

The West Wing Weekly
Episode 3.01: "Manchester, Part I"

[Intro Music]

HRISHI: You're listening to The West Wing Weekly. My name is Hrishikesh Hirway.

JOSH: And my name is Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: Today, we are starting off Season 3, for real.

JOSH: That's right. Season 3 proper.

HRISHI: We're talking about Manchester, Part 1. It is Episode 1 of Season 3.

JOSH: This episode first aired on October 10th in the year 2001. It was written by Aaron Sorkin. It was directed by Thomas (Tommy) Schlamme.

HRISHI: If you skipped out on our discussion of *Isaac and Ishmael* because you don't like that episode and because it falls out of the continuity and canon of the regular story line, I'd like to start this episode by saying "go back and listen to it" because it was one of my favorite discussions that we've ever had, and regardless of your feelings about the episode itself, I thought it was a really worthwhile conversation.

JOSH: Ok. Look at you. Tell 'em what to do. I say if you didn't listen to the last one, skip ahead to our next one. Just listen to *Manchester, Part 2* and I'm not sure why. I just also want to have an opinion.

HRISHI: Ok. I'm going to say "go ahead and skip ahead to "Manchester, Part 3"".

JOSH: Manchedder? That sounds really, really icky.

HRISHI: [laughs]. Go listen to "Manchester, Part 3" would be a really subtle way to tell people to go [explicative deleted] off.

JOSH: Yeah, that's true. Let's try that.

HRISHI: Oh, you don't like it, why don't you go listen to "Manchester, Part 3."

JOSH: Oh, that is kind of brilliant and I am going to tweet that at some point to somebody. You know what I like, since we're on the tweeting. I like when the official West Wing Weekly twitter feed gets a little snippy and a little edgy and then people always start to tweet out "I know who's in control of the feed today."

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Suggesting that it is I and not realizing that 99.9% of the time that is your voice and especially when it's snippy it tends to be you.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: I mean, it's usually you anyway.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I feel like you hide. You hide behind the mask of West Wing Weekly.

HRISHI: Josh, I contain multitudes.

JOSH: That...Oh, I know that. I just want them to know that.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: But that's fantastic; that is a great nerdy wing nut retort. "Yeah? Why don't you go listen to "Manchester, Part 3?". I can't wait to tweet that.

HRISHI: [laughing]. Ok. No one will know what you're talking about. Even people who have heard this episode will have forgotten it and will be like "that's not a real episode".

JOSH: That's entirely possible.

HRISHI: But here we are, back in the canon of the *West Wing* and I like this episode a whole lot. It's almost too much. Like the ambition of the episode is so high that to try and just talk about this one, especially as just the first part of it, I have not yet gone on and re-watched the second part.

JOSH: Nor have I.

HRISHI: Because I really wanted to be, I wanted to be pure for this discussion. There's so much going on in it, I feel like this might be a new high in terms of number of subplots and complicated relationships and dynamics that are happening that we haven't gotten to the bottom of by the time the episode ends.

JOSH: Yeah, it's kind of... it's too big for it's skin.

HRISHI: Yeah, but I admire that a lot.

JOSH: I liked it, too. I liked it, too, a lot. I had trouble on the first re-watch keeping track of time at points. It helped that it was raining in one time zone, but there are a lot of times where I thought: "Alright, I'm going to try for five more seconds then I'll just let Hrishi explain it when we discuss it later." Which I do often. It's good to have a buddy; a watch buddy.

HRISHI: I think this episode, you know, we've talked about how sometimes the episodes are ahead of the viewers. This one is so far ahead of the viewer, I really think you need to actually watch it twice in order to get everything. You know, for listeners of ours who have seen this episode many, many times, they maybe don't need that, but for anybody who's only watching for the first time now or if they are less familiar with this season or whatever, this episode, really, I think as soon as you finish it, you should go back and rewatch it "cause then you'll catch so much more.

JOSH: That's exactly how I felt on my second watch and, for instance, particularly in C.J.'s story and her storyline and...

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: Early on, she seems to be dealing with some sort decision or she's thinking about something and I just couldn't quite wrap my mind around it and when I finished I thought "oh, ok, now I'm going to go back and view it through that lens again".

HRISHI: Right, I think it becomes a different episode once you have all the facts that you have by the time the end credits roll on this one. Let's start at the beginning. I love this episode because it is so dense, I don't think I can even get through all of it in a synopsis, but I tried to write a little bit of a synopsis. This is going to be...I really...I'm just going to be skimming things. So. President Bartlet announces his re-election and we follow the events that follow immediately after that announcement as well as four weeks later. Abbey expresses her disapproval with his decision. C.J. makes a huge gaff. The President and Leo try to deal with the situation in Haiti. Charlie has to make a decision about taking immunity versus facing huge legal costs and a group of consultants join our show and they clash with the staff right away.

JOSH: Nice hrynopsis. The only thing missing from my point of view is that Toby, Charlie and C.J. also play fast and loose with the rules of 9-ball. They shoot pool in that bar and they have, there are a few things... I had some objections.

HRISHI: Ok, can I um, I think I know one of them.

JOSH: Yes?

HRISHI: Is one of your issues the fact that in normal rules, you shouldn't actually be able to put your hand into the middle of the game and roll the ball?

JOSH: Yes, I see where you're going with this. Yeah, that's a very good point. That is actually, probably, yeah, perhaps the biggest 9-ball gaff in the episode. I didn't have that one down. [cross talk]

HRISHI: Geez.

JOSH: It was so big I missed it. That's a very good point. C.J. does pick up the ball. That is a no-no. What I had was... if in fact they are playing 9-ball throughout, I know that Charlie and Toby play 9-ball because we see the game begins with a different rack from other billiards games. I assume that means that that's what C.J. and Toby were playing and if that is the case, in 9-ball, the goal is to sink the 9 ball, but that has to be done by always... the cue ball must make contact first with the lowest numbered ball on the table. You can't just go after the 9 ball.

HRISHI: Make contact? Or like actually sink it?

JOSH: Make contact. So in other words, let's say somebody breaks and nothing is sunk, no balls go into any pockets.

[cross talk]

HRISHI: Yeah

JOSH: So that means the 1 ball is now; you must hit the 1 ball first with the cue ball. If you can strike the 1 ball in such a way that it causes the 9 ball to go in, you've won the game.

HRISHI: Huh.

JOSH: So you don't need to knock the 1 ball in, you just have to make contact with it. If the 1 ball has been pocketed already, then it's the 2 ball; the 2 ball's been pocketed, it's the 3 ball. So one way you could win is by sinking everything in order.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Or you know if you sink the 5 ball by hitting the 1 ball then you're still, your turn continues, but your goal is to sink the 9 ball and win. There is a shot of Toby very clearly going after the 7 ball when the 2 ball is still on the table. Inexplicable.

HRISHI: OOHH.

JOSH: And unacceptable.

HRISHI: I see.

JOSH: Are you a pool player, or billiards player?

HRISHI: I mean, I think it's probably pretty obvious in my answers here, right? I mean... [laughs]

JOSH: [laughs] Why? You look like you could be a... You look to me like you could dress like a pool player. I feel like you have the shoes for it. Minnesota Fats, Jackie Gleason, *The Hustler*. That's the classic, uh, pool movie.

HRISHI: I love *The Hustler*.

JOSH: And Gleason was a really good pool player.

HRISHI: So when you say I look like I dress like I could play pool, you mean you imagine me as a fat man in a white suit?

JOSH: No, I do now. [laughs] Certainly was not what I originally meant.

HRISHI: [laughs]. You might not be able to tell from my very sophisticated analysis here of pool alongside you. I have not really played pool very much. I've barely played ever.

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

TOBY: *Wanna play for money?*

C.J.: *Sure.*

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I remember one time when I was on vacation with my family. We stayed at like a Holiday Inn and they had a game room and I was 8, my sister was 13 so this was very exciting. There was like ping-pong and pool and we had nothing to do so we spent a lot of time there.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: And I remember being there with my parents and my sister and I were – we decided we would try and play pool. We didn't know what we were doing and we were like we don't know how to hold the cues and we were just like trying to have fun with a game that we obviously didn't know how to play. And then my mom, who was kind of just quietly watching us, we were like "oh mom, do you want to play or something" and she took the cue and she cleared the table in front of us.

JOSH: Oh, that's awesome. That's awesome.

HRISHI: It's like we had never played... as a family we'd never played. I'd never played. I don't think my sister had ever played. We'd certainly never seen my mom ever ...

JOSH: Ever.

HRISHI: ...near a pool table and she was just like *whack whack whack whack whack*. We were like "what?" It's like finding out your parent is a superhero or something.

JOSH: That's awesome.

HRISHI: It was crazy. It was like one of those things where you find out the story about your parent's past that had never come up before. When my dad, when he as a grad student in Amherst, he had a part-time job to make a little extra money he worked as a cashier at a pool hall and he would work nights. My mom being new to the country and like not knowing anyone was too scared to stay in their like student housing apartment by herself. So she would come with him to his job and just like kind of hang out while he was working and then while she hanging out just like kind of walking around. She learned how to play pool.

JOSH: She got good.

HRISHI: And apparently got really good at it.

JOSH: Oh, that's a fantastic story. I used to, when I was a teenager, I used to play a lot with my dad.

HRISHI: Are you good at pool?

JOSH: Uh, no. I just played the other day with my dad, actually. My sister, Nicole, had a, uh, her JCC had a fundraiser and it was a game night and we played pool and, uh, no we're not good anymore. Either of us. We were laughing at ourselves and were saying "we used to be good at this", right? Although, we played a few games and we were

slowly getting better. I'm actually...I'm interested now in playing, uh, I really want very much to get good again.

HRISHI: Yeah. I like that Charlie was good.

JOSH: Yes, he was.

HRISHI: I don't know how he's good.

JOSH: I'm curious, actually. I was taking a look at it. Dulé looks like he...he knows how to hold a pool cue.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I'm curious to know. I'll have to ask him. Maybe I'll shoot him an email actually and ask him if he can really play.

HRISHI: Ok, let's go to the beginning of this episode. We start off with really the end of Season 2. We replay...

JOSH: The hands in the pocket.

HRISHI: Yeah. And we get – even with C.J.'s lead up to that, which I think was, was smart. It's not like they just went from hands in the pocket...

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: They started with C.J. already kind of having a little bit of a battle with the press.

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

C.J.: ... I don't know.

REPORTER: Any idea of who will be on the witness list?

C.J.: I can't comment on a witness list that doesn't exist. I imagine subpoenas will be issued to most senior White House staff, including myself.

REPORTERS: C.J.! C.J.!

C.J.: I'm sorry.

REPORTER: Will Congress be holding hearings?

C.J.: I would imagine.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: They're already like on top of her for answers and hounding her. And so I thought that was a smart way, given what was to come in the episode. At first I was like "why are they starting all the way back here?"

JOSH: Yeah, I get it.

HRISHI: And then they do this really clever thing where. You know my first thought was like “they must have filmed this last scene where he says the thing”:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Yeah. And I'm going to win.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: They must have filmed that at the same time and then just waited to save it for this. And then I went and looked back and I was like “oh, no, they didn’t do that at all, they just edited it cleverly”. So when you see him say those words, it’s just a close up of the President and he’s wet, but there’s – it could have been shot months later and I’m sure it was, they just happen to put footage of the space on either side of that shot.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: It worked really well. If you were watching *The West Wing* I think for the first time ever with this episode, by the time you got to the opening credits, you wouldn’t necessarily think that it was an ensemble drama. You might think that this was a show about C.J. Cregg.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. Indeed.

HRISHI: And it isn’t revealed until the very end, but there is something that’s kind of very similar to this episode as the first episode of the show. Just like in that episode, it kind of felt like “this is an ensemble drama; there’s a lot of great characters”, but it’s kind of seemed like it was centered around Josh. You know, his dilemma and his job was hanging in the balance. And at first, we don’t know that C.J.’s job is hanging in the balance, but by the time we get to the end of the episode, again, we start to realize: oh, she’s made this crucial gaff and um, she’s thinking about maybe it’s time to quit or maybe, maybe she’s wondering if they’re going to fire her. I like that shift. We haven’t had a lot of completely C.J.-centric episodes in the way that we have with, uh, Sam and Josh.

JOSH: That’s right

HRISHI: and Toby, really. Here’s something a little... did you notice that Jane Lynch was in “Two Cathedrals”?

JOSH: Uh, in “Two Cathedrals”? Yes, I remember that.

HRISHI: Yeah, she was back. She was a reporter before in *The West Wing* and then she was there in “Two Cathedrals”, but she is not in this. Like none of the footage of the press pool includes Jane Lynch this time.

JOSH: Ah. She’s no longer in the room.

HRISHI: She's no longer in the room. And that was, unfortunately, that was her last episode that we see her in was "Two Cathedrals".

JOSH: Ah. And things took off for her elsewhere.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: This is the mother of all guest star episodes though.

HRISHI: It is crazy. It almost feels like a superhero movie, like it's *Avengers 2* and now we have all these new superheroes that we're introducing.

JOSH: Yeah, but even among... even guest stars that we're used to. Oliver Platt is back, Marlee Matlin is back. Anna Deavere Smith is there. And then yes, we get all these new great actors – Ron Silver, Evan Handler, Connie Britton...it's really un-real, the depth of the bench on this show.

HRISHI: Yeah. One thing that's different, too, in this season is that Stockard Channing is no longer a guest star; she's in the opening credits.

JOSH: She's in the opening credits. I did notice that.

HRISHI: Which is good because they don't have room for any more guest stars.

JOSH: Yeah, that's right.

HRISHI: It almost felt like I was waiting for them to each reveal what their super power was. Evan Handler – he's able to match Toby in crankiness.

JOSH: [laughs] Yeah, it's actually kind of a good little match up. I like the two of them – Doug and Toby.

HRISHI: Yeah, and I love, in the bar, when they finally talk and Toby yells at him.

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

TOBY: You don't talk about military strategy in a conversation like this.

DOUG: I'm just saying if the table had been set right and he'd been able to invade...

TOBY: You want to speak up? I'm not sure the entire White House Press Corps heard you.

[UNIDENTIFIED]: Toby!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And the bartender says, uh, "Oh, are you guys friends?" And Evan Handler says:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

DOUG: Yeah.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Like with the little bit of disbelief like “it’s like, yeah we are friends”.

JOSH: It’s a good little moment. “Yeah, believe it or not, this is how he operates as a friend”. Evan Handler is an interesting, excellent actor. He has an interesting personal story. He had a life threatening leukemia and battled back from it and is in good health and wrote and performed an incredible one-man play that was called *Time on Fire* that I know he performed in New York and I saw him perform in Los Angeles. It’s just an unbelievable re-telling of what he lived through.

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: It’s a great piece of theater and I believe...I know there’s an accompanying book. He’s a great actor. I’ve liked him since I was younger. I remember he...also...I won’t tell the whole story because I probably can’t do it justice, but it’s worth googling Evan Handler’s participation in a Paul Rudnik play in the ‘80’s called *I Hate Hamlet*, a role that I think Brad Whitford stepped into and replaced Evan Handler and Evan Handler had a crazy and combative experience with another actor named Nicol Williamson and they had sword fights and Nicol Williamson would actually hit him with the sword and there was this famous performance where Evan Handler basically was tired of the abuse he was getting from this other actor and walked off stage.

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: A lot of crazy things happening. It’s worth reading about [cross talk]. It’s pretty interesting.

HRISHI: Alright, I’m going to look that up. Yeah.

JOSH: But Evan Handler was a terrific actor.

HRISHI: I want to go back for a second to the cold open, actually, because this episode is so huge, not just in terms of the number of storylines; it almost felt like Tommy Schlamme saw the ambition in the script and then decided he had to match it entirely in the scope of the production. But starting with this, when we get to the, I guess present tense, right, because we’re operating in kind of two timelines – right after the speech that the President gives announcing his re-election and then four weeks later starting with them getting onto Air Force One. And the way they reveal that shot, I thought, was so beautiful and such a nice little slow burn where you have the driver saying C.J.’s name and you’re just in a car and then it goes to reveal C.J. and then it kind of moves around and you see a cop car and then it pulls back and you see Air Force One and it pulls back further you see there’s like a dozen cars and then like fifty or a hundred extras and it’s this enormous... the scale of that one shot is enormous. And then, as if that’s not enough, the next thing is a walk and talk through that incredible environment.

JOSH: Yeah, I thought the same thing too. It’s a shot that essentially starts in her mind. She has to be brought back into the reality she’s in.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: He has to say her name a couple of times. "Oh, what?" And then you're right, it opens up into this incredible reality.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Yeah, it's a great shot. And you're right, that's the scope of the episode doesn't really shrink much even fast forwarding all the way to Jed Bartlet, Marlboro Man. And yeah, "We got cows. We got cows." Like "Oh right, wow. Right. Let's just show off our budget."

HRISHI: That's right.

JOSH: "We got some money for season 3."

HRISHI: I love also in that first walk and talk, they started off with Ron Silver's just there. He's like walking through the scene.

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

BRUNO: Mr. President.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Bruno.

BRUNO: We got a new section that I'd like...

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Give it to Leo.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's not even their walk and talk! Like you've got Ron Silver and Martin Sheen together and they're like... And they they just come and go and then instead it turns out to be this walk and talk with C.J. learning about RU486.

JOSH: I like the, um, political unraveling of the relevance of this announcement coming out on Monday and "do we postpone the speech" and is it going to end up turning this potentially positive news cycle into a story about process. I thought that was interesting, especially given the current climate and the number of process stories about Trump and his administration and how they can't get out of their own way. They're failing in that same arena that Josh is worried about failing in where the stories end up being about how they don't have ... process stories basically rather than substance stories.

HRISHI: Right. I'd say they probably get 2-3 process stories to every one of any kind of policy story.

JOSH: Right. Absolutely. And that's a disaster; that's not small stakes. This is like "Guys, you have to get your [explicative deleted] together."

HRISHI: Right. Yeah. The whole story by the end of the episode of C.J. being kind of harangued by the press and there's a line that they're making it about her:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

JOSH: How's she doing?

TOBY: It's getting away from her a little.

[in the background]: C.J.: I'm not answering that.

JOSH: They're making her the story.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I was thinking about Sean Spicer versus somebody like Josh Earnest. Like Josh Earnest was Press Secretary for President Obama for a long time. But I would say he's, I mean, and I don't mean this in any kind of disrespectful way, I really actually mean it in kind of the opposite, he's not really a household name.

JOSH: Right, which is probably the outcome to be desired. I think as the... you're not meant to be a big personality or certainly not to the point where you're the story here and there.

HRISHI: Yeah, like certainly for people who are news junkies, who are like invested in politics, yes, they know who he is, but it's nowhere near Sean Spicer impersonated by Melissa McCarthy on *SNL*.

JOSH: Exactly. That's a big problem.

HRISHI: Yeah. On a totally different note, I was thinking about Ron Silver. Ron Silver's character's name is Bruno Gianelli and I was wondering if you remember that this is not the first time we've heard the name "Gianelli" in the show.

JOSH: In this show? I don't remember that.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's sort of like tossed aside, but there have been a couple of mentions of a Senator named Gianelli. We get a mention of Gianelli in "20 hours in LA":

[West Wing Episode 1.16 excerpt]

LEO: ...talked to Huntington, he talked to Gianelli, he talked ..

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: and in the "Stackhouse Filibuster" when other senators come to Stackhouse's rescue during the filibuster, C.J. says:

[West Wing Episode 2.17 excerpt]

C.J.: and when Grisom was done, McNamara took over and, and after McNamara came Gianelli, grandfathers all.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's a very specific name to reuse, you know.

JOSH: Yeah, it's stuck in your head, huh?

HRISHI: It's not like Smith, so it must be ... it's just like a name that clearly Aaron has a fondness for. He likes the sound of it. He likes it being one of the words that gets to be said by his characters.

JOSH: That's funny. I think maybe I also noted that the guy flying Air Force One is named Gantry and I didn't know if that was just an Elmer Gantry reference. Maybe it's a book or the movie reference Aaron liked. Who knows?

HRISHI: There's one thing that we forgot to mention, which is when we were talking about, you know, Mrs. Landingham and Mrs. Tillinghouse when we were introducing the "Headmaster Bartlet Secretary Name Generator", is that Tillinghouse is another name that we've heard before. Tillinghouse is the guy who talks to Hoynes.

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

TILLINGHOUSE: Then why am I handing you a personal political victory?

HOYNES: Because I'm going to be President of the United States one day and you're not.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Anyway, I just realized we hadn't talked about that when we talked about the name Tillinghouse before.

JOSH: This is why I can't I can't compete on any impressive level in *West Wing* trivia. It's, it's too deep. It goes too deep. Who remembers this stuff? You do.

HRISHI: Well, I didn't, I didn't remember in time to talk about it when we were talking about Tillinghouse, but I'm making up for it now since we're getting Gianelli again. One thing about Bruno Gianelli, you know, he says:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

BRUNO: Hey, redheaded girl.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right. To Margaret.

HRISHI: I was wondering because I've heard from you and from other people and even like there was a thing that came up in that Charlie Rose interview with the *West Wing* cast...

JOSH: About Martin?

HRISHI: Yeah, that Martin can't remember people's names?

[Charlie Rose interview, excerpt]

ALLISON JANNEY: Martin? I told Martin that Martin has a problem with names.

CHARLIE ROSE: Yeah.

ALLISON JANNEY: And, and Martin for the longest time in fact sometimes he doesn't quite remember my name.

CHARLIE ROSE: So he calls you 'Big Lady'?

ALLISON JANNEY: So he calls me either 'C.J.' on a good day or 'The Big Lady'.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: I wondered if that was maybe a nod to that...if, if Aaron was pulling from that.

JOSH: That's very funny. I didn't even think about that, but I think that could very well be the case. Yeah, I think well into season 7, he was still calling Allison "The Tall One". So, I think...

HRISHI: What did he call you?

JOSH: I think he just snapped at me to get my attention.

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: Yeah, that's funny. That could very well be a Martin Sheen reference.

[Break]

HRISHI: I thought it was very sweet in this episode, we go to the Situation Room.

JOSH: Yes. I know where you're going with this.

HRISHI: For the first time where they're discussing Haiti and that's a place where at the beginning of the show, you know, the President expresses to Morris Tolliver how he doesn't think that they trust him.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: He has kind of a strained relationship with the military and I thought it was very sweet that after they finished their briefing, they all applauded.

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

NANCY: Mr. President?

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Yeah?

[applause]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Yeah, I wrote down the same. I wrote “unexpectedly placed moment” and I liked that a lot. And also, you know, the way he carries himself in the Sit Room has changed. He makes decisions, I think, with a little bit more confidence.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Over the time we’ve seen him there.

HRISHI: What did you think about the visual effects in the Sit Room? It felt like they were kind of stepped up, too, you know. We had the radar, we had the what I thought was interesting was the shot of the pilot in the cockpit in the moments when they’re actually pulling Desilina from the embassy.

JOSH: And then taking fire.

HRISHI: Yeah, and as they’re communicating, you can actually see the pilot. There’s this shot of the pilot there in the cockpit. I thought that was, you know, it’s like, that’s a set up that they had to do.

JOSH: Yeah, that is correct. Yeah, no, they’re definitely flaunting their budget, I think, in Season 3. But not in a showy way at all. It pays off. It really...the world is feeling real and rich. I like it.

HRISHI: This is one where I wonder what the difference was between what was on the page versus what Tommy Schlamme might have done in the direction. Like, on the page, you know, really all you really need from that is the voice of the pilot. [cross talk]

JOSH: The audio.

HRISHI: And I wonder if on the page if it was just he says this and if Tommy was like “Oh, let’s actually see him. Let’s put him on a video screen.” Or if Aaron was imagining now this kind of step up in the elaborate quality to what’s being displayed in the Sit Room as well, and so if he had written in “on the screen we see, you know, a pilot from the, from one of the Black Hawks”.

JOSH: Interesting question. Makes me want to look at the transcript.

HRISHI: Is it a Black Hawk? Maybe not a Black Hawk.

JOSH: That moment cuts forward to back to the bar in Manchester and helicopter and a video game.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: It’s a little bit on the nose. Still kind of liked it.

HRISHI: Yeah, that’s what I thought, too.

JOSH: [laughs] Well, I...here's what I actually thought and wrote down was "Maybe I would have done the video game and it would have been something military, but not exactly a helicopter being shot down." I would have split the difference and gone from real life military operation to "oh, video game", but not right on it...

HRISHI: [laughs] One thing that jumped to mind because of that shot of the pilot. It made me think of another Sorkin joint, *Charlie Wilson's War*.

JOSH: Yes, excellent movie.

HRISHI: Which I liked very much. I do think I would have liked that movie more if Tommy Schlamme had directed it instead of Mike Nichols, but I do love that movie and there are some shots from within the cockpit of fighter jets.

JOSH: That's right

HRISHI: But the other non-*West Wing* stuff that came to mind were two David Mamet projects. There's two things Doug asks, "Is it always this busy?" and the bartender says "Only when the circus is in town". And then in the bar, C.J. talks about:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

C.J.: Our hotel is located just a few miles from the site of John Goff's mill. Hunter John, as he was called, was granted the land as a reward for his services to the colony in the French and Indian Wars. Let me tell you something. We don't do that enough anymore.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Those two things combined made me think of the movie *State and Main*.

JOSH: Sure. Good movie.

HRISHI: It's a movie about a movie that's being filmed in a small town in Vermont. And the movie that they're shooting in *State and Main* is called *The Old Mill*.

JOSH: Ah, I didn't remember that.

HRISHI: There's like a line in there that buildings were destroyed in a "spate of suspicious fires" and then in this:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

C.J.: In 1845, when Theodore Odee Goff was the proprietor, the mill burned to the ground. Well, that totally blows.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's weird.

HRISHI: So there were a lot of similarities there.

JOSH: Yeah, and our very own Clark Gregg is in that movie – in *State and Main*.

HRISHI: That's right.

JOSH: He was quite good in it.

HRISHI: And another mighty Sorkin player, William H. Macy.

JOSH: That's right. There ya go.

HRISHI: And then the other movie that David Mamet is involved in that this reminded me of is *Wag the Dog*.

JOSH: I figured that was coming, yes.

HRISHI: When the President is talking to Josh and Toby about Haiti, there's this concern that they need to be cautious about their approach to Haiti because of the MS story for this totally different reason, they feel like they have to make sure that it doesn't look like they're trying to wag - do what they do in *Wag the Dog*, which is distract from some domestic scandal by having this international military conflict that they get involved in. It's basically the same thing, only in *Wag the Dog*, it's like, you know it's supposed to be a Clinton-esque sex scandal. And in *Wag the Dog*, they really are doing it, they're specifically doing it to cover up the scandal and distract the public. And here, of course, our administration is very responsible and they want to be hyper aware of that possibility because they know that that's not actually the case.

JOSH: Yeah, it did make me think of that movie and also I liked that they had the conversation vis-à-vis Desilene and what to do with him and how it's going to play out. This is how slight things - I'm not suggesting that Bartlet's MS and his covering it up is slight, but even slight things in these halls of power, if they're not dealt with candidly and openly and quickly, they end up being the pretext for all sorts of misunderstandings. I mean, the importance of them gets super-inflated because then every other decision can be questioned.

HRISHI: Right. And then they do lose the opportunity to do it without...they don't even get the chance to take proper action in Haiti without the cloud of political motivation because of C.J.'s gaff.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: It's really beautifully set up, these dominos and these like conflicting forces. You've got the President's MS causes the press to kind of froth at the mouth and really go after C.J..

JOSH: Right. They smell blood.

HRISHI: Yeah. And she's stressed out because of her own looming legal issues:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

C.J.: I'll be asking one of my fourteen lawyers about that. When are they gonna...

[fades out]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And she's got to do the already, you know, normally difficult job of being the Press Secretary while dealing with all of these things and so what normally would have been something she could have handled, she's just so stressed out. And it *is* her fault in that she makes the gaff, but there are so many things that that's a link in a chain that's so long that starts with the President.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: Before it ever gets to her.

JOSH: I agree. And it's almost a faint that Aaron executes. There's this scene in the Oval Office when they're discussing the Haiti situation and it sort of...it ends with Toby saying "Everybody's tired" and it's actually made explicit later in the episode.

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

REPORTER 1: Can you talk about his state of mind?

C.J.: His state of mind was he's Commander in Chief.

REPORTER 2: I think his question was 'was he physically and emotionally prepared to make a life and death decision after what he'd just been through'?

C.J.: He'd been through a TV interview and press conference. The President finds you all annoying, but not prohibitively debilitating.

REPORTER 3: C.J.!?

C.J.: Chris.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: There's all this buildup and this reasonable questioning of whether a president suffering or a president dealing with MS can be the president and Commander in Chief that we need him to be 24 hours a day and then someone else makes a terrible mistake because she's tired.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: So it is kind of...it's a great little slight of hand that Aaron pulls off in the episode.

HRISHI: Yeah. There are two moments of cinematography that I really loved as well. Again, I don't know whether this is a Thomas Del Ruth thing or Tommy Schlamme or... who knows and maybe it doesn't even matter, but it's such a...fantastic things that happen. One is that moment when Josh is talking to Joey about whether or not he should leak the memo and it's right when C.J. is getting flustered by the questioning from the staff.

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

REPORTER: Hang on. You need able to distinguish between the things we're supposed to know and the things we're supposed to know and you don't.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And as this is happening, the camera in Josh's office or in the bullpen is like pushing in on the TV, so you start to see the video lines from the feed. It's not a shot of C.J., it's a shot of C.J. on TV and it pushes in closer and closer, which is something that we don't really see a lot of and so you become aware of like the medium that she's being seen on. I thought it was such a neat way of isolating her in that moment. Like you've got Joey and Josh are having this kind of friendly repartee and then C.J.'s in a box in this space.

JOSH: Yeah, I think Tommy cut his teeth on that kind of approach on *Sports Night* probably.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: There were similar shots and it does have a very specific effect, I agree with you, when seeing he her boxed in, literally.

HRISHI: Boxed in. Yeah. And then like, the blue of the TV and, yeah, she's isolated physically in the space and then that thing where you're not seeing the real her, you get that sense of alienation from her. So that was one that I really loved. And the other was that scene where she makes the gaff:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

C.J.: To be honest with you, Carl, I think the President's relieved to be focusing on something that matters.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Even before she gets to that, there's this buildup in the tension of that scene and we're put on edge by very unusual camera move – they shoot it handheld. It's funny; I think we're so used to hand held camera work now. You know, and it's in everything; it's all over the place. But *The West Wing* usually has like a stateliness, I think, sort of about the camera work, the way it moves through the rooms and stuff.

JOSH: Sweeping and epic, yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah, but when they get to that scene and C.J.'s trying to fend off the reporters, they shoot it and it is shaky.

JOSH: Yeah, it's more frenetic and human and out of control.

HRISHI: Right. And so then when she finally gets to the part where she lets loose with "frankly he's relieved", it contextualizes it in a neat way because they've brought out that feeling.

JOSH: Right, visually. That's true.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Her real mistake, I think, also is to have not immediately fallen on her sword.

HRISHI: Right.

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

C.J.: Obviously what I meant to say was...

REPORTER: Excuse me. Did you just say he was relieved?

C.J.: Obviously what I ...

REPORTERS: C.J! C.J!

[end excerpt]

JOSH: She had an out that she didn't take advantage of.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: "I completely misspoke. These are my words, you know. This is a mistake. That's a horrible way to have articulated this. It's not the case...", you know. She little bit ... she tries a little bit of a buy back, but she's done. She's fried. She doesn't even have... she doesn't have the presence of mind to dig herself out. I think when she walked away, it just became a much, much more significant problem for everybody.

HRISHI: And I love when Leo's like questioning them about it. That he has that same thought; he's like:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

LEO: If she misspoke, then why didn't she clean it up in the briefing room. I mean, come to think of it, why didn't she clean it up in the briefing room?

SAM: She actually is... [fades out]

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Sam gets to bring back that idea of them being all tired. And he says, you know, she's actually tired. And Leo kind of comes back, but Sam ultimately raises his voice and he's like:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

SAM: Some of us have had more time than others.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Right. To Leo.

HRISHI: Yeah, and I think we've talked about this before, but that idea of putting the anger in Sam's voice...it elevates it more so than if Toby had snapped or Josh had snapped.

JOSH: Yeah. It raises the stakes. I agree with you. How about the final scene between Leo and Bartlet?

HRISHI: Where they're on the farm with the cows?

JOSH: Yeah. I like it.

HRISHI: I love when Leo is walking up and the president says:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: Awasiwi Odanak. It's an Abenaki phrase that means "beyond the village". [cross talk, simultaneously]

LEO: Beyond the village. Yeah.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But he doesn't just say "beyond the village", but as he's walking, he kind of sarcastically raises an arm up.

JOSH: [laughs]. Yeah. He's heard this a few times before. Yeah.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I like the final moment very much. I like, you know, whenever Sheen and Spencer are on screen, it's a little mini master class in acting. And I just like the way the final scene is handled when Bartlet basically says what we've heard him say before:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: I'm running for re-election. And I'm gonna win.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And he says it to Leo and I just like John Spencer's reaction is a little bit scrutable, you know. It's not... it's not a big smile like "all right, we're gonna go get 'em". It's just sort of...it's not handled the way most TV shows would handle a final moment like this. It's more, uh, a question of "oh, I'm not exactly sure what Leo's response is" and it's just, it's good acting and it's also a confidence in the filmmaking that we don't have to end with a moment that we all agree upon or that we all feel super comfortable with or know exactly what it means.

HRISHI: Yeah. No, I think that's a great point and I, I love how that plays into earlier in the episode when the president first says those lines and then we come back to the staff

and Josh is asking Toby:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

JOSH: Oh, why aren't you smiling?

TOBY: I'm wet.

JOSH: I'm wet and I'm smiling.

TOBY: I'm smiling on the inside. Ginger?

GINGER: Yeah?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And they are, like, revved up and they're so happy and they...

JOSH: Donna's super pumped.

HRISHI: Yeah. They're all really charged up, and I think that is another a really subtle, beautiful way of showing the distance between where they are at that point in the show and then what happens four weeks later. Like the momentum that gets lost, the infighting that's still happening, the complications because of Haiti. They don't just get to say like "Yeah, we got it! We're running for reelection" and now it's like a steady march toward victory.

JOSH: Yeah, I agree. The fits and starts and momentum builds and dissipates and then they're in the hole and I like that that's I guess the reality of being in the White House, being a White House staff.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: I had just one moment where I really enjoyed the closed captioning in the bar/pool hall: "Edgy alternative rock playing over radio".

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: It's the song "Evolution Revolution Love" by Tricky is apparently "edgy alternative rock".

HRISHI: [laughs]

JOSH: The only other thing that we haven't discussed, there's a brief scene... even with all of this going on, there's yet another layer of complication, which is that the president promised his wife he wasn't going to run again, and uh, he just is.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And there's a different energy and vibe between the two of them in their brief scene early on because she's no longer raging at him. In fact, even Stockard Channing's physicality; there's something about the way she's sitting...

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: She almost looks like a little girl because now he's just said to her "I'm running and we'll deal with it later" basically. And so she's not raging because I think she realizes she can't run over him or she's given her best and failed and she's just gonna now have to deal with whole sorts of stuff that she'd rather not and it gets put on the back burner, but it's also, it's one more element that's still cooking through all of this.

HRISHI: Again, it goes back to that cold open, for me, when C.J. is almost like the person who has to manage all of these and manage all of the different expectations. Like everybody's focused on their little bit. Josh is upset about RU486 and he's upset that the First Lady isn't there and he gives that to C.J. and he yells at her about that, you know, meanwhile the speechwriters can't agree on the speech and she has to deal with that. She's like "I can't conjure up the First Lady. I can't make these things happen".

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: And she has to digest all of this and then like, present it in some kind of coherent way to the rest of the world and what we don't know in that moment when we see it is that she's dealing with a failure to do that well. She's already had to.

JOSH: That's right.

HRISHI: And then the pilot says:

[West Wing Episode 3.01 excerpt]

PILOT: We anticipate a smooth flight.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: She just kind of gives a little bit of a wistful snort. And it's a moment that makes you appreciate everything that's on her shoulders, but you can't fully appreciate it until the episode's over.

JOSH: That's right and that's just not how this story would be framed or told in most other television shows.

HRISHI: Yeah. Should we talk a little bit about Ron Silver?

JOSH: Sure. May he rest in peace.

HRISHI: Yeah, we only get a little bit of Ron Silver, but he's a Tony award winner. He was a Tony award winner, actually, for David Mamet joint.

JOSH: *Speed the Plow?*

HRISHI: For *Speed the Plow*.

JOSH: He was a terrific, terrific actor. A wonderful actor. Passed away in 2009. And on the politically conservative side. I'd be interested to talk to some of the people who worked with him because I wonder. I wonder what that's like to have been a more right-leaning actor on that set.

HRISHI: Right. And playing a Democratic consultant.

JOSH: Right.

HRISHI: But he is great and I'm really looking forward to his continued...he's going to be in the next few episodes and it's one of the great guest arcs, I think.

JOSH: That is it for this episode of *The West Wing Weekly*. Thank you for listening.

HRISHI: If you want to discuss this episode with us, you probably know this already. You can leave a comment on our Facebook page: facebook.com/thewestwingweekly or on our website: thewestwingweekly.com. You can also tweet at us.

JOSH: I'm @joshmalina; Hrishi's @hrishihirway; the show is @westwingweekly and if it's taking shots at you, it's probably Hrishi writing them. We have an instagram account. It goes like this:

HRISHI: instagram.com/thewestwingweekly.

JOSH: I should be able to remember that. We have a Facebook page that's facebook.com/thewestwingweekly. You can support this show by buying a pin. You click on 'pin' on our website. You can listen to Hrishi's fantastic, much lauded, other podcast *Song Exploder*. You can see me on *Scandal*, Thursday nights 9/8 central on ABC.

HRISHI: Recently renewed for Season 7. Congratulations!

JOSH: Woooo! On April 1st, I sent my dad an email saying "Next season's only going to be 6 episodes and that's it. Shonda just wrote to us. Ugh." And as I do every April 1st...

HRISHI: Did he fall for it?

JOSH: Yeah, of course! I make him feel bad about my career every April 1st. I always write and say something like "my agent's dumped me" or "this guy cancelled" or "I've been fired". And every year when he calls me back, he sounds horrible. I can hear in his voice "Hi, it's dad". "Dad! It's April 1st! How are you not expecting this?" And then I feel bad. Although it should be noted that my dad as a kid in Brooklyn, in the 40s was visiting my grandmother's sister, he called her... he was at my grandmother's sister's house, he called my grandmother, he said "Aunt Hilda's dead" and hung up. It was an April fool's joke, so there's nothing I can ever do that's crueller than that.

HRISHI: Wow.

JOSH: He called his mom and told that her sister was dead and hung up. And that just... and it's not like he had a cell phone. I think it was maybe hours before he said, "I was kidding. It's April Fool's Day". So... I feel like it's ok to play tricks on that person.

HRISHI: Sure. He's karmically still got some due.

JOSH: Yeah, that's what I think.

HRISHI: The West Wing Weekly is a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a curated collection of extraordinary podcasts.

JOSH: Can I do a little piece of log rolling here? You texted me the other day "do you know the podcast Planet Money? Because they just gave us a nice shout out."

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: So immediately went and listened to that episode of Planet Money just so I could hear the nice shout out, which in fact we did get, and I loved the episode, so. Even though they're not Radiotopia or PRX, Planet Money is a terrific podcast and I enjoyed the episode. It was about this guy who makes low budget movies as a new paradigm for how to make money in Hollywood. And that if you make a ton of really low budget movies and even if 40% of them fail, when you hit it big with the others, you make a ton of money. It was pretty fascinating.

HRISHI: Yeah. I love Planet Money and I would even say that I credit them partly for the West Wing Weekly. I've been listening to that show for a long time and it is just...it's incredible what they do and the way that they're able to take serious, political, financial, social, cultural issues and make them entertaining and easy to digest and they do it with, like, such a great rapport. I took a workshop from Robert Smith, who is one of the editors of Planet Money and I learned so much from him and he's so funny. I mean, they're all really funny while also being incredibly informative and that the way they were able to sneak those things together...he talked about that in this class and it was incredible. And I've always wanted that kind of like.... I was making Song Exploder at the time; I didn't have a show with a co-host. But the banter that they have, I always loved that. So I love that show and I think the West Wing Weekly wouldn't be what it is if it weren't for that podcast.

JOSH: Look at us, from the mutually supportive world of podcasting in which we live.

HRISHI: It's a nice place to be. People who make podcasts are generally a really nice group of people.

JOSH: I find that to be the case, yes.

HRISHI: Us, of course, excluded.
[cross talk]

JOSH: Well, we're lovely.
[cross talk]

JOSH: Oh. We went different ways with that. That's why you're so mean on the West Wing Weekly twitter feed. He's the mean one, people! He's the mean one.

HRISHI: This episode was produced by my friend and colleague, Joshua Malina, along with me, Hrishikesh Hirway, and our two co-producers Zach McNees and Margaret Miller.

JOSH: Wooo!

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

BOTH: What's next?

[Outro music]