

The West Wing Weekly  
7.13: "The Cold"  
Guests: Bradley Whitford and Janel Moloney

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: And I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And today, we're talking about "The Cold." It's Episode 13 from Season 7.

JOSH: It was written by Debora Cahn, it's got a story by Debora Cahn and Lauren Schmidt, and it was directed by Alex Graves. She's now Lauren Schmidt Hissrich.

HRISHI: That's right.

JOSH: I forgot to mention, this is momentous: it first aired on March 12<sup>th</sup>, 2006, and did they somehow foresee this podcast, and take all of the second month of the year off, because the previous episode aired in January, I think.

HRISHI: You're right. No episodes in the second month of the year.

JOSH: How about that? So it's a free roll for me from here to until the end of the podcast.

HRISHI: That's right.

JOSH: Sweet, sweet.

HRISHI: So this episode is called "The Cold", and I think the best way to synopsise the episode, is talking about the ways in which 'the cold' could apply to different storylines in the episode.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: First of all, Senator Vinick has a cold.

JOSH: Right. I wrote 'Vinick and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.'

HRISHI: Yes. Mm hmm.

JOSH: As a subtitle.

HRISHI: Bruno might also be facing some cold treatment because there's a possibility that he's being frozen out in the wake of some unfavorable polling numbers, the aforementioned, 'No Good, Very Bad Day.'

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And then, there's also the cold weather in Kazakhstan...

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: ...where the president is contemplating sending many, many, many troops and one of the things that has to be considered is equipping them properly.

JOSH: Yes. Outerwear.

HRISHI: So, all that is going on in this episode, but let's not forget something very big and not very cold at all - something that happens in the cold open.

JOSH: Mmm.

HRISHI: Josh and Donna kiss.

JOSH: Hot, hot heat. Yes.

HRISHI: It finally happened.

JOSH: And joining us later, Ted Danson and Shelley Long to discuss about... Actually it's funny, later as you were starting to say, Brad and Janel will be joining us later to talk about the moment. But I thought one of the funny things is that I wrote to Janel and Brad to help schedule these interviews and I said we want to discuss the episode "The Cold" where Sam and Diane finally get together, obviously referencing *Cheers*. And Janel wrote back, "Who's Diane and am I even in this episode?"

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: So I told her to buy a TV.

HRISHI: We'd hoped that we'd get both of them together, but alas both of them being busy people with busy schedules, today was not the day, so we are speaking to both of them, but not at the same time.

JOSH: Yes. We tried folks, we tried.

HRISHI: So let's just jump right in. At the beginning of this episode, the polling numbers in the wake of the nuclear disaster in San Andreo have shifted in the Santos camp's favor. We kind of knew this already from the whiteboard where Josh had written 'too close to call' at the end of the previous episode but here it's news everywhere. They're up in all of these states, they're tied in states where they had been behind, and nationally, it's a tie 44-44 with 12 percent undecided.

JOSH: Very exciting.

HRISHI: Everybody's excited and they all run around, banging on all the doors of who I hope are campaign workers, staying in the hotel.

JOSH: [laughing] I had the same thought too, like 'I hope they've got the whole floor.'

HRISHI: Yeah. [laughing] There's a great Bollywood movie called *Zamane Ko Dikhana Hai* and there's a fantastic couple of scenes - this happens twice in the movie - where people run around in a hotel banging on people's doors, looking for someone.

JOSH: Oh, that sounds good. Is Matthew McConaughey in that movie?

HRISHI: [laughing] Uh, he's not, but Rishi Kapoor is.

JOSH: Nice.

HRISHI: Not to be confused with me, his name is just Rishi, not Hrishikesh.

JOSH: Oh, I thought you were going to say 'not to be confused with his brother Yom.'

HRISHI: [laughing] No, but every day before Rishi Kapoor's birthday, we celebrate Erev Rishi Kapoor.

JOSH: [laughing] Very nice.

HRISHI: Anyway, shoutout to *Zamane Ko Dikhana Hai*, if anybody knows the scenes that I am talking about where they run...

JOSH: I am going to go take a look.

HRISHI: It's great. There's some fantastic songs in that movie. It's a musical, actually!

JOSH: I wasn't gonna say...

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Oh sure, if it's hometown, then it's okay.

HRISHI: I watched it really while my grey matter was still too soft to have formed hard opinions.

JOSH: Mm hmm. Before you decided that you had to live and die by the 'I hate musicals' credo.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yep.

JOSH: One of the things I like about this episode, and the way Alex Graves has directed it, is the sense of, sort of, euphoria and movement and forward thrust of the Santos campaign as contrasted with a lot of stationery scenes of the Vinick campaign. Vinick and staff, they're

sitting around tables, they're kind of stuck in place while the Santos campaign is depicted over and over again as really sort of energized.

HRISHI: Yeah, I mean 'forward thrust' is maybe going a little far, they really only kiss in this episode.

JOSH: [laughing] That's a good point, I got all worked up.

HRISHI: I hope everybody is prepared for a very silly discussion.

JOSH: Oh sure.

HRISHI: [laughing] Continuing on the theme of music, and silliness, the song playing in the background is "Bang Bang."

["Bang Bang" starts to play behind Josh and Hrishu talking]

JOSH: Oh dear.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's Dizzy Gillespie's version, although that song was originally from the late 60s; it launched the Latin boogaloo movement when it was recorded by the original artist, The Joe Cuba Sextet.

JOSH: Wow.

HRISHI: Get it?

JOSH: I do. I think I do. And I think in many ways they were laying pipe for this scene throughout much of the series.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yep. Alright. That's enough for now. Ok so the national polling has the two sides tied at 44 percent, and then when we do go to the sadder, more static Vinick campaign...

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Bob says:

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*BOB: We lost these people because of the nuclear accident. Give 'em time to realize you didn't melt the damn thing down by yourself, they'll come back on their own.*

*BRUNO: A cycle like that takes a month, which we don't have.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought about how despite this episode happening in 2006, all the different ways this storyline has pre-figured the 2008 election, are really uncanny. And this being one that I hadn't even known about. You know, I knew about the comparisons and similarities between Santos and Obama, but the way that this nuclear disaster mirrors the economic disaster of 2008, is also really striking. There were 50 days between the collapse of Lehman Brothers and Election Day in 2008.

JOSH: Wow.

HRISHI: And I found this article from 2013 which talks about an event that Joe Biden and John McCain did together, and there's a quote from Biden that says: "The truth of the matter is Barack knows it, I know, had the economy not collapsed around your ears, John, in the middle of literally as things were moving, I think you probably would have won."

JOSH: Hmm, yeah. It's sobering, and it speaks to what Eli was saying to us last episode that no two elections are really fundamentally alike, because there's no just no accounting for the unexpected.

HRISHI: Right. So I could imagine that at the time it might have felt like a lot of dramatic license was being taken, I think that it actually drew from reality pretty accurately.

JOSH: In other words, you can imagine people rolling their eyes at the convenience of something like this turning an election around?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Yeah, I can see how you might think the plotline incredible, but it's credible.

HRISHI: Yeah. That is one of the things that I was mentioning in our discussion previously, that I like that it's not only the nuclear accident, there are also some really human decisions made by Vinick. You know, where he has a few political miscalculations along the way, to further exacerbate the situation.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. It adds nuance to the storyline. I did notice, at least his initial sneeze, he does not adopt CDC-approved technique. He just kind of sneezes out into the air.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I was disappointed at that. You got to go crook of the arm.

HRISHI: Mm hmm, mm hmm. I think the reason why he doesn't adopt appropriate behavior is because he's a little bit in denial about having a cold.

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*VINICK: Nothing, I'm fine. It's allergies.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Mm, yes, he seems to think he can will away reality.

HRISHI: Yeah, and I think he knows that having a cold, admitting to it would be bad news for a campaign that's already limping a little bit. I think if he has proper sneeze protection behavior, in some ways...

JOSH: It means he's prepared and realizes, sneezes could come at any moment. [chuckles]

HRISHI: Yeah, exactly. And then, soon after that, we see our other work couple in this episode: Will and Kate.

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*WILL: Hi.*

*KATE: Hi.*

*WILL: I have a thing of yours.*

*KATE: My Pyongyang report - good, I turned my whole office...*

*WILL: No, not that.*

*KATE: Really?*

*WILL: Absolutely.*

*KATE: It's in a blue binder, it may not be...*

*WILL: Nothing in a blue binder.*

*KATE: You're sure? I may have taken it out of...*

*WILL: It's a bra.*

*KATE: Oh. Ok.*

*WILL: I put it in a padded envelope, which seemed appropriate.*

*KATE: Really?*

*WILL: You want it now?*

*KATE: No. No. Yes?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I believe the 'I've got your bra' walk and talk was the walk and talk of which we did a single take.

HRISHI: And was that the only time that it happened to you?

JOSH: Yeah, I remember that, I know it was when Alex Graves was directing and I was acting and I believe it was with Mary, and I'm virtually certain it was this exact scene. We did a walk and talk, and he yelled, "Cut! We got that, moving on." And I remember everybody saying "What? What are you talking about?" Because forget about even if it's not a walk and talk, you don't do one take of anything. It just doesn't - You want back up, you never know whether you missed something, if it doesn't look quite right, even though they have video playback and they can take a look and the director can decide. And it spoke to, I guess, Alex's confidence. I remember he said, "No! That's what I wanted, we've got it, let's move on."

HRISHI: And indeed he was right.

JOSH: Yeah, I guess so, I mean, it's a fine take. Perhaps we could have done better, but whatever it is he was looking for, I guess we gave it to him. And usually it's something technical... the camera operator nailed it in one. That's really the more remarkable thing than two actors parroting their lines.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: It's the physical part that's really the hard part, and it's the guy walking backwards. So I guess just everything fell into place, and that is very, very rare indeed, especially for a walk and talk, and I think it's the only time I ever saw it happen in one.

HRISHI: Yeah. Congratulations.

JOSH: Thank you.

HRISHI: It's a great scene.

JOSH: I didn't mean it as a humble-brag, or a brag-brag. I meant it more as a... really it spoke more to Alex's confidence as a director, to just know that you have something. Because usually, this is what you hear also a lot is: "Cut! That was perfect; let's go again."

HRISHI: Right. Right, right.

JOSH: "So you're saying it wasn't perfect."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: You usually do a lot of takes.

HRISHI: You don't really do humble-brags.

JOSH: I just brag outright, right? If I'm going to.

HRISHI: If anything, more of a grumble-brag.

JOSH: Yeah, that sounds better. That sounds more me. If I can indulge in a humble-brag.

HRISHI: [laughing] So Kate's left her bra at Will's place, and he has it in an envelope to give back to her. And I thought this is not the first time an undergarment in *The West Wing* has been so contained.

JOSH: There are panties?

HRISHI: That's right!

JOSH: But I can't remember, I can't place them.

HRISHI: Well you'd find them in an envelope. They are placed in an envelope by Karen Cahill, who you might remember is *The West Wing's* fictionalised version of Maureen Dowd. And there are a couple of tie-ins to this episode, beyond just the undergarment-in-envelope. So Sam goes to see Karen Cahill, and I don't know if you remember this, he makes a mistake - he says Kyrgyzstan instead of saying Kazakhstan.

JOSH: Oh yeah, I do remember that.

HRISHI: Years before we were about to be drawn into an entrenched conflict there.

JOSH: It would be a great reveal if it turned out that all of this was taking place in Kyrgyzstan, [Hrishi laughs] and everyone just kept messing up the names.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yep. But then Donna has to go in and cover for him, and in so doing, she somehow leaves a pair of underwear on the floor. And Karen Cahill mails them to Josh's office the next day.

JOSH: Yep. So we've got underwear and outerwear in this episode.

HRISHI: [laughing] Right. I love Will and Kate, I like their romance a lot.

JOSH: I'm happy to hear that. Look, I like playing awkward, as I am, as it comes so naturally.

HRISHI: Oh, bumble-brag.

JOSH: [laughing] Very nice. I like what the writers did for us and how they wrote us I think it's unclear between them exactly what's going on, and it's all exacerbated by the fact that it's kind of happening at work, also. And I do like, ultimately, the scene, although it's kind of spackled on the awkwardness in this one, where Donna comes to discuss workplace romances with Will, and he thinks maybe she's talking about him. I felt so bad for myself.



[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*DONNA: If something had happened with us, when we were working, romantically - would that have been inappropriate?*

*WILL: Wow, uh, I'm flattered...*

*DONNA: Oh, no, no, no, no.*

*WILL: ...but I'm actually seeing someone in a very non-public and poorly-defined way.*

*DONNA: No, not you.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: [laughing] No, I think it's great! Will and Kate, I think are the more well-adjusted version of Josh and Donna, in a way. But even for them, even with a well-adjusted set of people, a work romance, and especially a White House work romance, isn't easy.

JOSH: Right, not easy to do. In fairness to Josh and Donna, they also had a boss-employee relationship, which really, really complicated matters, and at least Kate and Will don't have to deal with...

HRISHI: Yeah. Switching gears again for a second, when we go into the Situation Room and the president does bring up this matter of outerwear...

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: He says to Hutchinson, who I really just cannot believe still has a job in this administration, he says:

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: We're talking about sending 150,000 Americans to the 50th parallel in November. It starts snowing in Astana in August and doesn't stop until June. As opposed to the Russians, who do this a lot. Americans haven't fought a war in the cold for quite some time: I would like to know what kind of coats you plan to put on our troops.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And this felt like, if *The West Wing* is the fantasy of what we wished the White House would be, this feels like the direct rebuttal of the lack of body armor that the troops had in Iraq, at the beginning of the 2003 invasion.

JOSH: Mm hmm. I also like, there's a deft bit of writing from Debora Cahn, in the military honchos are talking about C17s and C130s and all sorts of technical jargon is being thrown about, and then they are kind of stumped by the president's asking about what kind of coats they are going to have.

HRISHI: Yeah, yeah. Just the most practical, basic understanding of the reality of it, yeah. I was wondering if the writers had been influenced by the study that had come out - I'll link to it on our website - but there was a *New York Times* article detailing this secret Pentagon study that had come out, that revealed that 80 percent of Marines who had been killed in Iraq from wounds to the upper body, could have survived if they had had extra body armor.

JOSH: How horrendous.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: And I think many soldiers were faced with trying to provide such armor for themselves.

HRISHI: Yeah, mm hmm.

JOSH: Which really should be unthinkable.

HRISHI: I can't help but think that something about that...

JOSH: Yeah, filtered into this scene, I suspect you're right.

HRISHI: Yeah. Well let's go to that scene you were talking about where Donna comes in to see Will.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: I've always loved their dynamic as well, from when Will gave Donna the job on the Russell campaign and throughout their time working together. It's nice to see them together again.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. I think they have a nice chemistry, despite Eli's attempts to kindle some sort of romance, or to make Will look bad for attempting one. I never played it that way, I never accepted that that's what it was all about.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: But it is kind of funny to see Will mis-take Donna's intentions with this question about dating a colleague.

HRISHI: Yeah. The thing that I really like about it is that it's resolved as quickly as it's brought up. You know, one of my pet peeves in storytelling is the trope of mistaken identity. Or just the idea of things being protracted because not everyone has the same information or whatever. Just somebody thinks something's not right and blah blah blah. Looking at you, Molière.

JOSH: Oh, I love Molière!

HRISHI: But isn't that the heart of everything?

JOSH: That's true, but I think in rhyming verse it works.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: When you've already got artifice in the delivery, and the text itself, it sort of merges with the artifice of mistaken identity.

HRISHI: Ok, ok.

JOSH: It works in Gilbert and Sullivan, and it works in Shakespeare. IT WORKS! It just doesn't work in [expletive deleted] sitcoms.

HRISHI: No, it's always bad, sometimes it's worse. It's terrible in sitcoms, not as bad in verse.

JOSH: Nicely done!

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I guess you won.

HRISHI: [laughing] But I really appreciate that as soon as Donna says "No, no, no, it's this other thing", Will immediately switches back into 'yeah, we're friends' mode, and can actually give her advice and it just snaps right back, and I appreciate that.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree with you, and I don't think I thought about that when I watched it. There is something nice about his not digging in and 'No, obviously you're talking about me' - that is the bad comic version of what would happen on a lot of other shows, and he does immediately of course realize that it is, in fact, Josh about whom she's speaking. And then she offers to make a deal, 'I'll tell you mine if you tell me yours', and he's like 'I know yours, it's Josh, you're not cryptic.'

HRISHI: It's a great line!

JOSH: It's kind of hilarious. And then it ends with actually just sweet encouragement that there's nothing so wrong about this...

HRISHI: Mm hmm.

JOSH: ...'You should feel ok.'

HRISHI: That's a great delivery by you, by the way.

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*WILL: Is it Josh?*

DONNA: No.

WILL: Then who?

DONNA: I'll tell you mine if you tell me yours.

WILL: Yours is Josh, you're not cryptic.

DONNA: And yours is?

WILL: Classified.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: It's great.

JOSH: It's great dialogue, I liked it.

HRISHI: But then, yeah, this line, the more sincere exchange, when Donna says we should drop it, Will says:

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

WILL: *It's not inappropriate. Seeing someone. It's weird, maybe, but you'll figure it out.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's great.

JOSH: Well what do you think altogether, about the decision to consummate, or at least, for them to snog a little, Josh and Donna?

HRISHI: Well, at the risk of not saving this for when we're speaking to the parties involved...

JOSH: Right, I know.

HRISHI: ...I mean, it's about time!

JOSH: Yeah, well it's funny, because I think, previous to watching this, or re-watching this, I suspect I've seen this episode before, I always thought they should have kept them apart. That's just generally you should never... But now I'm watching, and I'm watching the entire series, and I've been watching it chronologically, I don't feel that way at all. Obviously it is about time, and also knowing that the show was winding up, it's time for some progress, on many fronts, and this is one of them. It's enough already with the unspoken... these people are adults and they've had years together, and their feelings are more than physical. These

guys deeply understand each other and are drawn to each other so I find it satisfying to see them make some real inter-relationships... Hmm, what's the word I'm trying to say?

HRISHI: Kissing is, I think the word is, kissing.

JOSH: Oh yeah - see them kissing. [chuckles]

HRISHI: Yeah. I think you're right, I'm looking at this retrospectively, knowing that this is the end of the series, and of course that colors my interpretation of it. I think if I were watching and I didn't know if the show were going to go for another three seasons, if I would feel differently. But knowing that we have just a few episodes left before things wrap up. It's one of the downsides of the physical object of a book, just when something happens and you've got a few pages left, you know to interpret that differently than if the same thing were to happen in the beginning of the book. So I like that this is part of the conclusion of the show.

JOSH: Can you even access pre-podcast Hrish, who had not watched the final three seasons of the series? Do you remember how you felt about Josh and Donna?

HRISHI: I think that in general, I'm not so into the will-they-won't-they suspense over a long period, and I don't like it when it just hangs over the heads of our characters and the audience for years and years and years. So I would get frustrated a little bit, I think, watching the first four seasons, often if felt like: why, why can't these two people, who clearly love each other, figure it out? But at a certain point, even though I hadn't seen the final three seasons, I knew that they did end up getting together, so I could continue watching just the first four seasons, over and over again, knowing that they have a convergence point somewhere in the unseen future.

JOSH: And so maybe perhaps for the first time we've also stumbled on a storyline and an aspect of the show that we agree is better served by post-Sorkin writers than by the creator himself. Because I think he has indicated that he never would have brought them together.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: So I think we're saying here that we come down on the side of what they've done with Josh and Donna after he left.

HRISHI: Mm hmm. I guess that's what we're saying. I can't believe I gave you a little ribbing for not saying 'kissing,' and then I said 'convergence point in the future'. What the hell did I say?

JOSH: [laughing] That's really funny.

HRISHI: My God. I apologize to everybody. I knew this was coming eventually, I didn't know what episode it was going to be, and I didn't know it was going to happen quite like this. It happens in the opening couple of minutes of the episode, and there's something really surprising about that. And I think that it was great, it did give it this extra energy. Like you were saying, the euphoria of the moment...

JOSH: Right, carried over into the passion.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I liked that too, that when they finally did deal with it, they weren't precious about it or 'wink wink, here we go, we're finally addressing it.' It just happened. Which was, I think, the best way to do it.

HRISHI: Some thoughts on the actual kiss itself?

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: Well first of all, I thought Donna must really like Josh, because you know, you just know, he has some terrible morning breath in that moment.

JOSH: [laughing] I just assume, no offense to Brad, that Josh Lyman always has bad breath.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: But you're right, probably particularly bad in the morning.

HRISHI: Ah yeah. So she goes in for a second time, despite that, but I love that when Santos comes in, because there's a moment, just a split second where Josh gives him this look of such delight, and then they go towards each other for a hug, but for a second, I thought they were going to kiss too!

JOSH: [laughing] That would have been a surprise.

HRISHI: That would have been great. I almost thought it looked like he's going to make it less of a thing, he's going somehow diffuse what had just happened by kissing everybody. Then he goes and he hugs Bram, and I'm like 'they're going to kiss too!'

JOSH: Big Santos campaign love pile.

HRISHI: Mm hmm. It does feel like that, especially by the end of the episode, when everybody's sitting around and they're all in the glowy ambience, and Donna leaves her key.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: I mean, that is - these are some sexy times.

JOSH: Yeah. That scene left me thinking, well he could still go up there and tap on the door, right?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I wasn't sure why, plot-wise, that was like, 'oh, now it's not going to happen!'

HRISHI: Yeah, he could still do that.

JOSH: 'Donna, Donna.'

HRISHI: He knows what room she's in. She has, at least figuratively, opened to the door to him, by even making that gesture.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: But Ronna just completely [expletive deleted]-blocks.

JOSH: Yeah. You went for it.

HRISHI: More specifically, she lock-blocks.

JOSH: Nice! She [expletive deleted]-locks, really.

HRISHI: [laughing] I think even just the idea that despite the fact that they've kissed, the suspense has to linger on, is what I ultimately take away from it. At least until the next episode, we don't know if Josh is going to get over his sense of awkwardness.

JOSH: I actually don't know. I haven't watched beyond this, and I don't remember really what the future holds in store for them. I'm looking forward to finding out.

HRISHI: I look forward to talking to you about it, hearing your reaction.

JOSH: And I look forward to talking to Janel and Brad. We couldn't resist, we had to just jump in and discuss it between ourselves, but I'm curious to see what the principals involved have to say.

HRISHI: We'll put a pin in it for now. Ok, let's talk about some less happier moments in this episode. How about Sheila falling on her sword for the Vinick campaign?

JOSH: Mmm.

HRISHI: Do you feel like you spent enough time with the character of Sheila for this to have an impact for you?

JOSH: Yeah. Well it did have an impact, and it landed for me but if where you're headed with this is might it not have been a more palpable impact had we spend more time with her, I would agree with that. I would have liked to get to know her a little bit better, spend a little bit more time with her for this to really hit home the way it should. But I was affected by it, it's interesting to see, it's kind of an 'honor among thieves' kind of thing, where you feel like among politicians, even on *The West Wing* and in this world on both sides, in these two campaigns with an above average sense of honor. It's interesting still to see someone who's willing to say, 'look, I'll stay involved, but I'll be the public face of disgrace.

HRISHI: I'm impressed by Patricia Richardson, and Alan Alda, and the writers, that despite how little time we got with her, this was affecting. I think they built the rapport between her and Vinick up really well, and I think she's a really well-defined character, for having been in so few episodes so far. Every line that she delivers feels like it comes from a place of a three-dimensional character.

JOSH: I agree, it's a very grounded performance. We've never seen her do anything super flashy or be the center of any primary plotline, but she's a real presence nonetheless and so we care when she makes this offer.

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*SHEILA: I'm the public face of your campaign staff. You want this to work, it's got to be me.*

*VINICK: That's the dumbest thing I've ever heard. No really, from a smart woman that's an incredibly stupid idea.*

*SHEILA: You need someone to blame for the fact that we didn't campaign to the base. You need to apologize for that misstep and spend the next three weeks singing their song.*

*VINICK: We're not doing this -*

*SHEILA: Don't interrupt me. I can still be on the phone with you 24/7. Hire Jane Braun and once we get a 51 percent strategy in place, Bob and Bruno can execute it.*

*VINICK: We're not losing.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's one... actually that I think that again reminds me a little bit of something we've learned about from a previous episode, even back in season four. Will goes on record and makes a remark and then has to get slapped by the White House. There's the climate change story, the hydro-climatologist comes in, and they have to actually have the person who says the thing be... again, they need a scapegoat, who is high enough profile for it to make an impact, for it to be a story. And in that case, it's Will, and here, Sheila does something similarly where she says, 'they shouldn't fire Bruno', even though this entire episode, all things seem to point to the firing of Bruno.

JOSH: Yeah, and interesting; Bruno, at all costs, does not want to be fired.

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*BRUNO: I don't care if I'm being blamed. I care if I'm being shoved out.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Because you could also imagine where they don't fire him formally, but he's just no longer part of the decision-making council.



JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And that seems like really the worst thing to him. So she's made that decision, she in fact has already drafted the letter of resignation. She's such a good staffer to Vinick it's even already in his briefcase.

JOSH: Yeah, that whole thing: 'it's in your briefcase.' I was like, ooh.

HRISHI: Yep. And then she doesn't go with him to the event. Because at that point now she has given him the letter of resignation, she's officially resigned, and there's that really lonely shot of Vinick after he gets out of the car.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Just standing at the event.

JOSH: In silhouette, Vinick's silhouette.

HRISHI: I thought that was great.

JOSH: Great Alex Graves, I guess Michael Mayers composition there.

HRISHI: Mm hmm.

JOSH: I think Alda is great in this episode.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Again, and it's not flashy for him, things are sort of... he's on low ebb physically, and campaign-wise, there's something just subtle and moving about watching the air slowly come out of his campaign. He doesn't make a meal of it, but you feel what he's going through. He's starting to look like less of a guy who... he's looking less presidential, he looks like less of a guy who's going to win this thing, and he does it subtly, and well... Really what I'm saying is that he's always good. Whatever the storyline is, and he doesn't have to have incredible highs, or it doesn't have to be a bravura performance for me to still be knocked out by his acting.

HRISHI: Totally. Yeah. I love this scene at the end of this episode where Vinick, Santos and Bartlet are all in the room together, and he's giving them the lowdown on what's about to happen in Kazakhstan.

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: One of you will inherit this piñata, I thought you should know what's on the table.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, I liked that too. I liked that a lot. There's a nice bit of subtlety in the writing that C.J. makes sure that Vinick and Santos are both coming to the White House to have this confab, and she tells Josh what it is they're going to be discussing, and she doesn't tell the Vinick campaign.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: They know there's some sort of security briefing, but we have an explicit moment where they discuss what is it, and we don't know exactly. But we hear C.J. tell Josh, specifically what's going to be discussed, and I just like that little nuance of giving a little bit more info to the Democratic campaign than to the Republican one.

HRISHI: Yeah. I especially liked this and the last episode's way of interweaving both the White House and the campaigns. They've been separate for so long, you know, throughout season six as we discussed it often felt like a little bit of a let-down to me when we'd go from the excitement and novelty of the campaign episodes back to a White House episode of the week that felt slower or just less dynamic, but this season I think they've done a good job of really synthesizing the two storylines.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree, I agree.

HRISHI: I just like this kind of no good outcome scenario, as it sinks in for the candidates.

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*VINICK: Well I can say goodbye to my tax cut. Your education plan's certainly off the table.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I like how Vinick is imagining either one of them being president. There's something just really nice about that moment, I don't know, some sense of equality from him, as he takes in the ramifications of this war.

JOSH: Well said.

HRISHI: 70 billion dollars for the first twelve months, the president tells them. And that there is no short term exit strategy.

JOSH: Yes, well these are certainly situations that resonate with reality.

HRISHI: Yeah, I don't know if in 2006, we knew, even then...

JOSH: ...how long Iraq and Afghanistan would extend.

HRISHI: Yeah, I'm sure someone in some room did; predicted that this would be the case.

JOSH: I suspect so.

HRISHI: But I like that in this room, the president says, 'I don't have an exit strategy.' There is a little bit he's like, 'I suggest you both start giving it some thought, and you know what, three weeks from now, it's not my problem.'

JOSH: Right. But it's nice to think of a president who cares what might happen beyond his policy decisions.

HRISHI: Yeah, it's nice to think about a president who's interested in trying to diminish the possibility of loss of life.

JOSH: Hear, hear. I wrote down 'is Bono that exciting?'

HRISHI: I'll see your Bono and do the thing you're not supposed to do in poker, I'm going to string raise. I'll see your Bono and I will raise you one Dave Matthews.

JOSH: I don't even remember that. He's mentioned as well?

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*SANTOS: You know, in a minute, Dave Matthews is gonna come up on this stage, oh [crowd cheers and whistles] I know, I know. Believe I know, I feel the same way...*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing] Oh, I somehow missed that, my head was just taking in the astonishing exaltation at the prospect of Bono showing up. Big star, clearly, but Ronna basically loses her [expletive deleted] over it.

HRISHI: Mm hmm.

JOSH: And Donna's quite excited too.

HRISHI: I mean, they make a great trio: Ronna, Donna and Bonna.

JOSH: Thank you, I was hoping you'd go there.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I'm surprised since they changed Ronna's name, at the drop of a hat to rhyme with another's character, I'm surprised they didn't start calling her Rono in this episode with no explanation.

HRISHI: [laughing] Yeah. Dave Matthews gets a mention, not appearing in this episode, Dave Matthews.

JOSH: Right. And we get a Billie Holiday song, we get Body and Soul by Billie Holiday.

["Body and Soul" song by Billie Holiday excerpt]

HOLIDAY: [sung] My days have grown so lonely...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Oh, well that is a brutal application of a great song, in this episode. I thought that was a great music choice.

JOSH: I thought so, too.

HRISHI: But I also was wondering about younger viewers who are coming to *The West Wing* for the first time, which we know they are, if Dave Matthews and Bono are references that they have to be acquainted with, to understand what the import of that was in 2006.

JOSH: I assume that after looking up Bob Dylan in Wikipedia, they would just quickly move on to Bono and Dave Matthews as well.

HRISHI: Yeah. It does feel a little bit like, though, those would be like very exciting choices for an election, two election cycles earlier.

JOSH: Sure. Yeah, I'm sure that's...

HRISHI: Yeah, like a late 90's election.

JOSH: Yeah. Fair enough.

HRISHI: Who would you have gotten for your 2006 celebrity appearance?

JOSH: Elvis Costello...

["Alison" song by Elvis Costello excerpt]

COSTELLO: [sung] Alison, I know this world...

[end excerpt]

JOSH: ... and Tom Waits.

["Way Down in the Hole" song by Tom Waits excerpt]

WAITS: [sung] When you walk through the garden, you gotta watch your back...

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Ok, so you are right there with them.

JOSH: Well, I'm old as the hills.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I guess it's a question of whether you are posing a query about whom I would be excited, or who do I think would work up the masses. I answered the personally exciting version.

HRISHI: [laughing] I'm saying you're Janeane Garofalo and her team and they're in charge of getting some celebrity to show up and endorse the candidate and maybe perform, who would you get in 2006?

JOSH: Mmm. Elton John.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: But he's timeless!

HRISHI: I mean I think because of *Rocketman*, a lot of young people are very into Elton John right now.

JOSH: That is probably true. Just like because of Netflix, many people are into *The West Wing*. Although not for long, at least not for long on Netflix. That was kind of a bombshell that we haven't discussed.

HRISHI: That's right, yeah. If you did not see our posts on social media, it turns out *The West Wing* is going to be leaving Netflix and going to HBO Max instead next year.

JOSH: Yes. I'm hoping that puts some money in my pocket. It's the first thing I thought.

HRISHI: It's not going to happen until the spring when HBO Max launches. So it'll be after we've concluded our podcast. But it's going to be an issue for anyone who doesn't want to subscribe to another service, or doesn't already have the entire series on DVD.

JOSH: Yes, people are in a frenzy about it already. I see quite a bit of discussion about it on Facebook for instance, under the post we made about it. People are worked up. They want, they need their access to *The West Wing*. Anybody needs to borrow my DVDs, just email me.

HRISHI: I have to say that *The West Wing's* inclusion on Netflix was part of the logic for starting this podcast. For me, I thought, in addition to the DVDs now, people who had not yet watched *The West Wing* had an easy way to watch the show and maybe come along with us for the ride. I think *The West Wing*... I can't remember when *The West Wing* showed up on Netflix streaming. I think maybe it was 2014 and it was less than a year after that I started to bug you about this show idea. So in some ways it feels like perfect timing that it would leave after we're done. But I think it's going to be a bummer for a lot of people.

JOSH: Yeah. The one upside I can see, I'm hoping that we'll go back and now that it's going to be on HBO, we can loop in some [expletive deleted] and [expletive deleted].

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: [Expletive deleted]. Stuff like that, and just give it a little edge.

HRISHI: Just some extra...

JOSH: Right, extra bits of dialogue.

HRISHI: Turns out Mrs. Landingham swears like a sailor.

JOSH: Foul, foul mouth.

HRISHI: [laughing]

[West Wing Episode 1.19 excerpt]

*MRS LANDINGHAM: Charlie, tell the president he will eat his [bleep] and he doesn't like it, he knows where to put his [bleep].*

*CHARLIE: Well I don't think I will tell the president that, Mrs. Landingham.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: I like that idea. We didn't discuss, really, this whole ooh-ing and aah-ing and trying to figure out whether or not Vinick feels comfortable playing to the evangelical base of his party. Which I thought was an interesting, a bit of a Trump-ay-yi-yi. Can you imagine waffling over whether or not to pander or address that sector of your base? I can't imagine that now, but it's an interesting tension in the campaign where the numbers are going in the wrong direction and there are certain members of the party who would like to reshape the candidate a bit.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: You know, 30 days out.

HRISHI: My favorite moment in this part of the discussion is when they talk about the 50-state strategy.

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*SULLIVAN: So you're sticking with the 50-state strategy?*

*SHEILA: No.*

SULLIVAN: *We can't win 50 states anymore.*

SHEILA: *I'm aware of that, thank you. It's still the best strategy we have.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It kind of comes and goes, that moment, but I really liked it, because we get the flip side of the ambition of Bruno's plan.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Bruno's plan relied on this idea that Vinick is where most of the country is on most issues, and this could be a way for him to transcend party altogether by just appealing to what most Americans want and believe. But the disaster at San Andreo has torpedoed that idea completely and now all of a sudden, they're stuck, three weeks before the election without having shored up the base in this way that the RNC has been telling them to do this whole time.

JOSH: The whole time.

HRISHI: You hate to see it, but Sullivan is right.

JOSH: Oh yeah, he's certainly got a point. Political necessity is an interesting thing, it's interesting to watch it play out, and he's bridling against it and you understand why, but you also get the point Sullivan's trying to make.

HRISHI: Yeah, there is something extremely *West Wing-y* about the 50-state strategy. This idealistic idea...

JOSH: Exactly, it's idealistic.

HRISHI: ... and I think there's something also *West Wing-y* about watching that fall apart against the realities of the world. I love that conundrum the Vinick campaign has to face now.

JOSH: Yeah, me too.

HRISHI: Alright, let's pause there, and then we'll come back with Bradley Whitford and Janel Moloney.

[ad break]

JOSH: And now, very exciting, we get Janel Moloney back on the show to discuss The Moment.

JANEL: Hi.

JOSH: Welcome back, thanks for doing this.

JANEL: My pleasure.

HRISHI: Did you get a chance to watch this episode?

JANEL: No.

JOSH: You didn't, 'cause too many bad memories?

JANEL: Uh, no. I just couldn't. I do not love watching myself.

HRISHI: We're really interested in one scene in particular, which you may or may not remember, which was when Donna and Josh finally kiss.

JANEL: Uh huh. Yeah. There was a big issue of whether my hair should be up or down. I remember that. I think it should have been down, but I think it's up, as I remember.

JOSH: Mm hmm.

JANEL: Brad had some kind of a nasty cold. We had been talking for seven years about the eventual kiss, and he warned me he would be using his tongue...

JOSH: [groaning]

JANEL: ... that's what he kept telling me.

JOSH: That sounds like Brad.

JANEL: Yeah, you'd go to jail now if you said that.

HRISHI: [laughing] Right?

JANEL: So then he showed up that day and he was kinda cold-y and flu-y and it was sort of not hot - I'm sorry to disappoint everybody. But the whole show was very exciting to do, I remember it very well. I remember it more than most of the shows for obvious reasons.

JOSH: So did you and Brad feel - you talk about the seven-year build up - did you feel like the relationship be consummated from the beginning?

JANEL: Yeah, because usually that's how it goes on TV, and in life, well not always in life, but in TV for sure. They'd always said, Aaron and Tommy, and then John Wells always said, it's gonna be right before the curtain closes. We're not going to do this beforehand. But one thing I was really pleased about was that it wasn't a very special episode of Donna and Josh falling in love. It was Donna... kind of just did it, and made it happen, and Donna was the one that was in charge, which I thought was really refreshing, and I was happy about.

HRISHI: And do you remember filming the scene itself?



JANEL: I found that scene to be a little chaotic, how it was directed, and I don't remember enjoying the way it was filmed. When you were shooting with Alex, it was interesting, because you always felt like not as grounded - I don't know Josh, if you remember this - I never felt that grounded as an actor, but then I was always really, really pleased with what he got. Whereas with some of the other directors, I might have felt more grounded and connected as an actor, but then, like 'wait, where is it? I didn't see it', you know? But Alex was always doing something that you didn't quite know what he was up to - he had the big picture in mind all the time.

JOSH: That's an interesting take. So you felt that Alex would come in with something that might throw you off a little, or surprise you?

JANEL: Yeah. Or that it just felt like, he kept everything on its toes, everyone on their toes, and then he was focusing on something bigger than just your emotional connection in the scene. So if he visually thought it looked cool, and it was good in his mind, that's all he cared about, and that was actually quite good, and so when you saw it you were like, 'whoa, that looks amazing'. So Alex always had that approach. So yes the kiss felt a little chaotic and then Brad was sick, and there was the prop guy standing there, so it just, it definitely wasn't the romantic moment that I think that anyone would be hoping for. It was like, 'oh right, Steve's standing there while I'm kissing Brad for the first time', so it's not that hot.

JOSH: For some people, that is a turn-on.

JANEL: You know, listen, I loved Brad and I still love Brad, and I think it would be a big fat lie to say that we did not have a mutual ongoing seven-year crush on each other, and there was lots of downtime to discuss what this moment would be like, and the fact that it happened almost by mistake, which was a really wonderful thing. It just kind of happened in the excitement of the moment, that I think that was great.

JOSH: It's kind of classic, it comes out of the excitement of new polling numbers that suggest that Santos is really getting competitive and maybe evening up with Vinick, so it's so perfect for *The West Wing* in terms of *West Wing* passion. What else is going to ignite a long-awaited kiss?

JANEL: Yeah.

JOSH: Let me ask you this, one last technical question: do you remember if you guys kissed in rehearsal, or did you save it for the camera for the first time?

JANEL: I think we kissed like a little bit, in rehearsal, I think so. And did I mention he had a cold?

JOSH: Yeah, yeah. I'm definitely going to have to re-watch it and think of snotty Brad.

JANEL: [laughing] He's cute, even snotty Brad is cute.

JOSH: He's cute.

JANEL: And I love him.

HRISHI: In this scene, he is supposed to have just woken up, and I'm thinking whenever you wake up, you have a little bit of a flu-y kind of thing going on, everybody does, so it probably helped the scene.

JANEL: Yeah, yeah. Ok. Sure.

JOSH: [laughing]

JANEL: [laughing] If you say so.

HRISHI: We were wondering how bad Josh's morning breath must have been, given that Donna walks in, wakes him up to tell him the news: maybe Brad is method.

JANEL: Oh yeah, gross. Yeah, true.

JOSH: Do you have any memory of how fans reacted?

JANEL: I remember people being just very excited about it, and yes, and thank God. I don't remember anybody being negative about it, I think people were really, really excited. When we first started on the show, back in the old days, people watched the show on the night it aired. By the end of the show, people were watching the show at all different times, because they would DVR it or whatever. So I don't remember, it was maybe a little more diffused than some of the earlier episodes. But I think people were obsessed with those two getting together, so I'm imagining people were pretty satisfied. It was before the days that... you've managed to find all of the stuff online, but there were no Twitter account, so you could see what the immediate response was.

JOSH: There was Television Without Pity, I think, which we've discussed on the show.

JANEL: That's right. But no, so I don't really remember it being negative, I just remember people being excited.

JOSH: Yeah, I would think so. You guys were the iconic couple, probably of the show, so I think everybody was invested in whether this was going to happen or not eventually.

JANEL: Yeah. I do remember people saying they really got surprised, which is what I think John Wells wanted to do, he really wanted to surprise people with the kiss. I don't even think they showed that they were going to kiss in any of the promos or anything, so if you're a real fan, you had the pleasure of just 'Oh my God, they're kissing!' And I know that people were just screaming when they saw that.

JOSH: Yeah. Most other shows would use that, [crosstalk] this episode as a promotional tool.

JANEL: [crosstalk] Milk it, yeah.

JOSH: 'The moment you've been waiting for, seven years in the making.' But I think you're right, both in the way it was approached, promotionally or not approached, and the way it was staged and written and acted - it just came out of nowhere, and you're like, 'holy-moly!' This moment people have been waiting for, it just happened. I had no idea.

JANEL: Yeah, I think that was fun, I think that John Wells did a really, really good job in just how he let the whole thing happen.

HRISHI: I do have the Television Without Pity right up, by the way, in front of me.

JANEL: Oh my God.

JOSH: Here we go.

HRISHI: And here's what they said.

JANEL: She should have left her hair down.

HRISHI: [laughing] "So Donna knocks on a door, and we hear Josh's groggy voice from the other side. As soon as he opens the door, she bursts into the room. He's wearing boxer shorts and a shirt unbuttoned halfway down his chest. She just starts throwing state-by-state poll results at him, and he slowly walks toward her."

JOSH: Wait a second, read it slower.

HRISHI: [laughing] Sorry, sorry. "And then she tells him that in the Times..."

JOSH: [laughing] That's it, that's it.

HRISHI: "... that in the Times poll, the two campaigns are tied, 44-44. Josh takes a second to soak it all in, and screams 'Holy mother of God, we caught him, we caught him!' and then he grabs Donna's face in his hands, and plants a big one right on her lips. They break away from the kiss, look at each other, and then dive right back in. The camera spins around them, and I get a little lightheaded, and it's all very sexy, and then I realise that Josh just woke up. Morning breath. Ugh." Hey, same thought that I had.

JANEL: Yeah.

HRISHI: That was the immediate reaction, I guess, online.

JOSH: That reads like, had that scene not happened, that's like fanfiction of how it would have happened. It makes me realize that the scene is such a *West Wing* fantasy fulfillment.

HRISHI: That recap was by user LTG. Shoutout to LTG.

JANEL: Thank you, LTG.

HRISHI: What about the reaction within the crew and the cast?

JOSH: For instance, Steve the prop guy?

HRISHI: [laughing] Right.

JANEL: The single most excited person, in all of this, was Alex Graves. Because before Alex Graves started on the show, he was obsessed with Josh and Donna. I don't know what his first episode was, but I think it was that Christmas episode of the first season. And he was the one, in my opinion, that really made this Josh/Donna thing overt. It was more an undercurrent and then he did this one shot where he had Josh looking back at Donna after he gave her a gift.

[West Wing Episode 1.10 excerpt]

*DONNA: You see, you spend most of your time being, you know, you. And then you write something like this to me. Thank you.*

*JOSH: I meant it.*

[end excerpt]

JANEL: And you see, 'oh my God, he likes her too.' It sort of started everything.

HRISHI: That's right.

JOSH: So it was interesting for Alex to be the one to be there for that moment. And I think he was the most jazzed of everyone.

JOSH: And you're right, "In Excelsis Deo" was his first episode.

JANEL: Yes, that's right, that's right. And when he did that shot, I thought, that's not going to make that in there. Tommy's going to be like 'No.' But he really filmed Josh looking in a puppy dog, I-like-her, way. I think that really started the trajectory on the show. So he was really excited to be filming that and he was just super jazzed.

JOSH: You've kind of nailed in with Alex. In a way, he's one of the most enthusiastic, excited... he always seemed like he couldn't believe he was on the set of *The West Wing*, working with everyone. He was always so enthusiastic.

JANEL: Yeah. And he thought everybody was a genius, and he told you, and he really meant it. He wasn't just blowing smoke. You would do a take and he acted like you were Marlon Brando, *On the Waterfront*.

HRISHI: After this episode happened, but before you'd gotten the scripts for the final episodes, what was going through your head? Did you feel like, alright, it's on now. We've got to see this all the way through. By the end of this episode, they've still only just kissed. Did you think, they're now headed for a relationship? I mean, if anybody could screw it up, Josh Lyman definitely could.

JANEL: John only mentioned it if your character was going to die, or get shot, then he would mention it to you. But he wouldn't really mention anything else. Listen, I loved every minute of the show, and I always wanted to know what was going to happen, and this was obviously a really big moment for my character, and so I was excited to see what happened.

JOSH: Thanks for doing this.

HRISHI: Thank you so much.

JANEL: You're welcome, Take care.

[theme music]

JOSH: And now in a classic case of she-said-he-said, we're going to talk to the other half of the romance.

HRISHI: Here we go, joining us now is Bradley Whitford. Do you have any memory of when you first heard that this storyline was going to finally happen, that Josh and Donna were going to kiss?

BRADLEY: Yeah, I was excited. I get to kiss her!

JOSH: [laughing]

BRADLEY: I mean, in a purely professional manner.

JOSH: Sure. Had you foreseen that this is eventually where it was going to go, from the beginning?

BRADLEY: Well I was always... going way back with Tommy, I understood that there's nothing more boring in storytelling, unlike life, than consummation. [laughing] So I understood that we were going to drag this on, as long as possible. I did feel like my level of emotional constipation seemed to be a little insane, because it was so clear. I knew it was coming, I knew at some point, you couldn't leave this show without them connecting in some way. That way.

HRISHI: And what did you think of the actual scene, now having seen it?

BRADLEY: I hesitate to say this, just because I'm in it. By the way, Josh is really good in this episode, I hate to say.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Josh Malina? Let's be clear.

BRADLEY: Yeah. Yeah.

JOSH: Thank you, you're very kind.

BRADLEY: I thought it worked really well. It reminded me of how all the acting in the show was incredibly strong, and that we were dealing with these complicated political streams, complicated interpersonal streams, and whenever I see the show after a while, I'm like, 'oh wow, it's a miracle, it did work.' Nothing feels like it works when I'm shooting, which I think goes to why I'm always afraid to watch it. And I need to get, apparently, a decade or two between the making of it and the watching of it, to appreciate how it works, in an un-self-conscious way.

HRISHI: That's interesting, Janel said that she felt like it was awkward when it was being filmed as well. She didn't feel like it had really landed for her.

BRADLEY: Yeah, that's a common response after I kiss a woman.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: [laughing] You said it, not I.

BRADLEY: It's a great Alex episode, it was funny because I had this pet peeve after being on that show forever, and it was usually the guest directors would come in, and they would, as if they had invented fire, they would say 'Ok, I'm thinking about doing a 360.' I hated 360s, I hate 360s because when I see them in movies, I feel like I'm aware of it. I'm always aware of it, and I feel like if you're aware of the camera, you're dropping out of the story. And I think I have anxiety acting in them, because as the camera's spinning around, you're working on two levels. You're trying to forget everything and just be present, but you're very aware that there's a very tight window that you have to hit when you say your line. That said, I was upset because I was watching these, and I felt like the 360s really worked. But that's Alex. Alex is an extremely energetic, dynamic-with-the-camera director.

JOSH: I was just going to ask, do you have a memory of filming that scene with Janel?

BRADLEY: Yeah! It all kind of came back to me, there was such a build-up about us that there was a lot of pressure. I think we felt self-conscious in front of the crew. I remember being relieved that it's in the context of an enthusiastic explosion of good news.

[West Wing Episode 7.13 excerpt]

*DONNA: We got the new national tracking polls.*

*JOSH: The Times?*

*DONNA: It's 44-44. We're tied.*

*JOSH: We're tied?*

*DONNA: Nationally.*

*JOSH: Holy mother of God! We caught him! We caught him!*

*[kissing sounds]*

[end excerpt]

BRADLEY: I was relieved, just for our sakes, that there was a built-in excuse to be kissing. I think we had a version of what the audience was supposed to feel. Which was 'what was that?' Was that enough? Was that was the audience needed? Was that was the characters needed? So that kind of helped it work, I think.

HRISHI: At this point, seven seasons in, did you still feel invested in this part of your character?

BRADLEY: In the Donna aspect? In the romantic aspect?

HRISHI: Yeah.

BRADLEY: Yes! Totally, completely. I always felt that from day one, between Josh and Donna, from the first moment in the pilot, after the take when I went around and said to Aaron: "She's so strong to me, as somebody to work with and as an actress." Just because she really cannot be fake. She's translucent. I was very, very invested, and I think she was too, in not letting down the huge build-up that these two characters had.

HRISHI: I feel like from the people we've spoken to this on this show, there are these two extremes maybe in terms of actors' relationships to their characters and what happens to them. If on the one side we have Richard and his meticulous care about everything that Toby does, and then on the other side, like Josh saying 'tell me: happy face, sad face?'

JOSH: Where do I pick up my check?

HRISHI: [laughing] Right. And so I was wondering where on that spectrum you felt, in particular, about this. If there's some part of you that could exist as a fan of these two characters, rooting for them, while you were also just doing your work at the same time.

BRADLEY: I feel deeply invested. I never felt like, especially with Josh, because there was no false step for me, in that part. It never came up. I think for Richard there were moments where it really veered off from his passionate vision of the guy. I never felt like it veered off, for me. There's a very weird thing about the part which I think was an aspect of Aaron's gift of being able to pick up on what actors can give and write to that. I don't think there was anything I uttered in that show, politically, that would not be a version of my own political point of view. Which I think is, hopefully, passionately pragmatic. And the same thing was true with how I felt about Janel, and how Josh felt about Donna. I did begin to think, 'this is getting kind of ridiculous.' Now he's clearly in love with this woman, but by the time we shot this, I was like, let's go. They need to do this. And then, even in this episode, he's just so emotionally constipated that he can't pick up the key and get the hell out of there. He still doesn't know. He's an idiot.

JOSH: My feeling was even when Ronna grabs the key and returns it to Donna, Josh might have gone up there and knocked on her door.

BRADLEY: Well, there's a moment where I would have acted differently from Josh.

JOSH: There you go. I believe that.

HRISHI: I appreciate that it wasn't like they crossed this one threshold and then everything changed. I like the idea that they had this kiss that seemingly could have opened up all these doors, literally with the hotel room. But instead, Josh doesn't become a different person overnight.

BRADLEY: I did appreciate that, watching it. Because I had really forgotten the progression of this. Thank God, it wasn't like, a little mistake into some passionate, unforgivable 360 of love-making.

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: [laughing] Did you talk to Janel about the scene? Either before, during or after.

BRADLEY: Well we spent weeks with the intimacy coach, planning it out...

JOSH: [laughing] Not in those days.

BRADLEY: No, I don't remember but it's not the kind of thing you're gonna... it's not a logistically difficult sex scene. It's just a kiss. You know it's coming, and you just kind of throw yourself into it. It's probably more awkward afterwards. It's always awkward when you say 'cut'.

HRISHI: Was that the case?

BRADLEY: Well, I'd worked with her for seven years, but I'd never kissed her. [laughing] It's always a big moment.

JOSH: Yeah. It's an odd thing.

BRADLEY: Yeah. You want to do it passionately. [laughing] Whenever you do those things, you're wondering what's appropriate, what isn't. And at that point, Janel and I had absolute, relentless affection for each other. We loved working together. But still, when you kiss somebody the first time... And there's a combination in this thing, because it's almost like you're kissing the person you work with, you're kissing somebody you've been basically living with for seven years, like a sibling. So yeah, it gets different when you kiss.

HRISHI: Did it end up bringing you two closer as friends?

BRADLEY: I wouldn't say...I don't know, I'm blushing! I felt strongly, joyously in an uncomplicated, imaginary way, totally in love with her through the whole series, and there was an excitement about this idiot finally realizing what was right in front of him. And I felt



there was... watching it, I felt there was a very sweet complicated delicacy between us, following it. Which rang true to me.

JOSH: I agree. I think you guys both played it beautifully, and it was written well, and directed well, and it was something I'm sure many, many fans had been waiting eagerly for, for years. Do you remember any fan reaction or how people took it?

BRADLEY: Well this was before, as opposed to you, I learned very early on, doing regional theater, never go to the after-play discussion. And now, of course, the entire world is an after-play discussion.

JOSH: This is true.

BRADLEY: It would be much different now, with social media. But no, people were not like high-fiving me on the street.

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: [laughing] Not yet.

BRADLEY: Not yet.

HRISHI: Listeners, anyone, if you see Bradley Whitford, please high-five him on the street for his scene where he kissed Janel Moloney.

BRADLEY: [laughing] Yeah, yeah, anybody out there, I've been waiting for this for a long time. And frankly, being able to work with her, and work through brutal shoots, and brutal years, and our scenes were always this mixture of affection and logistics and sexual yearning. It was a very intimate dance for seven years, with a woman I loved as a person, and was, again, just totally translucent person to act with. She did not plan out a performance, ever. I always think that it's the difference between really exciting acting and just good acting. And so part of the reason every scene I got to do with her was so interesting was she couldn't help but be honest. There wasn't a performance sheen over it.

JOSH: Martin's youngest child - Performance Sheen.

HRISHI: [laughing]

JOSH: Janel has told us that she, from the downbeat of your relationship, played Donna thoroughly in love with Josh.

BRADLEY: From the beginning?

JOSH: Yes, from the very beginning. Didn't she tell us that, Hrishini?

HRISHI: Yes, that's right, she said she read the pilot script and from the beginning she decided, before it was ever implicit or explicit in the scripts, that the way she was going to approach the character was that she was in love with Josh.

BRADLEY: Well I think the dynamic that was going on there was that Josh, in his idiotic, oblivious, male cockiness, assumed... she confirmed for him what he assumed about what every woman felt about him. And so it felt like home.

JOSH: [laughing]

HRISHI: [laughing] Thanks so much, Brad.

BRADLEY: My pleasure

JOSH: That was great.

BRADLEY: I love you guys.

JOSH: Love you too.

[music]

JOSH: Thank you all for listening to another episode of *The West Wing Weekly*. Huge thanks to Janel Moloney and Brad Whitford for being our guests today.

HRISHI: As we get closer and closer to the finish line ourselves.

JOSH: Yes! I can see it now. Now we are, I mean, I don't know if it's technically home stretch. What comes before the home stretch?

HRISHI: The halfway point. Which I think we've just crossed.

JOSH: The halfway point of the entire podcast. I've done the math, and I think we're just there. Yeah. It's getting real.

HRISHI: Yeah. Let's not dwell on it too much. Plenty of time later on to dwell on endings. Now's probably not the time. For now I'll just say thanks to Zach McNees and thanks to Margaret Miller, as always for helping us make the show.

JOSH: And thanks to PRX and Radiotopia. *The West Wing Weekly* is a proud part of Radiotopia, a perverse and often baffling collection of podcasts, about which you can find more information at [radiotopia.fm](http://radiotopia.fm).

HRISHI: You can find us on social media, just look for *The West Wing Weekly*. You can find Bradley Whitford and Janel Moloney on Twitter: [@bradleywhitford](https://twitter.com/bradleywhitford) and [@nellymoloney](https://twitter.com/nellymoloney).

JOSH: You can watch Brad's new television show, *Perfect Harmony*, on Thursday nights on NBC. Check your local listings.

HRISHI: And leave us a note, let us know what you thought about this episode, on any of those places online.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: Josh'll see it.

JOSH: I was gonna say - I no longer respond, but I still read it all.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

BRADLEY and JANEL: What's next?

[Outro Music]