

The West Wing Weekly
7.01: "The Ticket"

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Welcome to season 7.

JOSH: Yee-haw. Is this the home stretch? Are we calling this the home stretch? Or am I-- is it premature?

HRISHI: I think maybe too early to call it the home stretch, right?

JOSH: Okay. Fair enough.

HRISHI: Today we're talking about "The Ticket". It's the season premiere of season 7.

JOSH: It was written by Debora Cahn, it was directed by Christopher Misiano, and it first aired on September 25th, 2005.

HRISHI: How about that? This is the first season premiere that was ever written by someone other than the show runner.

JOSH: Oh, how about that. Interesting.

HRISHI: Yeah. Congratulations to Debora Cahn.

JOSH: Well done.

HRISHI: In this episode, it's four days after the events of the season 6 finale and the Democratic convention. Things are off to a rocky start for the brand new Santos-McGarry campaign - the titular ticket - and inside the White House, they're investigating the leak of the top secret military space shuttle that's now off to rescue the astronauts in the space station. The campaign and the White House have some trouble coordinating their individual needs into a unified plan, which is exactly what the Republican Speaker of the House wants. But before we get to all of that, we start with a time jump to three years later.

JOSH: Yeah, how about that.

HRISHI: What the hell?

JOSH: [laughs] That was *my* reaction! I remember shooting that scene and in my mind it was part of the finale. [both laugh] I didn't recall that it was part of the season opener. Why? Whatever for?

HRISHI: I don't know, I'm very against it.

JOSH: I was not a big fan either. It's not also incredibly revelatory.

HRISHI: No, it feels like they're raining on the parade of, you know, anticipation that we might feel as the show heads towards the finale.

JOSH: Right and there's nothing particular that's teased there I think, that makes us intrigued by how we're going to get there.

HRISHI: Right. It's not like someone's got a gun to their head and it's a crazy action-packed *in medias res* thing that we're dropped into and then we have to figure out "How did they get to that place?" and then "How are they going to get out?!".

JOSH: Right. It's of very little value I think.

HRISHI: I think we've talked about this before. I'm someone who doesn't watch previews for a movie. Did you know that?

JOSH: That doesn't surprise me but I don't remember explicitly ever learning.

HRISHI: Maybe we haven't talked about it. I don't watch previews, I don't read reviews of something before I watch it. I want to go in and I want to see the story unfold for the first time as I'm watching it. I love reserved seating in theatres, because that way, I can-- I know where I'm sitting and I just wait until the previews are over and then I walk in and take my seat.

JOSH: Oh I'm a sucker for trailers. I was going to say I'm with you in theory. I do read reviews and I try as soon as my interest is piqued to stop reading a review. Like, I agree with you, I don't want to spoil anything but I will start to learn about a project and then once I feel I'm hooked and like I'm going to put down money for it, I don't want to know anymore but I *am* a sucker for trailers at the movie theater itself. I enjoy that.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I enjoy insta-reviewing them with my wife. [Hrishi laughs] Instant decision about whether or not we're interested and whether it seems worthy.

HRISHI: I love watching trailers for movies that I *won't* see.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: I like the art of the trailer, and it's-- yeah, I think it's really fun to just get a sense of a movie. But if it's a movie that I want to see, and you know I never know if it's a movie that I'm going to see when the trailer starts, I don't want to ruin the experience. I love just watching a movie cold. And when someone spoils a thing for you a lot of times someone might say "Well this doesn't give anything away... but at the end when the guy does this [laughs] it's really cool and that was my favorite part and when you get to that part you're going to know

what I mean.” That’s what this opening scene sort of feels like, like there’s a sense that they’re saying “We’re going to get to this place and it’s going to be great, and here’s some cool information.” And I just feel like no! C.J. and Danny have a baby together?! How? That is so--

JOSH [*interrupting*]: Well I can explain that to you off mic.

HRISHI: Okay. That would be great. [both laugh]

JOSH: I’ve done it twice.

HRISHI: Really? So 100% success rate.

JOSH: That’s right. Or 100% failure rate.

[both laugh]

HRISHI: Right. The fact that C.J. and Danny are back together, let alone they have a kid together, is so far from where we’d left things off and I feel immediately cheated of all this intermediary steps that I want to see. That’s an exciting development but I didn’t get to see that. Will is a congressman? I mean, it just-- I understand that yeah these might be natural outcomes but I just want to see these characters who I love *earn* their happily ever after.

JOSH: See, I didn’t even pick up that Will was a congressman. I was staggered by the fact that Will got Lasik.

HRISHI: That’s what I thought too!

JOSH: I didn’t hear anything beyond that, I just-- beyond seeing that. [Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: I wrote “Will is a congressman, exclamation point! He’s a backbencher and maybe got Lasik.” On the same page, you and I.

JOSH: There it is. I in fact have had Lasik surgery. I was trying to remember when it happened. But I don’t think they wrote it in, but I’ve had Lasik.

HRISHI: But you still wear glasses sometimes.

JOSH: Well that’s true - but he also said when I had Lasik, he said “Look at 45 or so you’re gonna come back and say I can’t read. And just know that that’s not what we’re addressing here, and that’s kind of everybody. That’s like the full population. So you’re gonna need reading glasses at some point.” And in fact, also my distance vision has also deteriorated slightly so I don’t *need* glasses now, but they help me and I prefer them.

HRISHI: Mm-hm. Okay but so at this point, Will Bailey had Lasik. Had you actually had Lasik at that point?

JOSH: I can't recall. I can't remember whether they wrote it in because I had and I said-- or it was just a way, because obviously I was clearly as young as ever. [Hrishi laughs] So maybe it was just a way to make me look a little bit older slash different.

HRISHI: Different, yeah.

JOSH: It also looked to me, I have to say - although it would have been horrible if there were you know, painting in little streaks of grey and whatnot - but it just looked to me like this was filmed the same time the rest of the episode was filmed. [laughing] We all look exactly the same, other than the glasses.

HRISHI: Yeah. Okay well so that happened and I'm not into it. You know, I've finished the series, I know what the ending is and everything but I feel a little but cheated by the intro to the season premiere.

JOSH: Well I'll say I was a little bit-- the C.J. / Danny thing was the one thing that made me think "Oh! This will be interesting to see how they get there." And the rest of it just seemed like kind of weak sauce. We didn't get anything about Charlie, which I thought was odd. If we *are* going to do this sort of hokey, "And this is what happens to him, and this is what happens to her," why we get nothing for Charlie I don't know.

HRISHI: No, it feels like we're starting the episode with the closing credits to *Animal House*.

JOSH [laughs]: Right it's one of those things.

HRISHI: Yeah, freeze frame on everyone. "C.J. and Danny move to Santa Monica. They have one child." So that was a disappointment. But I have to say, everything that comes after that I really enjoyed, I thought the rest of this episode was great.

JOSH: Yeah I liked this episode very much. I like the whole gist of it, the main focus being Leo's vice presidential candidacy and whether it was a great idea in the first place and we get to see how it's going. It sort of picks up on a place that we started to go at our live event. Of course when we did the live event I had not watched season 7 episode 1, nor did I remember a thing about it. And I started to bring up I think whether my feeling that Leo's credibility as a candidate - or his liabilities rather - in terms of his health and his prior history of addiction, or his history of addiction. And Lawrence I think kind of just didn't entirely engage, he just kind of said, of course-- he really felt that Leo made a lot of sense as the vice presidential candidate, and yet here we have a season opener that really looks at whether or not Leo's dragging down the ticket.

HRISHI: Mm-hm. it feels a little bit like a complaint that I know you've had in the past about multiple things especially with Josh and Santos, which is like - did you not talk before this decision was made? Like how are we not seeing the two of you sort of have a discussion where you figure this thing out. And it feels a little bit like we're seeing the aftermath of that happening again.

JOSH: Yeah, I had a little bit of that.

HRISHI: Yeah the end of Season 6, Leo gets added to the ticket in what felt like a very quick kind of addendum - an important one that as I mentioned I wished I had had the chance to see. And here we're seeing the aftermath of now Santos is like "Hey - who *is* this guy?"

JOSH [laughing]: Yeah, right. Of course. I *did* have flashes of what you're referring to, and most strongly when they finally sit down, it sort of ends the episode. It *is* a good feeling, it kind of like-- "Oh, they're making plans," Josh says, but I did have that thought. Particularly there, like *now* they're having this meeting? How do you see me? What do you see as my position as Vice President?

HRISHI: Yeah. I mean, you know, in the end I'm ok with it because I think that again if we just had a couple more seconds at the end of season 6, we could have seen the idea that the decision to go with Leo *had* to be done in such a rushed way that it's set up that Santos might have been like, "Okay, I'm just going with what you're suggesting, Josh. I am not sure that I'm fully on board, but this is what we have to do." We can fill in the blanks there and maybe that's what they expect us to do. It only bothers me to the extent that it pokes at the credibility of the situation, the set up you know. Because it doesn't feel like it's *entirely* realistic that a presidential candidate would just-- would be like, "Sure whatever you say campaign manager. I don't really know this person but we'll go with it." So I felt like there was a little bit of evidence for this even though that evidence came in the future.

JOSH: Yeah, right. One of the things I do like about this episode is rather than opening with a weirdly delayed "Why didn't they have this conversation sooner about Leo as vice president?", it drops us right into the thick of it where Leo himself is having to deal with what the press is throwing at him. So instead of talking about it, we're seeing it in action and even though you might wonder whether it ought to have been addressed earlier, we're just seeing it live action, current problem.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

REPORTER (CHRISTINE): When was the last time you went to a meeting?

LEO: I've made statements about that before, you should take a look at them.

MALE REPORTER: Does your cardiologist think you can handle this kind of stress?

LEO: My cardiologist- [fades out]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I think that this is really Josh's episode. This is Josh's story, and that last scene is a really great sort of justification for how he thinks and how that character operates. There's a moment early on where he is trying to get Santos and Leo together.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

JOSH: Hopefully you two will have some time this afternoon. Get to know each other, maybe lunch.

SANTOS: Who?

JOSH: You and Leo.

SANTOS: We've got one day in DC, you really think we should spend it on lunch?

JOSH: We're talking takeout-- [fades out]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And at first it seems like it might be a matter of getting some details straight, because where the episode begins after we come back from the flash forward is Leo about to give a speech. And he just doesn't have some basic details about Santos down.

JOSH: Right. Down to the pronunciation of his last name.

HRISHI: Exactly. I'm so happy that they addressed that because that was all over the place in season 6.

JOSH: Yeah, that's right.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

ANNABETH: Let's remember to call him "Santos".

LEO: The candidate?

ANNABETH: That's what he calls himself.

LEO: What'd I call him?

ANNABETH: "Santos," with an "ah" instead of an "eh."

LEO: "Ah's" not more correct?

ANNABETH: In Mexico.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And so you have to respect what the person's pronunciation of it is, you can't impose your own. That's something I sometimes have to think about when I meet other Indian people who have a more Americanised pronunciation of their name than I would have expected. And then I have to sort of back off from that and be like, well of course.

JOSH: Do you judge such a person on any level?

HRISHI [*whispers*]: Yes.

JOSH [laughs]: I like that you whispered that. I think the mic still picked it up.

[Both laugh]

JOSH: No, that's interesting. I mean, it's an interesting question. I don't think that's good or bad, I think it's understandable.

HRISHI: Yeah. And then Leo doesn't know whether he was in the Navy vs the Marine Corps. He's getting to know his running mate. He has to run and gun while he's doing it.

JOSH: Indeed.

HRISHI: And Annabeth is his Chief of Staff maybe, it looks like? She's no longer at the White House, she's now working for the campaign and she is Leo's main staffer, it seems like.

JOSH: Right. And her future say three years hence, doesn't matter.

HRISHI: Right. [laughs]

JOSH: Or she would have been in that first scene.

HRISHI: Yep.

JOSH: But I mean in our discussion of that scene, I was thinking about bringing up the fact that indeed we do not see John Spencer as Leo, and we know that he *has* passed away. Is it possible that scene was f-- why *isn't* he in that scene? Was it filmed after? That's what I can't try to figure out. Had he passed away, was it filmed for a future episode and stuck on there?

HRISHI: I think there's a reason why he wasn't in the scene, and it's kind of a silly reason I think. If you remember, that scene ends with the suspenseful build up of "Who is the president?"

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Josh walks in and says "Oh, the president has arrived." And we see the limo, and then we just see-- one thing we *do* know is the president has feet.

JOSH [laughing]: That's true.

HRISHI: But we don't know, is the president accompanied by Vice President Feet? We don't know. Is it Vice President Leo Feet?

JOSH: Well now that you bring it up, I'm wondering-- we've definitely established that Vinick has feet, because when we first meet him he's polishing his shoes.

HRISHI: Oh right, yes.

JOSH: Has it been made clear that Santos has feet?

HRISHI: Uhh, I think we might have seen a below the ankle shot.

JOSH: Perhaps so.

HRISHI: Yeah. But so if Leo is in fact the vice president, then he would be arriving in the motorcade. Maybe.

JOSH: I guess. Maybe.

HRISHI: Potentially.

JOSH: I don't know. There's no vice presidential motorcade?

HRISHI: He has theoretically vice presidential duties to attend to. That could be one reason why he's not there in the room.

JOSH: Okay.

HRISHI: Doesn't it seem a little bit like they're saying, "Oh by the way, Santos won," to have Josh be the person who runs into the room and say, "Oh the president's here"?

JOSH: It sure seemed that way. [laughs]

HRISHI: And I didn't want to assume that that's the case because that just seems like even just *too* big of a spoiler. Like that is the major moment of suspense of the entire season.

JOSH: Right. And given the fact that they do this sort of pan up and stop before we see his face, they're obviously going for mystery, so-- I guess you're left thinking maybe they're trying to throw us off by having Josh come in and say, "The president's here" and then we're going to reveal that it's Vinick. Or I guess.

HRISHI: I guess. I mean, I don't know-- is it a red herring of a red herring? Like are they trying-- I feel like they're using reverse reverse psychology on us. Or are they?

JOSH [laughs]: I think I know what you're trying to get me to say, but I'm not going to fall for it.

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: Yeah, no. I don't know. It doesn't work I guess, that first scene really, on any level.

HRISHI: Yeah, I just don't-- why *is* Josh the person to walk in and say "The president is here."? Are they trying to lean us towards Santos? I don't know. The whole thing is just bizarre.

JOSH: It's odd. As is, I would argue the *Time* magazine cover that has a picture of Jimmy Smits, and the headline "President Santos?". I want to give *Time* magazine more credit for-- I mean, yeah he's the nominee so the question is, is he going to become president? It doesn't seem like a viable *Time* magazine cover that they'd put the Democratic nominee on and question, "Hey, is *this* guy going to be president?". Yeah, that's the question. These guys are running for president. Is it going to be President Vinick or President Santos? I think you would say something-- you know, it would be, "Is America ready for the first Latino president?" or something, but just "President Santos?". [laughter] Yeah, we get it! Hey wow, you're right that really *is* the question. Thanks *Time* magazine. Like, really? I just feel like the *West Wing* writers could have given that another 15 minutes of batting around.

HRISHI: Maybe it's a set up so that Santos can say, "You know what I like about the 'President Santos question mark'? If you tilt your head just the right way and you squint, it says 'President Santos period'." So we mentioned Annabeth is working for the campaign. Another change in the show is that Kristin Chenoweth is now in the opening credits of the show.

JOSH: I noticed. I didn't take out my stopwatch, but I figured something got shaved off my time.

HRISHI: Actually, I don't think so because Stockard Channing is *not* in the opening credits anymore.

JOSH: Ohh, ok.

HRISHI: Yeah. Also by the way, when we do see Brad come in for the first time, I was happy to see Brad's hair was back to what I consider its sort of normal raffish, rakish length.

JOSH: Mm-hm. I agree. That's our Brad.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: He's still got good hair by the way. He's transitioned into silver fox very nicely.

HRISHI: Mm-hm. As people love to point out on our social media every time we post a picture.

JOSH: That is true. I don't disagree though, I'll give him that. He's a fine looking older, older gentleman.

HRISHI: So the thing that everyone is concerned about at the beginning of this episode is the Gallup poll. It's going to be a key indicator of the campaign's progress after the convention. The first real indicator actually, and so everybody wants to know what it's going to say. And it turns out actually the White House knows before the campaign knows, and that's sort of the first indication that there's *still* this distance between the White House and the campaign, even though the previous reasons for the distance has evaporated, right. There was a while where the president was trying to stay neutral while the nominee was being sorted out.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Now the nominee *has* been sorted out, but there's still kind of-- they have the information but they're not just calling up Josh and saying, "Hey by the way, we have the data."

JOSH: Somewhere presumably, someone is drilling President Bartlet in how to say Santos.

HRISHI: You'd hope.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: But then the Gallup poll comes out, all the staffers gets copies of it. Annabeth is smiling she's happy about it, Josh is happy. It shows them as nine points down.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

SANTOS: Only nine points down? Yes!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's actually a good thing because it could be a lot worse.

JOSH: Right. They clearly expected worse.

HRISHI: Yeah. And Annabeth is happy and Josh is happy and Santos is happy. That's the first page read. But deeper into it, it turns out Leo's numbers on their own are *not* good. We get the return of Joey Lucas again to break down the numbers, and she actually has a more sobering take on what the Gallup poll indicates than that sort of initial top-line read. And she's the one who introduces this idea that Santos, while popular, is not popular in a way that makes him seem Presidential. One little moment that I liked a lot?

JOSH: Sure.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

EDIE: Any chance Mallory'd be willing to bring the baby on the road?

BRAM: Is it a photogenic baby?

[pause]

BRAM: Hey, not all of them are.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes. I have that one written down too actually.

[laughter]

HRISHI: And Leo just gives him a look of death but Bram, I think, accurately says you know, "What? Not all of them are."

JOSH: Yeah. Guy's just trying to do his job. No, I liked that line too. Good delivery. I was just going to comment that I would have thought that everyone would have read fully the full poll and been on it, and realized quite quickly that there's a Leo issue.

HRISHI: I think maybe they did and Josh is like "Okay, the headline is nine points down."

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: That's what really matters. I was a little surprised to find that out and also see Annabeth's reaction. Like Josh's reaction, Santos's reaction - their immediate reaction rather - made sense, but the fact that Annabeth's, who is Leo's main person looked through it and smiled too. *That* was surprising to me because I thought, yeah wouldn't she be specifically looking for what Leo's results were?

JOSH: Yeah you're right of course, for sure she would have picked up on it.

HRISHI: Yeah. And then on top of that, *Santos* is getting questions about his health. It's not just Leo who has to field them, Santos is getting them too and he is not thrilled about that. So I started to say earlier that I really liked this episode, that it is kind of a justification for Josh and his wisdom ultimately, because he's trying to get those two guys together. But it feels a little bit like what keeps them from getting together to have that moment is a sense of resentment or weird passive aggressive energy from Santos about having Leo as a running mate that makes him kind of push him away.

JOSH: Yes, I agree with you. And I like how that tension between the two people on the ticket sort of bubbles underneath multiple scenes over the course of the episode.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I like how we're getting it without explicitly addressing it. It feels well-written and well-played. And well-directed.

HRISHI: And I love John Spencer's performance throughout this whole episode. He does such a great job of showing Leo trying to find the right place for himself-- you know, kind of being a little bit discombobulated when he has to be the candidate, and then trying to settle into this groove that he's much more used to, which is that of a campaign strategist, and then being rebuffed.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

JOSH: Okay, the Congressman calls this list, Leo this. Within the next 24 hours. We gotta do some hand holding.

LEO: Kelly and I go way back. Zwick too. Put them on my list.

SANTOS: I'll call them all. I'll do all the calls. Who else?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He just can't find the comfortable seat for himself. And I thought that was written beautifully and performed beautifully.

JOSH: I agree. It's a lovely performance full of great moments and yeah you can see in his eyes the struggle to sort of find his position and sit comfortably in the race. There's a great moment, I think it's late in the episode where he's sort of reduced to being told what shirt he should change into. And he kind of throws it over his shoulder and walks off, and you can see him trying to navigate that fine line between asserting himself and just sort of going with the flow of what's needed of him, or what they think.

HRISHI: Yeah. And it makes the dramatic choice of having it be Leo so smart and just so justified because this is the person who we have come to know as the person who knows all the angles, basically the king of strategy for them. And suddenly he has to be subjected to the kinds of decisions that he would make for other people. And all his own decision making power gets taken away and he just has to experience something that should be very familiar to him in a really unfamiliar way.

JOSH: Yeah I also like that his greatest assets are in some ways liability as well, which is that he can bring this sort of experiential heft to the ticket and bring what he knows and what he's learned and some expertise in foreign policy. But that very asset threatens to appear to outweigh what Santos brings to the ticket. So there's a-- he wants to be there and be able to help, but the impression that he's the real deal on the ticket is problematic.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's really great. You know, they have some disagreements about how to handle the stuff about Leo's past.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

LEO: I could talk about addictions and heart attacks till I'm blue in the face. Best strategy is call it old news and move on.

SANTOS: It's not the best strategy, it's not working. I'm spending half my day talking about it. Do the interview.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And suddenly I think maybe in the most palpable way so far you get a sense of Leo's fallibility as a strategist. I think everything about the president's MS - the failure to disclose and the consequences of it - I think the show made that more about the president. And maybe a little bit the First Lady, and maybe a *little* bit about Leo. But not *really* that

much about Leo. But you know he had to be a huge part of that decision not to tell the country not to talk about it.

JOSH: Certainly, yeah.

HRISHI: And I couldn't help but think of that philosophy being at play here, where Leo is just like "Eh, let's just brush it under the rug and we can just move on and we'll get past it." And Santos having a fundamental disagreement with that, and being like, "No, we have to come out ahead and address it." Which is ultimately what the president had to do with his MS and maybe if Leo had been oriented differently, that whole storyline would have played out differently.

JOSH: Perhaps so. But I mean, in Leo's defense, he *has* dealt with it. He just-- it's not up to him I guess whether or not the public and the press are going to demand that he deal with it again, and deal with it in present day. It's not gonna work enough to say, "Look, I've said what I have to say I've been open about my health and about my sobriety." And there is a moment that I either didn't like because it was kind of funny and off, or maybe it was more subtly clever than I realized. Which is that early on when Annabeth and Leo have a discussion about how he should sort of pivot off of questions he doesn't want to answer. And then we see him go out and he does it very successfully, I think in part to also tee up when he does it less successfully later in the episode. But one thing that happens is there's a press question, "When was the last time you went to a meeting?" and Leo says, "I've made statements about that before, you should look at them." And at first it kind of made me laugh, because it doesn't even really make sense as a response. She's asking you "When's the last time you went to a meeting?". If somebody had asked that previously, it would have been-- you know it's like, "What did you have for breakfast today?". "Well, I think I was asked that question three weeks ago and I gave an answer, why don't you look at that?". [Hrishi laughs] She's asking you *today*, when's the last time you went to a meeting?

HRISHI: That's true. Unless the statement was--

JOSH: I'm no longer going to meetings.

HRISHI: Or I regularly attend meetings. For the sake of the anonymity that's part of AA, I don't disclose when and where I go to them. But I still do attend regularly.

JOSH: Fair enough. That would-- you're right, that would be the second possible answer that he could have given earlier that would shut down the issue. But in a way almost I thought, later in the episode when-- first they kind of give Leo an opportunity maybe to come to the realization on his own that it's a good idea to sit down and cry for a few minutes on 20/20 and get it over with. And then later more pointedly, Santos *tells* him to do it. And I thought maybe this earlier moment is just more of a stark example of Leo really, he just doesn't want to deal with it. And not realizing that he's going to get these kind of contemporaneous questions like "When's the last time you went to a meeting?" and it's not good enough to just say, "I've addressed this stuff before."

HRISHI: Yeah, I think the major issue probably is, it's one thing to make that statement - even if the statement is exactly the same, there's a difference in meaning when you say it as

a Chief of Staff or as a Labor Secretary or as a campaign strategist, versus saying the exact same thing as a vice presidential candidate.

JOSH: Yes, I'm sure you're right.

HRISHI: And the press wants to be able to run a clip that they filmed today as opposed to running something he said three years ago. Maybe let's move into the White House for a second--

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: --and come back to the campaign.

JOSH: The return of Babish.

HRISHI: We get Oliver Babish back, yeah.

JOSH: Babish is ba-back.

HRISHI [laughs]: And pugnacious as ever.

JOSH: Indeed. I love Oliver Platt. And I love him in this role.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's funny how much he-- I feel like he really enjoys needling C.J.

JOSH: Yes, even the way he's lying on her couch as he's revealed as annoying.

HRISHI [laughing]: Yeah. And this feels like a great continuation of their relationship from when it was first introduced around the MS, the "17 People" stuff. And yeah, he will not give her a break. But it's ultimately in the service of him trying to do his job as best as he can. Like, he doesn't want to get brushed off by her. He resists any attempts for her to just say, "Well, look I've got other things to do."

JOSH: Yes. It's also clear in his conversation and his questioning of her that he is there not so much to get to the bottom of the leak, but to protect her.

HRISHI: Right, yeah. The fact that he ends with C.J. saying:

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

C.J.: You didn't even ask me.

OLIVER: Ask you what?

C.J.: "Did you tell Greg Brock of The New York Times of the existence of a classified military space shuttle?"

OLIVER: I don't want to know.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I *did* write down at that point, I love that moment and that response from him. But I did write down, would she really not at that point say, "Well for the record, I didn't do it." Or you know, why *wouldn't* she-- why wouldn't she claim not to? Unless she maybe did it.

HRISHI: I think that is really the line that they're trying to walk here. It felt like C.J.'s reaction to the idea that she might have been the leak was so genuine and credible in that moment, she was like:

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

C.J.: You think the leak came from me. I'm the suspect.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: For anybody watching, it would immediately extinguish this sort of trail of breadcrumbs that the show had been trying to lead us towards.

JOSH: Really?

HRISHI: You know, every time they say "Oh, there's a leak and we think it's coming from inside the White House," cut to a shot of C.J. Or you know, "We have somebody and you aren't going to like who it is." Cut to C.J. You know. Then she says, "Oh you think *I'm* the suspect," and she did it such a non-suspicious, genuine way. You know, just genuinely disbelieving what was happening that I thought oh okay, they're erasing it. But then they didn't. Then they kept going with it.

JOSH: Yeah no, I think they're clearly still feeding us stuff that is not entirely credible in the moment and it's clearly for the sake of the audience and trying to leave the question open. And I think foremost of these points is her not denying it to Babish.

HRISHI: Even then though, I actually was like okay that's fine, we're wrapping this up, it looks like they're no longer pointing our suspicion at C.J. But there's one more moment when they're all together in the Oval Office and Babish is telling the president that *he* does not want to continue the investigation, that he actually wants to hand the investigation over-- you know, or let the Attorney General do it because Babish doesn't have enough authority. He doesn't have subpoena power to do this in a way that will make them feel like they are above reproach in the way they're handling it. And the president says:

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: You have a suspect. Otherwise we wouldn't be having this conversation.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And again they cut to C.J.!

JOSH: Mm-hm. I agree, I also don't think it makes sense for the three of them to be in the Oval Office. For C.J. to be sitting there knowing that White House Counsel suspects her of it, and her having not denied it. You think she would've just-- and now she's in the presence of the president, and she's kind of giving him side looks like, "Oh, he's going to protect me" when Babish says "I'm not going to share the information of whom I suspect." The whole thing just doesn't entirely make sense to me.

HRISHI: The whole thing reminds me a little bit of a moment that I find frustrating in general. At the end of every episode of *Great British Bake Off*--

JOSH [laughs]: Here we go.

HRISHI: When they're about to announce who's going to leave - or really any reality show, but the only one I watch is *Great British Bake Off*.

JOSH: I only watch *all* of them. So make your point and I'll weigh in.

HRISHI: When they say:

[*The Great British Bake Off* excerpt]

SUE: As you know, we do have to lose one of you. And the person we're saying goodbye to today is--

[*suspenseful music and long pause*]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And it goes on forever. And the camera cuts between this person, close-up of this person. You know, they've kind of narrowed it down. *We* have a sense of we think, we know who's going to go down--

JOSH [cross talk]: Sure. This happens in every rose ceremony on *The Bachelor* and *The Bachelorette* as well.

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. We have some sense of who's going to be cut. And then they just keep alternating shots between-- and it is impossible not to try and reverse engineer--

JOSH [cross talk]: Right. How would they edit this if they want to surprise us?

[both laugh]

HRISHI: Yeah. Where it's like, oh well they cut to that person first, is that because *that's* who's going home? And then they cut-- they're like, well but they showed this person last. Well they *wouldn't* show that person last if they were going home. [Josh laughs] You know, we're going to find out in a second. [both laugh] So like--

JOSH [cross talk]: I do the same thing, that's very funny.

HRISHI: Can I just tell my brain to stop trying to anticipate who it's going to be? I know they're trying to get me to feel these feelings. The producers, the editors are making me think about what's going to happen next, and I don't-- I just want to know. [both laugh] There's no dramatization there to happen. You know, there's no plot. There's no information that they're actually giving to us.

JOSH: It's just images.

HRISHI: And it feels like it can go on forever. So that's what this moment and this part of the plot feels like.

JOSH: Right. Yeah, no I agree with you. And that Oval Office had some sort of again, moments like that. Cut to, cut to, cut to. And I was thinking, now this is where C.J. would say "He thinks it's me and I didn't do it Mr. President, just so you know."

HRISHI: Yeah. Cut to close-up of Kate. Did she do it? Cut to C.J., did she do it? Cut to Toby, did he do it? Cut to Kelwick did he do-- you know it's... and so there isn't really like an engine of plot motivating us closer to one or another.

JOSH: That said, it's entirely possible that we're going to ultimately get the most dramatic rose ceremony ever.

HRISHI [laughing]: Maybe it'll happen in the *Rose Garden*.

JOSH: Right, boom.

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

[ad break]

JOSH: And now, back to the show.

HRISHI: So there's also a nice moment here in this scene with Babish where Babish recommends they just let the AG handle the investigation, and there's some concern as to whether or not the Attorney General could be objective. Which makes sense, he's an appointed Cabinet member. But the president says:

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: The AG hates us, we hate him. It doesn't get more objective than that.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I don't know if you remember this, but that's a callback to a previous Debora Cahn episode, "Abu el Banat."

JOSH: Mm-mm, I *didn't* remember. In fact I also wondered about that, that one got a little question mark from me. That was a "talk to Hrishi" point.

HRISHI: Yeah. It is a callback to a subplot in that episode where - do you remember Dylan Baker was a-- guest starred on this show as Alan Fisk?

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: At this point in the administration, Alan Fisk is the Attorney General. And that's the episode where the Attorney General starts prosecuting doctors in Oregon for providing patients with medical aid in dying. Presumably as a set-up for a run for Governor in his--

JOSH [interrupting]: For a run for office, that's right.

HRISHI: Yes, in his home state of Mississippi.

[West Wing Episode 5.09 excerpt]

ALAN: How long before there's a lawyer arguing, "We can't limit this to terminal patients? We ought to include the chronically ill?" When is it allowing children to make the decision for their parents?

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Yes. When is it allowing the state to decide, not families? We'll just start knocking off the weak and the indigent along with the sick and dying. When does my administration completely deteriorate into the Third Reich?

ALAN: I'm not suggesting...

PRESIDENT BARTLET [interrupting]: The federal government has no place here. The question is a moral one, an individual one. Grappling with the nature of life and the purview of God, in which the federal government has no... Forget it. You do what you want. The courts are gonna nail you. You're counting on my silence, and you just lost it.

ALAN: Sir, a public debate...

PRESIDENT BARTLET [interrupting]: Yeah, I didn't want to get on TV with Oprah and talk about who's gonna cut my meat when the coordination goes, but c'est la vie. The lid's off. You pull this crap one more time, you're fired.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I guess he hasn't. 'Cause I'm wondering why *hasn't* he been fired by now.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think yeah, he's been more in line, but they definitely don't have much love between them.

JOSH: Apparently not.

HRISHI: I don't know if that's enough to convince *other people*-- if that's enough to convince Congress.

JOSH: Well maybe they just know that it would be *entirely* unacceptable to dismiss an Attorney General and replace him with one that would be more favorable to your administration. That would be so unheard of that they could not write that into a TV show.

HRISHI [*laughs*]: Ay-yi-yi.

HRISHI: But there *is* another investigation pending, Senator Weller wants to have an investigation of the leak. And the president feels like, he's like this is too many! This is now the third investigation!

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

BARTLET: We're running an investigation, the AG's running an investigation. What does he think Congress is going to find out that we won't?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Toby says that he doesn't think the AG is objective. The president says "the AG hates us, we hate him, it doesn't get more objective than that." It just-- you know. We know that that's true, but I don't think that that's a convincing argument for somebody outside of the White House.

JOSH: Mm.

HRISHI: Like of course Congress is going to want to run their own investigation, you can't just say "Yeah this guy... he doesn't like us, trust me."

JOSH: Right. And then it's so quaint later when Leo I think recommends to the president that he cooperate with Congressional investigation.

HRISHI: Right. I want to put up a link to an article that I read that I really enjoyed about the relationships between presidents and their Attorneys General over the years and how that's gone. There is a piece in the *Yale Law & Policy Review* titled "Too Close for Comfort: An Insider's View of Presidents and Their Attorneys General" by Kris Olson, who is a former US Attorney for the District of Oregon. And she is also the daughter-in-law of former Attorney General William Rogers who served under Nixon.

JOSH: Hmm.

HRISHI: It's a great, interesting read. So I'll put a link up to that so you can read it. Okay. Then there's also this issue of the education bill.

JOSH: Yes. I liked the idea of Haffley sort of out-manoeuving, or attempting to out-manoeuve, and the White House being stuck in a difficult situation. And I love the scene that it led up to between the President and Leo, where Leo tries to advocate on behalf of-- really on behalf of his own ticket and get the President to back down on trying to move forward with the bill. And the President a couple of times says, "Well what would you say if you were my Chief of Staff still?". I thought that was a great scene.

HRISHI: I thought so too. Yeah. It was the President calling bull[*expletive deleted*] on Leo and winning, and it was great.

JOSH [laughing]: Yeah, yes. Ultimately he gets sort of just a wry smile from Leo, which I took as sort of acknowledging that the president's right. He's not going to say it explicitly, but yeah I think that round goes to Bartlet.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: If you were my Chief of Staff...?

[long pause]

LEO [whispers]: Yeah.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Yeah, that's what I thought.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought that was really interesting and smart, because you can of course understand why the Santos campaign wants them to keep their hands off of it. Even though *everybody* knows exactly what's happening, that Haffley is just trying to play them. He's trying to play them off of each other, against each other, undercut the Santos campaign's key issue of education by dangling it as a sort of possible policy win for the Bartlet administration. It's really smart.

JOSH: Yeah, it's kind of brilliant.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: We know already from the polling that Santos has a substance issue. That doesn't sound right.

HRISHI [interrupting and laughing]: Well, Leo has a--

JOSH: Leo has a substance issue. But there-- in terms of appearing as a substantive *candidate*, Santos has a problem.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

JOEY [KENNY]: *Women love him, men want to have a beer with him. It's just not clear that it would occur to anybody to vote for him.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: He's great-looking, he's magnetic, he's charismatic. Or so we're told. [Hrishi laughs] And it's starting to be a bit of a liability that he's getting pegged as just another pretty face [Hrishi laughs]. And now we're told that his key policy initiative is possibly being stolen from him. [Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: One moment that surprised me, and I thought really - I mean I knew we were setting up a divide here between the two, but this felt like it took it just a *little* too far - was when Josh, when talking about this education policy potential, says:

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

JOSH: *You think we can bring it up in a debate after Jed Bartlet's already moved on it? We'll look like idiots.*

TOBY: *That's unfortunate. [fades out]*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Really, Josh? It hasn't been so long that you would suddenly stop referring to him as President Bartlet.

JOSH: Oh, yeah. I didn't notice that.

HRISHI: I thought it was a smart piece of writing though, because it did make him suddenly sound like an outsider. He sounded like somebody who doesn't work for the president anymore, which he doesn't of course, but it really felt like oh, the allegiances are being called into question. And you know, loyalties-- there's a sort of binary system of loyalty that's in place now. And so I appreciated what it indicated, while also feeling a little bit like, "Well, would he *actually* say that though? Like would he really drop the 'President'?"

JOSH: Interesting question. You know I think of this question a lot as I watch my new favourite show, *Below Deck Mediterranean*. Because Captain Sandy is not okay with being called Sandy. Maybe if you're the bosun or the chief stew you can get away with it, but if you're a mere deckhand, it's "Captain".

HRISHI: What is *Below Deck Mediterranean*?

JOSH: Ohh, Hrishi.

HRISHI: Should I not be asking?

JOSH: You shouldn't be asking because I assure you, you will have no interest in it. [laughs] But it's a reality show on Bravo about the yachting world.

HRISHI: At the end of every episode does someone get thrown off the boat?

JOSH [laughing]: That would be entertaining. That's actually not a bad idea for a twist. Uh, no. You sort of get the-- horrific clients are fun to watch, and the below-deck romantic shenanigans.

HRISHI: Oh, it's not a competition show.

JOSH: No no, it's got nothing for you.

HRISHI: Okay.

JOSH: But I'm currently watching four seasons of it simultaneously.

HRISHI [laughing]: I just imagine you as Sherlock Holmes like with four different screens, [Josh laughs] all of them playing--

JOSH: Cut to three.

HRISHI: --and your eyes going from one to the other, to the other, to the other, to the other. And you're just absorbing all of it, you know.

JOSH: You just, uh... on different televisions, I have different access to different seasons. My Apple TV will give me Season 3, I'm currently taping Season 4 I believe. And Season 1 is... I don't know, I'm also watching it somewhere.

HRISHI: It's like my story about *Farewell to Arms* in Calculus at the same time, you're like "I can watch all four at once!".

JOSH [laughing]: That's right, I can multi-task if the material's not too sophisticated.

[Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: In that moment when Santos first comes into his campaign headquarters, we meet Edie Ortega.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

EDIE: Oh, my God. The Congressman!

[clapping]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yes! Diana-Maria Riva.

HRISHI: Yeah! I most recently saw her in the Netflix series *Dead To Me*.

JOSH: Mm-hm.

HRISHI: But in between *The West Wing* and that, she was in a bunch of stuff with Brad.

JOSH: Oh yeah. *Studio 60*, and she played the boss on *The Good Guys*.

HRISHI: Yeah! They've done a lot together.

JOSH: She was Colin Hanks and Brad Whitford's boss on *The Good Guys*, a series-- of which? Of which? I did an episode.

HRISH [cross talk]: On which? In which? Sandwich?

JOSH [cross talk]: Anyways, I didn't-- a series *on* which. In which. Sandwich, I did an episode. I was remembering a funny thing that happened. I trolled for an episode. This was during one of many slow points in my career, and Brad had a new show and I know Colin Hanks and I love him. And so I was kind of troll-- not kind of, I was trolling for a guest spot, and I tweeted something like, "Yeah, put me on *The Good Guys*, I'll work for minimum." And then I got an offer to do an episode - I'm not sure how much time elapsed between the tweet and the offer. And then my agent said, "They want to pay you minimum." And I was like, "Are you kidding me? I've done 250 episodes of television." They said, "Well apparently you tweeted it." [Hrishi laughs] I said oh. And then my agents were like, "So what do we do?". My agent was like, "We're in a real bind, apparently you said you'd do it for minimum?". I was like, "Yes, I did say it, but I won't. This isn't a problem."

HRISHI: It's like, why in your Twitter bio did you put "All Tweets are legally binding"?

JOSH [laughing]: Yeah, right. Dammit.

HRISHI: Oliver Babish wouldn't have let you get away with that.

JOSH: No, no. He wouldn't even have wanted to know whether I was on Twitter.

HRISHI [laughing]: Hey, you know what, there's another small moment that I really loved.

JOSH: What's that?

HRISHI: It's just two words. So Leo gets to the headquarters, and he says to Josh:

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

LEO: *Hi, kid.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And the way he says it is so sweet, and the phrasing is the way he addresses Zoey.

JOSH: Ohh.

HRISHI: Like, that's how we heard him talk to Zoey in the past. He doesn't really-- hasn't traditionally had a lot of that with Josh, despite that we know he has a lot of affection for him.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: But they are just like, so-- he's not Josh's boss anymore, so maybe it's a little bit easier. But it is so sweet, the familial quality between them. I think really makes Santos's-- it plays into Santos's doubts in a way, like that they have this bond that he doesn't share. And it ends up setting up this fantastic, horrible moment where Santos is at his most passive aggressive, where he says:

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

SANTOS: Josh is in the market for a deputy. Someone to help him out, if anybody's got a cousin who needs a job.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Mm. Right.

HRISHI: And there's a little bit of a thing there, like Brad gives him a look. Like he's still sitting down as this is happening, but he gives him a tiny look of like, "What the [*expletive deleted*] did you just say?".

JOSH: Yeah there are a lot of subtle things I think also played and written into this script by Debora Cahn in this episode, one of which I think also includes a sort of peripheral referencing of the warmth between Leo and Josh, in that Josh doesn't want to engage about whether Leo's a problem early on.

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: You know, you can feel Santos trying to get a little traction with Josh on the discussion he feels they need to have, and Josh is just kind of brushing it off and kind of protecting his friend and mentor.

HRISHI: Yeah. That's what it seems like. But then when we get to the final scene between the two of them, you get this justification of Josh's instincts.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: When he says, "No, it's *not* just a get to know you. It's *not* just about learning the biographical lines or some kind of nice, cute social visit. It's-- if the two of you get together, there are strengths that you each have that will complement the other, and you can really help each other." And it's only after they have a little bit of ice breaking, and kind of friction that they have to get past - you know, Leo has to apologize, they have to kind of figure

things out. And then we get that great moment where Santos starts talking about what he really wants to do once he actually-- if he were to actually win.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

SANTOS: You're here because you know how to run a country. The conversation I'm interested in is how do we build a four year plan where you don't know what kind of Congress you're going to have to work with.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I mean, it's a real meaty question that he's asking, right? It's not just like "How do we handle this interview?" or "What are we going to do about this part of this poll?". He's talking about real governing, and Leo has real answers.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

LEO: Okay. Well, let's start by reframing the question. Forget about a four-year term. The Presidency is 18 months, that's your window.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Like, he's giving him the real stuff. And as I'm watching it, I was like "Ahh, this is what Josh wanted them to do!". This is the conversation he was trying to get them to have.

JOSH: Yeah. And I would argue that we've seen a maturation of Josh's management style 'cause the old Josh normally is a bulldoze. Right or wrong, he just tries to jam his way forward and-- particularly when he's right, and he knew he was right about this with Santos and Leo. But he took a sort of softer approach to it. He's grown, he's developed as a character and professionally, in his approach to getting things done. He allows for a little bit more air around the things he wants to make happen.

HRISHI: And yet - Donna.

JOSH: Mm. Yes. Well let's talk about that scene altogether. I was going to say actually, I like that scene very much.

HRISHI: Oh I love it.

JOSH: Yeah. It's one of the few times though where I felt that the music, that the scoring--

HRISHI: Oh!

JOSH: --I don't want to say ruined the scene for me, because it's still a great scene as written and acted. To me, the scoring was telling me "You're watching a scene about missed romance and failed opportunity," which of course there is-- of which of course there is an element in that scene. But I thought really what that scene is a rough, tough straight-edge look at politics and winning and losing, and having to deal with the consequences of things

you said on the campaign trail. I really liked the sort of brutality of it, but the music was asking something else of me.

HRISHI: Huh. I'm embarrassed to say I don't remember the music. I didn't clock it at all. I think I was furiously scribbling, you know, just like thoughts about the actual dynamic between the two of them. And I love that in an episode where the larger story is about Josh's wisdom, that he is not infallible himself either. Because I think that the argument that Donna is making, is at a professional level, incredibly sound. And we know he needs a deputy.

JOSH: Yeah, but I sort of agreed with him when he-- you know, first of all he's got the folder. He's been waiting for this moment, he knew it was going to come. He's got a folder filled with things that she's said on behalf of Russell that didn't sit right with him.

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

JOSH: "Claiming three House terms qualifies you to be president is like me saying I'm a foreign relations expert because I ordered Kung Pao last night."

DONNA: I didn't say that, did I?

JOSH: February 26; Coffee, Cake, and Candidates; Raleigh, North Carolina. "He wasn't a military strategist, he was a pilot. Ask him about the overhead compartment, not about defense."

DONNA: You called Russell a cowpoke. You said the President avoided him in the halls. You hummed "These Boots are Made for Walking" every time the press mentioned his name.

JOSH: Yeah, but I won.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Which I thought was a great line. Not necessarily his being a huge *[expletive deleted]*, but like that's the reality, yeah. We won, so it's not something I have to deal with, and there *is*, you know-- he doesn't say exactly, but I was trying to... filling in some blanks. It might be hard to have somebody step in as his deputy, even to the public or to the outside, who was saying negative things about the candidate she would now work for.

HRISHI: See, I think that the-- I felt like this was an example of him letting the personal get in the way of the professional. Because that's just the reality of politics, as he has lived it. As someone who went from being on the Hoynes campaign to the Bartlet campaign, would he have sort of disqualified himself from Leo's invitation? I mean, I guess it's a little bit different. He was convinced by the candidate's viability and jumped ship early, but he did go from one candidate to another, and he knows that that's what happens you know? And he needs somebody, and there's theoretically not a ton of people with Donna's qualifications and experience, and effectiveness. I was thinking about what Jennifer Palmieri had said, you know the day that she had to leave the Edwards campaign and get her John Kerry email address and how brutal that was.

JOSH: Mm-hm.

HRISHI: But that's just what happens at a certain point. Winners start to emerge, and top operatives move with the winners.

JOSH: Uh, yeah that's true. Look, no I'm not denying that there isn't an element of "Oh, is Josh letting the personal filter in here?". For sure, that's an aspect of it, and one of the things I liked about this scene was that it wasn't black and white, it was all sorts of gray. But I mean I guess what I was saying was that on the whole, in sum I sort of get that it's a problematic-- maybe Santos wouldn't want her on the campaign.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: I mean, you know there's plenty of video and print evidence of her having said some very negative things about him, and there is some baggage. And I don't think it's a slam dunk, I'm not sure I'm as convinced as you that there aren't a lot of other well-qualified people to be his deputy. But you know, I think she has a good argument certainly and I understand the response both on the personal - "Oh, I just might be too difficult for him" - but also professionally, I sort of get that that's a lot of baggage to bring into the campaign at this point.

HRISHI: Regardless of any kind of professionalism or anything like that, it's such a great scene. It is so loaded and so layered and complicated, that just the dread that Donna has, knowing that she's-- she knows that she's probably not going to get this, but she has to try you know. And she's making the argument, and she says "It's one of the more awkward moments of a lifetime."

JOSH: Mm-hm.

HRISHI: And you know there's just so much buried hurt on both sides. And maybe she's trying to make amends and he's too stubborn, and... it's so smart, the way that the battle of the campaign gets to be this thing that's sort of on top, but their actual person dynamic is some sort of really maybe what they're talking about too, but even at that level Josh is like:

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

JOSH: And if you think I don't miss you every day...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Oh! So good.

JOSH: Oh, fantastic. No I agree. And this is-- it's great writing, great direction, wonderful acting. And it's the kind of layered scene that you can't get sometimes in a movie where you only have two hours with characters we've had 120+ episodes. And we know so much and we have a lot invested with these two characters and so, as you say the amount that's sort

of percolating under the surface is fantastic. I also like that, as written, she does-- she's not asking him for a favor, she tells him, "I'm good, this is a job I deserve and I'd be great at."

HRISHI: Right, yeah. And I think she would be too.

JOSH: I do too.

[West Wing Episode 2.05 excerpt]

DONNA: Which, I guess, makes me Deputy Deputy Chief of Staff.

[end excerpt]

JOSH [*laughing*]: There you go.

HRISHI: Okay. So, another moment of writing that I thought was really sharp in the way that it illustrated the divide between the White House and the campaign, was this line from C.J. where she says:

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

C.J.: You people are nine points down.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And that phrase, "you people", is the language of isolation.

JOSH: Hm.

HRISHI: I remember hearing about how that is the phrase that will make someone lose an audience. If you refer to the audience as "you people", you've automatically done yourself a disservice in terms of-- like if you're a stand-up comedian, or if you're trying to connect with the audience, if you use the phrase "you people", it automatically has this othering kind of quality,

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: And it's really a--

JOSH: It alienates your audience.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's an alienating phrase. And so it's great that C.J. deploys it here.

JOSH: Mm-hm. Good point. I had one other Trump ay-yi-yi moment, which was Annabeth's setting up sort of a makeup consultation for Leo, and saying:

[West Wing Episode 7.01 excerpt]

ANNABETH: The base is looking a little orange under the fluorescents.

[end excerpt]

[laughter]

JOSH: Ay-yi-yi.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Alright. We've done it again.

HRISHI: Thanks so much for listening to another episode. Thanks Josh, for continuing to be my co-host as we head into our final season.

JOSH: Oh thank you Hrishi. It's very exciting. It is bittersweet indeed. I can't believe... although we've got quite a chunk of episodes left, I know it's going to go in the snap of fingers. That doesn't-- that's not a saying. It's going to go very quickly, is what I'm trying to say.

HRISHI: Bittersweet, but sometimes bittersweet chocolate chips make the best chocolate chip cookies.

JOSH: That's true. Sometimes you gotta go with 62% percent.

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: And that's what I'll be trying to give this season. [Hrishi laughs] I'm taking it up a notch. [Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: Thanks so much to our team that continues to make this show with us. Zach McNees, Margaret Miller, and Nick Song.

JOSH: Thanks to Radiotopia for continuing to have us as part of their cavalcade of cutting-edge podcasts. You can find out more about the other wonderful shows at radiotopia.fm.

HRISHI: And you can find out more about our show. You can see all of the past episodes and you can read our FAQ and all kinds of stuff on our website, thewestwingweekly.com.

JOSH: And if you don't want to read it: F-A-Q.

HRISHI [laughing]: Josh...

JOSH: No?

HRISHI: No, I accept it.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH and HRISHI: What's next?

[Outro Music]