

The West Wing Weekly

7.22: "Tomorrow"

Guests: Aaron Sorkin, Thomas Schlamme, Martin Sheen, Bradley Whitford,  
Richard Schiff, Allison Janney, Marlee Matlin, Jack Jason, Kathleen York,  
Allison Smith, Melissa Fitzgerald, Ramon de Ocampo, Evan Arnold, Karis Campbell,  
Teri Polo, Christopher Misiano, Dylan K. Massin, Matthew Del Negro, Eli Attie,  
Jimmy Smits, Josh Singer, Mary McCormack, Kevin Falls, Lawrence O'Donnell,  
Paul Redford, Ron Ostrow, Kim Webster, Peter James Smith, William Duffy,  
Tim Davis-Reed

[Intro Music]

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

JOSH: Hello. You are listening to the final episode of *The West Wing Weekly*.

AUDIENCE: [booing]

JOSH: They're not booing, they're yelling, "Josh".

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

JOSH: I'm Joshua Malina.

AUDIENCE: [cheering]

HRISHI: And I'm Hrishikesh Hirway.

AUDIENCE: [cheering and clapping].

HRISHI: Happy birthday Josh.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

HRISHI: Thank you all so much for being here. Thanks, Josh for being here on your birthday.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

JOSH: It's the most pathetic way to have a party.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

JOSH: And charge at the door.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: We're delighted to be here at the Ace Hotel. Shabbat Shalom.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

JOSH: The delightfully ungapatchka Ace Hotel. How awesome is this venue?

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

HRISHI: Before we get started tonight, we want to take advantage of the fact that, for the first time ever on this final episode, our team is all here in the same place. So please welcome Zach McNeas, Margaret Miller, and Nick Song.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

JOSH: Oh, and quickly, before we move on, I know this is going to turn into a jumble of an evening and chaos, and before it finishes, I want to make sure to say that – I've told you this privately, I want to say it publicly – much like *The West Wing* itself, *The West Wing Weekly* is certainly a collaborative effort, but also like *The West Wing*, it is, in its own way, the vision of one man with drive, and vision, and creativity to spare. And that is Hrish Hirway.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

HRISHI: That was awfully nice of you.

JOSH: It's the truth.

HRISHI: Today we're discussing episode 22 of season seven, the series finale of *The West Wing*. It's called, and I'm doing this under duress, but it's called:

[Annie (1982 film) excerpt]

*ANNIE: [singing] Tomorrow! Tomorrow! I love ya, tomorrow! You're always a day away.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: How can you not be inspired by that little moppet?

HRISHI: I can tell you.

JOSH: Come on.

HRISHI: I can tell you.

JOSH: It was written by John Wells. It was directed by Christopher Misiano –

AUDIENCE: [delayed low-key cheers]

JOSH: Don't act like he's here.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

JOSH: And it first aired on May 14th, 2006. Over 10 million viewers watched this finale, and their names are...

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

HRISHI: [laughs] For this final synopsis, it seems appropriate to quote the Roman philosopher, Seneca, who said:

*"...Every new beginning comes from some other beginning's end..."*

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

HRISHI: And yes, that's also a line from the song "Closing Time." We have a few guests as you might be able to tell from these chairs.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

HRISHI: I'm going to say their names and then they will come out in whatever order, but please welcome to discuss the episode with us tonight: Bradley Whitford. Mary McCormack. Allison Smith. Writer Eli Attie. Mrs. Helen Santos, Teri Polo. The director of this episode, Christopher Misiano. The incoming President-elect, Jimmy Smits. And last but not least – by the way, in this house, when he stands, nobody sits. Our president, Martin Sheen.

AUDIENCE: [cheering and clapping throughout]

JOSH: And that's the show.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

JOSH: I'm emotionally drained already.

HRISHI: Let's start from the beginning. Actually, before this episode aired, NBC replayed the pilot of *The West Wing*. There was also a commercial for *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

HRISHI: "Tomorrow" begins with the white screen, black type treatment. The unusual one. It makes sense for our final. And it's Inauguration Day; the whole episode takes place over the one day. The first person who we see is President-elect Santos, thoughtfully gazing out the window.

JOSH: Yes. Uh, Santos is very Folgers commercial. Santos in the window nook, looking very manly with his morning cup of joe.

AUDIENCE/GUESTS: [laughter]

JOSH: Very swoony.

HRISHI: It's 6:00 am. And then we see Josh in bed with the comforter, tastefully pulled up to hide his bare chest.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

HRISHI: Hiding also with it the scar/no scar. And Josh is not alone, he's there with Donna. They're back from vacation and still together.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

HRISHI: It's a sweet scene. Even just – even though it's wordless, it's really, it's a beautiful, tender moment. And it's nice to know that these two kids made it back from their trip and are still going strong.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

JOSH: Also, another swoony scene, it made me a pine for a “Men of *West Wing*” calendar.

AUDIENCE: [laughter and cheers]

JOSH: Where I would be any month other than February.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

HRISHI: There is a theme in this episode of men thoughtfully gazing out the window.

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: We'll get to more of them later. First, we get to C.J. She's reading the newspaper and listening to the news at the same time, which I'm impressed by her multitasking ability. And she has an expression that I would describe as inscrutable, maybe melancholy. I don't know. She's – the news is calling the Bartlet era often tumultuous, which I think is accurate. It's how they sustained seven seasons. And then enter Will Bailey. The Spalding is still in the office, which means that Toby is still there too. In a lot of ways, Toby's spirit hangs over this whole episode, even though Richard Schiff does not actually appear in the episode.

JOSH: His presence, nonetheless, is there.

HRISHI: Yeah. The main plot of this episode, other than sort of tying things up and bringing us to a gentle stop, is this question of, “Will Toby get pardoned or not?” And the president is up this morning as well. Also, thoughtfully gazing out a window. It's a good look for a president.

JOSH: Sure. And they have to amortize the cost of those windows over the course of a season, and one more episode to use them.

HRISHI: I feel like if you're going to contemplate the future of the world, it's good to have some nice natural lighting. And if you look, actually, if you Google “president looking out the window,” there are a lot of results.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

HRISHI: Pete Souza got a lot of mileage out of President Obama just looking out of a window. Christopher Misiano.

JOSH: Here we go.

AUDIENCE: Woo.

HRISHI: Could you tell us about what conversations you had, before you started filming this episode? What were the discussions like at a practical level, in terms of all the things that you had to accomplish with this finale?

CHRISTOPHER: Well, it's been a very long time. John had written the script and, and he basically, he sent us – the gift was to be able to go to Washington. There was one story that, Jimmy, do you remember? Being out with Michael O'Neill, and Teri, and being out walking through a school. And we got outside, and we were going to film the end of the scene and the National Cathedral bells started to ring, and I thought, ok, cut. We'll wait. And then they went, and they went.

JOSH/AUDIENCE: [laughter]

CHRISTOPHER: And literally then we sent the PA, and they went to the National Cathedral. And they were ringing for two hours.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

CHRISTOPHER: It was a concert being recorded.

JOSH: And did it hold up filming for that entire time?

CHRISTOPHER: God bless Jimmy and Teri and Michael O'Neill, they kept speaking.

PANEL: [laughter]

CHRISTOPHER: Just a little louder. But anyway, we, by that point, I think we had such a shorthand that John and I, we had some conversations, but they weren't in depth about it. It was like we kind of all felt what this was, which was a kind of... reverie to what we had done. And I think everybody's staring out the window, what I feel guilty about already, is...

JOSH: [crosstalk] No, No. We liked it, we liked it.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

CHRISTOPHER: [crosstalk] I feel a little criticized, but it's ok.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

CHRISTOPHER: Redundant. I know.

JOSH: [crosstalk] This is what we do Chris. This is what we do.

CHRISTOPHER: But we just knew that it was thoughtful, and it is slightly different pace than we had marched through the halls all the rest of the time.

JOSH: Are you psyched as a director to be given the final episode [crosstalk] or do you feel pressured?

CHRISTOPHER: [crosstalk] Are you kidding?! Absolutely! Psyched and scared, but there you go.

HRISHI: This first scene with the President and the First Lady on their last morning in the White House is a really poignant one, and I think one of the most immediate impressions this episode gives is one that is not triumphant. I think on either side, really, even for the incoming president and the outgoing president, there isn't this sense of fist pumping victory. And I think with even just that contemplative look out the window, you can tell with both of them that they are, they're thinking about something larger than themselves. So, it's not a criticism at all.

JOSH: No. That's one of the things I love about this episode, because of what John and Christopher did, is that it has a strong sense of what's lost, in addition to what's gained. Like the transition of power is not treated lightly.

HRISHI: Here is a criticism though.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

HRISHI: Not of you.

JOSH: Oh no. No, no, no. This is a Brad's performance-

BRAD: Oh, oh great.

JOSH: Comment.

HRISHI: The First Lady talks about how cold it's going to be for inauguration, and she says this:

[West Wing Episode 7.22 excerpt]

*ABBEY: Who in his right mind decided that January would be the best time of year to hold an outdoor ceremony north of the equator?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Jefferson, Adams, Franklin.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: None of them came up with the idea of inauguration in January. Inauguration, until 1933, was March 4<sup>th</sup> - a much better time to stand outside. The first inauguration actually took place on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 1789 and then from...

JOSH: [crosstalk] It was meant to be March 4<sup>th</sup>, but there was bad weather.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

JOSH: Bad weather's funny, apparently.

HRISHI: And then from 1793 until 1933 they were held on March 4<sup>th</sup>.

JOSH: 20th Amendment addressed the change.

HRISHI: That's right. Because previously, March 4th was the day on which the federal government began operations. But then with the 20th Amendment, Inauguration Day moved to January 20th. And that's where it's been ever since, unless it's on a Sunday, and then they'd do a January 21<sup>st</sup>.

JOSH: Eli, how'd they miss that?

ELI: Yeah. You know it's funny. Watching the episode, re-watching the episode, I caught that this time. I have no memory of that error, but it's a commonly known thing. Lawrence O'Donnell and I were just talking backstage about this.

AUDIENCE: [cheering]

JOSH: [crosstalk] Are you saying that Lawrence...

BRAD: Lawrence O'Donnell?

HRISHI: Wow, wow,

ELI: No, No. Not at all.

JOSH: You just keep quiet who you've been chatting with backstage, Mr. Man.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

ELI: Just that...I'm off to a bad start. Forgive me. All right. I will say this. I think the reason that was changed was because the transition to FDR was such a long one –

JOSH: [crosstalk] Yes.

ELI: And the previous president –

JOSH: [crosstalk] In the middle of the Depression –

ELI: Was a lame duck. Exactly. And it was, felt at the time, that it was just months where nothing happened, and the country really needed relief, and that was the impetus for changing that. And I should stop now, because I'm already behind. No, I really am mystified that that mistake made it through, and don't really know why and neither do people that I talked to on the phone and text with repeatedly.

AUDIENCE/PANEL: [laughter]

HRISHI: Dr. Bartlet's trying to joke a bit, but the president is not in a joking mood, and she can read him, and I love that without having to explain anything, and she says, "You did a lot of good, Jed."

AUDIENCE: Oh, oh.

MARTIN: I did.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

HRISHI: Martin, could you tell us a little bit about what it was like working with Stockard Channing? The dynamic that the two of you have on screen is...

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

JOSH: Well, I was talking to her backstage and she said –

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

MARTIN: My only disappointment working with Stockard is that she did not like one of my favorite movies, *Grease*.

JOSH/AUDIENCE: [laughing]

MARTIN: It was a forbidden topic.

JOSH: Really?

MARTIN: I don't know why, but she didn't like the movie, she didn't like herself in it.

JOSH: She was terrific.

MARTIN: I thought so too. Maybe she'll get this message.

JOSH/AUDIENCE: [laughs]

HRISHI: And then she can come on the next episode.

AUDIENCE: [chuckle then melancholy] Ohhh.

JOSH: Aww.

HRISHI: Too soon? Did it take a long time for the two of you to find a rhythm that seemed, onscreen, to be so natural and so lived in?

MARTIN: There wasn't, there just wasn't enough time. I mean, you have to... [laughs] Television, you have to move very quickly. And, I was delighted. I don't mind saying that I had made some suggestions for the First Lady that were not accepted, but I was delighted.

JOSH: [laughs] Wait. Let's hear some names. Come on. Spill that tea, sister.

MARTIN: Seriously?



JOSH: Yes.

MARTIN: Mia Farrow.

JOSH: Oh. Come on out!

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

JOSH: Interesting.

MARTIN: Yeah, she was my first choice.

BRAD: This is going to be great for Stockard. It's just going to be...I mean, you got bigger problems than *Grease* now.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

BRAD: [laughs]

MARTIN: I'm done.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

HRISHI: I think with the business of the series mostly done, what comes through in this episode is that it's mostly about the marriages of these two administrations. Those are my favorite parts of the episode, the moments between the President and the First Lady, and the President-elect and the First Lady...elect? First lady-in-waiting? And it's... they're really beautiful compliments to one another. You sort of see this kind of symmetry, but also, I think, the regret on President Bartlet's side, and then this sort of stepping into the unknown, the void on the Santos' side. Teri and/or Jimmy, could you tell us about what your memories were about filming this last episode?

MARTIN: He thought I'd never leave.

JOSH: [laughs]

JIMMY: Well, I do know that re-watching them recently, the banter between the spouses was something that was an ongoing thread with all of the couple characters, whether you were male/male, female/male, husband/wife. And I thought that that was beautiful, that there was that juxtaposition that was happening there.

HRISHI: I love this moment between Helen and Matt early on, where Helen comes in and asks – it just felt very real, she asks which necklace to wear. And Matt Santos tells her, and then she decides to do the other one.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

JOSH: [laughs] Also, did you guys – you guys are prepping for the inauguration at Blair House. Did you shoot at Blair House? Or that's a no-no.

CHRISTOPHER: Well, we were allowed to exit Blair House.

JOSH: Uh, everyone's allowed to leave Blair House. You just stand in front of it and you leave.

CHRISTOPHER: I don't think that's true.

JOSH: You're probably right.

CHRISTOPHER: During the scout, we were actually invited in, and we got to go through Blair House, and we actually got to go down into the basement and see the sign-in book, which had Gandhi's signature in it. And –

TERI: Where was I?

JOSH: [laughs]

CHRISTOPHER: [cross-talk] Make up. I don't know.

TERI: [cross-talk] Wasn't I invited to this?

JOSH: I myself have been to – I can't remember, as my memory is not great, how or why, but it had to have been through *The West Wing*, I got to go visit Blair House.

TERI: What?!

JOSH: And I got to stand in the room. Yeah. Yeah. Huge Will Bailey fans.

PANEL: [laughs]

JOSH: I just remember I got to stand in the room where Francis Preston Blair offered the generalship of the Union army to Lee, which he of course turned down, and went for the other guys.

TERI: Oh yeah.

JOSH: But it was, it's an incredible place.

CHRISTOPHER: It's an incredible place. And Abraham Lincoln sat with his advisors and all the rest. It was, it was an incredible moment. But when we filmed, we were able to step them in the door. And then step them out.

JOSH: Exit.

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah.

JOSH: There was also, I think, an infamous assassination attempt on President Truman's life in front of Blair House. There's a lot of history in Blair House.

TERI: Well that's a downer.

JOSH: Yes, it is.

TERI: But where did- we shot- We actually shot that scene on the stages, didn't we? Didn't we shoot the scene of us getting ready on the stages? On set?

CHRISTOPHER: [cross-talk] Getting ready was on the stages, but it was that walk across walk across the street –

TERI: But then it was that walk across the street that we actually shot from Blair House. Yeah.

HRISHI: Inside Blair House, or not Blair House, as the Santos' are getting ready, Bram knocks on the door, and Helen's a little surprised because he just comes right in. I think we've gone from the era of the walk-and-talk to the knock-and-walk.

JOSH: That is true. It's very *Downton Abbey*, I think the knock and immediate entrance. Right? Isn't that what they do? You guys watch any other TV?

EVERYONE: [laughs]

JOSH: Just this?

HRISHI: Teri, I love your performance in this moment. I'm going to play this clip.

[West Wing Episode 7.22 excerpt]

*HELEN: Come on, it'll be an adventure. That's what you told me when you wanted to run for city council, and I didn't want you to. "Come on. It'll be an adventure"*

[end excerpt]

TERI: What was I doing to him?

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

HRISHI: I will say, there is a whole vibe between the Santos' that is very... playful.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

HRISHI: But it's a good moment –

TERI: [crosstalk] That's one word for it.

HRISHI: But that's not what's happening in this moment. I think it's just –

TERI: I was putting his clothes on.

HRISHI: Yes.

TERI: I was not undressing him.

HRISHI: It just feels like there's so much subtext loaded in this moment. It feels like a combination of pride, and also this recognition that life is never ever going to be the same. And all of the feelings that go along with that acceptance. I felt like that that all came through, and it's a really beautiful moment.

JOSH: It's very much like *The Crown*.

AUDIENCE: [cheers/laughter]

JOSH: I don't know if you guys watch that, but what you're giving up as you ascend to power.

TERI: Maybe. You know, what's really interesting about their chemistry – and throughout the whole thing, was I always sense that there was, from Helen, there was a reticence, a, “I don't know if I really want to do this,” and “Are we really doing this?” And I guess you're just kind of, “Ok, we're doing this. Ok, cool. All right. Yippee, I'm the First Lady.”

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

TERI: And in that moment, I think it was more about her giving to him, and encouraging him, and then supporting him. Cause he was nervous. He had, you know, but I think that that was more about him, for her to have been supporting him, and dressing him and making sure that his tie looked good. 'Cause he's a horrible tie-tier. But yeah, that was always very interesting.

ELI: Yeah. I was just going to say the one thing, re-watching the episode, that I thought was very interesting, was the audience knows the complexity of being married in that building in a way that the Santos' don't yet. So it's very pregnant moment, I think, and that's true of a number of those little handoff moments, watching it, which is that we have so much more information about the toll it takes, about the highs and the lows, and everything is ahead of them.

JOSH: And Eli, can you tell us what your involvement in the writing and the creation of this script was? We know it's John Wells –

ELI: Not a whole lot. I mean, other than the fact that –

JOSH: Get out

ELI: Yeah. I'm just, I'm really just here to tell you who's backstage, basically.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

BRAD: Eli was in charge of the inauguration research.

JOSH/EVERYONE: [laughs]

ELI: Touché. But one thing that I remember, really even before the last, say three episodes, was John asking the writing staff, you know, “Think about moments you want to see as we wrap up the series. Think about things you want to pay off,” and just, you know, how you would want the show to end. Because I think he always had in mind that this was going to be a really valedictory episode, and that it was going to be maybe a little less story-driven than kind of an emotional conclusion. So, there was discussion in the writer's room about that, and everybody chimed in different things here and there. I think the stuff about the train, the ice storm that affected that Amtrak train, I had researched and given some stuff –

MARY: What's more emotional than that?

EVERYONE: [laughs]

ELI: Yes, this is actually me.

JOSH: [singsong] Dump on Eli.

EVERYONE: [laugh]

ELI: Exactly. This is actually me saying how little I had to do with the episode.

MARY: I'm giving you [expletive deleted].

ELI: No, no. I know.

JOSH: With this appearance, Eli Attie becomes our most frequent guest.

HRISHI: It's true.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

ELI: Well –

JOSH: Edging out – edging at Bradley Whitford by one.

ELI: It's, it's – I'm going to leave now, and he can – No, no, it's been a pleasure. And I know this is probably for the second half, but it really feels to me, and I've talked to other people here, that it's the end of the kind of a second run of the show. It's been such a lovely thing to have been a part of this twice.

AUDIENCE: [claps]

JOSH: Thank you.

ELI: So, thanks to you both.

HRISHI: I'd like to talk about this train scene.

JOSH: Oh yeah.

ELI: Oh, you mean the, the crux of the episode.

HRISHI: [laughing] Exactly.

ELI: The money scene.

MARY: I nailed it.

JOSH: [laughs]

ELI: You did.

HRISHI: Anyway, it becomes the Amtrak regional train. And I'm just going to play this part:

[West Wing Episode 7.22 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Sounds like a state matter.*

*KATE: Normally, yes, but it's between the Exeter and Haverhill stops.*

*WILL: Also known at the New Hampshire-Massachusetts border.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I'm impressed with the accuracy, because the Amtrak regional does, in fact, stop between those two cities.

AUDIENCE: [claps]

HRISHI: However –

ELI: I cried.

HRISHI: Let's not get too excited, because Kate mispronounces both of them.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

HRISHI: And –

MARY: It was the last day!

JOSH: [laughs] She had been drinking heavily, in fairness.

MARY: We were drunk.

HRISHI: On behalf of Exeter and Haverhill.

MARY: I mean, we were pretty loaded at that point.

ELI: We were.

HRISHI: And then, even more shocking to me is, I mean, the president says nothing!

MARY: [crosstalk] He doesn't care!

HRISHI: [crosstalk] A New Hampshire Bartlet lets that slide. I just thought what, self-respecting New England pedant lets that slide?

JOSH: Certainly not this one.

HRISHI: Yup.

BRAD: What is the correct pronunciations?

HRISHI: “Hayvrill” and Exeter.

MARY: Ohhh.

ELI: Picky, picky.

MARY: I had a new baby.

JOSH: She had a new “babby.”

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

MARY: My milk was coming in.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

HRISHI: Also coming in is Charlie.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

JOSH: Woah. Nice segue.

HRISHI: Thank you. Charlie’s wandering the halls. He meets up with C.J. They’re discussing some of the last-minute business that has to be taken care of, and they get to C.J.’s office and Margaret’s there, and I love that C.J. calls Margaret “Sugar.” It’s a nickname that I only really started to appreciate recently, over the course of this podcast. At some point, I heard Josh calling one of his family members “Sugar” over the phone, and it was so cute. And it was nice. I always thought of it as before, as sort of like a creepy...thing that it’s like, only old-timey detective said it like, “Hey, Sugar.” I wish I could pull it off.

JOSH: [cross-talk] No the old-timey –

MARY: Not the time Mel Gibson said, “sugar-tits.”

HRISHI: Is that creepy?

MARY: Less sweet.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

HRISHI: Borderline. So the president gets both governors on the line to deal with this train situation. Both of them are online. They’re both waiting to be spoken to. And he

says to Will, and to Kate – he gestures both of them and says, “Pick a number, two or four.” And Will says, “Two”, and Kate says, “Four”. Which is entirely predictable. That they could have chosen two different numbers. You’re asking two different people to choose two different numbers. Just pick one person.

MARY: I think he was talking to me, though. I think he was talking to me.

JOSH: Oh, and I just jumped in.

HRISHI: And the president gets frustrated, but it’s a silly strategy. It’s almost as nonsensical as Leo’s suggestion in the season six finale for a three-way rock, paper, scissors match.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

HRISHI: Which, by the way, was also written by John Wells, which makes me wonder – how does he make decisions?

BRAD: What the hell are you guys gonna do?

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

JOSH: After this? Hrishu will be fine.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

HRISHI: Also, Mallory is back in this episode.

JOSH: Yay!

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

HRISHI: Joining us for the first time on our podcast.

JOSH: A newbie!

HRISHI: Allison Smith.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

JOSH: Yeah. I want to start. I’m going to start at the very beginning. I want to talk about *Annie*. So we’ve already referenced it.

ALLISON: I was slightly, I was slightly insulted that you didn’t use a clip of me.

JOSH: Sorry.

ALLISON: I played Annie on Broadway when I was young.

JOSH: Yeah. How old were you?

ALLISON: I only – I only do finales named *Tomorrow*, apparently.



JOSH: If we had had a little more of foresight, we would've gotten your clip. That'll  
would have been good.

ALLISON: That's ok, that's ok.

JOSH: Can you do a little live, hotshot?

ALLISON: A little live?

EVERYONE: [clapping and cheering] Yeah!

ALLISON: [sings]      When I'm stuck with a day  
                          That's gray  
                          And lonely  
                          I just stick out my chin  
                          And grin  
                          And say  
                          Tomorrow, Tomorrow!  
                          I love ya, tomorrow!  
                          You're always a day away!

EVERYONE: [applause and cheering throughout]

JOSH: Wow! That was a mic drop.

HRISHI: We definitely should have charged more for these tickets.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

JOSH: Damn. That was awesome. Ok. How did you get to be in *The West Wing*?

ALLISON: From the very beginning?

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Sure, like what's your origin story? And what's your superpower?

ALLISON: My origin story is that I went in for Mallory O'Brien, and I had a friend at  
the time, Eric Stoltz. And I said, "I have this audition." And he said, "Oh, you got to  
talk fast. You gotta talk fast. All my *Sports Night* friends...like you gotta talk really  
fast." So, I was lucky to have that tip. And I talked really fast in that audition, and I  
walked out. Aaron was there. And Tommy, and John Wells, and I walked out and I  
had that actor-y moment where I was like, "I think I could do better." And I had that  
horrible, horrible thing that you can do as an actor when you're not in the space to  
just own it and say, "Can I do it again?" You're just lingering in the hallway holding  
your car keys, pretending like you have something to do, but you're afraid to leave  
because you feel like you could do better. And then I waited a minute too long and

Aaron comes out the door there. They were done. And I was like, "I think I can do it better; I think I want to do it again. I think I want to do it better." And he said, "Well, you got it, so you don't have to." [Audience applauds] So that was pretty good. That was pretty generous.

HRISHI: That's awesome.

ALLISON: It was amazing.

HRISHI: I love that Mallory's in this episode. Of course, all of our characters are connected to Leo, and Mallory has her own personality and persona in the show as well. But the fact that Mallory's there, and part of this, I felt really brought Leo into the episode, in a really tangible way.

ALLISON: Well, she has to bring the gift. And I was honored to have the writers think of Mallory to bring the gift. And I think when I was re-watching the episode, I think, it did bring Leo back, but I also felt like John was always there. Like John and Leo were just ever present until the very end. Everybody missed him, and the characters missed their boss and their friend, and the actors missed their dear friend, so...

AUDIENCE: [applause]

HRISHI: Even though we don't see Toby in this episode, as we talked about, we feel his presence as well. And I really loved the moment where the president, in his final act behind the Resolute desk, considers – and then eventually grants – the pardon to Toby. Martin, I felt like you did this incredible thing where it felt like the president considered every single bit of frustration that he had with Toby, all of the things that he had pent up. And then there's this giant cathartic sigh, and then something passes, something changes. It was like some kind of exorcism, and the ghost of that feeling is gone, and then forgiveness is able to come in. And then finally the president signs the pardon.

MARTIN: I could not imagine not pardoning Toby, because I don't think Richard would have ever spoken to me again.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

JOSH: If you ask Richard, he didn't do it anyway. If only he were here. That's one thing that did make me laugh is that I freeze framed on the pardon letter, and I guess the property people did not foresee Netflix, and the ability to freeze frame on the letter.

ALLISON: Oh my God.

BRAD: [cross-talk] You're killing me, Josh.

JOSH: Some of the wording is odd. The pardon letter ends with a sentence that begins: "In testimony whereof I have here unto agreed."

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

JOSH: And then after that it's actual gibberish. I just thought this is – this was not writing made for pausing.

HRISHI: I wasn't going to bring up the fact that I paused it as well, but I liked also that in the first paragraph, every line begins with a capital letter as if it's a poem.

AUDIENCE: [Laughs]

JOSH: I noticed is that too. The whole thing reads like a Trump tweet.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

JOSH: Random capitalization, and it makes no sense.

MARTIN: You know, I really should have read it.

AUDIENCE: [Laughs]

JOSH: Yeah, really. Exactly. You gotta to read what you sign.

MARTIN: Maybe I didn't pardon him. Maybe that's the whole point of the scene.

JOSH: [cross-talk] I think you have here unto unpardoned him.

HRISHI: Then the president says, also, that he's going to take a final stroll around the joint. And Eli told us that, if this is correct – Chris, you might remember that – was this the final scene that you shot? The final walk around the set was also the final shot of the series?

CHRISTOPHER: Yeah, it was. I don't know if it was the ADs, or all of us collectively, or John's idea that *that* – I mean, it was, as you can imagine, it was an incredible day on the set. And everybody who had been around and whatever collected in the lobby, and Aaron was there, and everybody was there. And, I was trying to shoot.

JOSH & AUDIENCE: [laughs]

CHRISTOPHER: But anyway, I'm not...

JOSH: [crosstalk] So sentimental.

CHRISTOPHER: But anyway, it was this idea that that would be a fitting last moment for us to go out on, Because it was so collegial, and it was so lovely. And Martin, God bless him, it's just – the hardest thing to do is to stop him from talking to people.

EVERYBODY: [laughs]

JOSH: I thought the most ambitious scene was where Bartlet's walking and mentioning everyone by name.

CHRISTOPHER: Oh my God!

JOSH: I was like, anybody who writes that scene for Martin Sheen is a brave writer indeed.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

HRISHI: I will just mention that –

JOSH: [crosstalk] I was excited when he knew my name tonight!

HRISHI: I will just mention that earlier tonight – sorry – sorry, Mr. Sheen – he did forget Aaron Sorkin's name.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

HRISHI: Just briefly.

JOSH: He referred him as the guy who created it. Mia Farrow, he remembers.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

MARTIN: I'm kind of glad that I only did one other of these.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

JOSH: You didn't know it was going to be a roast.

HRISHI: Maybe the cutest “in” joke of the entire series happens while the president is doing this walk round. We get this scene:

[West Wing Episode 7.22 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Nancy, how is your mother doing?*

*NANCY: She's fine now, Mr. President.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Tell her I'm looking forward to seeing her again soon, would you please?*

*NANCY: Absolutely, sir.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Thank you.*

[end excerpt]

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

HRISHI: That's President Bartlet, played by Martin Sheen speaking to Nancy, played by his actual daughter, Renée Estevez. Telling her that he's looking forward to seeing her mother, very soon.

JOSH: Janet.

HRISHI: Her mother, in fact, is backstage.

JOSH: But she will not talk to Eli for some reason.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

HRISHI: I wanted to ask about acting beside your daughter in *The West Wing*.

MARTIN: Yeah, she played –

ALLISON: [crosstalk] Renée –

MARTIN: Renée, I know [laughs]

EVERYONE: [laughs]

MARTIN: You think it's funny. [Laughs] I've always enjoyed working with my kids, and that was the second time that we'd ever worked together. And it is always a joy and you have to take special interest in – it always made it so personal, you know? So, I particularly enjoyed that. I hope she did. Yeah. She doesn't talk about it.

MARY: Ok, well, let's ask her. She's backstage.

HRISHI: Ok. Do you want to talk about your missing –?

JOSH: Yes. Eli, maybe you'll remember this, there are some vestiges of what was a small Will Bailey storyline – references, I think Josh says to Will, “Have you written it yet?” And we never really find out what it is, and Josh says, “Just make it funny.” And the storyline was that in reality, there is a man's tuxedo vest, which each press secretary passes down to the next press secretary. They refer to it as the flak jacket, as if it's going to protect you from the reporters and the questions, and there is a tradition of leaving notes in the pockets of this vest for the next press secretary. And the storyline was that Janeane Garafalo, Louise, Lou, was going to come be the incoming press secretary, and I felt all this pressure about what to leave for her. And it had to be funny, and then Janeane Garafalo, off-camera, who was originally in the episode, put a lot of pressure on me. She kept saying, “You better make my job easy. It better be really...I hear you're really funny.” And I felt – I felt, you know, when a stand-up comic that you love thinks that you know, you better be funny. I just completely collapsed under the pressure. And we filmed the scene, and I wrote – every single take I had to write like a new fricking thing that was supposed to make her laugh. And every single one bombed. And then she was like, “I'm obviously just going to have to act it.” [Panel and Audience laugh] And the only two things I remember that – one was like a very bad Michael Jackson joke, and then the other

one I drew a picture with a really long stick figure, and then a tiny little stick figure, and I labelled them Janney and Chenowith [Audience laughs] She did not like that. And the storyline was cut.

HRISHI: Do you remember that, Eli?

ELI: Yeah. I mean what I remember mostly about the episode as a whole, including the fabulous train storyline, is that, is that in a typical *West Wing* episode, something like either of those would have been stretched out over three or four scenes. And I think maybe uniquely in the series, John felt from the beginning, at some point, but even more so as he got into the editing room, that this episode wasn't really about story. That it was about the emotional resolution more than it was about beats of a plot. And it was too long, and a bunch of things were cut.

BRAD: And you want to focus on the characters you care about.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

JOSH: Brad is –

ELI: [crosstalk] Alright, stand back.

JOSH: Brad is absolutely right, and I'm not offended by that. And there is a parallel story, which is that the outgoing president has written a letter for the incoming president.

ELI: That's right.

JOSH: This would be a more important story line, I agree. And actually there's a fantastic scene – Jimmy has some incredible acting, which is just a man reading a letter, and I wonder – what were you reading? Was it all you, or was there something good left for you when you have to read what President Bartlet has left behind? It's great acting.

HRISHI: It is incredible.

JIMMY: Marty left me a letter.

AUDIENCE: Oohhh.

JOSH: Oh, is that true?

MARY: Oh, he did?

JIMMY: [laughs] No.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

MARY: That is messed up! Oh my –

JOSH: Oh, I love it.

MARTIN: Boy, that was close.

JOSH: So, you're just looking at "where of I have here unto agreed?" Oh. Even better acting than I realized, my friend. Is that hard to do?

JIMMY: I felt so honored to be part of this show, and the legacy that it had left for the seven seasons that it was on, that it was... I was just channeling that.

AUDIENCE: [clapping] Aww.

MARY: I think everyone who came late to the show can sort of sympathize with that. I mean, I feel like I'm late to every party.

JOSH: [laughs]

MARY: I am always like, "Hey guys, when did this start?" And like, and that's how I felt when I came to *The West Wing*. And in the episode before, Allison Janney has a line to me. She goes, "Well, you got here two years ago. It looks different on the backside of eight."

JOSH: Mm hmm.

MARY: And I think that was true for the newbies. I mean, I think that was true for us.

JOSH: I remember one of the strongest memories I have of this final episode, is what I think was the final scene, and everybody clapping and surrounding Martin after finishing the final take. And I remember kind of backing up and feeling, even though it was very special and I was moved, but I felt like it was other people's moment. The people who had been there from the beginning.

MARY: [crosstalk] Yeah, I just felt lucky to –

JOSH: It was *their* very special thing, and I was happy to be even peripherally involved.

BRAD: And it was –

JOSH: [crosstalk] Shut up, Brad.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

JOSH: Oh, you're going to say something real? I'm sorry.

BRAD: No, it was a very... When I was watching it, I was thinking about how so much of that show you could use. You didn't have to act. We were always tired. We were always trying to get through the day really quickly. And I just remember, I realized I didn't watch any of the episodes after – I hadn't seen this episode until

today. Because I really had not watched them, and I think it's because – you know, John passed away, and that was a big deal [tears up]. And it was, you know, we're all navigating that, along with kind of trying to celebrate this wonderful thing. But, you know everybody took an existential hit on that. Which, unfortunately, or fortunately, we were able to put into a show. I guess.

AUDIENCE: [claps]

HRISHI: I wonder how much that feeling was being channeled by John Wells when he wrote the script to be this sort of somber finale overall. Even though it's not expressly about that, there are, of course, these beautiful moments, like the “What Would Leo Do?” Post-It note that C.J. gives to Josh, and Josh's question, “Did this ever stop feeling like Leo's office to you?” But even apart from those moments, I think there's some tenor of that the entire time. And in terms of emotional beats and closure, I wanted to highlight this moment between the president and Charlie.

[West Wing Episode 7.22 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: I don't need this anymore. I thought maybe you could get some use out of it. I was trying to remember if my father had given it to me when I was in the tenth grade or the eleventh. Considered getting you a tie with the scales of justice on it. Figured you'd use this more.*

*CHARLIE: Thank you, Mr. President.*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Thank you, Charlie.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He gave him the Constitution.

Audience: [Laughs and applauds]

JOSH: And how it cuts like a knife.

Audience: [Laughs]

HRISHI: I have to say, this is just to be able to be meta about this for a second. I really appreciate getting to have these kinds of conversations because that is a moment that just kills me in the episode, and the performance from Dulé Hill is so beautiful, and so touching. But then to get to know that that was actually the last thing that was being filmed for the series, that there was this other real world emotional component to it, too. Just, for me at least, it just makes it so much richer and deeper, and I appreciate it even more.

AUDIENCE: [applause]



HRISHI: Immediately after that scene, apparently there was a deleted scene. The scene continued in some version, where everybody then claps for the president in this final moment. And, not only do we have a lot of the White House staff that we know there applauding him, it was actually a chance for Eli Attie and Josh Singer to be in the background as well. But they cut it.

Audience: [Laughs]

ELI: Yeah. John had just asked any of the writers who wanted to – I think probably Josh and I were the only people who wanted to, and some other members of the crew if they wanted to be, as Bartlet walks a little bit further, just applauding him as he left the building – which is something that would really happen. And I have a copy of the scene, and it was not deemed suitable for broadcast.

PANEL: [laughs]

ELI: But that was a really heavy night and I remember it was a bunch of us, a bunch of the writers, because we were going to be in that scene – you know, we're dressed up, and everybody was coming back from the life of the show. I think of that as a really intense, emotional day. Every time you would go to the monitors, to the video village, there would be more and more people as the night went on and as we got closer to that last shot, it was really something.

HRISHI: Yeah. I think – I got to see it because Eli showed me the scene, but I think it was the right note to cut it because –

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

ELI: I mean, it's some of my best work.

JOSH: But you want that good looking staff you've gotten used to. Not a bunch of writers.

CHRISTOPHER: No. I was, I don't know why I thought of it this at this moment, it doesn't pertain to the scene. But I just remember that Alan Alda – we were walking down Warner Brothers, and it was – we knew we were ending and I mean, I was in awe of Alan Alda, as I should have been – and he put his arm around me and he said, “So, are you ready for it to be over?” And I was like...in denial, I suppose, and I kind of said, “Yeah, you know, Alan, I think it's been seven years. It's an organic time. It should – you know, it's coming to the end of the presidency. It feels right, and whatever.” And there was a pause, and he just said, “It's going to be a lot harder than you think.” And he was right.

ELLI: By the way, I did notice in re-watching the episode, that Chris' lovely wife, Hillary, is in the episode, *not* cut from the episode, [everyone laughs] which I totally understand.

CHRISTOPHER: [laughter] Better performance.

ELLI: I totally get it. I totally get it.

JOSH: Also, the guy who created the show.

ELLI: That's correct.

JOSH: He's at the Inauguration.

AUDIENCE: [applauds]

JOSH: Aaron.

CHRISTOPHER: I wish I had given him a better angle, but you know, maybe...

JOSH: What was that like? How'd you get Aaron back?

CHRISTOPHER: I think John probably said it would be lovely to have you there. And, and we had built – I mean, it was before digital and whatever, and I mean, it was a remarkable thing that we, that day, that we had built this incredible platform.

JOSH: It looks great.

CHRISTOPHER: And Ken Hardy, the production designer, did an incredible job with building the façade. And we had this whole platform out in the parking lot of Warner Brothers.

HRISHI: Wow.

CHRISTOPHER: And so, it was just this whole – you know, we had cranes, and this and that, but it was just massive amount of people. And I was like, I think about it now and I'm going, "I can't believe we managed that. We did that."

ELLI: By the way, I don't know if you remember this, Chris – but my memory, which could be wrong of that, is that Aaron was working on the Warner Brothers lot at the time.

CHRISTOPHER: Yes.

ELLI: He had an office there. And I think someone just reached out to him that day. Oh, I think someone just went over there and said, "Do you want to be in this shot?" I could be wrong.

CHRISTOPHER: I think you're right. Because I think it was a surprise to me, but it was like, you know, I was like, "Ok, I think we should get a shot of him." [Laughs]

JOSH: Aaron writes in Inauguration wear, that was convenient. "I'll be right there."

BRAD: Inauguration ready, baby.

ELI: He took off his top hat for the scene.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

HRISHI: I'm so dumb – because there are exterior shots in D.C., and the setup is so impressive –

JOSH: [laughs]

HRISHI: I thought, what building in D.C. did they build this enormous set? Right?

CHRISTOPHER: I mean, I can only imagine it now that we would've had it incorporated into the massive crowds and the whatever, and, but that scene doesn't include that. It just really includes the people on the platform.

JOSH: A lot of people don't know that the Trump inauguration actually took place in the Warner Brothers parking lot.

EVERYONE: [laughs and cheers]

HRISHI: The Chief Justice – Chief Justice Lang swears in the president, which is great. But, much like this podcast, I guess you all couldn't get Glenn Close.

JOSH/AUDIENCE: [laughs]

ELI: I mean, we can ask her when she comes out.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

JOSH: Hey, you were close.

AUDIENCE: [groans]

BRAD: It's almost over.

AUDIENCE: [Laughs]

JOSH: It really is. You got to leave 'em time to buy posters. [Everyone laughs]  
'Cause this is it for me.

HRISHI: I want to say, I think – I love all of the stuff after the Inauguration, of the changeover in the White House you see. The White House domestic staff come and take all of the Bartlets' stuff away. And then as the new kids come in, and the old administration is moving out, there's a funny feeling in there. You know? We get to see Josh and Donna walk in with a sense of familiarity and – but also the sense of something new. Sam walks in like he owns the place, which is great. But then there's this – this scene between Charlie and Bram.

JOSH: I love this scene.

HRISHI: Me too. It's funny to think about this scene in contrast to the first episode, with Charlie, you know. And talking to Josh about how the feeling doesn't go away. But now it is the end of his time in the White House, and it's kind of anticlimactic. Bram moves into his office, and Charlie says – he tries to tell him something about the thermometer, and Bram doesn't even listen to him. And then eventually, just, Charlie just walks out.

JOSH: I love that moment because Bram is played so well by Matthew Del Negro.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

JOSH: Yes. I like that not everybody shows up with a reverence for what came before, and an openness to input. And so I like that you also see that moment where Charlie attempts to kind of make a connection, and maybe give him a little advice and touch base, and Bram's more interested in kind of sitting at his desk and getting Charlie out of his office. I thought it was kind of a profound scene, in its way.

HRISHI: Yeah. I spoke to Gary Lee, who was a staffer in the Obama White House, about the last days there.

AUDIENCE: [single person clapping/whooping]

JOSH: Gary Lee fan.

HRISHI: Gary Lee came in as a – originally, he came in as a legislative assistant. He basically described his job as if Ed and Larry had an assistant, that's what he would have been [Audience laughs]. But by the time he left, he was the director of planning for the office of Political Strategy and Outreach. But the last day he said *was* anticlimactic for him. And it wasn't even Inauguration Day. His last day was, it was a little bit before, and by the very end, there's only there actually probably more people in the White House in this episode than there actually are on those final days. And he said, "You know, we took a few photos, and then we just left." I think also for them, you know, it's a slightly different situation going from the Obama administration to the Trump administration. Everybody in the Obama administration was extremely depressed. And here, you know, we get to have this moment of a Democratic administration to another Democratic administration even – and, you know, we have not had a transition within the same political party since... 1988?

ELI: Reagan to the – yeah, to the first Bush.

HRISHI: '89?

CHRISTOPHER: I just wanted to mention one moment that I actually really love in terms of that, which was when Lily Tomlin is in her office.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

CHRISTOPHER: And the actress who I've seen recently, named Karis Campbell, comes in, and she has this extraordinarily, for me, I think, one of the most touching moments in the piece, where she just steps to the door of the Oval Office. And she just looks at it. And Lily is just kind behind her, and supportive. And it – she just, it's that glory that we want that place to be. And it's really reverent.

AUDIENCE: [applauds]

ELI: I was texting with these guys yesterday, and something that is not a joke.

JOSH: We're here tonight.

ELI: That was not a joke. But something that I was remembering as I was just re-watching the last ever episode of the series, was a time in season four, early in season four, when Aaron one day came into the writer's room and said, "Hey, I – I know how I want to end this entire series. I know what I want the last visual image to be." And it was going to be of Bartlet walking out of the White House gates, and then just slowly disappearing into a crowd of people walking on the street. And I think the next episode, or maybe the one after that he wrote that we worked on that season, was the *Red Mass*, and the Senator Stackhouse character. That's how he leaves the story at the end of that episode. Which I thought was a great story about Aaron, because he puts every single idea he has into the thing in front of him that second. Which is why he's so good. But I mean, it was this idea that one day he thought he would save for years and the series with. And then he used it a week later.

PANEL: [laughs]

ELI: Looking for an ending.

HRISHI: I have one misgiving about this new administration's transition, because we see Ronna take over for Debbie Fiderer, and then when we finally get the Santos team in there, we've got President Santos, and he's got Sam, and Josh, and Bram in there. I was just surprised that it would be all men surrounding him after –

MARY: Yep.

HRISHI: Yeah.

MARY: I felt that way too.

HRISHI: And Ronna is out –

AUDIENCE: [applauds]

MARY: Completely.

HRISHI: In the outer office –

MARY: Letting people in with a clipboard.

HRISHI: Yeah. It did not. That didn't feel right to me.

MARY: No, I know.

HRISHI: And I thought, well, hopefully Amy Gardner's going to get in there and make some big structural changes. But that was really surprising. Especially, in the last few seasons between C.J. as Chief of Staff and Kate Harper as National Security Advisor, I mean, it felt like this was an administration that had good representation. And so just to end on that note, I don't know, I was a little surprised and a little disappointed by that. I thought Ronna had been such a key part of the strategic team, the fact that she wasn't in there getting to weigh in on these kinds of conversations didn't feel fair to her.

MARY: Here, here.

AUDIENCE: [applauds]

CHRISTOPHER: We've all learned –

HRISHI: But one thing that we do get just so satisfyingly – we get this from President Santos:

[West Wing Episode 7.22 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT SANTOS: What's next?*

[end excerpt]

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

ELI: At a certain point in season three or four, Aaron had told me about the TV show *Tanner '88*, which was this HBO series that had been fantastic series. Very different from *The West Wing*, but it had been directed by Robert Altman and written by Gary Trudeau. And I remember him just telling me how great it was, and telling all of us how he couldn't believe that when *The West Wing* premiered, more people didn't see the influence of *Tanner* on *The West Wing*. And it's tonally very different and it's a half an hour, and it's kind of a comedy. But I eventually got the episodes – I don't even think it was available on DVD at the time – and “*What's next?*” is a phrase that appears in *Tanner*, as a button to one important scene. And so, I mentioned that to Aaron the other night, and it may well have been in the recesses of his mind when he

then got that idea from Tommy. But you know, who knows? It could also be a coincidence. So, when John was working on this episode, before he wrote the script, I had sort of – we were all throwing a lot of ideas at him, and I had pitched to him that however the episode ended with President Bartlet, which I didn't know what John was planning to do at that point – some emotional scene with the music playing and a flag billowing in the wind – that there should be a sort of a hard cut to the Oval Office with no music, and military advisors leaving, and Santos behind his desk and Josh just kind of with him, and him turning to Josh and saying, "What's next?" And then hard cut to black. And John didn't do that, he did a version of that as the penultimate scene, and John had a rule, which is to never give him the same note twice, and it was my last note on the series, so I gave him the same note twice, but he didn't take it. But watching the episode, I think he did the right thing. Because we end with our hero, and our leader, and we end with that emotional moment of the story we've been following the whole time, and, you know. So he knew a lot of things I did not.

BRAD: It's weird we didn't cut back to the train wreck, you know?

EVERYONE: [laughs]

MARY: You didn't because I go to the movies.

JOSH: Oh, that's right.

MARY: And what's more emotional than that?

HRISHI: The President and the First Lady are on – well, it's no longer Air Force One, because he's no longer the president – so now it has to be called Sam two eight thousand, or whatever that plane is called when it's, or Sam two nine thousand...

JOSH: I thought it was Southwest. Looked like it.

HRISHI: And he opens up the gift from Mallory, and it's the – it's the Bartlet for America, that napkin. And it's just killer. And then we get to have one more shot of the president gazing thoughtfully out the window.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

JOSH: Which we love.

AUDIENCE: [cheering]

HRISHI: It's beautiful, and it ends like this:

[West Wing Episode 7.22 excerpt]

*ABBEY: What are you thinking about?*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Tomorrow.*

[end excerpt]

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

CHRISTOPHER: Ladies and gentlemen, Snuffy Walden.

BRAD: Snuffy.

JOSH: On that note.

HRISHI: On that note, let's take a quick break.

JOSH: We'll be back potentially with Lawrence O'Donnell.

BRAD: And Mia Farrow.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

HRISHI: We'll be back soon.

AUDIENCE: [cheering and whooping]

[Ad break]

AUDIENCE: [cheering and whooping]

HRISHI: And now back to our show.

AUDIENCE: [cheering and whooping]

JOSH: Eli has more friends than you thought!

HRISHI: For the second part of the evening, please welcome our guests.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

JOSH: Bradley Whitford, who played Josh Lyman. Mary McCormack, who played Kate Harper. Allison Smith, who played Mallory O'Brien. Producer/writer Eli Attie. President Josiah Bartlet, Martin Sheen. Teri Polo, who played Helen Santos. Jimmy Smits played Matt Santos. Richard Schiff played Toby Ziegler.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

JOSH: I'm gonna – I'm going to have to ask you to hold your applause to the end. Guy's arguably a traitor to the country.

HRISHI: We have way too many names to go through, so...

JOSH: Kathleen Bird York played Andrea Wyatt. Marlee Matlin played Joey Lucas. Jack Jason is Marlee's interpreter and producing partner. Melissa Fitzgerald played Carol Fitzpatrick.



AUDIENCE: [cheering throughout]

HRISHI: Does anybody have any popcorn?

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

HRISHI: Ginger has the popcorn – Kim Webster. Writer/executive producer, Lawrence O'Donnell. Team Santos is here: Matthew Del Negro, played Bram Howard. Karis Campbell, who played Ronna Beckman. Evan Arnold, who played Ned Carlson. Ramón De Ocampo, who played Otto. All here, representing. Kevin Falls, co-executive producer. Paul Redford, co-producer. Dylan Massin, co-producer.

AUDIENCE: [cheering throughout]

JOSH: Oh, Peter James Smith, played either Ed or Larry.

HRISHI: William Duffy played either Ed or Larry.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

JOSH: Ron Ostrow, played reporter John. Tim Davis-Reed played Mark O'Donnell. And Christopher Misiano is still here, and Josh Singer, Late Show producer and writer.

HRISHI: Oscar winner.

JOSH: And Paul Redford, producer and writer. For the love of God, is there anybody else?

HRISHI: There is someone else. In fact, there are two more people. They are the reason why we are all here. Please welcome Tommy Schlamme and Aaron Sorkin.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

JOSH: I'm sweating from that.

HRISHI: This is something. My first question is for Aaron and Tommy. I was wondering if you remember when you first learned that *The West Wing* was ending.

AARON: First of all –

TOMMY: For us? Or for the series?

JOSH: Answer as you like.

AARON: Thanks very much for having us here. I cannot... I'm overcome. Seeing everybody.

AUDIENCE: [applauds]

AARON: I think this may be the first time I've been with this group of people and not been behind on a script.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

AARON: And I have to say, seeing you in this new light, you all seem very nice. And not so scary anymore. When did we know that we were leaving? Or when did we know the show was ending?

HRISHI: When did you know that the series was wrapping?

TOMMY: Honestly, I don't know. I think – you know, I have a relationship with John Wells, and we had been talking a little bit, and I think honestly, it was probably with the passing of John that it became sort of... clear.

JOSH: Spencer.

TOMMY: John Spencer, clear to everybody who was still on the show, that that's a possibility that the show will find a way to gracefully – and it's incredible run. Is when I knew.

HRISHI: I read a quote in from the *Oakland Tribune*, that John Wells was actually trying to see if he could tempt you back, Aaron, to write an episode or two for season seven, but that you were busy at the time and just couldn't make the stars align.

AARON: I don't remember that. I'd like to think I would never be too busy to do that.

HRISHI: Do you remember filming this final episode – your cameo in the scene during the inauguration?

JOSH: As man at inauguration

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

AARON: Yeah. And what happened there was I drove to work, my office is on the Warner Brothers lot, and in the parking lot, you guys had built this enormous stand for the inauguration of, I believe Jimmy Smits – I've not seen, don't, no spoilers –

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

JOSH: Don't spoil.

AARON: I'm not a hundred percent sure. And I just went over there to say goodbye to Chris Misiano, who's directing the episode, and whatever ADs happened to be around. This was going, this was the last day of shooting, so this was my chance to say goodbye. And I went over there, I happened to be wearing a jacket and tie that day, so Chris said, "Aaron, you've got to just sit up there. I'm just gonna – we're just going to dolly past you like that." And I thought, ok.

HRISHI: Tommy, did you get to come to the set for any of these final days as well?

TOMMY: Yeah, I came – I think it was like the second to last day of shooting, 'cause I was still at Warner Brothers, I think we both went over there. They didn't ask me to be in any shot.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

TOMMY: Because I also don't wear coats and ties to work. But I do remember going there and I just, I remember you (Aaron) were there. We went into the Oval Office and took a picture, and it was very emotional.

AARON: The last shot, actually, now – was it night?

TOMMY: Maybe it was the last day? Yes.

AARON: And I remember being on, on the set on Stage 23.

TOMMY: It was the last night.

AARON: And people were looting *The West Wing* set. Matthew Perry stole the fake Nobel prize that was won by Teddy Roosevelt in the Roosevelt Room. It's like, "Matt, it's not a real Nobel prize. That props made, they've probably got ten of them."

JOSH: That was one of my questions, to throw it open to everybody. I took the plaque that says "White House Communications Department," and it hangs proudly right outside my office. Anybody else take anything?

AARON: Well, my friend, I have the door to the White House Communications Office is my office door.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

AARON: And it was given to me by Tommy Schlamme.

JOSH: I have one of the pillars from the White House portico outside my own house.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

AARON: I have Richard Schiff in my house. He cooks me breakfast.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

JOSH: Checkmate.

HRISHI: I had started to prepare things, but I think...there's no, no hope in that. And I think we would just love to hear from everyone about the end of the show, and not just the end of the show. Really just your favorite memories from filming this. This is a really incredible occasion to have all of you here, and if we can just take some time to talk about *The West Wing*, I would love to hear any stories that you want to tell. I think we're all up for it. If anyone has a favorite story.

JOSH: There's forty of you, somebody better have a story.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

BRAD: I'll say something. Whenever anybody asks me that, I always...the first thing that pops into my head is Yo-Yo Ma playing cello. And Dulé – improvising on the cello– and Dulé tap dancing. It's something I will... I will never forget.

AARON: Here's what I remember. Listen. I have a lot of memories from the show and I...it was also, a couple of us were having dinner the other night, and we were talking about the role that luck plays in this. And it does. It plays a big role, a role – a frighteningly large role, to get a cast like this, that worked so well together. You got a director like Tommy setting the template, and directors like Chris Misiano, Alex Graves, coming in and doing the work they did. The technicians that we had. And then just the way that it landed with the audience. Somehow, it's just the sight and sound of decency and confidence, and kind of reaching for something higher. Really landed with the audience. But, I'll tell you, my first memory of the show, and it was this. We were just a couple of days away from shooting the pilot. Tommy came into my office, very excited, and there's nothing like lighting Tommy up like he's a kid. You know, Tommy was always incredibly supportive, but I'd say twice a year I'd write a script that would really light him up. But he just couldn't wait to direct this. Anyway, he came into my office a couple of days before the pilot started shooting with that spirit, and he said, "Come with me, I gotta show you something." And he brought me over to – back then, we were on Stage 17 – to our set, which was almost finished, and he wanted to show me an idea that he had for...not the cold open, not the part of the pilot where everybody is learning about – and by the way, the opening of the pilot depended entirely on nobody having ever heard of the acronym POTUS. [Audience laughs] Ok? You remember that? We could never do that opening today. But after that, Spencer walking through the door. I had basically set that whole first scene, I think in one room, ok? And Tommy said, "Just walk with me for a second." [Laughing] And I'll never forget those words.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

AARON: Then he took me from the door, through Josh's bullpen, which is what it would be called in the script, back through the lobby, in through the communications office, through Mrs. Landingham's office, through the Oval Office, and into Leo's office, and he said, "You know, we can do this whole thing on the move." And I said, "Yeah, ok". And that was it. And so I am telling you right now, when it comes to the walk and talk, I'm the talk part. Ok? He did everything else.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

TOMMY: I will say one thing. An incredible memory I had was at the end of season one, where it was the assassination, and we had set up this huge, you know, sequence. And we were, two of us, were like standing up on a scaffold, sort of look down at everything. And I just looked at Aaron and I went, "I can't believe they're letting us do this." This moment. And that's the same exact moment I just had backstage, standing with Aaron, and I looked at him and I went, "Twenty-one years ago, you had this idea and we got to do it." And look what you guys have done to bring all of us back together."

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

HRISHI: I wanted to ask some of the writers who are on in season seven, what it was like to know that the ending was coming? Because I feel like it's a privilege that a lot of shows don't get to have, you know, to sort of wrap up a show and say, "We know, you know."

TOMMY: [crosstalk] [feigns cough] *Sports Night*.

EVERYONE: [laughter]

JOSH: You mean we're not making more?

HRISHI: To be able to have your show sort of instead of abruptly cut-off, coast to your finish. To me, it's felt really incredible. I think, especially as we've been doing the podcast in conjunction with it, because it meant as we come to the end of our own series, we got to have a sort of mirror image of some of the feelings that the characters were having, and some of the things that were going on. You know. Our ending gets to follow along with an actual ending. And it struck me as we got to these final episodes how rare that must be.

LAWRENCE: Well, it meant that we actually – in the writer's room and as writers individually, and writing the final episodes – and I guess I wrote... I guess 20? You know, the third last episode. We experienced the end before anyone else, because I typed Mary-Louise Parker's last scene. And her wrap. We were the ones who went through that moment first, and there was nothing quite like that. Especially when you were writing your final episode. Eli, were you 20...-?

ELI: No, I'm – the last one I did was "Requiem," which was the John Spencer – Leo's –funeral. And so that was its own, that was its own kind of natural ending point. But I was just going to say, I was going to echo what Tommy said before, which is that – and this has been talked about on the podcast, I think before. But when John

Spencer passed away, and you know, Aaron and Tommy came back, and there were sort of services on the set, it just felt...it took so much wind out of the sails, I think, in a lot of ways, and that made it feel like a much more natural end point. And I think at that time, maybe carrying on, felt almost kind of like, it might've dishonored him in some way. So, I think that was when it really felt real.

HRISHI: For any of the actors who were in that final episode. Do you remember filming your last scene? Your series wrap?

WILLIAM: William Duffy. Thank you.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

WILLIAM: I know, I was on *The West Wing*. So –

HRISHI: Were you Ed or Larry?

WILLIAM: I was the other Larry. Yes. The other Ed and the other Larry. Yeah. But no, it was great because it was just, it was like a family. The last day was like a family, especially that last shot, because we were in that last shot when Martin comes down and says goodbye to everybody. And he got our names right for the first time, in the entire seven years.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

WILLIAM: And I also found out I had kids [Audience laughs]. He says to me, “How are the kids?” And I'm like, “Who wrote that I had kids?” I had no idea, for seven years, I had kids, but it was just, it was a great – it was a great, great time with everybody. It was a family. As it is today, you know, an extended family over the seven years, so. It was great.

PETER: Peter James Smith. Hello. At the end of season four, Aaron generously got us end credit players tickets to the Emmys. And so, it was actually a very boring show until we won. And then it was fantastic. And there were so many people, you know, rushing up to the stage and we had end credit player seating so by the time we got up to this stage, security tried to not let us up. [Audience laughs] But NiCole Robinson, who played Margaret – it was you? Oh, Kim, well, you finish this story, then.

KIM: Kim Webster, Ginger. I brought the popcorn. I...What did I do? Did I punch him in the stomach? Or no. I just like, like side swiped him, and *The Sopranos* people were looking at us like we were thugs, but, you know, it was a one-time, one-time deal for us.

AARON: Always the best part of – we won the Emmy four years in a row – and always the best part was everybody comes up on stage, when you win, and just watching everybody come up on stage. I remember Josh, that when we won in season four, you ran right up to me on stage and said, “I didn't ruin the show.”

AUDIENCE: [laughs and cheers]

JOSH: Well.

AARON: But watching –

JOSH: That's because Richard had been telling me for months that I had.

AARON: There was always this very glamorous problem that I had, and I know that you guys inherited. You guys had the problem too. Which was that there were so many mouths to feed on the show. There just weren't enough basketballs to go around, and that every week you felt you were short-changing someone. And that was the case with Toby and C.J. in the first couple of episodes. As a matter of fact, when we were casting the show, there wasn't enough in the pilot episode to give to the actors reading for Toby and C.J., so Tommy said, just do me a favor. Just write a scene, just in mid-air, write a scene that isn't part of any episode for Toby and C.J. so we can see these actors do something. And I did, and Tommy promised me, “Don't worry. No one's ever going to see this. We're never going to do the scene. I'm never going to point a camera at the scene.” Two episodes in Tommy said, “Hey, you know that scene that you wrote for casting? That would be a good thing.” And it turned out it was a good thing, because what that scene led to was an episode called “The Crackpots and These Women,” [Audience cheers] in which, that finally kind of, Toby put a flag in the ground of who he was, and especially who he was in relation to Bartlet, and what the intention and obstacle was. Anyway, Toby and C.J., the series started off, those were the two most underfed roles on the show. Richard and Allison, first two people to win Emmys for the show.

AUDIENCE: [applause]

JOSH: Incidentally, “The Crackpots and These Women” is the episode in which David Rosen is not mentioned. [Audience laughs]

RICHARD: I did not know that story.

AARON: Now you do.

RICHARD: And I'm better for knowing it, now.

AARON: Cool.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

AARON: Here's another little one. We're three days into shooting the pilot and suddenly I noticed Richard was wearing a wedding ring. And I- Oh, jeez, I didn't, ok, I didn't think Toby was married.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

TOMMY: By the way, that's underestimating the way you reacted, but that's ok [Aaron and audience laugh] That's ok. For everybody out there, he was so, "Oh, he's wearing a wedding ring."

AARON: And I went up to Richard. And I said "Richard, I didn't think Toby was married." And Richard said, "Yeah, he's not." And I said, "Why is he wearing a wedding ring?" And Richard said, "It's for you to figure out."

EVERYONE: [laughs]

AARON: So. Which is why Richard is in love with Kathleen York, and twins came along.

RICHARD: Actually, what was in my mind – because you know, when you start a show, the prop master comes to you and says, you know, what kind of watch do you want to wear, and are you married, because here are the wedding rings. And I had already decided – and I might not have told you that day – but I already decided that he had been married and lost his wife. Which is what kind of gave him this kind of dark drive to, to devote –

AARON: I – that actually would have been pretty good. [Everyone laughs] I wish you'd –

EVERYONE: [laughs]

RICHARD: This is before I knew Kathleen was in the picture, 'cause that would have changed the entire story. So...

AARON: I understand.

RICHARD: But it's what kind of gave me this kind of sense of this dark drive to be focused on work. I remember it as you both running up to me, which often happened, this frenzy of neurotic energy coming at you at 100 miles an hour –

TOMMY: I was just trying to make sure he didn't grab you by the neck.

AARON: It's true. He was running pass blocking for you, believe me.

RICHARD: I didn't know Toby was married, and then this idea came for him to have an ex-wife, and I went, "Wow, that's a lot of adjustments that I have to make." But



that's the nature of television, is that we have two different ideas of where they come from and where they go, these characters, and you have to constantly adjust. But when you have, you know, this kind of writing and this kind of directing, if they don't match, you can have a discussion and figure it out, right?

AARON: Yes. Josh and Hrish, if you don't mind, I just want to say something about the other writers.

HRISHI: You can say whatever you like.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

AARON: I appreciate that. First of all, Kevin Falls and Paul Redford were both on *Sports Night* with me. Were both invaluable. And I once wrote something where I described Kevin as being like Hoover in *Animal House*. The head of the sorority is just trying to keep everything cool. So Kevin handled the craziness in the writer's room in addition to having fantastic ideas. Paul had fantastic ideas in addition to being a great writer. The second, in the middle of the second year of the show, I think it was, correct me if I'm wrong. My long-time assistant is backstage, Lauren Lohman. We've been together twenty years.

AUDIENCE: [applauds]

AARON: And Lauren is a great gatekeeper, sometimes too great a gatekeeper. Lauren came into my office one day, and said, seriously, then Vice-President Al Gore was on the phone. "Do you want to take the call?" [Audience laughs] What? Yes! You crazy, there's one person in the world who doesn't take that call. It's not me. And Al Gore got on the phone to recommend a senior member of his staff, Eli Attie [Audience applauds], who – we were the destination for Democrats leaving Washington with their tails between their legs. Eli Attie came to the show, and we started with Lawrence O'Donnell, who was there for two years [Audience applauds], came back for the last two years. Now hosts possibly the most indispensable hour of television.

AUDIENCE: [applauds]

LAWRENCE: It's the second most. Rachel Maddow's on 9 o'clock.

AUDIENCE: [applauds]

AARON: Your lead in is pretty good, but I stick around for you. And then writers who came after I left, Josh Singer. A woman who's not here, Debora Cahn, who is fantastic. And I would imagine that it wasn't that easy. Kind of...you can do the show without me. It's harder to do the show without Tommy. And you had to find a whole

new way of doing the show, because I assume that no longer was my nutty way of doing the show really going to be tolerated by John, anymore. Anyway, the admiration, respect and love I have for you guys is marrow deep. Thank you very much.

AUDIENCE: [applauds]

LAWRENCE: On the plane today from New York. American Airlines has the first five episodes, so I managed to watch a few of those. And I remember we probably had shot about four before we went on the air, something like that, we certainly had at least four read-throughs before we went on the air.

AARON: Yeah.

LAWRENCE: And so after maybe the fourth read through, that – that would be, you know, almost four hours of television, almost two movies. I remember walking across the Warner Brothers lot thinking, "The script is great. All of Aaron's scripts have been great. They're just great. This is great. I love it. But the fact that I love it doesn't mean you're going to get any viewers at all." And at this point, I said to some of the other writers, we were walking across the lot with, that, "Ok, by now, meaning by the time the audience sees all of this, all four of these, they will be on to us. They will know that nothing happens [Aaron laughs] They will know. They will know the cops aren't chasing anybody. There's no one dying in the emergency room. There's just nothing that happens that's within the convention of hour-long T.V. This isn't what the audience thinks drama is." And, I'm thinking, you know, they're going to be wrong. But I just don't know how they're going to stay with this. And then of course *you*.

AARON: Yeah.

LAWRENCE: Stayed with it. And that's where we discovered, that's where we as television writers discovered, the drama is what Aaron Sorkin says it is.

AARON: No. Well, it's – that's nice of you. The show that Lawrence is describing that the audience was going to miss, that action adventure show, is the show that NBC wanted originally. The show was put off for a year. Warren Littlefield was the head of NBC at the time that I turned in the pilot, and I remember – you might remember from the pilot that Cuban refugees, *on rafts*, are trying to make their way the ninety miles to the coast to get here. Warren Littlefield and the NBC executives wanted Josh to basically swim out after them and rescue them, like really rescue them.

BRAD: Like Rahm Emanuel in a Speedo.

AARON: [laughs] And I'd just say "It's not the show."

RICHARD: Which explains why they didn't want Toby.

ELI: You. know, I just wanted to add one small thing to Aaron's very kind words that he said about me, which is that, and I – I've never told Aaron this, actually. So, you know, I was Al Gore's speech writer and was with him through the end of the Florida recount, and, you know, I wrote speeches and talking points for him and, you know, was with him all day, most days, and we were pretty close. And so, I'd already had a brief phone conversation with Aaron, and I thought, I had no background in Hollywood or screenwriting, but I thought this would be the coolest job in the world, and I really, really wanted it. And so, I emailed Al Gore and I said, "Hey –" And I was already no longer working for him, and I said, "Hey, here's this job that I'm interested in. Here's this guy's phone number, here's the show." And I wrote talking points for that call.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

ELI: And –

AARON: [laughs] I didn't know that.

ELI: It's true. And to Gore's credit, he was always very good on email. About ten minutes, fifteen minutes later I got an email back from him saying, "I just spoke to him. I thought it went great."

AARON: It did.

ELI: So I'm sorry if this all began with an act of fraud. I apologize. But, I'll add to that – that this is the honest truth – that when I was working on the show in the post-Aaron years, anytime I had to write anything for that show, I always felt beneath the task. You know, which is partly how I am, and partly that it was probably true, but I would study the old scripts, and I was constantly asking myself, "What would Aaron do in this situation? What would Aaron write?" And I, sometimes now in other projects and on other shows, I try to remind myself to still do that, because there's no one who writes like him.

AARON: That's very kind of you to say. But I promise you, if you have a favorite moment, at least from the first four years of *The West Wing*, which are the only ones I can testify to, chances are Kevin, Paul, Eli, or Lawrence, it was their idea. Speaking of which, the pilot originally ended with the line, "Thank you, Mr. President." Ok. Bartlet said, "Josh, don't ever do it again." Josh said, "Thank you, Mr. President," and left, and we fade it to black and we rolled credits. And it was Tommy who said, "You know, I just, I feel like we should get the sense that life goes on." And perhaps it was

because I had no idea what episode two would be and I didn't want life to go on, I was resisting that. And anyway, that's where the line "What's next?" comes from.

AUDIENCE: [applauds]

HRISHI: One of the things that I think is so interesting – you know, when you were describing the walk and talk from the pilot, and you said, "It goes through Mrs. Landingham's office." And as the show has gone on through seven years, characters have changed, new actors have come in, characters have changed their roles, but that room is still Mrs. Landingham's office. You know. Even through the end of season seven, and even – there's an exchange between C.J. and Josh where they say, "Did you ever stop thinking of this as Leo's office?" And what I love about the show and how it began, and where it came to, is that just a – there is such a sense of permanence right from the beginning in, in the pilot – these things feel so established, that there was enough cement there that you could riff off of it. And so, it allowed for enough room for evolution, and you could see all these changes to get to a completely unexpected place, I think, by the end of the series, while still feeling connected to the legacy of everything that's started with.

AARON: Well, that's – that's really nice to hear. It really is, you know, so much of, we were in a bunker when we're doing the show. I remember Rob Lowe. I wish Rob was here – saying –

AUDIENCE: [applause]

AARON: Yeah. That, like, before he went to work on this show, he asked Candice Bergen, of course, you know, "What am I in for here?" And she said, "You're going to walk onto a soundstage, and you're going to walk off, and it's going to be seven years later." And that's what it feels like. We're not really aware when – when we're doing the show, because it's such a dawn to dusk thing, of how it's playing out there, and how people are feeling about it. So, a night like this is really incredible.

AUDIENCE: [applause]

MELISSA: Hello, I am Melissa Fitzgerald. And –

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

MELISSA: And first of all, I think some of you might know that I moved to Washington D.C. and I work there now. And there's not a day that goes by where somebody doesn't come up to me and say that *The West Wing* inspired them to spend their lives in public service. And it has been such a gift to be a small part of such an extraordinary show, with this extraordinary group of people, and I just want to say

thank you to this *West Wing* family for everything, including supporting the work I'm doing now. And thank you to *The West Wing Weekly* podcast family, Josh and Hrishi.

AUDIENCE: [applauds]

AARON: [crosstalk] Yes –

MELISSA: For all the support you've given us. And, you know, there are about 300,000 people that got into a treatment program instead of sitting in prison.

AUDIENCE: [applauds]

MELISSA: Because of the support of people like you guys, and the support of people like Allison Janney, who's on the phone calling in!

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

MELISSA: Ok Allison, you're on speaker.

ALLISON: Hello everyone there in the audience, everyone on stage. I can't believe I'm not there, but I love you all, and thank you for supporting this podcast, and, and the show, and everything *West Wing*. Whoo!!

AUDIENCE: [clapping]

MELISSA: Wait, what?

ALLISON JANNEY: Well, when are you getting back Melissa? 'Cause I need to know if I leave the key out...

EVERYONE: [laughs]

MELISSA: I will be home as soon as we're done here, and I left the key in the normal spot.

AARON: We love you.

MELISSA [to ALLISON JANNEY]: Ok. Thank you.

EVERYONE: [laughing and clapping]

MARLEE [spoke by JACK JASON: Hi, I'm Marlee Matlin.

EVERYONE: [clapping and cheering]

MARLEE [JACK]: Thank you. And I have a lot to say, only because they told me that we only have a limited amount of time. But first of all, I am extremely indebted to Aaron for taking my call when I called him about – about a chance to meet, just an opportunity to meet, because of *Sports Night* – a character that you had written, a character on the show that was offscreen. A deaf sister of one of the characters. I believe it was Josh's sister? Yes. And so that was my way of getting – working my

way to Aaron Sorkin. And then, thank you for the Chinese lunch that you treated me to. And from that point on, he wrote my beautiful character of Joey Lucas.

AUDIENCE: [applause]

MARLEE [JACK]: And we all know that, I mean, how difficult it is to get work for a person who is deaf in Hollywood. And he – that was the last thought on Aaron's mind, the last thought. He is one of the very few people in the business who just writes a scene for me. Just writes the scene and it fit. And I am forever ever grateful for that. And the other note that I just want to make before I finish is to this day, wherever I go, no matter where I am, they say *West Wing, West Wing, West Wing, West Wing, West Wing*. And the question they always ask me is, “Why didn't Joey get to hook up with Josh?”

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

MARLEE [JACK]: And, lastly, and sorry, my husband is up there in the audience somewhere. It's Hollywood, so he knows what it's all about. People asked me, “Please, please could you say this?” And I'll say –

MARLEE [speaking herself]: I'm Joey Lucas. You idiot!

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

AARON: [laughing] Yeah. “I'm Joey Lucas. You idiot!” is one of my favorite lines I have ever written. Like, Marlee is an example of another really big problem.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

AARON: Which is that, like I said, there were eight people on this show. Eight stars on the show, who could each be carrying their own show, who are in this ensemble. And then a guest actor would come on who would just hit it out of the park, and you would just, you'd pray for one of these people to come on and be boring so I don't have to... [Audience laughs] but, you know, Marlee came on and killed it, and so many other people did too – Allison Smith in the pilot episode? I felt another nine people. Everybody just kept coming on and killing it.

RON: So did you, Josh.

JOSH: Ron Ostrow. Yay.

RON: This is a more narrow memory, but there are people on the stage that I've known for over thirty years, and I've known Aaron for over forty-five years.

JOSH: How old are you guys?!

RON: I am a hundred.

AARON: [crosstalk] I wish you hadn't...

RON: I'm 107 years old.

JOSH: [crosstalk] What the hell?

RON: But when I joined the show and I got the script, and my character's name was John, I called Aaron. I said, "Did you name my character for my son?" And he said, "Of course I did." And that is a story that I just want to share because I don't think in Hollywood, we get a lot of stories like that. And, I think that I may be the only actor that has been in all four of his television shows, and that is also something that you don't get to say to somebody a lot. So, thank you, Aaron, and thank you for letting me be a part of this.

AUDIENCE: [applause]

AARON: Thank you very much. Thank you.

KATHLEEN: I'll be quick. Kathleen York.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

KATHLEEN: Two things. How many men have I had come up to me in the last fifteen years and say – and they're all kind of Toby lookalike...

EVERYONE: [laughs]

KATHLEEN: One guy actually was executive producer of NPR, and literally said, "I can't believe you didn't take the house."

EVERYONE: [laughs]

KATHLEEN: And these guys mean it. And I have to say, it was, "I didn't write that. It's a television show." And the only other thing I want to know, is what writer was responsible for – it wasn't until the very last episode of season four that Richard looked at me, and spilled the beans, and said, "I'm really glad, you know, after you had the baby, that you made it."

EVERYONE: [laughs]

AARON: Wait –

KATHLEEN: And when my agent called me and said, you know, "They want you to be more involved in season four." And I read the script, and I heard, I think Aaron said, "You're going to be pregnant," and I thought, "Great, great." But back of my mind, I'm like, they're going to get rid of me. Something's going to happen when I have that – but then I heard, "You're pregnant with twins." I thought they're never

gonna – but there was a plan, I guess, for Andy to not make it, and then I only found out, like, by, like Richard – I think told me I was going to make it.

AARON: [laughing] Perhaps there was a discussion. Look, once I killed Mrs. –

EVERYONE: [laughing and clapping]

AARON: Once I killed Mrs. Landingham, nobody was safe on the show anymore.

KATHLEEN: So, thank you for letting me live.

AARON: Happy to. Do you remember the names of your twins, by the way?

KATHLEEN: Molly and Huck.

AARON: There you go.

KATHLEEN: And she likes a little bird. He likes a little bird.

HRISHI: There was a beautiful moment backstage right before the curtain came up, where I saw Karis Campbell speaking to Aaron Sorkin and I heard, I heard the words, “It’s nice to meet you.”

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

HRISHI: And that’s –

AARON: [crosstalk] I can’t get over it myself. That there are people on stage I’m meeting him for the first time.

HRISHI: Yeah.

RAMON: Hi Aaron. I’m Ramon de Ocampo.

AARON: [laughing] I know who you are.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

RAMON: I played Otto and I’d thought...

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

RAMON: Thank you. And I thought I could give a – a kind of idea of what it’s like to be – I think I was the, I’m the newest of the staff members.

HRISHI: [crosstalk] I think that’s right.

RAMON: [crosstalk] Looking at who was fired or not fired. I was the newest, so –

EVERYONE: [laughing]

RAMON: Sorry Evan. It was good. It was a great scene. But I came into this, and it was my very favorite show. It was the – it was everything I wanted to watch. It was something that I would watch again and again. It was a huge responsibility, and that’s



really what it felt like, that I was this young actor, that had just come to L.A., and I got to do the one thing that I really wanted to do. And I was so scared, and I've got to say, that every minute of it were these scoops of generosity from these really amazing artists, peppered by Bradley Whitford trying to haze me.

BRAD: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

RAMON: Yeah. At some point he said, "You know, I got Josh Malina to say he's a bad actor."

EVERYONE: [laughs]

RAMON: "I'm coming for you." Is what he said. Which made me feel like family. But I'll tell you, the minute that that crystallized it, and I was thinking about in the car on the way here, like my, my time in *The West Wing* was – we were doing this long walk and talk, and at the end of it, I remember I was just, I was by my trailer, and I think I was like stretching my calf out, and – which was not, it wasn't because of the walk and talk, I was just stretching my calf – and John Spencer comes up to me, "Well, what's going on?" And I was like, "I'm... just nothing...I'm just..." He goes, "Oh, I know what that is, come, come here." And I said, "Ok." So, he was like, "Oh, let me show you something, I'm going to – come, come to my trailer." So he walked me into his trailer, and he goes, "You know what it is?" And he dug into his closet and he said, "It's the shoes." And he brought me his slippers. His soft, like, memory foam, beat up slippers, and he was like, "You can have these, they're a gift. Uh, wear them on the set. In fact, if you're not walking so much, they'll probably let you wear it during this scene." And, you know, he was – he's obviously, he was our – he was my favorite person, and that was what this show was, was these incredible artists who I looked up to, these – these giants giving you slippers to support your feet. It's amazing.

EVERYONE: [laughing and clapping]

AARON: The first really big, um, you know, I've never called it a walk and talk before, the first really big steady cam shot that we did, was the cold open for "Five Votes Down." Right? Which took Bartlet offstage after a speech in a hotel, through a lobby, down through a big, big kitchen, and up onto the street.

TOMMY: Dave, Dave Chameides.

AARON: Oh, wow. That's great. Dave Chameides was our steady cam operator. It was a very hard job. The camera was about 110 pounds, and you're walking very fast. Backwards. Ok?

RICHARD: Twenty-nine takes, as I recall.

AARON: Yeah. All night long – and we shot it at a hotel downtown. I just can't remember –

TOMMY: Biltmore Hotel.

AARON: Biltmore Hotel, but we were shooting in an active hotel, so we had to shoot it between 10:00 pm and 4:00 am or something, and it's a hard shot to do. And we're all at what's called video village, where I watched the show from, where the director watches the show from – you're looking at monitors, you're listening to it – and the shot went so deep into the basement, into a kitchen covered in cinderblocks, that there was kind of this radio blackout period during the shot, where we just lost contact with the actors, with the image on the screen. We had no idea what was going on until they re-emerged up on the sidewalk outside. And we'd get word from a second AD, you know, "It all worked, down there." And it was, I don't remember how many takes it ended up being, but I know on the fifth take –

RICHARD: [crosstalk] Tommy says it was eleven.

BRAD: Tommy says eleven.

RICHARD: I remember all day.

AARON: I remember the fifth take was printable, and Martin – and this had to have been, I mean, if we got the place, if we took over the place at ten, we probably got off the first shot at 1:00 am or something, right? Martin starts jumping up and down, "Yeah, let's do it again. Let's do it again." And I thought, we have something, the actors are having fun.

TOMMY: I don't know if you remember, but that shot – it wasn't designed yet, 'cause Michael Lehmann, wonderful director, ended up really finessing that. But while we were doing the pilot, we were shooting at the Biltmore. And we were setting up, and I went for a walk. I was just trying to –

AARON: [crosstalk] And you found –

TOMMY: [crosstalk] I saw that room, and then I walked down another set of stairs, and then another set of stairs, and then I was in the kitchen, and then I kept going down further –

AARON: [crosstalk] And did you come to me and say write a few more –

TOMMY: [crosstalk] And I went, here's this... Look at this... We could do this one day, if we ever get picked up, which neither of us thought we would.

AARON: There was, again, never supposed to be an episode two. But I, I don't remember that. That's great.

BRAD: Am I imagining...did we catch that hotel on fire?

TOMMY: Yes, we did.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

AARON: A couple of times. Yeah.

TOMMY: Which by the way, is why I know it was take eleven, because they were not going to give us a take twelve.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

AARON: [laughing] And 'cause it was very important to Tommy, that when Rob walked past the stove, like, a grease fire shot up.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

AARON: So yes, we did.

CHRIS: [impersonating Tommy] I want my grease fire.

RICHARD: There's another little item that I remember about that shot. You remember Ken, the sound guy, there was a stretch when we lost our wireless mics, and he goes, "I have done documentaries, I can do this with the boom." And he tried to walk back – you know, the camera guys, Dave Chameides –

AARON: [crosstalk] And the choreography of it is, you guys are constantly sort of changing places –

RICHARD: [crosstalk] That, and they're walking backwards down the stairs.

AARON: Yeah.

RICHARD: So, so Ken, who's, you know, my age now, *then*, is a, "I've done documentary, he's holding up the boom." [Aaron laughs] And the first – you, he hit, the – they hit the stairwell, and I saw his eyes go –

EVERYONE: [laughing]

RICHARD: We had to catch him.

TOMMY: That's the other reason we only did eleven takes.

RICHARD: Right, but we had like an hour of a break because they had to fix the wireless mic.

AARON: [crosstalk] Of first aid, yeah. Well, it wasn't the only time. I can't count the number of times I've been watching a scene on a monitor and suddenly you hear this horrible sound, and the shot goes up to the ceiling because the operator has fallen down backwards, down a flight of stairs. But you guys keep talking.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

AARON: [laughs] Like you just don't care, you're just doing your thing.

HRISHI: Chris Misiano.

CHRIS: Oh well, I just in – in – in line with what you're talking about. I guess I came to direct the first time, I don't know if was the fifth, sixth –

JOSH: [crosstalk] “Mr. Willis,” right?

CHRIS: Yes, it was “Mr. Willis,” and I was, I had –

AUDIENCE: [applause]

CHRIS: I had seen the pilot, and was just stunned, and startled like everybody. I was just this... I had been involved in politics as a young kid, I loved it, and I wanted – I just wanted to do that show and I was, like, crazy. The directing was incredible. The writing was incredible. I needed to do it. So, I actually, fortunately, got that opportunity, and I got to the Warner Brothers, all these steady cam shots had come on those episodes before, and I was waiting a little bit, not long, but a little bit, for my teaser to come and whatever, and the word went out across the lot. And I got called in and it's, “Your teaser's on your desk.” And I went running to my office and I thought, “What is it going to be?” And it was six people at a card table for five pages, and I was like, “NOOO!!! NOOO!!! I'll never get hired here again.”

AUDIENCE: [laughing and clapping]

AARON: Sometimes you get-

CHRIS: That was the only time I think we brought a crane into Leo's office, 'cause something had to happen.

AARON: Sometimes you get that, too, but you know, you mentioned, you said you were waiting for the teaser for the cold open. Not one of these directors, maybe with the exception of Tommy with the pilot, but not one of these directors got the amount of prep time that a director is supposed to get before they shoot an episode. The amount of prep time before, or the actors too, for that matter. But I handed out the

script in five pieces, the teaser, the first act, the second act, third act, and the fourth act in a...it was a kind of “trust me” thing, and somehow they managed to make it look beautiful with no prep time at all. I think the only damage that was done was perhaps demonstrating to a studio that you don't need as much prep time as you say you do. But now that I've tried directing, you need way more prep time than you're given.

TOMMY: In the same way you were talking about the writers, for me, to be able to work with you, and Alex and so many other directors, but specifically the two of you and what you were able to bring to this show, and then after we left where that show went. I mean, I think visually it took on another life. You guys were extraordinary, and part of the reason for the success of this show is because of what you guys brought to it.

AARON: Yeah.

AUDIENCE: [applause]

JOSH SINGER: One thing, so I would just jump in and join the chorus of people who are inspired by the show. I was in law school and the show came on, and I didn't watch T.V. And I had a buddy who said, “Watch this.” And I was like, “Ahh!” And that was it. It was the only show I watched. And when it came out here, actually, what I did to try to get a job was I studied “Proportional Response,” which is third episode of the show, which is an incredible episode. I must've read it like a hundred times. I had little diagrams in Excel, like, here are the five different storylines and this is how many different – this is how many scenes are in an act – and I couldn't... I was amazed at how he had gotten these five, six storylines that all were about proportional response. You wish the president would watch that episode, maybe, but that aside, you know, I was so inspired. And, and then to be able to come and play in this incredible sandbox that Aaron had created with the best actors in the world, and these incredible directors to learn from, and I learned so much for Chris Misiano and Alex Graves and all the actors on this stage, as well as the incredible writers who I got to work with. And that's the thing, that – you know, I was a fan, but there are so many writers, one of my favorite writers in Hollywood, Liz Hannah, and I go back and forth on *West Wing* lines. We'll, like, swap them, and, you know, “Oh, well that's this, and that's...” I mean, there are so many writers who were inspired to join the business and to try to hit the heights that Aaron hits, you know, which is almost impossible. You know, every day. You know. It's trying to fill those shoes as Eli was saying. I mean, that's – there's that other gift of this show, I think, for a lot of us.

AARON: Thank you very much.

ELI: The one, I wanted to just add one addendum to what Aaron was saying about the late scripts, which is just that, I don't even know how much Aaron was aware that, you know, he'd be in his office, and he'd be working on an episode, and it would be two days into shooting, and there would only be twelve pages of it done. And the directors would sometimes come to Kevin and Paul, and Lawrence or myself, and just say, "Where do you think this storyline is going?"

EVERYONE: [laughter]

ELI: And you know, we would say, "Well, we can't guarantee it, but it might be going here." It's a testament to the quality of the writing that it would shoot so well, when, you know, even the director didn't really know the end of the story.

AARON: I appreciate that. It would be expensive to my lateness, I mean, in real dollars. For instance, at the end of season one, had I known who had gotten hit, we could have shot the beginning of season two while we were in Roslyn, Virginia, right? On that same location. But I didn't, yet. All I was able to say to Tommy was, "Keep my options open [Audience laughs]. The way you shoot it, just make sure that my options are open."

EVAN: Hi Evan Arnold. I played Ned.

AUDIENCE: [applause]

EVAN: Thank you. I don't know if I'm pronouncing his name correctly, I just wanted to give a shout out also to Michael Mayers?

AARON: Yeah.

EVAN: 'Cause when you're new to the cast, there's often a trial by fire where you're doing a walk and talk, and I was just thinking the whole time, "Hey Michael, you're, you're incredible. One of one of the many people walking backwards take, after take, after take, after take." So I just wanted to give him a little respect. That's all.

AARON: Yeah, a lot of deserve a lot of respect. So, listen, when it's an eight-page steady cam scene, you do not want to be the person who screws up on page seven. Ok? So that you have to go back again. You screw up on page one, but you don't want to be the person who screwed up on page seven. It just hardly ever happened. Everybody was always up for it. Everybody was – came to work, prepared, ready to go. Nobody was learning the scene in the hair and makeup trailer. You know?

[UNKNOWN]: What happened to those days?

RICHARD: I got to say something about the walk and talk. I didn't know that it wasn't called that, that you never even thought about it. But –

AARON: [crosstalk] But didn't... I'm sorry..., Chris, Tommy, you guys directed episodes of E.R., didn't people walk and talk –

TOMMY: [crosstalk] Yes.

AARON: – on E.R. before we did our show?

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

TOMMY: Yeah. I think they even did it well before that.

AARON: I think so too. I have seen movies where people have been walking and talking. Why did it become this thing on our show? Like we invented it?

RICHARD: Because there are T.V. shows where you stand and look at each other, and that's what you do. So let me just tell you, I'm on sets now where, this, I read a script and it says "Walk and talk," and the director comes up to me and goes, "Hey, you know, you know, walk and talks, right?"

EVERYONE: [laughter]

RICHARD: "We're gonna, you know, we're going to start walking and, and we'll do the scene like this." And there's no motivation to start walking and whatever, there's no reason to start. And by the way, the hallway ends right there. Where are we going to go? They design these shots to try to imitate you guys, and there's no reason or way to even do it.

AARON: Well, we had a set with a lot of acreage. It was a – I'm not sure if it still is, but it was, at the time that it was built, the largest set ever built for television. So there was, there were a lot of places to go. And Tommy made sure that there was a lot of glass on the set, so that shots had a lot of throw. That when you were standing in one hallway, you could see through the Roosevelt Room into another corridor, into the communications bullpen, into Toby's office. Which meant that there were days where these guys were the most expensive extras in Hollywood, because we'd line up a shot, and we need Toby to be sitting in his office during the shot that's fifty yards away from it. But Tommy really did all that, and it started with *Sports Night*, all of the movement, and all of the throw for the shots. He did all that because he understood – I'm not putting myself down, really, but he understood that there's very little visual interest in what I write. [Audience laughs] That I write people talking in rooms.

TOMMY: I will say that is not true. But, because, when I read both those scripts, *Sports Night* and *West Wing* on the same night, I remember reading them, moving

around, literally moving around, because – I think everyone can attest to this, there's so much energy in your writing. It's just, I don't know anyone else who does it. It doesn't read like anyone else, and you just start to feel it as you're reading the words, and it didn't feel sedentary to me. It felt there – was motion to what you are writing.

RICHARD: It's almost like they block themselves in some sense. In that I once took an RSC, a Shakespeare workshop, and he had a bunch of actors do scenes from Neil Simon, and it would end up being people standing pretty much like the *Honeymooners*, in a line, and they would do the scene. And then he would give him a scene from Othello, or from some other play I'm not allowed to mention in here, and all of a sudden the scene started to happen. And he writes so that people know who they're talking to, "Sire," you know, "bad news," or whatever.

AARON: Uh huh.

RICHARD: And it created a movement because there was energy behind the line, and that's what your writing has.

AARON: Well, I appreciate that.

RICHARD: It has that kind of, you know what you're doing, you have a reason to be there, and you have to actually physically demonstrate that, it has to express itself physically.

AARON: There was an idea that Kevin Falls had, five times. He pitched this idea to me five times. Really, so important to him, it was sweet, and I love Kevin, and would do anything for him, but I just couldn't do this. I couldn't come up – it was Halloween, and Kevin would always come in and remind me, "Just so you know, this episode, episode four, it's going to air the week of Halloween. Don't you think we should do a Halloween show?" And I was thinking, "I'm just not seeing, like, pumpkins and spider webs all over things. Like I'm just, I don't – I don't have the idea for it yet. I just don't, I'm sorry." And so, Kevin sicked Dee Dee Myers on me, season three. Dee Dee Myers was one of our consultants; Halloween was coming around again. Kevin was going to make his annual pitch, and so he had Dee Dee call me and say – and this is usually how ideas would begin to happen with a consultant. She said, "Listen, I just want to let you know that on Halloween, the White House Press Corps, they get to bring their kids to the White House to trick or treat." And I thought, "All right, well, there's something in that. Like, what if Bartlet is just Scrooge about Halloween? Like he doesn't get it. He thinks these kids are little thieves coming in for candy, [Audience laughs] and he's going to lecture them about like the true meaning of All Hallows Eve, and Ichabod Crane or something like, that'll be a funny cold opening, and that's



all I'd need to start if I can just – if I could just hand these guys eight pages tomorrow, I'll be happy. I don't have to know what's going to happen in the rest of the episode.” But I thought that was a really good teaser, and that was the first time that Kevin lit me up, and that day, that was September 10th, 2001. And I woke up the next morning and prepared to write this Halloween thing, and the world changed.

LAWRENCE: Let me take this in a different direction.

AARON: [laughs] Yeah, ok.

LAWRENCE: I just want, I want to mention someone, and I want to ask Brad about this, actually. This is someone who couldn't be here tonight because she's with her two beautiful children and husband in Brooklyn, Janel Moloney.

AUDIENCE: [cheers]

AARON: The reason why Marlee never got together with Josh.

LAWRENCE: And what Janel is a great example of is how collaborative this kind of work is, and how synergistic it is, and the energies come from all sorts of different directions. When we're sitting in the writer's room, we kind of think it's up to us and we'll come up with it, or, you know, we'll just let Aaron come up with it. Maybe we can throw a log on his fire if we're lucky. Maybe. But actors also generate energies in the writing of the show. Janel is, I think, maybe a really singular example of this, because in the pilot she was just hired as a day player to get through the pilot.

AARON: Two lines.

LAWRENCE: Yeah, two lines, and was not a regular – a series regular when we started off. She was just being hired episode to episode, but she was being hired episode to episode, because she was inspiring Aaron every single time the camera was aimed at her. And Brad, you are in all those scenes. We were sitting there trying to think of stories. We're trying to think up Donna stories –

AARON: It's true.

LAWRENCE: Which was not necessary because it was all in this relationship.

AARON: Yeah. Janel, who had done a scene on *Sports Night*, and so she was an actress Tommy and I knew about. She had started with two lines in the pilot and then incredibly, when Tommy got done in the editing room with the pilot, it was 40 seconds short, and there's very little wiggle room with the network in terms of the length of the episode. He just asked me to write a little bit more, and I thought, “You know, that, remember when, uh, Donna, I think is her name, said to Josh, ‘You're late for a meeting.’ That really worked, that was good. Let's have them do something else

together.” Lawrence is right. Janel was not a series regular during the first season. She was not in the main titles. She was simply hired as a guest actor in every episode. Janel didn't quit her waitressing job until the second season. She was still waiting tables during the first season because she just thought, “Not only will this be my last episode of *The West Wing*, it will be my last episode of anything ever. I will never get paid to be an actress again.” And it's just sort of an example of the Darwinism that that goes on.

BRAD: It's one of the unintentional advantages, I think, actually, of the – of the way you work, which is – you are, if you've planned out an entire season as other showrunners do, which has its virtues –

AARON: I've heard.

AUDIENCE: [laughter]

BRAD: You would not, you wouldn't, you would never pick up on that.

AARON: No.

BRAD: And you're sitting there, you know, watching dailies and seeing something work, which I think really kept things alive. I have a very clear memory of, I remember they said “Cut,” and I walked over, I think you were at the monitor. And I was like, “I love her.”

EVERYONE: [laughter]

AARON: I remember that. I remember that.

BRAD: Yeah.

AARON: Donna is the answer to why didn't Joey Lucas and...

JOSH and AUDIENCE: [groans]

AARON: 'Cause I was worried I was going to be killed. And I understand, on other shows, Jimmy, that characters, you know, date many people and everybody is constantly changing.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

AARON: [laughing] I know, how did Jimmy become a standard for David Kelley right out... But I just, I had a hard time coupling people up. I just did.

JOSH: Karis?

KARIS: Sorry. Hi, I'm Karis Campbell.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

AARON: Hey. Karis, it's nice to meet you.

KARIS: It's nice to meet you, Aaron. I actually had a segue, a Janel Moloney segue, and I wanted to give a special shout out to Laura Schiff and Josh Einsohn, who were the casting directors at the time that I came on board. They were incredibly talented, and you were speaking about the guest cast on this show, and I think it was a huge cast and the people that would come on were all... I just was, I was constantly in awe of the people I was getting to work with. But I did not have an agent, so they brought me in for the show, I had no agent, they brought me in a couple of times, and they kept on saying, "We'll find something for you," which, you know, you're optimistic. And then Debora Cahn wrote the role that I ended up playing, and I was still waiting tables at the time. And Laura Schiff called me directly, 'cause I had no agent. She said, "We have three episodes for you, but that's all we're promising right now." And my boyfriend at the time, who's now my husband of almost fourteen years, said – yeah – said, "I think you should hang up your apron, and, you know, like really lean into this opportunity." And I'm like, "Oh my gosh, ok." So, I quit my waitressing job, and two weeks later I was on a plane, sitting in first class next to Janel Moloney.

AARON: Get out.

KARIS: Flying to Toronto to shoot on location, and my head was spinning, I just couldn't believe it. And then when we got to Toronto, I think it was you, Evan, actually, that called me from the hotel room and said, "Oh, we're downstairs having drinks and some food. You should come join us." And so I sort of trotted downstairs, and, ironically, it was a location of the restaurant chain that I had worked in [Audience laughs] two weeks prior. And so literally two weeks before then I was standing in a crisp white shirt and a bow tie doing a menu presentation, holding a giant steak, and now I was sitting in a banquettes with these phenomenal actors on location, on the most spectacular series and, yeah.

RAMON: Did Janel give you her slippers?

AARON: I have other questions, like, why were you shooting in Toronto?

JOSH/KARIS: [laugh]

AARON: But – which leads me to what a thrill it was two, three times a year we would go to Washington for four days or so, to shoot the Washington exteriors. This cast what, when we would go to Washington, they were the Beatles. It was unbelievable. They would have to, like, to turn down coffee with a senator because they already had coffee scheduled with another senator. I was summoned to Sandy Berger's office. At the time, Sandy Berger was – he was Bill Clinton's last National

Security Advisor. And you get summoned to the office of the National Security Advisor, you're not sure if you're gonna come out of there alive or not. He can kill you, pretty easily, and he just wanted to know why there was no National Security Advisor on the show. That's how Anna Deavere Smith got a job.

AUDIENCE: [applause]

AARON: Yeah.

RICHARD: This is my D.C. story. I have two. I was sitting in Lafayette Park on an off day, and my phone rings, and – I guess we had cell phones in those days – and it was John Podesta from the White House. Chief of Staff of the White House. He said, “What are you doing?” And I said, “Well, I'm actually across the street in Lafayette Park.”

AARON: [laughs]

RICHARD: He goes, “Would you mind coming over to the Treaty Room in the OEOB? The National Breast Cancer Coalition is meeting at the Treaty Room, and Bill and Hillary were going to host them, but they got busy. And they found out you were in town.”

AARON: [crosstalk] Oh my God!

RICHARD: [crosstalk] “Would you mind very much coming over?” And I think I called you, and I think we both went over to – do you remember this? We went over to them and made speeches.

EVERYONE: [laughing]

RICHARD: Ok. But the second time, the second one, we were there in D.C. for the Correspondent's Dinner, I was working with the Creative Coalition, so I was working all day. I was actually going out and doing stuff. And then the next day, I was at this brunch, and all of these, you know, Washington people that were famous were there, everyone that you see on T.V. And this very strange looking man started making his way toward me. Like his eyes focused right on onto me, and I realized, “Oh, that's General Alexander Haig.” And his eyes were boring down into mine, and he comes up to my face, and he says, “I find your show eerie.” [Everyone: laughs] And walked away. And I said to myself, “Thank you.”

JOSH: You should've said, “I find your show eerie.”

AARON: Yeah. We were shooting a scene with Brad. It was a long shot. Brad was way down on the sidewalk, and he was just going over his lines. So he's muttering to himself and it was a fairly animated a scene, so he's muttering to himself, going like

that. Turns out he was doing it in front of the FBI building, and there are cameras on him.

AUDIENCE: [laughs]

AARON: [laughing] Agents come out.

BRAD: Yeah, yeah, yeah. I was – for hours, I had this huge thing I had to memorize, and I'm pacing back and forth and, like, screaming about like Congress, and they've gotta get their [expletive deleted] together, [Everyone: laughs] and then – and then when, when people would come by... actors, like, when you're doing that, you just stop. You know? You stop acting, and then they go and they do it. And this guy comes running around the corner with his gun, his gun out. He's going, "What's your name, what's your name!?" And I'm like, you know, I'm like, "I'm Brad Whitford! I'm an actor and my life is silly! Don't shoot, man!"

EVERYONE: [laughs]

BRAD: One quick one, I know. We're going... don't people, don't they need to like go eat?

AUDIENCE: No, no!

BRAD: One very quick funny thing. We were doing "Noël." At that point, Bush was in, and we're going in and out of the gate, and I sort of knew some of the Secret Service guys, and they were seeing me exit the gate and then going back in. And Josh Bolten, who was the actual Deputy Chief of Staff, comes in, and we're in that, that little gate where the Secret Service is. And I'm walking in with them and they go, "Yeah, go, go ahead." And they, they wave me right through. And they go, "Hang on," to Josh, and they search –

EVERYONE: [laughs]

BRAD: They search his bag, and he's like, "This is ridiculous." He's very upset.

AARON: Just before you – 'cause I know you gotta sign off, but he mentioned "Noël," and I just want to end on this quick "Noël" story. That was the one Washington trip that I wasn't able to go on, because my daughter was born. But Tommy was shooting the scene, the last scene in the episode with that choir sing the bell song in front of the White House, Josh and Donna coming out. It had to have been freezing outside. It had to have been two o'clock in the morning, or something. And Tommy asked everyone, the choir and the crew and everyone had to do him a favor. He got the choir to sing my daughter – it was a Hebrew lullaby, which translates roughly to "Welcome little princess," and did a beautiful crane shot, where he showed the White

House at the end and gave me that tape. And that, and having you and your wife at the time, over to watch “Noël,” and seeing her just weeping and weeping at “Noël,” those are two really strong memories for me.

AUDIENCE: [applause]

JOSH: All right. I feel like the bummer dad who comes downstairs at the sleepover and is like, “Guys, it's 11:30. Go to bed.”

AARON: Yeah. But I think we need to thank Josh and Hrishi, right? *The West Wing Weekly* has been unbelievable.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

JOSH: Well –

AARON: [crosstalk] How you kept the show alive.

JOSH: Yeah. So, it really is that time. I was hoping to have something profound to say at the end, but I don't. What I do have is profound gratitude. To Aaron, first and foremost, and Tommy, and all the people that are on stage, and that worked in front of and behind the cameras to make this show that was such a special experience that, in gratitude to Hrishi, we found a way to relive for a few more years. It's a testament to the experience that we want to, that there's the vibe in the room where you just don't want to go home because you want it to just last a little bit longer, and what I will say is while we're all wrapped up in what the experience was, the beauty part is that what's left behind, twenty years later, is the work. And so that we'll go home and wish that we had an excuse to all be together again, and hopefully we'll find reasons, at least in small groups, to actually see each other again. I hope for you guys, the experience will continue because tomorrow you can go home, hit a button, and watch the pilot again.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

HRISHI: It's going to be impossible for me to express all the things that I feel, and all the gratitude that I have to everybody here, and all the people who aren't here, that made this podcast possible. I can't believe that a night like this even happened. It's really incredible, and it's been an honor and a pleasure to do this with you, Josh, and, um, yeah. So I'll just leave it there. I'll just say thank you all so much for being here. Thank you for making this one of the great pleasures of my life.

AUDIENCE: [clapping]

HRISHI: Thanks, so much to Zach McNeese, Margaret Miller, and Nick Song for their help making the show. Thanks to everybody here at the Ace who have been

incredible coordinating this circus. It's been amazing. Thank you to Angie and Vanessa. Thank you to our photographers. Thank you to everybody who helped make tonight possible, and whom helped make the podcast possible.

JOSH: Including Radiotopia. We are a proud part of Radiotopia.

EVERYONE: [laughs]

JOSH: You need a new podcast to listen to, checkout Radiotopia.fm. There are a slew of wonderful podcasts there.

HRISHI: And I think this is the last time we're going to get to say this, but...ok.

JOSH: Ok.

EVERYONE: What's next?

JOSH and HRISHI: [in unison] Tomorrow.

AUDIENCE: [clapping and cheering]

[Outro Music]

JOSH: [whispers] This is the flentl.

[Josh and Hrishu laugh]