

The West Wing Weekly
4.12: "Guns Not Butter"

Guests: Abby Leibman from MAZON and Tom Hart from The ONE Campaign

[Intro Music]

JOSH: Welcome back. You're listening to the West Wing Weekly, and this is Joshua Malina.

HRISHI: And this is Hrishikesh Hirway. Today we're talking about episode 12 from season 4, it's called "Guns Not Butter".

JOSH: It was written by Eli Attie and Kevin Falls, to whom we spoke a few episodes back, and it was written by Aaron Sorkin, and it was directed by Bill D'Elia, and it first aired on January 8th in the year 2003.

HRISHI: Here's the synopsis from *TV Guide*. Actually, before I read the *TV Guide* synopsis, let me read you the NBC synopsis, which is just: "The staff comes together to fight a losing battle on a foreign aid vote in the senate." That's all.

JOSH: Huh, that's it?

HRISHI: That's it.

JOSH: Damn.

HRISHI: Here's *TV Guide's* longer synopsis: "On the administration's agenda: a foreign-aid bill. However, Senate Republicans---and some Democrats---have other ideas. And it's up to Josh to get the vote to come out right. So he sends Donna in search of one freshman senator who doesn't seem to want to be found. Then there's the fence sitter who'll vote the administration's way if they'll agree to fund a medical study on the efficacy of prayer. Meanwhile, Danny Concannon is getting closer to the truth in the Sharif affair; and Charlie wants to help a soldier whose family needs food stamps."

JOSH: Eh, better. That's more comprehensive.

HRISHI: Mm..hmm

JOSH: I like towards the end of the cold open, Josh getting all bent out of shape...

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

JOSH: President Bartlet

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Yes

JOSH: I like that whole... I think I want to turn that into a... into a...meme? Or a trope? Or something. Whenever I'm just annoyed I'm just going to say "President" and then whatever the thing is that's annoying me. Like, if you know, if we're fighting about what to watch on T.V., I'm just going to go "President T.V." and walk out. And if it goes over people's heads, fine. That's going to be my *West Wing* reference that I don't care whether people get, and I'm going to do it when I'm legitimately annoyed.

HRISHI: What if it doesn't go over people's heads, but they just don't think it's funny?

JOSH: Oh, that's every day with me. I'm certainly comfortable with that scenario.

HRISHI: Not so much over their head as straight into the ground.

JOSH: Right. President ground.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Exactly. You thought that came across as petulant, not a good reprimand from Josh?

JOSH: Maybe because if you've heard it enough times before then its strength is diminishing? I guess it's maybe diminishing returns, the number of times that you use it.

HRISHI: Hm. President returns.

JOSH: [Laughs] President president.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Yeah, I feel like they've kind of already established the president many times before.

JOSH: Right. Also, he was losing the argument, so...

HRISHI: Nothing, nothing for that?

JOSH: What, what did I miss?

HRISHI: I said, "I feel like they've already established the president"...

JOSH: Ah! Very good. That went over my head, and into the ground. [Laughs]

HRISHI: [Laughing] And into the ground! Both things... I lobbed it.

JOSH: Which is possible. Yeah, right. I think maybe part of it also is that only works when you then walk away with momentum, but he was not getting what he wanted. So, you know, I wanted the other person to go "Yeah, good one."

HRISHI: [Laughs] Right.

JOSH: It's kind of like, no you didn't just earn the swell of the credits, Josh, you just said kind of a lame thing as you lost.

HRISHI: There's kind of an awkwardly long time between him exiting the room and the credits starting.

JOSH: I noticed that too.

HRISHI: You know, after his last line, she says "You're one vote down on foreign aid," he turns around and walks out, but it just takes maybe one or one-and-a-half seconds too long so that we get to sort of like rumble... we know the credits are coming and we're like "Alright..."

JOSH: It would be funny to re-edit it with him mumbling "Roll the credits."

BOTH: [Laughs]

HRISHI: When we come back, from the credits, the president is working a rope-line and we get a glimpse of what happens on the rope-line beyond the handshakes and the hellos and how are you, and the putting your hand on your heart and stuff like that.

JOSH: Right, the hurried handing off of any mementi given from the crowd. I thought that was interesting, actually.

HRISHI: I thought so too. I liked this part of the episode. I liked the storyline, both the procedural

part of what happens when somebody hands Charlie a letter, or hands the president a letter, as well as what the letter contains, the plight of a service member who has to also rely on food stamps. Charlie, initially is sorting the letter while Jean Paul is heckling him.

JOSH: Completely.

HRISHI: And Charlie asks about the envelope, he says...

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

CHARLIE: That big envelope, where is it going?

STACY: General correspondence. It was a service woman talking about food stamps.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I thought that's...

JOSH: Yeah, we never get to meet General Correspondence.

HRISHI: He's a really high-ranking member over there.

JOSH: Oh, that's where you were headed?

HRISHI: That's exactly where I was going.

JOSH: [Laughs] It was a bit of a footrace there, sorry.

HRISHI: It's true, it's true. You just jumped in.

JOSH: Sorry.

HRISHI: I wrote in my notes, "The letter was going to General Correspondence who probably ranks very high in the DoD"

JOSH: [Laughs] Sorry, that's better put. I just was excited. I got over excited. I didn't realize I was racing you there.

HRISHI: I kind of get the feeling that we're not supposed to like Jean Paul.

JOSH: You think? Yeah. I get that subtle feeling myself.

HRISHI: Like maybe we're supposed to, I don't know, not root for him.

JOSH: Why's he got to be such an ass? Like, he has Zoey. I mean, they're in a relationship. Why's he got to try to denigrate Charlie for his job, or put him down.

HRISHI: Well, I think it goes to the little clip that they show in the previously on...

[West Wing Episode 4.11 excerpt]

JEAN PAUL: She talks about you so much I think sometimes I want to kill you.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I think that's what's at play here, is that Jean Paul, though he is dating Zoey, he still has this chip on his shoulder about his status with her and sort of the prominence that Charlie has, you know. He looks at him he's like "Yeah, I'm royal," but this guy somehow even though I think he probably sees all the reasons why he should feel like he's ahead, and yet then in conversation with Zoey he realizes that he's not. Somehow this guy ends up being his peer, or maybe even ranks a little bit higher. Up there with General Correspondence.

JOSH: Right, I see.

HRISHI: Oh, speaking of military rank...

JOSH: Sure

HRISHI: Charlie, later when he calls to discuss the letter, he tries to call his friend Barry Moreland, and when he asks for him the first time, he calls Sergeant Major and then from then on he's Sergeant. These are different ranks though. I don't think you can just sort of abbreviate like that, without demoting. When he says "Sergeant Major Moreland, please," but then he calls the Sergeant Moreland, then his boss says "Sergeant Moreland works for me."

JOSH: Oh, it'd be funny if they just kept lowering the rank every time they mentioned him. Until someone finally picks up: "Private Moreland."

HRISHI: [Laughs] Right, yeah.

JOSH: That's how I would have written it, in my Marx Brothers movie.

HRISHI: That's really good. [Laughs] I want to see that episode told from the perspective of Barry Moreland. He's just like: "Through no fault of my own, I just keep getting demoted."

JOSH: Yeah, what the hell.

HRISHI: Like *Meet the Parents*, but it's *Meet the General Correspondence*. So, just to continue this part of the plot, Charlie is trying to... he gets ruffled by Jean Paul. Though Jean Paul's needling of Charlie is prompted probably by some insecurity on his part, he manages to do what he wants, which is get under Charlie's skin. And then Charlie, it turns out, is doing all of this because he's still trying to impress Zoey.

JOSH: Which he admits to President Bartlet—President Bartlet—in a, I think, very sweet and good scene between them in the oval towards the end of the episode.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Dulé has a great little mini monologue there.

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

CHARLIE: I had asked an assistant I know to give it special attention. I don't know the woman or anything. It wasn't patronage. But I was... You know... I was showing off for Zoey.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: It's well acted.

HRISHI: It is. He loses the train of thought. But this is a real issue, the issue of service members whose families are on food stamps.

JOSH: Well we can talk a little bit about, I mean, the SNAP, or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, is what we sort of, I guess, colloquially refer to as food stamps.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: And, we're going to get some more insight into food insecurity as it affects people in the military and veterans. We're going to talk to Abby Leibman of MAZON. We've talked about MAZON on the podcast before, and I did I think what is an interesting experience. On MAZON's

recommendation I took the SNAP Challenge a few years ago, which is...

HRISHI: I remember that.

JOSH: ...you know, an attempt to eat on a SNAP or food stamp budget for a week.

HRISHI: And the budget is ridiculously low.

JOSH: It's unbelievable. I mean, I think it comes out to about a buck-and-a-half or maybe a little bit less per meal. And I highly recommend it. I took some flack, you know, some people... taking this challenge and sharing your experience is a great thing to do. Some call it a publicity stunt, or oh you know people who aren't food insecure are you know... The idea really is to open your own mind. First of all, I think it is a good idea to share the experience, if you do it, but trying to spend a week in the shoes of somebody who is on a budget that tight is very enlightening. And, of course, even during that week, you know at the end of the week you're going to go back to eating whatever you want. So, you know, you're not really even standing in someone's shoes who doesn't know what they're going to eat on the eighth day, either, but it remarkable. One of the things that struck me immediately is just that even though the N in SNAP is Nutrition, it's the first thing that kind of goes out the door when you try to figure out how you can even keep your stomach full on so little money. You know, things like fresh fruit and vegetables become a luxury that you simply can't afford.

HRISHI: Yeah, there's actually a page on the, on the MAZON site that links to a bunch of people's experiences. You wrote about it on your Tumblr page, and we will link to that on the website. For more on this issue, let's talk to Abby Leibman now. She's the president and CEO of MAZON. Abby, thanks for joining us. In the episode the president says:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: There are a couple of thousand military families on food stamps. I can't stand it. The Pentagon knows it. Some families are eligible, some aren't. But to change it, they'd have to raise everyone's pay, which they can't do, and this memo is a reminder.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: They send a memo about procurement and budget. And so, we would love to know about the kind of things that MAZON is doing to fill in the gaps, and really if there's any updates since this episode aired in 2002 about, you know, if things have gotten any better or worse since that time.

ABBY: It's funny, I too was really struck by the statistics that fictional President Bartlet quotes, that even at that time, in concerns about military hunger, one of the biggest issues was that nobody has an accurate count. And, so, when we're talking about currently serving military families, so we're talking about people who are for the most part probably enlisted personnel who are at the lower pay levels, and those individuals have changed in terms of who they are, so we're talking about more families then we were probably when much of the military pay structure was designed. And, we're talking about people for whom it's common, as it is for most working families, that two incomes are necessary. And that income of that enlisted member will not go far enough to pay for everything, including all their food. So, with that as some background, what happened is that the military will not divulge how many people are on some kind of support for food. The military had its own program—John McCain was very instrumental

in creating—the stated purpose of which was to address the stigma that might be attached to the fact that there are currently serving military that are in fact on food stamps. So, it was important to create a different program.

HRISHI: Stigma for the service members themselves, or stigma the military would receive that some of its members would require food stamps?

ABBY: I believe it really was the concern about what this messaged about our military, if we were not paying people enough money that they ended up on government support. So, the program, it sunsetted. So, it's gone, and the interesting thing to me about what happens in this episode is that, that immediate response is the DoD and they come up with this giant memo that basically is like “back off,” and basically says something about military pay, it is very typical to what we experience when we try to get information out of the Department of Defense, individual military installations, or even Congress. Nobody seems to know, and we ask members of Congress to go to the Government Accounting Office and ask them if they had data on this, and they went to DoD and DoD stonewalled them to end, so they asked DoD that they spend time finding out what the actual numbers are, because no one knows how many people are really struggling. Two thousand is very low, and we don't believe that's the number. The number is far higher than that now, and probably was far higher than that fifteen years ago. So, it's really an issue that we don't have a real number to put on, but I can also say that there is a food pantry on or near every military base in the United States.

HRISHI: And that goes beyond the, discounted prices for food at commissaries on military bases?

ABBY: Yep. It has nothing to do with that, it is, these are private, non-profit organizations that are either permitted to come onto the base, or are located right near it, and they are accessed, sometimes they can only be accessed by actually sworn military personnel. We know that there are families that are living on or near those bases that are struggling, and we can't count them, but in my mind, even one family that is having the problem is one family too many.

JOSH: It sounds like a prime subject for an extra-governmental study.

ABBY: Well, MAZON is not in a position to do something that large. We actually tried to push some universities to see if they might be interested in doing that, but the expense and cumbersome nature of this didn't really appeal to them, I think. And one of the challenges that we have is that while they are doing this study, we have families that are struggling, and I don't want to watch them continue to struggle when Congress could fix this. There is a fix, and what MAZON has tried literally for years is to get an anomaly in the law corrected, so that these military families could actually apply for food stamps. A lot of them can't, they're income ineligible because of a glitch in the law that has to do with the way that the U.S. Department of Agriculture counts income. And, it's been recognized as a glitch, it's been supported as a change by Republicans and Democrats, and we still can't get it changed. And it's been literally years and it looks as if it's going to take years more and there doesn't seem to be any reason for this other than a lack of will. We got push-back from any number of individuals who are either Democrats or Republicans, we have lots and lots of people will tell us that we're making this up, it's not really a problem. That really what this is an issue of is an 18-year-old who has gotten his very first paycheck ever and you make your choice here, he's either frittered this

money away on a new convertible, a big truck, a flat screen TV, or any combination thereof. As if this is something about, you know, these young men who can't manage their money, and the truth is that the military is far more diverse than that. Not only are we talking about men and women, but we're talking about people from diversities of backgrounds, and diversities of family structures, and it's just not that military anymore. And those salaries were set with that as the thinking about who that person would be, and it's not just about that single person right out of high school who has no obligations and no dependents. It just doesn't work that way anymore, and the challenge is to try to get the military to move. And this is a big ship to try to turn.

JOSH: And that sounds like one of the many falsehoods you hear altogether about SNAP and SNAP recipients, you know, they're spending their money elsewhere or they're using food stamps to buy high end steaks. There are all these things you hear in a recurring fashion, which wears people down and creates a false awareness you that have to battle against.

ABBY: Right, because there is nothing like an anecdote to create a mythology that flies in the face of the statistics. And, so, we're doing our best to lead a charge that says: this is a problem that you cannot continue to ignore. That no matter how distasteful it might be to admit the truth, that's your job. Your job is to confront unpleasant realities, and help to correct them, and our job is to hold your feet to the fire and make sure that you are accountable to your constituents, who include these men and women who put their lives on the line and shouldn't have to worry about whether they have enough money to feed their families.

HRISHI: On the government side, there is a bill that's in Congress, that was introduced last year by a Congresswoman, Susan Davis, called the Military Hunger Prevention Act. It was introduced last year and according to congress.gov, the last action on it was that it was referred to the subcommittee on military personnel, but that was almost a year ago, that was in March of 2017. Have you heard anything more about that bill?

ABBY: Yeah, that's our bill.

HRISHI: Yeah.

ABBY: Yeah, and it got killed in committee. So, in order for the bill to have been heard, there's a quirk in procedure and because it addressed issues that are governed by agriculture, which is where food stamps is housed the Chair of the House Agriculture Committee had to grant permission for the House Armed Services Committee to hear the bill and do something with it, and he refused. He then suggested that he would take care of this in the farm bill, which is coming up for reauthorization this year, but we don't know what that means and we don't know what he has in mind. So it was very discouraging. We'd done a lot of work, the Congresswoman had been very scrupulous about getting lots of co-sponsors on both sides of the aisle, and she really worked hard. And we thought we were going to be able to make this fix, and that is that small technical fix that I referenced.

HRISHI: This is where we insert the perennial Josh Lyman quote:

[West Wing Episode 1.04 excerpt]

JOSH: You know, I'm so sick of Congress I could vomit.

[end excerpt]

ABBY: [Laughs]

JOSH: And as we talk about food insecurity in the military, it's a subset of the greater disgraceful situation in the United States, where 40 million plus people are getting SNAP assistance. And am I wrong or is funding for SNAP in greater jeopardy than it has been in a long time, under the current administration now.

ABBY: Yeah, so, we have a dilemma, that has been brought about, not only by, I think, traditional conservative budget practice, but also the tax bill and the new deficit we've created. And that there are many people who are among the leadership in both houses that would like to see that deficit reduced, and the only way you're going to do that is to cut some of the programs that have high ticket expense and one of those would be SNAP, the food stamp program. And it's huge, because it's got a huge number of Americans that rely on it. So, it has a big target on its back, yes. And we are very concerned for the first time in, I'd say, a couple of generations, that there could be massive cuts to this program that's been around since the 1930s, that has been really the flagship example of bipartisan collaboration. The farm bill's a very complicated piece of legislation, and it's got rural and urban and democrat and republican and various different mechanisms between them, all come together and make this giant piece of legislation that takes care of the entire food system in the United States. And the biggest part of it is this program that helps support our economy. So, there's an interesting cyclical nature to this, right, because if you figure one-in-eight Americans get funding from this program in order to put it back into purchasing food, which is being produced by these farmers, there's a whole relationship here that the farmers don't want to disrupt either. So there's a lot of important energy that comes from various sources to support this. But, in the very bare bones way in which this Congress appears to be looking at things, "how much does it cost" and "wow, can we just get rid of that money."

JOSH: And I feel like I've read about a push from certain corners to move from fluid funding that responds to changing need to block grants. The whole idea of that seems to be ignoring need, and how it changes, and...

ABBY: Right. So the irony of this being, of course that the number of people on food stamps have decreased in the last few years because the economy started to improve. So, as people come off of those benefits, we have to spend less, but at the end the economy is improving. So, it is doing exactly what it's supposed to do. The Republican leadership, at least in Congress, around this has assured us that they are not going to support block granting. Now, I have learned my lesson the hard way, I don't believe anybody until it's over. And I've had members of Congress lie to my face, and I don't know what is wrong with me that I was shocked by that, but I was shocked by that.

HRISHI: Would you care to name names? Feel free.

ABBY: [Laughs] Yeah, Chairman Conaway who's the chair of the House Agriculture Committee. He told us one thing, and then turned around and did something entirely different, around the military hunger work. And I just couldn't believe it. You know, if he wanted to tell me he wasn't going to support it, I would have lived with that. But, to tell me he would and then he didn't was very disappointing, to say the least. And so now, since he is the very same person who is saying: "we're not going to block grant this," I don't trust that. I'm worried about it. And I know

there will be pressures that will come to bear on him from Republican leadership that he may not be able to ignore.

HRISHI: So, if people want to send Mike Conaway a message and let him know how they feel about it, you can go to Conaway.house.gov/contact.

JOSH: Right on. And that brings me to, in addition to supporting MAZON with money, which we encourage, and we support ourselves, what else can we do...to the people who are listening to you and getting moved to pick up a mitt and get in the game, what can we do, action wise?

ABBY: I think there are a couple things, but you can sign up to be a part of our advocacy alert system and we send things out to people to get them to communicate with others. But, I think one of the things that's really shameful in this country is that we rarely hold our elected leaders accountable face-to-face around issues that affect people other than us. And that to me is something that people could do as we are starting to approach an election year. Ask questions about this. Ask your representatives or the candidates how they feel about fully funding food stamps. Most of them don't even know. If they say, "Did you even know that there are military members that are on food stamps" they won't know it. They may fake it better by saying "Oh, that's very disturbing, yes." And then you say, "Well, what would you do about it?" You got to ask, and we have all kinds of resources people can look at our website which is mazon.org, and you can find all kinds of information about this so you are informed. It's not that complicated. It's pretty straightforward stuff. And if you don't hold elected officials accountable, if they don't hear from you, they think you don't care and they can do what they want.

HRISHI: One of the other issues in this episode is that of foreign aid, and Danny argues that you should push for a more self-interested kind of argument—one that demonstrates why foreign aid is actually important for everyone's well-being here in the U.S.—and I was wondering if there is a pragmatic, non-charitable kind of argument that can also be made for domestic hunger as well? Is there a self-interest argument that can be made to persuade people to want to get involved and contribute as well?

ABBY: I suppose, like anything that drives the economy, it drives the economy, and this puts money in people's pockets and they spend it locally. So it drives many local economies, and in fact when there are dips in food stamp allocation or there's some shift in the way in which funding for food stamps is distributed, you can find communities become economically damaged by this. Big retailers love the SNAP program, because they're selling product to that constituency.

HRISHI: So there you go. Go to mazon.org and sign up to help or donate, unless you want to be branded as 'soft on economic growth.'

JOSH: [Laughs] Ha, there you go. I was also going to say, one of the beautiful projects that MAZON put together to share the face of hunger was a travelling, interactive multimedia exhibit called 'This is Hunger.' I thought it really was revelatory, and I was very moved by it. It's very effective. Is it still out and about?

ABBY: It's on the last legs of its tour, it's actually in the San Francisco bay area as we speak, and it will be in Los Angeles again, and it will have its permanent home here in Los Angeles. So, for those of your listeners who are here, we'd love for them to come and see it. If you travel to

LA, we could make it a tourist destination, I guess. And, we've actually had members of Congress go through it and we've had state legislatures go through it, we've had members of the past administration who went through it. I'm not sure if we've had anyone in the current administration who have been in it. And nobody comes out of it untouched, so it is a powerful experience. And it's the same kind of result you would expect if you stopped talking just about the gigantic statistics and those numbers, and you begin to make it real for people, which I think is what *The West Wing* episode touches on beautifully, in that it's a real person who gives that blue envelope to Charlie. And, who was she? And, how could this have happened to her? And know that's what he's reading in that letter. We never get to see it, but we know there's something there. This is a real person, and because it was a real person it moved him to act, and I think that's really important.

JOSH: Well said.

HRISHI: Thank you so much.

JOSH: Thank you President Leibman. We like presidents on this podcast. [Laughs]

ABBY: [Laughs] It was really a pleasure, thanks a lot!

[music]

HRISHI: If you want to learn more about MAZON, go to mazon.org. And again, we'll have Josh's notes on his experience doing the SNAP challenge linked to our website.

JOSH: And if you want to donate to MAZON in a way that makes me look good, I'll put up the link to my birthday challenge.

HRISHI: That's true. Happy birthday, Josh.

JOSH: Thank you, you're very kind. I think we're planning to celebrate it together this weekend.

HRISHI: I can't wait. Hopefully it will be a tradition. It'll be the second year in a row...

JOSH: The second year we will celebrate our birthdays by participating in an escape room. And god-willing, with the help of remote prayer from all those listening, we will...

HRISHI: Actually escape?

JOSH: ... be successful. We will actually escape, yeah. [Laughs]

HRISHI: Or else, no episode next week.

JOSH: That's right, 'cause we're still in the room. How about the remote prayer subplot? I was with Josh Lyman before I realized he was going to be on board for it, and at the end I was still on board with throwing the \$125K at that.

HRISHI: I don't understand the reason why not to do it.

JOSH: Oh. Wow, I thought you were going to fight me on this.

HRISHI: No.

JOSH: I was looking forward to butting heads, but yeah...

HRISHI: The idea is being backed by a nonsectarian medical school, and it's an experiment. It is not to prescribe religion on anyone. And, as Josh mentions, there's no specific religion they're

putting forth or anything like that. And there's no single group that is specifically the recipient of this benefit, it can work for anyone, theoretically. They just want to do the study. Why is the study not worthwhile?

JOSH: Yeah, I'm with you. In a way the writers on this one created a straw man that doesn't hold up. There's a whole thing there and, you know, I guess the takeaway is also like, "Josh, you knew better" and even he's a little bit ashamed of it all. But, at the end of it, I'm still thinking: give them the \$125K! For one, I'm actually curious to see what the results of this study are. This Chief Cardiologist at Duke Medical Center thinks there might be some virtue in studying this and that there's some data that can back up the potential efficacy of remote prayer... look into it! I agree with you, it's not, it's only in the vaguest way a church and state issue, and I think when you take a close look at it, it really just isn't.

HRISHI: I mean, do you remember in science fairs where people might have their experiment be playing music for their plant and another plant that doesn't get music and seeing which one grows better?

JOSH: Or an ESP test, I'm holding a color and looking at it and you're on the other side of a wall, and see whether, more often than you randomly should you pick the correct color. You know, things like that do get studies. In a sense, this felt to me like the subplot of a big block of cheese day [laughs], that that storyline could have been BBOC event.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: But as it works in this episode, it still left me thinking, wow, that's a pretty cheap and yet interesting experiment to fund in order to get these billions in foreign aid approved.

HRISHI: Right. I'd be interested in that study, apart from the exchange for the vote.

JOSH: As would I.

HRISHI: And then, when you have the chance to pass foreign aid with it, it's a strange time for them to suddenly stand firm on, you know...

JOSH: They're standing firm on a principle that isn't really invoked...

HRISHI: Exactly.

JOSH: ...by the situation.

HRISHI: Yeah. It's not even \$125,000 as you said, it's \$115,000, \$10,000 cheaper.

JOSH: There you go.

HRISHI: But the subject of the amount of money ends up being almost a little bit of a Sorokin cliché, the way that it's employed here.

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt compilation]

TOBY: You said you wanted a hundred and fifteen thousand and you meant million. A hundred and fifteen thousand dollars.

JOSH: Million.

TOBY: No, thousand.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: *Million.*

JOSH: *Thousand. A hundred and fifteen thousand.*

DONNA: *Don't you mean a hundred and fifteen million?*

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh, every time [laughs].

HRISHI: Every single time. And, I feel like if you were going to make the parody version of an Aaron Sorkin screenplay, you would have people repeating the same phrase over and over again. Like a very specific set of words said by multiple characters, and here it feels almost like a parody.

JOSH: President million.

HRISHI: [Laughing] I'm just going to laugh at that every time.

JOSH: I hope so. Well, I'm certainly going to say it until you don't.

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: So, were on the same page.

HRISHI: Yeah.

JOSH: Well, may be dull for the listeners, but I'm sure we'll get some pushback on the website.

HRISHI: About the compromising the spirit of separation of church and state?

JOSH: Yeah, and they really sell it hard.

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

JOSH: I just recommended to the president that he buy a yea vote for a hundred and fifteen thousand dollars and the bill of rights.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Like, wow. I mean, so, everyone's on the same page at the end of the episode, and we're on another page entirely. He's been shamed, he's just a little ashamed of his own behavior, and I still think he's right in the end.

HRISHI: What do you think about the reasons why he does it? The way the president characterizes it:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: You know what the difference is between you and me? I wanna be the guy, you wanna be the guy the guy counts on.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: That's good writing, and it's kind of moving, but I didn't know if it was a fair assessment of Josh. I think he is ultimately very loyal to Leo, but he walks into the oval office and there's that cute moment where Toby says:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

PRESIDENT BARTLET: No way, you guys didn't come in here to tell me something funny?

TOBY: Three of us did.

PRESIDENT BARTLET: You. You are the wild card, my friend.

[end excerpt]

[Hrishi and Josh laugh]

JOSH: But, so even at that point, you can't really argue that Josh is pushing this in order to not disappoint Leo. Leo doesn't agree with him, and Josh is still trying to push the point. So, he's trying...he's trying to get it done.

HRISHI: Well, I think, you know, Leo is, at that point, more accepting of the idea that they might lose the bill. But Josh knows that ultimately this is what Leo wanted to have executed. So, even though Leo himself is okay with it, Josh can't accept being in any way responsible for failure for Leo.

JOSH: Ah yeah, perhaps. And perhaps Bartlet's assessment of Josh Lyman is accurate, but it's not necessarily what I see in the episode. What I see is that Josh is the most brass tax practical, trying to get it done. So, I think he's trying to be the guy in this episode.

HRISHI: The person I'm really impressed by in this episode is Donna.

JOSH: Ah!

HRISHI: I mean, the girl the guy...

JOSH: [Laughing] Go for it, I want to hear this.

HRISHI: ...the girl the guy counts on who's being counted on by the other guy.

JOSH: [Laughs] Yeah.

HRISHI: The aforementioned guy, there is a guy, and there is another guy who is being counted on by the guy, let me introduce you to a third person, this one is a girl, and she is being counted on by the second guy, not to be confused with the first guy.

JOSH: Stuff is better when Aaron writes it. [Laughs]

HRISHI: You don't think that was Sorkin-esque?

JOSH: -Esque. Esque-ish. [Laughs] Yeah, I see what you're saying. You know, I think they, being Eli, Kevin, and Aaron, slightly undercut Donna in this episode as a character, because I feel like they a little bit frame her dedication to fulfilling her mission as a reaction to not wanting to lose Josh, who has said...

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

JOSH: I lose this vote, I'm resigning.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I wonder why they decided to sort of shine that light. It's brief. It's not heavy handed, but they sort of shine that light, and then she revisits it one time and says, "Did you really mean it?" I feel like it slightly colors her subsequent performance of her duties in a way that it didn't need.

HRISHI: Oh, that's funny. I disagree with that, because I feel like it just parallels. To me it shows that she and Josh are more similar maybe than we have come to realize before. What the

president says about Josh wanting to be reliable for the person who is his boss could be also applied to Donna in the exact same way. You know, and I think the thing about Josh saying he's gonna quit if he doesn't pass the bill, just underscores how important it really is.

JOSH: I guess then, maybe it's just my mind that drifted to almost like their romantic interest in each other.

HRISHI: Is what was motivating her?

JOSH: That's what I felt like. "Oh, I'm going to lose Josh" kind of thing. Whereas if there had been no mention of that, we know how important it is and then we see in her dedication to helping him.

HRISHI: Hm.

JOSH: Maybe I'm making too big a deal of all of it altogether, but that's where my mind went on those two little moments, and I'm not sure what the extra value of them was.

HRISHI: I mean I liked seeing that. I liked seeing the fatigue that Josh feels in that moment. I mean we had an episode called Five Votes Down. Josh is in charge of executing the legislative plays, and there have been a lot of bruising battles that they've had over the course of the series so far, and the idea that there is some kind of cumulative effect it gives it a sense of serialized weight.

JOSH: Well, I don't disagree with that, I guess I just preferred the professional lassitude as presented later in the episode when Donna says to him:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

DONNA: Is it me or is this getting harder?

JOSH: It's getting harder.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I preferred it served that way better.

HRISHI: I see. I understand why you would have read it that way. I didn't read it that way but I understand. But Donna's so resourceful in this episode. I would... there's another version of this episode, you know, where it's not an ensemble drama, but it's a show about Donna doing her job.

JOSH: Ha! I see where you're going.

HRISHI: [Laughs] It's sort of like my Barry Moreland spin off...

JOSH: [Laughing] Yes.

HRISHI: [Laughing] ...where he just keeps getting demoted in, as you said, a Marx Brothers kind of comedy. There is like more of a suspense thriller... Donna in her own political drama where she is cunning and resourceful and just doing everything she can to try and execute the play.

JOSH: Certainly, the envelope caper is brilliant. I loved it.

HRISHI: It's great.

JOSH: Loved it.

HRISHI: Yeah. What I also loved about the envelope caper, specifically...

JOSH: Oh, oh, you're going to correct my pronunciation.

HRISHI: What?

JOSH: You're so French-ified. Ahn-velope. Ahn-velope. [Laughs]

HRISHI: [Laughing] How do you say m-a-r-i-o again?

JOSH: Marry-oh.

HRISHI: Marry-oh. [Laughing]

JOSH: [Mockingly] Marry-oh. That sound... I say ahron too. And sometimes I say Sarah. I have a friend named Sarah, and people will be like "Oh, S-ah-rah? Did you talk to S-ah-rah?" But, anyway, enough of my pronunciation difficulties. What were we talking about? Ah, the envelope or ahn-velope caper, or cap-ay.

HRISHI: Yes. [Laughs] When Donna pulls that caper off she, she uses this stratagem of going up to a guy and saying "Rick?" and getting his name wrong. She knows that's not his name, well maybe she guessed it right, maybe his name was Rick. And he says "Jason." And she says:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

DONNA: Excuse me, is it Rick?

JASON: Jason.

DONNA: Jason, I'm sorry, I'm new. This needs to get to...

[excerpt fades out]

HRISHI: Just that little bit, the idea that, you know, getting somebody's name wrong because somebody is new is also woven in throughout this whole episode with people getting Will Bailey's name wrong. Over and over and over again.

JOSH: Yes, that is intentional, no? I take it as tertiary hazing.

[Hrishi laughs]

JOSH: The Ted and the Bill, I think it's all hazing. I think they know damn well what his name is.

HRISHI: Really? Wow. [Laughs]

JOSH: [Laughing] Maybe I'm just being proprietary about my character's feelings, but I'm pretty damn sure every single person who got his name wrong knew better.

HRISHI: Oh, I thought Donna sincerely was trying to say hello to Ted when she said "Hey, Ted."

JOSH: Maybe, I don't think so. [Laughs]

HRISHI: It would, on its own, be a funny little motif throughout the episode, but then it kind of comes up again in this one little bit in a totally different context, of "Rick?" "It's Jason."

JOSH: I felt bad for Donna, that having gulled Jason into giving away information he should not have shared, she makes such a huge gaff.

HRISHI: Oh yeah.

JOSH: I mean, it's such a shame. She's on fire this episode in terms of her cunning and her

élan, and she's pulling things off left and right and then right at the finish line she just stumbles so badly.

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

DONNA: We've got two yes votes, McMichael and Schapp.

[end excerpt]

JOSH: And, again, I didn't remember this episode, and I didn't remember that that was in fact going to be bad... as she said it I thought, why? Why even say that you got the votes, just figure out a reason to get out of the room. You don't need her anymore, but why kind of rub it in? It's a little bit of hubris, like she kind of wants to flaunt her victory, and then to specifically say the names of the people. Ugh.

HRISHI: I think it points to her projecting kind of relationship onto the Senator and her aide, and her personality that she thinks that Josh has as well, she says the Senator can come out of the woods. She's really being helpful at that moment to Ellen, Senator Hardin's aide, not knowing that that information is going to be used against her.

JOSH: I see.

HRISHI: And then later at the end of the episode, you know, she says:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

DONNA: Josh has asked me to work Saturdays, work Sundays, and at least once a week he has me there after 1:00 A.M. He's asked me to transpose portions of the federal budget into a base-8, go to North Dakota, and dress as an East German cocktail waitress. In five years of working for him, he's never asked me to hide him from something. Can I have my boss's phone back?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: She's proud to be working for who she works for, and there's a little shaming that she does of the other side for the moves they pulled. Actually, I think that's really the only thing that she could possibly get from that last move, going to see Ellen again and trying to give her the phone. At that point they know they've lost the vote, they don't have the votes possibly. She's still just trying to get her part of the job done, which is to put the phone in the Senator's hand so she can speak to the president so the president can convince her to vote yea. Again, I like that about Donna, her tenacity here, but in some ways it's also...it's futile. From the get go, so there's part of me that feels like she's doing it just to say this last little...

JOSH: A Pyrrhic victory, as it were.

HRISHI: To give them a little bit of grief for the way that they conduct business. Hey, speaking of names, by the way...

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: You know, we were talking about your Hebrew name in our last episode, and I mentioned, I asked you, you know, what would my Hebrew name be. We've actually gotten a bunch of responses from West Wing Weekly listeners who have suggested possible Hebrew names for me.

JOSH: Yes! The best of which I'd like to share with you, and I can't believe it didn't occur to me.

HRISHI: Oh yeah, which one do you like?

JOSH: A couple different people pointed out that Hrishī's Hebrew name could be Rashi; Rashi being an acronym by which a very famous, I think medieval French Rabbi was known. Rashi. Hrishī. Rashi. How did I not, how did that not occur to me?

HRISHI: Well, it's not a Hebrew name really, right? I mean it's a nickname.

JOSH: Well, he's known as Rashi.

HRISHI: It's not like Yakov.

JOSH: [Laughs] No, it is.

HRISHI: Someone also mentioned another Rabbi, his nickname was Resh Lakish. Do you know who that is?

JOSH: No, I don't really.

HRISHI: But what I really liked about this is the nickname Resh is the letter, the Hebrew letter...

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: ...that apparently can stand for Rabbi.

JOSH: Sure.

HRISHI: And, Resh, I really like. I like the idea of that it could be a letter, because you know, I often sign things HH. I use my initials as a stand-in all the time.

JOSH: Alright.

HRISHI: I like that one. Here's some of the other ones that I got that I really liked, and I liked some of the meanings that people...

JOSH: How great are our listeners?

HRISHI: Pretty awesome.

JOSH: The Weeklings. The Weeksling.

HRISHI: I mean, people went and actually bothered to ask or look up what Hrishikesh meant to find a cognate—Co-ñate, sorry [laughs]

JOSH: A barrel aged Co-ñate [laughs]

HRISHI: —so they could find some kind of equivalent definition, you know, in a name. It's really wonderful. Or someone suggested, you know, because I'm a musician, you know, maybe Asaf? Who's Asaf...How would you pronounce it? A-S-A-F, A-S-A-P-H...

JOSH: Hm. I don't know. Asaf.

HRISHI: Anyways, someone said oh, Hrishikesh, you know there's a river in Hrishikesh and Nahar, that's a nice name.

JOSH: Very nice. Nahar means river in Hebrew.

HRISHI: Right.

JOSH: Oh, I see, Nahar.

HRISHI: So that was really nice. I was really touched by that.

JOSH: Well, ponder it and pick one.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: And I am going to call you Rashi.

[both laugh]

HRISHI: People will just think you're saying my name incorrectly.

JOSH: Right, which I get nervous every time I say it. [Laughs]

HRISHI: [Laughing] My name?

JOSH: Well, I said it incorrectly for a fair amount of time. I used to say how I felt it read. I used to say: Rish-uh-kesh. And you, you gave me a little lesson that it was: Rish-E-kAsh. But I still, I get very nervous in front of you. It'd be easier to just go "This is Rashi."

[Both laugh]

HRISHI: Well, my trouble with Rashi is that it is also an Indian name. We have a close family friend named Rashi, a girl.

JOSH: Oh, you want something that's distinctively Hebraic.

HRISHI: If possible.

JOSH: Nahar is good. I like that.

HRISHI: Gavriel, someone suggested.

JOSH: Sure. Yeah, but that's too much of a barrel-aged Co-ñate [Cognate] for Gabriel. I like Nahar because it's really kind of its own distinctive thing.

HRISHI: Well, someone asked "What does Hrishikesh mean?" Do you know what Hrishikesh means?

JOSH: I do not.

HRISHI: It means...

JOSH: I don't really know what Joshua means either, and I probably should.

HRISHI: Joshua's another name for Krishna, did you know that? [Laughs]

JOSH: No, I did not know that. [Laughs]

HRISHI: It's surprising. Hrishikesh is another name for Krishna, and it means something like: one who controls his senses. Or, ruler of one's senses.

JOSH: Nice. Master of his domain. [Laughs]

HRISHI: [Laughs] Exactly. So Josh, if you can put on your thinking yarmulke, and let me know what goes along with that, ruler of one's senses, in Hebrew.

JOSH: Sure, ok. I'll ponder it further.

HRISHI: Ok.

JOSH: I guess Joshua means God saves, Jehovah saves.

HRISHI: Hm.

JOSH: But Jesus scores on the rebound!

HRISHI: He had a great season... ah, again, you beat me to it. [Laughs]

JOSH: [Laughing] There's a sense I get sometimes were there's going to be a race to a punch line, and then I forget, I don't care about finding the best iteration of it, I just want to win.

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

[Ad break]

HRISHI: You know, one thing that I realized, maybe this is a product of us taking such a long break between our last episode of last year and our first episode of this year, in "Holy Night", I think this is the first time in the series where we had an episode with no Rob Lowe.

JOSH: Ooh...

HRISHI: And he's not in this episode either.

JOSH: Indeed. I had the first moment that I really felt I didn't deliver as an actor in this episode.

HRISHI: Oh?

JOSH: I felt that I had an anemic goat reaction. [Laughs] Which, coincidentally, is the name of my jazz combo, and I think that there might be a shirt in it. But yeah I didn't love my Will's reaction to the goat in his office.

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

WILL: Professional comedian, Elsie...[Goat bleats] Ahh!

[end excerpt]

[Josh and HrishI laugh]

JOSH: Well, you know, as I watched it I thought, that would have been funny if we had kind of both [makes goat noise] at the same time. Because Ron does vocalize at the same moment, and we could have, it would have been a funny thing to do...

HRISHI: [Laughs] True.

JOSH: Having occurred to me 15 years too late, I don't think the money's there for a reshoot. [Laughs] But, yeah, I didn't love it.

HRISHI: That would have been like when Donna runs into C.J.'s office with the turkeys and she makes the sound that sounds like a turkey.

JOSH: That's right.

[West Wing Episode 2.08 excerpt]

DONNA: Wait wait wait wait wait wait wait [Turkeys gobble in background]

[end excerpt]

JOSH: Oh, that's right. This would have been the perfect pairing

HRISHI: Yeah. Because this did feel, everything with the goat did feel a bit like a callback to Eric and Troy.

JOSH: Yes, yeah I agree. Although with the whole Heifer International of it, there is a nice...I like how they worked that in. I like that it ties to another whole subplot.

HRISHI: That's true. I read that the reason why Heifer International was featured in the episode was thanks, at least in part, to Bradley Whitford. Everything about Ron the Goat and his handler Mike—aka young Willem Dafoe—felt a little Eric and Troy.

JOSH: Ha! Yes, it was a little Eric and Troy. Absolutely yeah. And I think, did I mention another episode that Ron the Goat, I believe is named after mighty Sorkin player Ron Ostrow, who is in this episode...

HRISHI: [Laughs] That's right.

JOSH: ...asking a question of C.J. in the press conference. Ron Ostrow's a terrific guy, great actor, old friend since high school of Aaron's, and I think that Aaron was giving him a little [expletive deleted] by naming the goat after him.

HRISHI: You know who else we haven't spoken of recently.

JOSH: Yes?

HRISHI: Gail.

JOSH: Yes! Gail's got a whole menagerie in her fishbowl of Heifer International... Heifer International is this great organization—if I'm correct, I can't...I'm no expert on it—that addresses food insecurity and poverty throughout the world in a sort of holistic way where they try to give communities the tools to feed themselves and create products. Things like eggs and milk that they can sell at a marketplace, and they then interlink communities, and they really do incredible work, and so I think it's great that Brad got Aaron and Kevin and Eli to write an episode that focused on a specific and real organization. And it would be interesting to find out whether the exposure on *The West Wing*... you know, I know they've been around for many decades, I wonder if they got renewed interest from people who hadn't been aware of their work.

HRISHI: One year I got a Christmas card from someone who had given a goat through Heifer International in my name, and it was really wonderful. And of course, when I got the card, I thought "Just like in *The West Wing*!"

JOSH: Oh, there you go.

HRISHI: If you want to learn more about Heifer International, you can go to heifer.org. There's one little bit of production value show-offery in this episode that I appreciated which is that when Toby is first speaking to the Republican Senator Hoebuck about the remote prayer study...

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: When they cut back to Toby and you see the scene in the background... Out of focus behind him is the rope-line, and you see the president getting back into the car to go back to the White House. And I thought if you're going to get an out-of-focus Martin Sheen just for some, you know, added background--

JOSH: You're sure it was Martin Sheen? [Laughs]

HRISHI: [Laughs] Maybe it was a case of like Rob Lowe in the--

JOSH: You're sure it wasn't Estelle, the lady who worked in the cafeteria, in the commissary?

HRISHI: He wasn't that out-of-focus.

JOSH: Well, fair enough.

HRISHI: But it was impressive, you know, the level of coordination to end the line and have Charlie ushering the president into car at the same time. So you realize how these scenes cut together, and also just to... you've told me about how Dulé would position himself so he wouldn't have to be in a shot, and so the idea that they would have this sort of depth of focus and mise en scène, maybe, to include the president in the background, slightly out of focus.

JOSH: It's a nice touch of artistic verisimilitude. I like this little bit. I'm also having my first scenes with Brad Whitford—first Will Bailey-Josh Lyman scenes...

HRISHI: 'scènes'

JOSH: Yes, 'scènes' I'm sorry. And...

HRISHI: Since my name is Hrishikesh, I am master of 'scènes'.

JOSH: Mise having my first scènes with Josh, and there's a funny little couplet there:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

WILL: You know you get a pretty good aerobic workout talking to someone in this building.

JOSH: I've heard the jokes, what do you need?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: I can just hear Aaron saying, "I've heard every walk-and-talk joke I ever, ever need to hear."

HRISHI: It's true. Well, this brings us to this other great refrain in the episode...

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

JOSH: Sixty-eight percent of respondents think we hand out too much in foreign aid, fifty-nine percent think it should be cut.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: He manages to keep saying it. He's harping on it. We don't find out why until he finally explains it to you what his problem is with the statistic. But throughout the episode, you seem to be just in earshot when he's saying it.

JOSH: Yes.

HRISHI: In fact, at one point Will says:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

WILL: Were you talking to me just then?

[end excerpt]

JOSH: [Laughing] Right.

HRISHI: There's a really interesting argument that comes later in the episode from Danny that kind of, again, sometimes Danny will have these moments where he'll, it feels like he hands C.J. the playbook that would work. You should be doing this--instead of this.

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

DANNY: We cut farm assistance in Colombia. Every single crop we developed was replaced with cocaine. We cut aid for primary education in northwest Pakistan and Egypt; the kids went to madrasahs. Why weren't you making a case that Republican Senators are bad on drugs, and bad on national security? Why are Democrats always so bumfuzzled?

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: The thing that's interesting and compelling but also kind of cynical about Danny's argument is that the only way that this is going to work is if you steer away from the idea that foreign aid is something that is good. You know, that there is a moral quality to it.

JOSH: That there is... right. Drain ethics from the conversation and make it about partisan politics.

HRISHI: Right. And I wondered if that is true, if that is in fact what it takes. Foreign aid is always such a contentious issue. I thought it would be interesting to hear from someone whose job it is to try and convince people to give money to spend on foreign aid. To find out more, I spoke to someone from The ONE Foundation. We're joined now by Tom Hart. Tom Hart's the North American executive director of ONE, which is an organization whose mission is to end extreme poverty and preventable disease around the world, particularly in Africa. Thanks so much for joining us, Tom.

TOM: Well, yes, I'm glad to be here.

HRISHI: I wanted to ask you specifically about these two moments in the episode where characters make arguments for the foreign aid bill. And I think the episode does a good job of explaining both sides of the argument, but I feel like there's probably more that could be done to convince people. There are a couple more layers to it. Danny says at the end with C.J., he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

DANNY: Nobody wants to put money in a hat in Botswana when you got hats that need filling here. You can't make this about charity. It's about self-interest.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: And I was wondering, how much does that kind of thinking play into your work as executive director in North America?

TOM: Oh yeah, it's a tough job. There's no question. People have schools and roads and concerns at home and they have a lot of questions. They also think we spend 25% of the budget on foreign aid, and that it doesn't work. If either one of those things were true, I'd want to cut it too, but, you know, it's less than one percent of the budget, and it does an incredible amount of work, lifesaving work, around the world. The self-interest argument is an interesting one. It depends on if you're talking inside the beltway or outside. Inside the beltway we talk to

Congress, we talk to other policy makers, administration—the self-interest arguments really do work. Arguments about building economies and markets so that people will buy American market goods is both true and interesting and perks people’s interest. And also interestingly, and we’re doing a lot of work on this now, is the national security argument. We are talking to a lot of current and former Generals and Admirals who are saying, “Hey, we’re not going to bomb our way out of this current crisis.” The extremists find refuge in ungoverned and hopeless places. Places where people are in extreme poverty, no jobs, little healthcare, their governments don’t work well. That’s where extremists are taking root. Development, fighting poverty is the answer, not more bombs. But let me just say, quickly, outside the beltway, the average American citizen, they support foreign aid because they think it’s the right thing to do.

HRISHI: Hm.

TOM: We’re an incredibly blessed nation. We’ve got drugs that might save someone’s life? Great, let’s help them. So that still is the overwhelming argument, interestingly, for the American public.

HRISHI: Hm...so you have to tailor your language depending on who you’re speaking to.

TOM: Of course, absolutely.

HRISHI: I feel like the most cynical version of even the national security argument is still one of economic self-interest. That, ultimately, fighting wars or having to, you know, react to unstable nations impacts the bottom line for Americans. It impacts the budget. It impacts how much we have to spend in terms of military and even law enforcement, domestic law enforcement. Does it get that far? Do you feel like you have to really take it all the way to its logical conclusion and make it really so nuts and bolts to get the kind of support you need in D.C.?

TOM: Yeah, you do. And I think it is both an economic argument, wars are simply a lot more expensive than preventing wars. That is a truism that sounds a bit cliché, but honestly, we’re not making this argument nearly as eloquently as the Generals are. The last thing they want to do is send you know, is put their troops in danger and to spend billions and billions of dollars if they can prevent it in the first place. So we do get that granular and we are working really actively with military and security officials to make that argument, because especially in Washington at this point, we’re looking for lots of reasons to get people on board, and having the military support is invaluable.

HRISHI: There’s another part of the episode where Will says to Josh:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

WILL: Why is foreign aid important?

JOSH: It fosters democracy.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Is that also an argument that you find useful?

TOM: It probably isn’t our lead argument, but what Josh says is absolutely correct. When you have a hopeful and healthy and engaged population, it does improve democracy. I mean, you support women and you have a better functioning more accountable government system. And our foreign aid does all of that. We try to bring lots of arguments to the table because people are

multifaceted, not just one argument's going to convince them. We like to bring a bunch to the table.

HRISHI: I think it's a compelling one, the idea of a return on investment. This is such a small part of the budget than the amount of difference that it makes is huge, but is it hard to then demonstrate that return on investment to the people who you went to in the first place to say here is something tangible that you can look at and consider a return on the investment that you put in there?

TOM: Yeah, it isn't hard to show results. Our foreign aid systems are really sophisticated in the way they are targeted at achieving specific results, whether it's number of kids that get vaccinated, number of people who get lifesaving AIDS drugs, number of people who get food assistance. We do a really good job actually at counting and making sure there are measurable results. Now, to say, "Hey, America will benefit economically" or "We've lowered our security risk by X percentage," yes that's a much more difficult case to make.

HRISHI: Yeah. 'Cause even Danny's argument to C.J., you know the second half of what he says is:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

DANNY: We cut farm assistance in Colombia. Every single crop we developed was replaced with cocaine. We cut aid for primary education in northwest Pakistan and Egypt; the kids went to madrasahs.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: But it's hard to prove that something worked in the absence of a negative.

TOM: Yeah.

HRISHI: You can't say, "Hey, look, it worked because nothing disastrous happened."

TOM: Exactly, no, proving a negative is one of the hardest jobs around. People in Washington and outside of Washington are satisfied if they know these things are working, if they make a difference. If the small bit is actually achieving what we've asked it to do, which is vaccinate kids or feed hungry people or help build economies, that's sufficient.

HRISHI: Who are the kinds of people that you find yourself in conversation with when you are in D.C.? Who ends up being your audience, primarily?

TOM: What's great about these issues is they're really bipartisan. It actually was President George Bush who really did transformative work to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa. President Obama continued and expanded that legacy and also did great work on food security. So it's really become a bipartisan issue, so we find ourselves talking to both sides all the time. Clearly, this has been a difficult time with this administration. I guess this is a Trump-ai-yi-yi moment...

[Hrishi laughs]

TOM: ...where they're proposing big cuts.

HRISHI: Yeah.

TOM: But we're finding a lot of receptivity on Capitol Hill still, and with a really diverse set of actors inside and outside of government. From think tanks to security officials to soccer moms

and people of faith.

HRISHI: To go back to what you were saying about the kind of argument you have outside of D.C., do you find that there's any kind of partisan change there?

TOM: Yeah. That's a great question. We did a really interesting experiment this last year, we helped get thousands of phone calls into some of the Congressional leader's offices and we picked up a lot of comments, these were frankly cold calls into these states and districts asking them to call their leader in Congress to oppose cuts. And we got a lot of amazing comments back saying, "Gosh, why would we want to cut this stuff? You mean it really works? We should be doing more of this." So, what I said earlier, people want to do the right thing. They believe it is part of being American, to be able to go and help others. And that is true whether it is our neighbors across the street or across the ocean.

HRISHI: Do you find the poll that Josh talks about, the results, the 68% and 59%, that that doesn't actually ring true with what you've experienced first-hand with speaking to people?

TOM: It rings absolutely true when you say, "Do you support foreign aid?" No, those numbers haven't changed, interestingly, since the show aired at least much. When you ask people, "Do you think the United States should vaccinate kids in Africa?" the answer is overwhelmingly, "Yeah, we should do that." "Do you think we should provide, you know, lifesaving AIDS medicines that we can get next door?" Yeah, we should do that. You know, so it's like every poll, it's how you ask the question. It's a little bit like "Do you like your Congressman?" and "Do you like Congress?" Do you like foreign aid? No, I don't want that, you know, but you ask it a different way and people are like, absolutely we should be doing that. When people get the facts, that it's less than one percent, that it actually saves lives, that it's accountable, people are on board.

HRISHI: Awesome, thank you so much.

TOM: You're absolutely welcome. Yeah, we all grew up watching the show and I came to Washington wanting to be Josh, and the one bill he couldn't get passed was the foreign aid bill, really? Very disappointing.

HRISHI: [Laughs] Well, we don't know, maybe he got it. Maybe we get the continuing resolution, and maybe 90 days later maybe they had some better success.

TOM: Yeah, right. [Laughs]

HRISHI: Thank you so much for doing what you do and joining us on the podcast. What should people do if they want to learn more about ONE and what you do?

TOM: We would love people to go to one.org. We're not asking people for their money, we're just asking people for their voice, to get in touch with their representatives, so that they can tell those facts that we talk about.

HRISHI: Great. Thank you so much.

TOM: Great to talk to you, Hrishu.

[music]

JOSH: I think it's worth noting, but not pausing too long on, the fact that Stacy, a White House

aide with whom Charlie interacts in this episode, is played by Nicole Lyn, Dulé's first wife.

HRISHI: Ah.

JOSH: For those keeping track at home.

HRISHI: But they weren't married at the time?

JOSH: No.

HRISHI: But maybe this is where they met?

JOSH: Perhaps so. Weird, to me, lightning in that scene. There are a lot of shadows and not that there can't be shadows, shadows can be very effective, but it was sort of dimly lit in Charlie's area and weird shadows being cast on the walls.

HRISHI: Someday we're going to have to have Thomas Del Ruth on the show, right?

JOSH: Yes. We should, yeah.

HRISHI: There's one that stayed with me, which is:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

JOSH: Make big plays today!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: It's something I say to myself all the time.

JOSH: Do you?

HRISHI: Yeah, when I'm frustrated with myself, you know, it's similar to the line where Sam is trying to get himself going and he says, "Get. Up." He's trying to wake himself up in the morning. When there's a big thing in my life and I have to perform or I have to whatever, get it right, "Make big plays today." I hear Josh saying that in my head, I say it myself...

JOSH: And then do you respond to yourself, "Nice *West Wing* reference." [Laughs] Probably not.

HRISHI: [Laughs] No.

JOSH: I'm trying to figure out to what extent you've disassociated.

HRISHI: Completely. I mean, me thinking to myself that I've made a *West Wing* reference would be like me noticing that I'm breathing.

JOSH: Oh, fair enough.

HRISHI: What were you going to say about it?

JOSH: Just that the president has a line when talking to Leo, "We have many, many back up plans in the works" and I just thought that spoke to me of the "I told many, many people" which was one of the great lines ever written for me in an episode of *Sports Night*, has been stolen brutally and used in the trailer for *Mamma Mia! 2*. Like just a complete, total comic lift from Aaron's work into their movie.

[*Mamma Mia 2 Trailer Excerpt*]

SAM: I just told Bill.

BILL: Yeah, and I told Harry.

HARRY: And I told many, many people.

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Did you have some input into that line, yourself as well?

JOSH: No. I would love to say that I did, but it was just a peach handed to me on a silver platter.

HRISHI: Is it Colin Firth who says it?

JOSH: Yeah, well I said it Firth. For the record.

HRISHI: [Laughs] And you are Colin him out.

JOSH: That's right. [Laughs]

HRISHI: The other thing that's interesting about that line too is that, you know, there's a surprising verbal gaff, he says, "We have many, many back up plans in the works" as opposed to...

JOSH: Backups plan.

HRISHI: ...Backs up plan.

JOSH: Very good. I had a really weird thing... there's that moment where Donna is lying in wait to sort of ambush the Senator and she's in a kitchen, and she...

HRISHI: That whole weird scene with Giuseppe and...

JOSH: [Laughing] But the weirdest thing is that there are two chefs with lines in that scene, one of them is nine feet tall, and the other is two-and-a-half feet tall. It's like a... go take a look again. It's the weirdest thing I've ever seen. There must be some sort of explanation for it, but it's like frickin' Willy Wonka or something. The delta in their height is impossible.

HRISHI: My question is, where is she?

JOSH: I also don't know that.

HRISHI: How do the chefs at this hotel know her by name? Why does Giuseppe know Donna at this hotel?

JOSH: Somebody will have a theory on the website [laughs].

HRISHI: [Laughing] It's strange. I think the line is so weird too, he says:

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

CHEF GIUSEPPE: Maybe I could learn something if I beat you about the head with a sturdy ladle.

[end excerpt]

[Josh and Hrishi laugh]

HRISHI: These guys are in a different T.V. show.

JOSH: [In Italian accent] That's a spicy meatball, hey Mario! Yeah, I don't know what the hell is going on in that scene.

HRISHI: Somehow Donna has stepped into yet another show.

JOSH: Yeah.

HRISHI: Another show within the show. Giuseppe and the sous chef.

JOSH: [Laughs] Yeah. I like when Leo taunts C.J. with snakes in her car.

HRISHI: [Laughing] Oh yeah.

JOSH: And he doesn't have the slightest smile on his face. [Laughs] It's so deadly, it's funny, but he's just, he's grim. He doesn't give it away. I like John's delivery. He's not really kidding.

HRISHI: [Laughing] Her reaction is great.

[West Wing Episode 4.12 excerpt]

C.J.: Come on, don't say that! Not even to joke!

[end excerpt]

HRISHI: Alright, thanks so much for joining us for this episode once again. We'll be back next week with "The Long Goodbye."

JOSH: Yes, and somewhere down the line we will share with you the great good fun that was had on stage at Marine's Memorial Theatre in San Francisco last weekend. Thanks to everybody who came out. Thanks particularly to all who participated in Big Block of Cheese Day, and that included almost everyone by the end, because we got that fifty-pound curd down to the lobby and people stood in line to chat and meet us and take pictures, and they walked away with cheese.

HRISHI: I had fun.

JOSH: I had a great time. It was a bit of a madhouse and a three-ring circus and we hope it will translate into audio.

HRISHI: Exactly. Our thanks to Abby Leibman, CEO and President of MAZON.

JOSH: President Leibman.

HRISHI: [Laughs] And to Tom Hart, the North American Executive Director of ONE. If you want to follow their organizations on Twitter, you can do so @MAZONUSA or @ OneCampaign. You can follow me or Josh as well, I'm @HrishiHirway, for now until I change it to Nahar, and Josh is @YankelMalina (@JoshMalina).

JOSH: Yankela.

HRISHI: The West Wing Weekly is @WestWingWeekly plus we're on Facebook and on Instagram, and we have our own website thewestwingweekly.com. We'd love to connect with you in all of these places, leave us a comment, send us a photo of you wearing your pin, anything like that.

JOSH: Shouts out to Margaret Miller and Zach McNees for their fantastic contributions to today's episode.

HRISHI: Margaret edits our words, Zach edits the sound of the words.

JOSH: The West Wing Weekly remains part of Radiotopia. Two other 'topes dropped by on

stage for Big Block of Cheese Day in San Francisco, and really made it a party.

HRISHI: Yeah, we had Helen Zaltzman of The Allusionist and Nate DiMeo of The Memory Palace. It was a 'tope fest.

JOSH: It was. You can find out more about Radiotopia and listen to the other fabulous story-driven podcasts at Radiotopia.fm

HRISHI: We are not story-driven, however.

JOSH: No. I'm not driven at all. [Laughs]

HRISHI: [Laughs] Ok.

JOSH: Ok.

ABBY and TOM: What's next?

[Outro Music]