH: It's a great storyline. It has a very interesting ethical question. No?

HRISHI: It felt a little bit to me like-- you know, we've talked about this before. The opposite of *deus ex machina*, where you [*cross talk*] need to pull this thing out--

JOSH [*cross talk*]: *Machus ex deina?* *(laughter)*

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Gave it a shot.

HRISHI: But it also might be totally real. I mean, it's also explained that the reason why this stuff is coming up in the last minute is because Baker has not been vetted. That the primary process involves stress testing all of the candidates and every element of their biography and their loved ones' biographies really, and he hasn't had to go through that. So--

LAWRENCE: It was also based on a real-world possible Republican candidate for president who was polling enormously well who chose not to run because there was a concern about his wife's medical history in this territory. Colin Powell was polling at like 75%. You know, it just would've-- if he'd gotten into the race, all the polls indicate he just would've walked all the way to the presidency and Clinton would not have had a chance in a re-election against him.

[1995 Colin Powell news conference ("Powell Decision Not to Run") - excerpt]

POWELL: My wife has depression. She's had it for many, many years, and we have told many, many people about it. It is not a family secret. It is very easily controlled with proper medication, just as my blood pressure is sometimes under control with proper medication. [laughter] And you obviously don't want your whole family life out in the press, but when the story broke, we confirmed it immediately, and I hope that people who read that story who think they might be suffering from depression make a beeline to the doctor. Because it is something that can be dealt with very easily.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I thought one of the things it showed also was that Will and Josh are political operatives. Because they're just trying to find any way to use it. I mean, they're not trying to find *any* way. Their justification is it's going to come out if he becomes the nominee and we're going to lose to Vinick anyway. But they're going-- they want to use the information.

HRISHI: There's a sharp contrast in the candidates which we've seen throughout the whole season, but it really gets distilled really succinctly with this subplot about Governor Baker's wife. And it really comes through in the way that their representatives try to handle them and their response around it. There's these two lines that I think really-- that are really poignant. One is Donna and Will talking about what they're going to do. You know, Donna says "This is a brutal character assault on a man's wife for an 8-hour story." And she's trying to convince him to convince Russell not to use it.

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

DONNA: Don't do this. The Vice President will do it if you tell him to. Please.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then compare that to Josh and Leo.

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

JOSH: He's not gonna do it just because I say so, Leo. He's his own man.

LEO: And here I thought I found the last one.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Awww. *(laughter)* One of the things I like in the final that Santos-- there are a couple things I like about that final Santos really locking up the nomination. One is that it's a great hero moment. But he's also being pretty wily. He has basically told Leo that he's going to throw his support behind someone else. As such, he locks up a position to speak again.

LAWRENCE: Well, but if you look at the dialogue, he was very careful not to say that to Leo. Although Leo's certainly got that impression.

JOSH [*cross talk*]: But I'm saying--

MARY [*cross talk*]: It's implied and intuited.

JOSH: I give a little hat tip to Santos for kind of actually being a little bit wiler than we normally give him credit for because he works himself into this position addressing the convention again and then [*reverse noise*] turns it around. And not only that-- well, two things. First of all, I love the shot. Alex has this low camera looking up. You see the lights behind Jimmy, they're blown out. First of all, you know how you always, if you're smart, you hold your camera up when you're taking a selfie because it's flattering. Only Jimmy Smits from below shot up the nose still looks like a god.

(laughter and applause)

JOSH: I was like, if that had been me, whoo that wouldn't have worked. But then the other thing is that in this next clip, in doing what he does, he also *grills* Leo and Josh for what they would've had him do.

[West Wing Episode 6.22 excerpt]

SANTOS: Now it's been suggested to me this week that I should try to buy your support with jobs and the promise of access. It's been suggested to me that party unity is more important than your democratic rights as delegates.

CROWD [cheering]: Santos! Santos! Santos!

SANTOS: That's right, It's not. And you have a decision to make.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I love that he just goes after-- he doesn't mention them by name, but we know it's Josh and Leo who have made those suggestions to him.

LAWRENCE: And here you have this big convention episode, and all you get of convention speech is this tiny little bite that is shot really tight and it doesn't have any of that convention feel. Because what matters is everything that happened before it. And the *words* of that speech matter only because of what happened before it. Which only we know, in *The West Wing* audience, not them out there in the convention audience.

HRISHI: What's interesting about that speech is it reminds me of that phrase "a constituency of one". Who he really has to convince. Because when he's giving that speech, people are moved by it, people are stirred by it, but it still feels like the people who are going to break for the delegates that they've already committed to might still go that way. Like the people who start chanting "Santos" are not going to be the people who are Hoynes people. So--

JOSH: Who's he talking to?

HRISHI: Yeah. And so the one person he's really talking to is the president. It really feels almost like a dialogue as they cut between his speech and then the president watching his speech. And ultimately the president deciding, in response to what C.J. says where she says "Isn't it time that you picked the successor that you actually want?". That he's done it with that one speech.

LAWRENCE: You know, one of the writing challenges of this season once we got into the presidential campaign was how do we keep Martin not just in the show, but keeping him important in the show. What does *he* have to do with a presidential campaign? And we kept finding places. And Martin was just fantastic every time we handed him that ball.

JOSH: For what it's worth, far less than important but from my perspective, Will was out of a job. *(laughter)* And I remember sometime around this time in production John Wells calling me to his office. And I remember a couple of things. I figured I was finding out whether or not I had a future on the show in the next season. The first thing that I remember was they sat me in his office and I waited for him, but in his inner office. And I happened to notice that on his desk was a list of everybody's salaries. *(laughter)*

MARY *[cross talk]*: Oh my God.

LAWRENCE *[cross talk]*: That was in a drawer. That was not on his desk. *(laughter)*

JOSH *[cross talk]*: No, actually--!

MARY: Oh my God. Have you ever told this?

JOSH: I don't think I've-- no, I didn't because it feels dirty. *(laughter)*

MARY: It *is* dirty.

JOSH: Far from opening a drawer, it's even unlike me to do what I did which was walk around the desk and just-- *[random sounds]*. You know, if I had my phone I would've taken a picture now. But I looked at everyone's. I confirmed that in fact everybody was making far more money than I, which I suspected. And then I was trying to think "why would he bring me in here and show me everyone's salaries?". *(laughter)* Ultimately, I decided that was just a mistake. But I enjoyed the information. And when he did come in, I remember him saying to me "Look, I think I've figured out a way to keep you on the show and you'll do 11 episodes next season. You'll do about half the season. How does that sound?" And I was like "it sounds 11 better than being fired." *(laughter)*

MARY: He called everyone in. Everyone had that meeting.

JOSH: Oh, is that true? *[cross talk]* Because I didn't even know that.

MARY *[cross talk]*: Yeah, I had the same meeting. I didn't see the salaries. I didn't snoop.

JOSH *[cross talk]*: I hope you didn't snoop. I hope you didn't see what I was making.

MARY *[cross talk]*: Well. No, but I think everyone was called in and said "Listen, you know the licensing thing and the budget and Warner Brothers and a whole bunch of business reasons."

JOSH *[cross talk]*: Yeah, part of the discussion was the show has become tremendously expensive. We are not--

MARY: If we want to have another season, then--

JOSH: We're not what we used to be, we want there to be another season, here's what I can do. Which I just thought was a very straight-up and lovely thing to do.

MARY: I agree.

JOSH: Because in this business most of the time just... you find out when nobody calls you to tell you to show up three months later.

MARY: I thought it was so nice, agreed.

JOSH: And then the other thing he did, which is *completely* unheard of was, he said "And for the last two episodes, I'm going to give you a raise. So that when you're looking for another job, your quote will be higher than what it is now."

MARY: So that's incredible. And I have something similar, too, I had the same meeting. And I was like "well, eleven's not great since I budgeted for this and I moved back to LA."

JOSH: Oh, that's what I should've said! (*laughter*)

MARY: But you know, no but I was happy to do it. I was thrilled to do it, I said "I'll do whatever you have." And then he also did something, he said, "Listen I can't-- it's hard for me to make up that money to you. But why don't I just write you in on a bunch of *ER*'s."

JOSH: I do remember that.

MARY: And I was like I'll take that. Yes, thank you so much. (*laughter*)

JOSH [*cross talk*]: I should've held out for *ER*.

MARY [*cross talk*]: So nice, I mean what a gentleman. I mean, no one does that, so it was really...

JOSH: He's one of the best. He's one of the great bosses of all time. Because that's all just completely unnecessary--

MARY: 100%.

JOSH: Compassionate treatment of employees.

LAWRENCE: That's who this guy is. I mean, he was just the best executive producer you could work with in television. I just loved every minute of being around him.

HRISHI: Let us rush towards the end of our episode the way this episode rushes towards the end a little bit. (*laughter*) Because in the final moments, we have this great heroic scene of Santos getting the nomination-- or sort of, we don't actually see it happening but he's got the nomination. The president comes in and convinces the teachers unions to back him and this is going to seal his path to the nomination.

JOSH: In part just with his magnetic aura. Like, you see the guy walk in the door and he's like "It's the president...!" It's just, the Martin Sheen-ness of it all is enough to-- (*laughter*)

MARY: And that teacher tenure just goes out the window. *(laughter)*

JOSH: Exactly. Whatever.

MARY: Tenure schmenure.

JOSH: I'm yours.

(laughter)

HRISHI: And post-seduction, the guy casts all the votes from New York to Santos, and we figure that things go according to the way that Josh said they would if they could get the teachers unions. But then in the last couple moments of the episode - last couple minutes literally of the episode - we find out that Leo is going to be the vice presidential running mate.

(applause and cheers)

HRISHI: Which is a beautiful moment in the plot. I mean, it's a beautiful thing that that's going to be the ticket. But it's a moment that I wish I had-- I don't know, 10 minutes to sink my teeth into instead of two minutes because on paper, it's a little bit strange. As we have been reminded throughout this episode, again there's no chemistry between Leo and Santos. They don't see eye to eye, Santos just called him out in his speech-- well sort of, he subtweeted him. *(laughter)*

JOSH: Exactly.

HRISHI: And I mean Leo still doesn't really know how to totally pronounce his name.
(laughter)

JOSH: I also thought that the baker's wife-- Baker's wife. Governor Baker's wife plot also had me thinking about Leo and his viability as a vice presidential candidate.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. There are things that--

JOSH: Things are raised.

HRISHI: Mm-hm, yeah. And some of the stuff are things that were discussed when they were talking about possibly dropping Hoynes ages ago. So I would've loved to have been in the room when they had the discussion about how to decide that it was going to be Leo. But do you have any insight at least in the writers' room about how you decided that it was going to be Leo?

LAWRENCE: The writers' room is a slow moving thing. There are very few "a-ha" moments in the writers' room, it's very rare. You crawl along and you come to stuff usually only when you have to. So who's going to be the vice presidential nominee? And we're looking at this field of possibility within the Democrats that we've created and we're not particularly inspired by our field of possibility of these guys. And then, you know it would be wrong to simply pull

somebody out of the air who we'd never seen before. "Oh, let's get this amazing Congresswoman who no one's ever heard of who suddenly appears." At that point, unless you create someone several episodes back who can slide into this, then you're going to have to pick out of the deck of cards you have. And so the justifications for Leo were many, including age balance on the ticket, experience balance on the ticket, and... he was when I look at him now in the post-Obama era, he was very much a Biden kind of vice president to a Barack Obama. Which was Barack Obama's choice. That was his deliberate choice, no one manoeuvred him into that. And what Barack Obama liked about Biden was that experience and all of that knowledge that Biden brought to it. I had personally had plenty of practical, political justification for why this is Leo. The series had powerful, dramatic justification for why this is Leo. I mean, really powerful dramatic justification. And so those two things converged but it was mostly probably the dramatic justification that drew us to him. And really if not Leo, just look around and tell me who else? Like, who else would've made sense on that ticket the next year?

HRISHI: No, I think absolutely there are great reasons for it. I think President Bartlet's popularity at that moment, a way to tie in some kind of dynastic sense of continuity with the previous administration. All that stuff makes sense. I just would've loved to have gotten a little bit of it.

LAWRENCE: No, I know. I was surprised actually when I watched this episode and I saw how quickly we did that and moved on. But I know that if we had made a meal out of it, it would've been one of those-- I mean, the only thing to do is show you the "talking him into it" scene. And I think by that time we trusted the viewers - come on, this is the season finale of Season 6. You know exactly what this scene is. Leo says "That's crazy. I shouldn't be-- here's the 10 reasons I shouldn't do it." You know, and then Josh says this. And Matt Santos says this. And ultimately in the end, Jed Bartlet says *this, this, this, and this-- (laughter)*

JOSH: That's so true.

LAWRENCE: And Leo's the Vice President. *(cheers and applause)* And we didn't need to write that for you because you knew what that would be.

JOSH: That's true. And it would've killed the momentum of the episode.

HRISHI: Well there *is* a moment that I want to talk about-- maybe we can end on this. The moment that I think does that exact thing *and* I felt like I didn't need anything more. I did not need any words or anything. This beautiful shot that Alex Graves does that's in some ways a reflection of something he did in the Season 3 season finale. At the end before the president announces for the first time-- when he presents the first time the ticket, there's a shot of the president and Leo and they're sort of facing each other, but they aren't looking at each other. I don't know if you remember this scene. It's the shot in the Season 3 finale when the president gives the order to assassinate Shareef, there's this really beautiful shot of the two of them together. The president says "Take him." The composition is kind of unusual for this show, but it's a tight shot of their two heads. And they don't speak to each other. The resident is a little bit out of focus, the focus is on Leo even though he's further back, and then we get the final scene. And that was, I just thought that was so beautifully done.

Without any dialogue or anything. Just with the composition and the staging and blocking of it. We sort of all got what that meant.

LAWRENCE: John Wells wrote them into that spot, physically. And then Alex took that spot. (*applause*) And you know, made it a work of art. I mean, it's just... [*choked up*] And I can't even talk about it because John Spencer's in that shot.

(*applause and silence*)

HRISHI [*sighs*]: Yeah.

JOSH: It's hard to watch.

LAWRENCE: I can watch it, I can't talk about it. It's a different thing.

JOSH: Fair enough.

HRISHI: Thank you all so much for coming out tonight.

(*applause and cheers*)

JOSH: Thanks to our guests, Lawrence O'Donnell and Mary McCormack. (*cheers*)

HRISHI: Thank you to Zach McNeas who's here tonight--

JOSH: In da house!

HRISHI: -doing the recording. (*cheers*) Thank you to Margaret Miller and Nick Song. Thanks to Dave Nadelberg from the *Mortified* podcast, which is another Radiotopia show that you can check out. He was the voice of Odysseus. (*laughter*) And speaking of Radiotopia, *The West Wing Weekly* is a part of Radiotopia.

JOSH [*daft voice*]: Which is a cavalcade of fantastic podcasts! (*laughter*) You can find out more about the other Radiotopia podcasts at radiotopia.fm.

HRISHI: Okay.

JOSH: Okay.

AUDIENCE: What's next?

(*cheers and applause*)

[Outro Music]