

The West Wing Weekly  
2.21: "18<sup>th</sup> and Potomac"  
Guest: Oliver Platt

[Intro Music]

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

JOSH: and I'm Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Today we're talking about "18th and Potomac." It's season two, episode twenty-one; the penultimate episode of season two.

JOSH: Very exciting. Before we begin, I'm gonna have to ask for a password.

HRISHI: Ah. Fidelio?

JOSH: No...[both laugh]

HRISHI: That was my least favorite part of *Eyes Wide Shut*. Sagittarius.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*TOBY: Sagittarius.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That is not my sign.

HRISHI: See, this is what I was thinking about...I don't know if you're an Outkast fan...

JOSH: Not enough to get whatever you're working towards [laughs].

HRISHI: They have a song called "Aquemini" from an album, *Aquemini*.

[Aquemini excerpt]

*OUTKAST: [sung] Aquemini*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: That's because the two of them, their astrological signs are Aquarius and Gemini...

JOSH: Ahhh

HRISHI: And so the song goes, "Nothing is for sure, nothing is for certain. Nothing lasts forever, but until they close the curtain - it's him and I, Aquemini."

JOSH: Nice. I was fishing for you to come up with what my sign is.

HRISHI: Our's would be-

JOSH: You already know my sign.

HRISHI: I'm saying, "Nothing is for sure, nothing is for certain. Nothing lasts forever, but until they close the curtain - it's the two of us, Capriquarius."

JOSH: Nice. I like it. [both laugh] This actually- the repeated deployment of the password Sagittarius made me think of the fact that I worked on The West Wing for four seasons, for four years, and I had to do my own equivalent of that, which was to show picture ID every time I ever drove on to the lot. I wanted to say - in fact actually I did say at Warner Brothers what I wanted

the characters in *The West Wing* to say...like “Do you not recognize me?” [Hrishi laughs] “I’ve been working here for four years. Do I really have to take out my driver’s license again?” I kind of felt like that too. It’s like “I’m Josh Lyman. Can I go in the room please? Alright, Sagittarius. But really? Come on.”

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Oh that’s quite a security system.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: How ‘bout do you tell the guy, “Leo, C.J., Sam, Toby, and Josh are gonna come in, just don’t let anyone else in.”

HRISHI: [laughs] Right. I do feel like you kind of blew past the fact that I had prepared Outkast lyrics with our astrological signs.

JOSH: Yeah, I think I didn’t- it’s catching up with me, I might be a little bit tired. [Hrishi laughs] I was like, “Did he do that on the fly? Why was he so ready for that? And why does he know my— so you actually— that was your prep for the episode.”

HRISHI: [laughs] I actually- I think I had that in my back pocket from a while ago, I don’t know why...probably ‘cause I was just listening to Outkast one time and I was like, “Hm, it’s the two of us, Capriquarius”

JOSH: [both laugh] Yeah. You do astounding things and I take them for granted.

HRISHI: Astounding is a very nice way of saying, “Totally [expletive deleted] dorky.”

JOSH: No. [Hrishi laughs].

HRISHI: Later on in this episode, once we stop yapping we’re going to be joined by Oliver Platt who plays Oliver Babish.

JOSH: I love Oliver. Both of them. [Hrishi laughs] Olivers Platt and Babish.

HRISHI: [laughs] Olivers Platt...So let me hit you with the synopsis.

JOSH: Please.

HRISHI: From *TV Guide*: “With disastrous hypothetical polling numbers from Joey Lucas in hand, staffers prepare to announce the President’s condition. But first, both Sam and Oliver Babish question the First Lady about the matter. Meanwhile, a crisis erupts in Haiti, Josh deals with two democratic senators who are less than enthusiastic about the government’s tobacco industry suit, and male staffers can’t help but give Mrs. Landingham car buying advice.” I wanted to let the listeners in on a little peek behind the scenes of our process. We tried to record this episode last night and utterly failed.

JOSH: That’s true. It’s the only time ever I think that we just didn’t get traction [laughs].

HRISHI: We were both exhausted, and I think we were a little bit at a loss for what to say, and I have a theory as to why that is.

JOSH: But first can I say also that during that conversation, I pulled a Carol and I told you that you looked tired.

HRISHI: [laughs] Yeah that’s right. I was like-

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*C.J.: That's what you're sayin' to me?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [Hrishi laughs] We actually had that moment.

HRISHI: [laughs] Yeah it's true. I was like "oh," I said "how are you?" You said, "tired". I said, "yeah, me too". You said, "yeah, you look tired."

JOSH: [laughs] And then as I said it, I was like "I've learned nothing from this show."

HRISHI: [laughs] Exactly.

JOSH: Hit me with your theory.

HRISHI: Ok, well I think it's pretty hard to talk about this episode. Everything that happens in the first 40 minutes, when the episode ends with the death of Mrs. Landingham. In the actual episode itself...the last two minutes of the show, there's no dialogue.

JOSH: Is that right?

HRISHI: Yeah. Charlie says –

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*Charlie: No. She's dead.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And from then until the last two minutes of the episode, there's just no speaking. It's just Leo taking it in and then having to go and tell the President. It's probably one of the longest, if not the longest stretch of a *West Wing* episode with no dialogue.

JOSH: I'm sure you're right. Shall we try that with this episode of our podcast?

HRISHI: [laughs] Well...

JOSH: It may not play as well without the visual element.

HRISHI: [laughs] Right. But I'm looking at you through streaky glass as we talk.

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: But it like highlighted, when I watched it again today, it reinforced I think why I had such a hard time yesterday. Which is it's too much. It's too big and too sad of a plot point to then kind of riff on, I don't know...about jokes about the tow package? I mean it's- yeah. Did you know what was going to happen in this episode? Did you remember from the first time when you watched, how this episode was going to end?

JOSH: Yes. I knew that Mrs. Landingham would die in this episode. I didn't really remember the details of how- I remembered it as I watched it, but I didn't start it at the full knowledge of how it would unspool.

HRISHI: Right. Yeah, it was a real sucker punch.

JOSH: Yeah, it is. It's an absolute punch to the gut, yeah.

HRISHI: You've already got so much on the plates of the staffers. It's like as if the MS stuff isn't

enough, and the re-election stuff, then there's this whole debacle in Haiti...and normally that would be enough for an episode. You know, you've got your domestic, political crises and then you have like an international subplot that happens off screen but is important and somehow plays into things...and then they sneak in this move that just- it puts the whole thing into context a little bit. Even though we don't get into it – like we don't get to discuss the ramifications of her getting killed in this episode, it changes the tenor of everything you saw leading up to it.

JOSH: Yes. That is true. I thought a lot of- there's a lot of things of micro and macro importance happening in this episode [cross talk] and affecting each other. Also, let me just say that the teleplay is by Aaron Sorkin.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: Oh my gosh. I totally skipped all this stuff.

JOSH: The teleplay's by Aaron Sorkin, the story by Lawrence O'Donnell. This episode was directed, beautifully, by Bob Berlinger, and it first aired on May 9th in the year 2001.

HRISHI: He's credited in the episode as Robert Berlinger.

JOSH: Yes I just –

HRISHI: But you know him as Bob- Bob Berlinger.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: You're on De Niro terms with him.

JOSH: Perhaps it's overly intimate, and he would balk at my use, but yes – Bob Berlinger.

HRISHI: I always wanted to get to that point where I- you know, everyone calls Robert De Niro, "Bobby".

JOSH: Yeah. How's that going? Have you made any progress?

HRISHI: Oh I only call him Bobby. [cross talk] I've never met him...

JOSH: [cross talk] Ah.

JOSH: Oh, I see.

HRISHI: But...[laughs] mission accomplished.

JOSH: Look at you, making your dreams come true.

HRISHI: [laughs] Yeah.

JOSH: If you'd like, you can call me Bobby.

HRISHI: [laughs] Someone that we spoke to once referred to Martin Sheen as "Marty" and I thought, "That was awesome".

JOSH: And who was that?

HRISHI: I think it was - was it Lawrence O'Donnell?

JOSH: Larry? [Hrishi laughs] Might have been.

HRISHI: I don't know if people know that I call you Joshi...but only because you first called yourself Joshi-

JOSH: We're way past that, you've now publically called me "Hot Pants" [Hrishi laughs] so "Joshi's" really meaningless at this point.

HRISHI: Yeah. I liked it because I felt like you were relating yourself to me when you left that in a voicemail when you said "Hrishi, it's Joshi."

JOSH: [Laughs] Hey there you go.

HRISHI: Ok. This episode - should we start at the beginning?

JOSH: Why not? For a change.

HRISHI: The cold open starts in the basement and the staff is meeting with Joey Lucas to go over the numbers.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*SAM: These numbers aren't going to mean anything, right? With the hypothetical and lack of context? Plus the pre-existing level of trust.*

*C.J.: Yeah.*

*SAM: I'm saying, he's got numbers like Walter Cronkite.*

*JOEY: Yeah.*

*JOSH: Is there anything in there that we're gonna like?*

*JOEY [KENNY]: We are in fact, eating more beets.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I'm glad that people appreciated the – at least some people- appreciated the beets, beads, bees reference. [Mmhhh] Now I can't watch any of these episodes without thinking of it. And then the President asks - I always wondered if people are going to know the answer now – the President asked-

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*JOEY [KENNY]: ...giving the governor a hypothetical concealed-*

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Excuse me, how many people in this room know Kenny's last name?*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I wondered how many of our listeners shouted, "It's Thurman."

JOSH: Hmm. I didn't.

HRISHI: [laughs] Did you think, "That's a good question."?

JOSH: Yeah. I think I was more on that camp.

HRISHI: When we did the *West Wing* trivia night outside the DNC-

JOSH: That was one of the questions?

HRISHI: One of the questions was "What's Kenny's last name?" I felt good about that one.

JOSH: Yeah. I don't think my knowledge base for future *West Wing* trivia is improving. I mean certainly, it's better than it was a year ago, but not impressively so. Things aren't sticking.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Uh huh.

HRISHI: I bet that's not true. I think you probably retain more than you give yourself credit for.

JOSH: Maybe. I sometimes look through as I go to get the air date and the credits for an episode, my eye takes in other episodes' titles and very rarely does an episode title mean anything to me [Hrishi laughs] in terms of what happens in an episode. There's certain ones, like "18th and Potomac," I always remember that that's the intersection- there's certain giveaways- "Take this Sabbath Day"...but most of them, couldn't tell ya.

HRISHI: You want to do a quick little lighting round right here?

JOSH: Bring it.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*C.J.: Sorry Mark, we've run out of time, but we'll pick it up with our lightning round tomorrow.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: So, here's our lighting round.

JOSH: Ok.

HRISHI: Alright, this is just off the dome for both of us. Let's start with this episode. What is the name of the democratically elected President of Haiti who's been deposed?

JOSH: Dessaline

HRISHI: Yeah. See you're off and running

JOSH: Go ahead, hit me with your second question. I'm on a huge roll.

HRISHI: You're on a roll

JOSH: I could just quit now as the undefeated champion [Hrishi laughs] of The West Wing Weekly Trivia Quiz .

HRISHI: I'm going to go further back. I know this is going to be trouble for you. What is Leo's ex-wife's name?

JOSH: Thurman.

HRISHI: Correct. [Josh laughs] That's amazing! That is amazing.

JOSH: Uh...Marilyn. Stacey. Joshi. Bob.

HRISHI: You're close in that all of those are names.

JOSH: Mmm. That's all I've got. Multiple choice?

HRISHI: [laughs] Sure. Is it Ellie [Josh laughs]? Is it Jenny? Is it Joey?

JOSH: Jenny! It's Jenny. I remember.

HRISHI: It is Jenny.

JOSH: Ok. So I'm one for two.

HRISHI: [laughs] Ok. One for more good measure?

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: Ok. What state is Donna from?

JOSH: Uh, is "I don't care" an acceptable answer?

HRISHI: [laughs] It is! You are right! That's two out of three. That's pretty good.

JOSH: What state is she from...she's from Wisconsin.

HRISHI: You're right. Exactly.

JOSH: Is that true?

HRISHI: That's true.

JOSH: Oh. Fantastic.

HRISHI: Yeah. Like I said, you've retained more than you think.

JOSH: Much better than I thought.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I know two out of three things about this show.

HRISHI: [laughs] Jenny McGarry is pretty far back. Anyway...so the President asks if anybody knows Kenny's last name. Nobody answers, which is a little bit surprising.

JOSH: And that is a "should we trust this guy" moment.

HRISHI: Yeah...I mean I think- this is actually something that you talked about one time when the President says:

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: I believe this operation is no longer covert.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: 'Cause you were saying how like they said 17 people, but then they didn't include Charlie. [cross talk] There was already leaks sprung between this- the idea of this information staying secret is pretty faulty.

JOSH: [cross talk] Right.

JOSH: Right. I think we're seeing something like that play out now in the headlines [Hrishi laughs] [cross talk] currently. I think keeping a lid on things in a situation like this is not easy.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: I mean they have no idea if any of the doctors might have said anything. I mean you'd like to think that they observe doctor/patient confidentiality or whatever, but somebody might say something to their wife- who knows? And so then we get to Joey's poll numbers and they are pretty rough.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*JOEY [KENNY]: 1,170 registered voters in Michigan were polled, giving their governor a hypothetical concealed degenerative illness. These are the results:*

*"Do you agree that it's okay for the governor to lie about his health?" 17% agree, 83% disagree.*

*"Would you be as likely or less likely to vote for the governor now that you know he has a*

*degenerative illness?" 71% say less likely. The largest block of likely voters are women over 55. 78% of those women say they wouldn't vote for a candidate with MS.*

*C.J.: We just lost Florida.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But here's something that is interesting. So did we do when this episode aired?

JOSH: Yes. May 2001.

HRISHI: May 2001. So in October of 2001, there was an actual poll that was done that was remarkably similar to this poll.

JOSH: Really?

HRISHI: And I don't know if it's because of *The West Wing*, but the actual results were actually much more positive. Here's just some pop level numbers. 92% of Americans at the time were aware of MS and almost 1/2 of them, 48%, who were aware of MS, believed that the disease would have little to no effect on decision making abilities. 48% of those aware of MS, believed that MS medications are effective. But 77% - here's the big number - 77% of people who were aware of MS would remain confident in a leader's ability to perform his or her job duties despite the disease.

JOSH: Hm...those questions though, to me sound a little bit more nuanced than the ones that Joey's rattling off. You know, it's about the deception that the President had perpetrated a fraud.

HRISHI: Right. Do you think it's okay for the governor to lie about his health?

JOSH: Right. And again, with reverberations about what's going on now, even if I am not concerned about the thing that you lied about...the fact that you lied about it is its own issue.

HRISHI: Yeah....and on our next episode, we're going to be speaking to author Mary Graham. She's the author of *President's Secrets: The Use and Abuse of Hidden Power*, and we're going to get to talk to her a little bit about the ramifications of Presidents concealing their health and real life examples of that in history and compare it to what's happening in the show.

JOSH: That should be very enlightening.

HRISHI: So...the cold open ends on this really nice, cheery note.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Joey, is there any good news in there at all?*

*JOEY: No sir.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And then it hits the music. What? Oh great.

JOSH: [sings theme song] da dum... pum pum pum... [Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: So once they set the tone with the A plot there and then we get right into the B plot, which is the Haiti plot. And again it's just a total [expletive deleted] show.

JOSH: Yeah. I saw a little bit of that situation as a metaphor somehow for Bartlet's and...for Dessaline in a car trunk being snuck in, you know, through a gate and I just kind of felt that

there was a little bit of a...I don't know if I can show the exact parallel, but Bartlet's sort of throwing a lifeline to another leader who's just hanging on by a thread. [cross talk] And when he says, you know, it's a tough decision when it's laid out pro and con, the ramifications of his saying, "Let him through." [cross talk] I just think Bartlet at that moment is empathizing and identifying with the guy in the trunk. I think Bartlet sees himself as the valid and deserved leader of a country who is being assailed from all sides.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: I thought it was maybe like President Bartlet was doing some kind of karmic penance? Like if he can save this guy and his presidency, then maybe he might be able to make up for his own presidency.

JOSH: Hmm...ok, I buy it.

HRISHI: Then we get into this kind of strategy session that's happening still down in the basement...or as I like to call it, la casa de la Sagittarius.

JOSH: [Laughs] Very nice. Yeah. I like what's going on in that room because our heroes are fighting...and I like when they don't get along and C.J. and Sam are snapping at each other...

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*C.J.: He needs to be with the First Lady.*

*SAM: In some decorative room? Sitting with his wife weakens him. Let's put him behind the Kennedy desk. Let's put him in the East Room. Let's put him in the Briefing Room.*

*C.J.: Sam, he's going to go on TV and say he lied, I don't want him doing it behind the Seal of the President.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I enjoyed that fractured group dynamic that we rarely but sometimes get. [cross talk] And the stakes are high.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah, it feels like they're kind of nasty to each other. It doesn't feel like a well-oiled machine on any level. [Right] It's interesting too – I think that they've done a good job of carrying through the plot that the people who have found out later about the MS are dealing with it less well. C.J. and Sam are kind of at each other's throats and they seem to be a little bit more on edge, whereas Toby seems a little bit more like exhausted and resigned...

JOSH: Well he was the first though

HRISHI: And he was the first-

JOSH: But he flipped. But he flipped badly...even somewhere in there he kind of, in a self deprecating way, he gives kudos to Donna for how well she took it.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*JOSH: How'd she take it?*

*TOBY: If everybody out there takes it the way she did, we may be okay. If a few more people in here took it the way she did, that'd be alright too.*

*JOSH: Was that for me?*

*TOBY: That was for me.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I love that exchange.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah and so I was thinking, like both of them, Toby and Josh are the first two people- Leo, Toby and Josh these are the first people to know. Sam and C.J. find out later and of the senior staff, it feels like they're still processing. [cross talk] They're still angry about it.

JOSH: [cross talk] It's fresh.

JOSH: Yeah, it's raw...that's correct. I did notice also, we talked I think last episode about how Joey responded when she got the news and how she pretty quickly asked about how the President was feeling and how he was doing. [cross talk] Donna does a similar thing.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*DONNA: Is the President in any pain or discomfort right now?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I don't know if it's a female thing or a maternal thing or- I certainly noticed that both the two of them were the ones who immediately reacted with concern for the President himself and how he was doing. And then Donna showed that first worry and then immediately snapped to it and got back to work.

HRISHI: Yeah. Maybe it is a maternal thing because they're both people who are potentially romantically involved with Josh Lyman who needs a mom.

JOSH: Ha. There you go....Why did Toby tell Donna?

HRISHI: Well this is what I thought was neat. I thought this was kind of a carry over from the previous episode when Leo, he started to talk to Abbey before the President could.

JOSH: Right. Which tweaked the President.

[West Wing Episode 2.20 excerpt]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: How could you tell Abbey about the health form before I did?*

*LEO: I didn't know you hadn't told her.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: You know, there was this strange kind of thing about like the bounds of marriage and what an outsider can do or say, and I felt like a similar thing was being explored here, even though Josh and Donna aren't married, let's face it. They basically are.

JOSH: Right. They're TV married. There was a similar dynamic. And Josh gets tweaked.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*JOSH: You told Donna.*

*TOBY: Yeah.*

*JOSH: Why didn't you let me?*

*TOBY: You hadn't yet.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It felt like a strange violation of boundaries or something...to Josh at least.

JOSH: Right. But even in the moment, why did somebody need to tell Donna? So that she could bring them donuts and coffee [laughing] in the basement room or something? I don't quite see what part of the puzzle, in terms of the need to know clearance, I'm not sure why Donna needed to know.

HRISHI: Well, you know, Toby's explanation is "this is what Josh is going to be working on 24 hours and he's going to need your help and he's going to need you to know, and so I'm telling you." And I think somehow Toby sensed that Josh might drag his feet about it because even later as they get into it and Donna has to reveal that she knows about Sagittarius, which I thought was quite a silly way of revealing it by the way. But even in that point, he's still covering. He's like "you know what that is." And so Toby's right, he's like "He's going to be more effective at his job if she can help him." But the only way that she can help him is if she's on the inside.

JOSH: Hmm...I don't know if I buy that, but ok.

HRISHI: But she is, the blankets is maybe like a minor thing relative to the big picture, but it's also a crucial thing and shows that she's anticipating needs and realizing what they...she's doing a good job because she knows that people are going to be down there 24/7-

JOSH: Oh, is that what she brings them?

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*DONNA: There's an empty office next to the conference room downstairs. I moved two couches in and there's some pillows and blankets.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: See. I don't even remember. I can't even get that trivia question. I made up coffee and donuts. [both laugh]. How about this? Instead of Toby telling her this top-secret piece of information, he says, "Hey, can you grab a couple of blankets and bring them to this room?" [Hrishi laughs] "I can't tell you why because it's [expletive deleted] top secret, but just grab a blanket and bring it down." That also would have worked.

HRISHI: But...[Josh laughs]

JOSH: And then you wouldn't get a couple of good interchanges in the subset, don't get me wrong.

HRISHI: I think she would need to know...she's going to need to know something, you know, because he's got to be, he needs to-

JOSH: She needs to know that you have to grab a couple of blankets [Hrishi laughs] and bring

them.

HRISHI: Otherwise, Josh is working on the tobacco lawsuit.

JOSH: Yes. I did notice in the tobacco subplot, we have Ritter, Senator? Ritter played by John Rubenstein. I thought this was a lovely little bit of happenstance, if that's English. John Rubenstein starred in the original Broadway production of *Children of a Lesser God* [cross talk] premiered on Broadway in 1980. I was there opening night because dear friend of the family Manny Azenberg produced it-

HRISHI: [cross talk] Ha!

HRISHI: And you're a big Bill Hurt fan.

JOSH: [laughs]...and I'm a big Bill Hurt [chuckle] fan. Bobby. Billy. [Hrishi laughs] Right, and of course Marlee Matlin won an Oscar for the 1986 film version of that play.

HRISHI: Right. She was not in the 1980 version on Broadway as she would have been 13 years old.

JOSH: That is correct. Phyllis Frelich played the role and she was wonderful...and I was...uh, 1980, I was 14 and it was a very impactful performance. Incredible play.

HRISHI: Was that your first time seeing something on Broadway?

JOSH: Um...no. I was very lucky because my parents were big fans of the theater, and also because my dad's best friend was this big Broadway producer, I was very, very lucky and got to see a lot of theater in New York.

HRISHI: Hm. That's awesome.

JOSH: What was your first Broadway play? Mine was...I can't quite remember...it was either *Pippin* – it's a musical, I can tell you about that later- or *The Magic Show* starring Doug Henning. I forget which one of those I saw first, but those were one and two for me.

HRISHI: Hm. Well I think you know my first Broadway-

JOSH [sighs] In addition to being [expletive deleted] at *West Wing* trivia, I'm not that good at Hrishi trivia. [Hrishi laughs] We've had this conversation before?

HRISHI: Um...yes.

JOSH: Is there a way you can give me a hint? What year was it?

HRISHI: It was 2016.

JOSH: Wait a minute. What are you talking about?

HRISHI: The first time I ever saw anything on Broadway was-

JOSH: was *Hamilton*?!

HRISHI: Yes.

JOSH: Are you kidding me?!

HRISHI: No! [laughs]

JOSH: What the hell? Oh my God. Oh dear Lord.

HRISHI: I played a show with my band once at town hall, which I think, is that considered Broadway? No. It's just a venue near Broadway.

JOSH: Yeah, that's true. Wow that's amazing.

HRISHI: But my first being in the audience of a Broadway play was Hamilton in 2016.

JOSH: There's another great theater actor in this episode.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Peter Michael Goetz plays Paul Hackett.

HRISHI: Oh, the NBC executive.

JOSH: Yes. Exactly. C.J. negotiates the interview without telling him at all what's going to be discussed. Terrific theater actor and played the dad in *Brighton Beach Memoirs*, the Neil Simon play...went to opening night of that in 1983...Matthew Broderick, Peter Michael Goetz, incredible cast. I just love seeing these tremendous theater actors pop up in small roles in *The West Wing*.

HRISHI: Yeah. That was a nice little piece of network synergy there...you know that they're going to do it with *Dateline*. We talked about how they had Jay Leno on [cross talk] in the office outside the executive assistant office and now they're like it's going to be *Dateline*. They get to mention all kind of NBC stuff in there, and I thought "Well that's a good way to suck up to your bosses."

JOSH: [cross talk] Right.

JOSH: Yeah. It was almost too much. "But that's when *Friends* is on." We'll preempt it.

HRISHI: Wait did they- is that-oh [both laugh]

JOSH: I wanted to make mention of all the other shows that were on NBC.

HRISHI: [laughs] That's right. C.J.'s the person who has to understand the needs of the networks...

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Which makes sense as the press secretary, but it is a little bit crazy that Sam can't see past his own outrage.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*SAM: Who gives a damn about May sweeps?*

*C.J.: They do, Sam!*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right. Yes.

HRISHI: It reminded me a little bit of a moment in "Lies, Damn Lies, and Statistics".

JOSH: I recognize that as the title of a *West Wing* episode.

HRISHI: That's right!

JOSH: 3 for 4 now.

HRISHI: And in that one they're arguing about-

[West Wing Episode 1.21 excerpt]

*C.J.: What's your problem?*

*JOSH: "When making policy decisions, do you think that President Bartlet puts the needs of average people first?" "Average people" is a pejorative phrase and occurs about six times in the polling model.*

*C.J.: This may come as a shock to you...[fades out]*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh right. I do remember. It's a walk and talk.

HRISHI: Yeah. Exactly.

JOSH: 4 for 5.

HRISHI: [laughs] And C.J. says-

JOSH: C.J., played by Allison Janney. 5 for 6.

HRISHI: [laughs] This is a new, interesting model of our show. [laughs] But C.J. says- she again kind of undercuts that and she's like, "You know, most people actually like the phrase "average American". It's comforting to them. It's only [expletive deleted] head snobs like you that [cross talk] are upset by it." Anyway, I got a similar vibe from that line that she says to Sam.

JOSH: [cross talk] Right.

JOSH: How about the Abbey/Sam scene? I feel like this is a pairing we've maybe never seen before? [cross talk] And it was interesting and am I wrong or underneath this whole sort of, little bit of a cat and mouse thing-

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*ABBEY: Why aren't the President and I doing this together?*

*SAM: I'm sorry?*

*ABBEY: Somebody's doing this with the President, and I was asking, why we're not doing it at the same time. Is it so you can compare our stories?*

*SAM: Yes.*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: But underneath it all, I also felt like she might want to throw him on the table and take him right there. [Hrishi laughs] There's a little bit of something. She gives him a look. There's a little bit of a potential cougar moment happening, [Hrishi laughs] Am I making that up? [Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: I don't see it, but -

JOSH: Am I wrong?

HRISHI: I'm not saying you're wrong, but I didn't see it.

JOSH: Oh ok.

HRISHI: The part in that scene that always catches my ear is when Sam takes a beat and then he says, “Yes”. Like he says it with a kind of vehemence or something, that like portrays some kind of anger or frustration.

JOSH: I do know the moment and I think you’re absolutely right that there is something there and I think it’s, “Of course that’s what we’re doing.”

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It’s a little bit more of a Babish thing, like “Yes. In order to protect you, these are the things that we need to do because somebody on the other end is going to pick apart your stories and if they’re not the same and if we don’t find where they differ and kind of hammer that out, there’s going to be trouble.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: So yeah, I think it was loaded in that one little syllable.

HRISHI: I think it was neat how much they – you can see the difference between Sam’s dynamic with the First Lady because you have to contrast it with Oliver Babish’s scene with her...and it’s in the same setting, it’s in a very similar kind of set up, but Sam is- except for that one moment, he’s like trying to keep his frustration in check and being deferential. But I love that Babish just has no- doesn’t really have time for any of that.

JOSH: Yeah, that’s right and Oliver’s performance, and then Oliver Babish’s approach to these scenes or his questioning- I feel like the unspoken message is, “ I’m not the one who’s in trouble here, like there’s no risk to me. You don’t want to do this, you want to be difficult about everything- understand it’s your ass that’s out there. I think Sam feels really identified and you know [cross talk] and at some risk himself and drawn into it, and Babish has sort of a very important and palpable remove from [cross talk] the danger of it all.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Oh yeah.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Right.

HRISHI: Right. My favorite part in that exchange though is at the end, when he ends the conversation by calling her Dr. Bartlet.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*ABBEY: Is there anything else?*

*OLIVER: No. Thank you, Dr. Bartlet.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He’s so sharp, he’s able to stay on his game, do everything that he needs to do, but in the- essentially “letter of the law” kind of way, he takes in the information that she gives him and he digests it and then is able to use it-

JOSH: Yeah that’s right

HRISHI: and he calls her “Dr. Bartlet.” He doesn’t do it in a deferential way or even in a very nice way, but he is doing what she asks, which is she wants to be called “Dr. Bartlet.”

JOSH: That’s right.

HRISHI: This is one of those moments where we had a conversation about “Mrs. Bartlet” versus “Dr. Bartlet” ages ago on our podcast, and everybody was like, “This all gets cleared up in season 2 episode twen- you know” and we had to be like “Yes we know, but we’re not going to talk about that until it happens.” So finally it’s happened and we can actually talk about it.

JOSH: Do you think that I knew it was coming and I was like “Hey, we can’t talk about it now” or did you think I didn’t know what was being discussed?

HRISHI: You were like [Josh laughs] “18th and Potomac,” 6 for 7.

JOSH: [laughs] Exactly. Bam! [Hrishi laughs] Bring it!

HRISHI: It makes me wish that the First Lady was in every episode though.

JOSH: She’s fantastic. I mean she always lights the place on fire.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: ...So Mrs. Landingham dies. [Hrishi laughs]

HRISHI: Here’s something that happened because of this episode. This is actually real. This really happened. The California Assembly had a moment of silence for Mrs. Landingham after the episode.

JOSH: No way.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: That’s indefensible. Well you know what’s interesting, I will say this about the moment, is that the first time I watched this episode was sixteen years ago and Kathryn Joosten was alive and so re-watching it, knowing that this wonderful actress in fact had passed away made it land in a more significant way I think. I mean it always was a great episode and a very impactful moment, but something about knowing that the actress herself is dead [cross talk] gave it a sort of really more deeply melancholy feeling.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah, absolutely. That must be hard for anybody who knew her to watch this episode.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: Even though it’s not her, it’s a fictional character.

JOSH: Right, yeah, no. I would think so.

HRISHI: I was reading interviews with her that she did after the episode aired and everybody found out, you know and it seemed like she was taking it in good spirits. Here’s a little background from Aaron, this is from an article from July of 2001. “Sorkin said, ‘The response has been amazing, as if a real person had died. The worst part of killing Mrs. Landingham was losing Kathryn from our cast’ he said. He recalled that the idea to kill the character came to him when the cast attended a charity banquet and he and Kathryn Joosten went outside for a cigarette. ‘She happened to mention’ –this is a quote from Aaron, ‘She happened to mention that she was going out for a pilot and I didn’t hear a thing she said, because I started thinking about what it would be like if she left us.’ he said. ‘Then I kept thinking about it and I saw Mrs. Landingham’s death as a way to take the President right to the edge. [cross talk] Now the joke

around set is 'Don't take a smoke break with Aaron.'"

JOSH: [cross talk] Hmm.

JOSH: And certainly don't discuss other projects you're pursuing [Hrishi laughs] with your current boss.

HRISHI: [laughs] I guess that's just good advice-

JOSH: Which I guess I've always just intuited naturally as an actor, but I guess she learned that the hard way.

HRISHI: But yeah, it goes along with everything that you said about how Aaron Sorkin pulls ideas for stories and plots and pieces of dialogue from everything around him. He's just constantly absorbing information, pulling it in and then churning it out into stuff that makes it into episodes.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: It makes it crazy 'cause it's such a huge, huge moment in the show...what would have happened if she just didn't mention it?

JOSH: Yeah...maybe Charlie would have died.

HRISHI: [both laugh] and it would have been your favorite episode.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: We haven't talked about this on the podcast, but this is a thing that you've- a running joke that you've had when people have asked what your favorite episode of *The West Wing* is-

JOSH: I always respond, "the one where Charlie died" [laughs] Spoiler alert.

HRISHI: Season six spoiler alert.

JOSH: Now that's really mean. [Hrishi laughs] That's so unlike you, but I like it. Did she go on very quickly, Kathryn Joosten, to *Desperate Housewives*?

HRISHI: Let's see. That was 2004, so not that quickly. She'd go on to *Desperate Housewives* when that show started up, but my favorite post *West Wing* thing that she did was an appearance in *Gilmore Girls* in one of my favorite moments in one of my favorite episodes of that series, where Luke and Lorelai have their first date at her restaurant that is Luke's favorite place and it's a great wonderful scene when she shows up in that role. It's perfect. Shout out to any *Gilmore Girls/West Wing* crossover listeners.

JOSH: Kathryn started acting or being a professional actor at 42, having been a psychiatric nurse prior to that.

HRISHI: And she only moved to Hollywood I think, in her mid-50's.

JOSH: And she won two Emmys for her work on *Desperate Housewives*. How 'bout that?

HRISHI: Wow. Yeah.

JOSH: It's worth noting that Kathryn Joosten was a governor of the academy of television arts and sciences.

HRISHI: Part of the reason why this episode is hard to talk about I think is because it's

essentially a continuation of- it's like a bridge episode.

JOSH: That's true.

HRISHI: I mean, the death of Mrs. Landingham is this huge event, but it only happens at the very end and it's only covered in this one phone call that we don't actually hear. It's just this one bit of dialogue between Charlie and Leo. Everything else that happens is really- it's just furthering- you know, the Haiti plot was a continuation, the MS is of course a continuation from a five-arch, even the tobacco subplot, which I thought in the last episode was handled so nicely and had this, you know, wonderful resonance of the fraud that's being perpetrated. Here, even that continues and I was almost surp- you know, I know where it goes, but I was surprised to be like "oh yeah, this is still a thing that's going." It felt nice because it was realistic [cross talk] in that these single issue-

JOSH: [cross talk] Right.

JOSH: These things don't resolve and go away or disappear, [cross talk] they're still sort of...thorny, daily elements played out against greater crises happening.

HRISHI: [cross talk] Exactly.

HRISHI: Yeah, like single issue voters, we have single issue episodes.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Yeah, but here it actually continued. But it was a little bit jarring, I was like, "Oh this is- " It almost felt like it was being dragged out or something, just by virtue of getting some more information about this one story. So really, I think it's kind of hard to talk about because there's not- it's hard to talk about in a new from way from everything that we talked about in the last episode and the episode before that...and the episode before that. Let's take a break and when we come back, we're going to talk to Oliver Platt.

[Advertisement deleted]

JOSH: Now Hrishi and I are delighted to welcome to the show a multi Emmy nominee, a Golden Globe nominee, an Independent Spirit Award winner...he's a star of stage and screen, my friend Oliver Platt.

OLIVER: Hey Josh, how are ya, buddy?

JOSH: Heyyy Oliver. Ah it's nice to hear your voice.

OLIVER: Nice talking to you. Of course I've been listening to your voice and yours Hrishi all afternoon. I just started with, this afternoon with the one that you guys – I guess it was the last one you posted. The one where you had the long talk with Richard?

HRISHI: Yeah.

OLIVER: Yeah yeah yeah. [laughs] It's amazing, how much detail. It's incredible. Am I wrong or is the podcast actually longer than the episode?

HRISHI: Oh definitely. Every time. For sure.

OLIVER: I was freakin riveted. Anyway, I'm delighted to talk to you guys.

JOSH: Thanks Oliver. You know I was reminiscing with Hrishi and your first appearance. I have been a fan of yours since 1988 and your appearance in *The Miser* at Yale Rep.

OLIVER: Well dude, I have the best story about almost not doing this. I was in Canada, I think it was 2001. Everybody was very concerned about a looming writer's strike. People were worried it was really going to shut the business down...and I was, like a lot of people, up in Canada. I was doing a "strike movie," which in other words maybe not the- it was just like people thinking, "got to work, you got to put money in the bank". And I remember I got a call from my then manager and he said you know, "Aaron Sorkin wants you to come and be in *The West Wing*." And I had literally just had my own TV show, when I say my- a TV show that had actually been sort of built around me, ripped unceremoniously off the air after three episodes. And so I was like "Television [spit sound]" [Josh and Hrishi both laugh] and "NBC [spit noise]." I knew how good *The West Wing* was because I'd seen it, but hadn't- I had seen a couple of episodes. I knew Aaron because Aaron wrote the first draft of a movie that I did with a young actor named Josh Malina [Josh laughs] called *Bulworth*. He had asked me personally to read this and wanted to talk to me about it...and the only reason I read it is because I wanted to call Aaron and I was totally going to pass, but you know, I wanted to show him the respect that he deserved and again, I was glad to be asked, but then of course I read it...and that actor thing took over you know and it was like, "I'm not going to watch somebody else do this." [Hrishi laughs] You know what I mean? And I told Aaron exactly that and um I had no idea that I was, you know about to go and work on sort of a historically, fantastic television narrative. I learned more about how to make television in- it was really only eight visits I think, but I learned just a tremendous amount about how good television is made, you know?

HRISHI: Let me go back for a second and get the chronology right. So I didn't realize that Aaron Sorkin had done a draft of *Bulworth*. I had no idea.

OLIVER: Not a lot of people know that, but it's a matter of record, I mean it's my understanding anyway, the first draft of *Bulworth* was Warren.

HRISHI: Josh, did you know about that? Is that all-

JOSH: Oh yeah.

HRISHI: -related to how you guys got the parts?

JOSH: I know that he was in the mix and working with Warren for a long time and I know that I also got *Bulworth*, once again, if not directly, through Aaron then certainly indirectly because we did a reading of a play of Aaron's called *Making Movies*. It's a two act version of a one act he wrote called *Hidden in This Picture* and he invited Warren Beatty and Annette Bening and Garry Shandling was there too. Aaron got me a lot of work [laughs] even when he didn't directly write the project, he put me in front of the right people, so that led me to *Bulworth*, doing that little play reading...and to working with Oliver.

HRISHI: It's funny that your first experience seeing Oliver in something was at the Yale Rep. My first experience of becoming a fan of both of you guys as actors was when I saw *Bulworth* at Yale, and I think Oliver, I'd seen you in stuff before but that was really the first movie where I was like, "Ah this guy, I really dig" and Josh that was the first thing I'd ever seen you in, um and that was also at Yale.

JOSH: Look at that. Look at that Yale-

OLIVER: Look at that. Look at that. [Hrishi laughs] But I will tell you this, that scene, you know, Josh and I had a bunch of fun stuff to do in Bulworth, but that substance abuse scene in the closet.

[insert clip from Bulworth]

*DENNIS MURPHY [OLIVER PLATT]: I've had other offers you know , plenty. I beat them off with a stick. [snorts] Didn't he have it all though, Bill? Didn't he have it all? Looks? Brains more or less enough. Classy white. But Jesus Christ Bill, for God sake, he had us. The mother [expletive deleted] had us. [snorts]*

[end excerpt]

OLIVER: That remains sort-of one of my favorite scenes that I've ever put on film in any medium.

JOSH: That makes my day to hear because it's certainly on my highlight reel, which is a lot shorter [all laugh] than yours. For it to be on yours is really something and very flattering.

OLIVER: Quality over quantity, Malina. Quality over quantity. [laughs]

JOSH: Nice. Nice. What was the short lived Oliver Platt series?

HRISHI: That was *Deadline*, right?

OLIVER: Yeah. *Deadline*.

HRISHI: I remember that.

OLIVER: Not every show comes relatively fully formed out into the world, much like *The West Wing* did. To go from an environment where you had people who were learning how to work together and really try to find a show to one that was humming on all cylinders...for instance, when I came in for the first episode - on a Sunday afternoon, they drove me to Aaron's bungalow. Aaron and I got in his golf cart and drove to the set. We walked into the mural room and there was Marty, John, Tommy Schlamme, practically the entire cast, you know this is on Sunday night. It's like "oh this is how hard you need to work when you know..." Anyway, we never did Sunday night rehearsals on that other show, I'll tell you that.

HRISHI: [laughs] So that was for your first real rehearsal for the episode? You already had the part at that point?

OLIVER: Oh yeah, Aaron offered it to me. You know, again that call that I got in Canada was when I found out that he wanted me to do it...and this was the next day, the Monday we were shooting something like you know, freakin eleven pages of dialogue and very kindly they wanted to do rehearsal, I was thrilled.

JOSH: So would that have been your first big scene, with John and Martin?

OLIVER: Yes and let me tell you something. You know, talk about a writer who knows how to write an introduction for a character. You know, that was the hammer scene-

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*WOMAN: Would you like us to pack your big hammer?*

*OLIVER: Okay, you know what? Don't make fun of the big hammer. The big hammer happens to be a gavel given to my father's father by Justice Louis Brandeis. I need a Dictaphone.*

*WOMAN: You've got one on your desk.*

*OLIVER: It doesn't work.*

*MAN: What's wrong with it?*

*OLIVER: Doesn't work.*

*WOMAN: He's asking...*

*OLIVER: It's stuck on record. It won't stop recording things; so it's just what you want lying around the White House Counsel's Office because there's never been a problem with that before.*

[end excerpt.]

OLIVER: This particular rehearsal and the experience of being the first episode, when I finally talked to Aaron from wherever I was in Vancouver, I told him the story and he goes "Oh great". I'll never forget. He said "Just make it your own. I really want you to make it your own." I was coming more a little bit more from the movie world where scripts are a lot more fluid. You know what I mean? [Hrishi laughs] So then I'm flying in on the plane, I was sort of crossing stuff out and going, "You know what, I'll probably say this instead" [Oliver and Hrishi laugh] And we get to the rehearsal, okay, and everybody's arrayed around this table and you know Aaron's just very kindly introducing me and then he's reading logistical notes. Marty, who I'm sitting next to, raises his hand, just stops everybody out of the blue and he said – he very clearly had a question about the script, and Aaron walks slowly back around, looks over his shoulder and Martin literally says, " You know, I really think that this is-" and I'm not exaggerating here, "I think this is a 'but', not an 'and'." [Josh laughs] And Aaron looked down at the page and it seemed like- it was probably only for about 15 seconds, but it felt like an hour [Hrishi laughs]...and then he finally said, he finally said, "Let me think about that" and then he slowly walked out. You can imagine my flippin' blood froze [Josh and Hrishi laugh] because I had eleven pages of dialogue the next day that I had sort of like very loosely committed to memory [Josh and Hrishi laugh]. You know, it was sort of poetic justice that my character was supposed to be incredibly tired in that first scene, having stayed up all night because in fact, I had. [Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: Oh my God, that's hilarious.

OLIVER: Josh, when you got there, was there still this lovely Irish woman named Hillary...who was not the script supervisor, whose only job was to, you know, reach out to you after your previous take and very politely in a lilting Scottish voice, point out all the things you got wrong? [Josh and Hrishi laugh]

JOSH: [laughing] Yeah, absolutely. The best part of that story is that he set you up. "Make it your own." Just don't really make it your own.

OLIVER: I don't know if he was consciously doing that, but he certainly did. You know what I mean? The other great thing about it though, was that I actually happened to know a lot of members of the cast. Allison was quite a close friend of mine. I knew Bradley. I knew Richard from New York. They knew the hell that I was going through and they were sort of like- they all

had these sort of like, you know, slightly sadistic, but affectionate smiles on their faces, like “Yeah man, we’ve been there. Ooo boy.” Let me tell you, it was such an incredible blessing, like John and Marty were just, they were so kind, you know what I mean? And so understanding and so helpful and so welcoming. They meant a huge amount to me because it was very disorienting ‘cause I just wasn’t used to sort of- you know, I hadn’t worked that way for a while.

JOSH: It’s funny, ‘cause I remember the opposite when working on *Bulworth*. I remember walking to the set one day with Warren and he said, “So what do you want to say?” “I don’t know, what are you talk- what do you mean?”

OLIVER: Exactly! That’s the world that I was coming from, you know?

JOSH: Yeah, he was like, “Well what do you want to say in this scene?” I was like, “What’s written?” He said, “No, we’ll do that too, but think about what you want to say.” [laughs] I’m not used to that. Coming up in the Sorkin world, I wasn’t used to that.

OLIVER: I made the mistake of unconsciously conflating Aaron with that experience and so-

JOSH: There you go...and in fairness, he did tell you to make it your own. I like that your name is Oliver in the role by the way, because while you lose yourself into roles, and you have a huge range...there’s also something quintessentially Oliver about you. I like that you’re Oliver on the show.

OLIVER: That was another thing - crap for me - I was like, “ ‘Oliver’, well cool that Aaron wrote this for me” – and I’m sure I was like the 8th person that they went to in a panic, because I later learned that the brilliant John Larroquette took a very sudden [indecipherable] apparently...and anyway, lucky for me at the end of the day- yeah it was- “Oh ‘Oliver’, yes well clearly this is destiny”, but I think it was just Aaron being smart, you know?

HRISHI: But does that change your approach to the character? You know, if you did feel like it was written for you, do you feel like you made different choices as an actor than you would have maybe if it hadn’t been named- if the character hadn’t been named “Oliver”?

OLIVER: No. Honestly not really. I mean, Aaron was very good at names, right, for his characters regardless who’s playing them. The character was very much in a weird way, could have been named Oliver...and especially Oliver Babish, you know? But no, I mean for me it’s the text, it’s the words, it’s the character. The only thing that I give myself credit for, for understanding, aside from the fact that it was just a great role, was that in the culture of this show- the secret of the show in weird way was just this wonderful sort of, voyeuristic wish fulfillment in the sense that you had this extraordinary man who was the President of the United States surrounded by these extraordinary people who are all deeply loyal to him...and treated him like the sort of, you know, great man that he was and along comes this guy who’s just like- he clearly is very loyal to the President, but he practices tough love...you know, he’s a son of a bitch....and also the various directors were egging me on to go in that direction and it was, you know, it was really fun.

HRISHI: You have kind of major set piece scenes in these first three episodes. Your first appearance you have this great back and forth with the President and Leo. In the second one you have C.J., the confrontation with C.J. at the beginning at 5:30 in the morning...and then in the third episode really, it’s between Oliver and Abigail when you kind of take apart her entire

argument.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*OLIVER: As the President's physician, have you ever asked him if he's ever had any extramarital affairs?*

*ABBEY: No.*

*OLIVER: Isn't that a crucial question in the diagnosing of autoimmune diseases?*

*ABBEY: I'd like to be next to my husband when he does this.*

*OLIVER: I'd like you to get your own lawyer.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Which is an interesting reversal from when C.J. comes in and she says, "Do I need a lawyer?" and the response is, "No, I'm the White House's lawyer." But I was wondering if, of those three episodes and those three big scenes, did one stand out as being more challenging than the others or just harder to find?

OLIVER: The first set of scenes was more challenging simply because [laughs] I was sleepless. If you knew how tired I was and how many takes it was taking me to get those scenes the way they were written, you would- we were there a long time [Josh and Hrishi laugh]. Also like anything, I just sort of skimmed these scenes in preparation for talking to you guys today. As is always the case, I saw myself kind of settling in a little bit. You know, like actors we always do this and especially the older you get and you look at stuff you did when you were younger. Invariably for me, if there's any headline it's "Oh, I wish I did a little less." But even just sort of watching the trajectory of how settling into that part- you sort of just get a little bit more comfortable. But I can't remember anyone- I mean again it's like when they're great scenes, it's never difficult, it's just fun. For me, in a weird way when I think about the experience, the heart of the great scenes believe it or not, for me are the ones that are to come with Abbey. I think there were some wonderful scenes in the end of the second season there, but some of those scenes with Abbey in the beginning of the third season- that's sort of to me where the heart of the story is, those scenes with Abbey.

HRISHI: Yeah.

OLIVER: But no, I mean it's a very good question, but again, Allison's my pal. It's so much fun like sort of going after each other. You know again, that is sort of the great thing about being on a show where everyone's sort of firing on all cylinders on every level of this sort-of creative team. There's all this help. You sort of have more fun with this kind of stuff working harder or somehow working better. Speaking to this sort of like hard ass aspect of Babish, I have this particular memory...I think it's the last scene of the first episode when I show up in Marty's office.

[West Wing Episode 2.21 excerpt]

*OLIVER: The new slogan around here is gonna be "bring it on". He's gonna have access to every piece of paper you ever touched. If you invoke executive privilege one time, I'm gone. An assistant DA in Ducksworth wants to take your deposition, you're on the next plane. A freshman congressman wants your testimony, you'll sit in his kitchen. They wanna drag you to the Hague*

*and charge you with war crimes, what do we say?*

[BEAT]

*PRESIDENT BARTLET: Bring it on.*

[end excerpt]

OLIVER: I remember we were blocking it, and Martin came in and I was standing there and Martin sat down. I can't remember if, was it- I think it was Bill Johnson who directed the episode so-

HRISHI: That's right.

OLIVER: He said, "Do you wanna sit down too?" and I said "Look, how about if I don't- what if I don't sit down?" And because again, it would sort of seem a little bit more imperious and more sort of like not so doing whatever the President did. And there was actually- so the rehearsal stopped and like I think that literally calls were made, you know? [Josh and Hrishi laugh] "What if Oliver doesn't sit down?" Literally golf carts came screaming into the stage and there was this [Josh and Hrishi laugh] [indecipherable] that came and said, "Guess what? Don't sit down. Don't sit down" [Josh and Oliver crosstalk.]

JOSH: We've got a blocking emergency.

OLIVER: [Laughs] Yeah. I was like, "Okay, I won't sit down." But that's what made me feel like "Oh, this is really-" It sort of confirmed this idea that you know, this was a really interesting character played throughout this show.

HRISHI: You said that that first scene, it took a lot of takes because you were so tired. How many takes did it take to get the smashing of the tape recorder [Josh laughs] down?

JOSH: What a great moment.

OLIVER: Luckily enough, that, we isolated because they probably had only so many tape recorders they wanted to destroy. If I recall, I think we got that in very few takes, if not one. If you think about how frustrated I probably was at that time. I was going to frucking pulverize that tape recorder on the first go. [Hrishi laughs]. Don't get me wrong, I was having a ball - how humbling it was, and again everyone was so nice and I was working with my friends...and again, John and Martin were just so delightful and so supportive...'cause I think they had- maybe not to that degree but they'd seen other visitors to the show go through the same thing.

HRISHI: Sure. It makes me chuckle a little bit at the fact that C.J. has to say to Babish, "I don't know you" twice. When in fact that's somebody who you were good friends with.

OLIVER: Right. I just learned so much. I learned so much about the law. I just learned so much about that kind of law. I also learned so much about the White House...and again it was a great, great story and one of the things that was- aside from being a fascinating story legally, it was clearly such a trauma that was visited upon this group of people, right? This extraordinarily loyal, tight-knit group of people who have learned that their hero had kept something crucial from them. That meeting in the basement after the polling- you know and again, that extraordinary scene in the airport with Bradley with Marlee Matlin....and that amazing scene with Dulé where Charlie figures out, you know, finds like the smoking gun- the school forms that Abbey signed...and it's clearly an emergency, but it's classic Aaron Sorkin. It's like "Okay

something bad happened.” We don’t know what it is until, you know, three or four scenes later exactly.

JOSH: Was there ever any time in this process to get any background or research, or talk to anyone else on the staff or the writing staff or any of the consultants or was it- you were just really thrown in?

OLIVER: I was thrown in, and I always asked a lot of questions, but again, the writing is so good, and look, you get to read the whole script, right? And so you know, if indeed it’s there to do something structurally where he’s sort of planting a question to which he’s not giving the answers for a while, you’ve read the answer actually. And again, there were so many people around anytime you had a question like some freakin’ Lawrence O’Donnell would come down from the writer’s room-

JOSH: Right.

OLIVER: -or something like that, you know? So there’s a lot of experts around.

JOSH: The real deal.

OLIVER: Yeah, totally, the real deal.

JOSH: Awesome. And that’s it for this episode of The West Wing Weekly. Thank you for listening.

HRISHI: I hope that you’ll join us next time. Next time is going to be a little bit different. Our next episode is the season two finale of *The West Wing* and it is a big one as a lot of you guys already know, “Two Cathedrals” is a huge one. It’s a lot of people’s favorite episode of the series and we felt like there was a chance we might not be able to do it justice with one episode. There’s just too much to talk about, so in the first of our two parts on “Two Cathedrals”, we’re going to be talking to Lawrence O’Donnell both about his role in the show as an actor as well as a writer and producer. And then we’re going to follow that up the week after with some more on “Two Cathedrals”. So tune in next week for that.

JOSH: Ok, in the meantime you can follow us on Twitter. I’m @JoshMalina, Hrishi’s @HrishiHirway, Oliver Platt is @OliverPlatt, the show is @WestWingWeekly.

HRISHI: And if you want to discuss this episode with us or other West Wing Weekly listeners, you can leave a comment on our website, [thewestwingweekly.com](http://thewestwingweekly.com) or on our Facebook page, [Facebook.com/thewestwingweekly](https://www.facebook.com/thewestwingweekly). We’re also on Instagram where we post fun pictures for all you tweens.

JOSH: It’s worth noting that The West Wing Weekly is part of Radiotopia

HRISHI: From PRX, a curated network of extraordinary, cutting edge podcasts.

JOSH: In the meantime, you can also listen to Hrishi’s other fantastic, Radiotopia podcast, Song Exploder and you can see me on *Scandal* Thursday nights on ABC at 9/8 Central. And you can buy all sorts of merchandise at [westwingweekly.com/merch](http://westwingweekly.com/merch).

HRISHI: Get a shirt and then wear it to Radiotopia Live so we can give you the signal when we see you.

JOSH: That’s right.

HRISHI: Or a pin.

JOSH: Goodbye. [Both laugh]

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

OLIVER: What's next?

[Outro Music]