

= In Excelsis Deo =

" In Excelsis Deo " is the 10th episode of the first season of The West Wing . It originally aired on NBC December 15 , 1999 , as the show 's Christmas special . Events circle around Toby getting involved in the fate of a dead Korean War veteran , reactions to a severe hate crime , and the ongoing controversy surrounding Leo 's past alcohol and prescription drug abuse . Written by Aaron Sorkin and Rick Cleveland and directed by Alex Graves , the episode contains guest appearances by Paul Austin and Raynor Scheine . It also earned Sorkin and Cleveland an Emmy , as well as one for Richard Schiff .

= = Plot = =

As the episode begins , Toby gets called by the D.C. police to identify a dead homeless man . It turns out the man (a Korean War veteran from the 2 / 7) was wearing a coat that Toby donated to Goodwill , and Toby had left his business card in it . The event stays with him , and he decides to trace down the man 's next of kin . The only relative he can find is a brother , also homeless . Using the influence of the president 's office , he arranges a military funeral at Arlington . President Bartlet is informed about Toby 's transgression , but can only muster limited indignation and jocularly asks if the country is still in NATO . To the president 's concern that this could create precedent for other veterans to come forward , Toby replies " I can only hope , sir . " Mrs Landingham , who has just told Charlie about losing her twin sons in the Vietnam War , joins Toby and the veteran 's brother at the funeral .

Meanwhile , Josh ? who is worried that Rep. Peter Lillienfield (R) may disclose information the Congressman has about Leo 's past treatment for alcohol and Valium abuse ? approaches Sam and proposes using Sam 's prostitute friend to dig up dirt for use as leverage against Lillienfield 's allies when the time comes . Leo objects strongly to the plan , calling it unethical .

C.J. gets emotionally involved in a story about the deadly assault on a homosexual youth . She sees this as an opportunity to push hate crime legislation , but the suggestion finds little support among the others . Reporter Danny Concannon also disagrees , but this encourages her to finally accept his offer of a date , to have him convince her .

President Bartlet sneaks out to go shopping at a rare book store and refuses to take photographers along , much to Mandy 's chagrin . Donna has at this point been pestering Josh about her Christmas gift all day . While he doesn 't follow the list submitted , he picks up a book for her at the shop and writes a message in it that leaves her tearful but happy .

= = Production and real @-@ life issues = =

The episode 's title is taken from the angels ' song to the shepherds in Luke 2 : 14 , announcing the birth of Jesus , and is in reference to the show 's Christmas theme . The words also make up the beginning of the Great Doxology : Gloria in Excelsis Deo (Glory to God in the highest) .

It was awarded an Emmy for Outstanding Writing for a Drama Series , credited to Aaron Sorkin and Rick Cleveland . In the summer of 2001 , a public argument broke out between the two on the internet forum mightybigtv.com (later known as Television Without Pity) . Cleveland claimed to have had the original idea , based on the experiences of his father who was a Korean War veteran , and felt offended that Sorkin had not given him a chance to honor his father 's memory at the award ceremony . Sorkin responded that Cleveland had not contributed significantly , and that writing credits were simply rotated among the staff writers . The argument ended amicably , with Sorkin apologizing for belittling Cleveland 's effort and the two writers expressing their admiration for each other .

The scene at Arlington was made with the full co @-@ operation of the Pentagon , who liked the message of the script and wanted to do what they could to help . Originally , the president was to have been in the scene as well , but this was changed because it " took away the power of Mrs. Landingham and Ziegler " ; it was felt that the scene would be more powerful without the looming

presence of the chief executive . The fourth person attending the funeral is the superintendent of Arlington National Cemetery John C. Metzler , Jr . , appearing as himself . The funeral is accompanied by the song " The Little Drummer Boy " , sung by the boys ' choir .

The story about the hate crime against the young homosexual man is based on the real @-@ life case of Matthew Shepard . This was confirmed by Allison Janney in an interview with the gay magazine The Advocate .

= = Reception = =

Sorkin and Cleveland won an Emmy for Outstanding Writing for a Drama Series , and actor Richard Schiff (Toby Ziegler) was awarded the prize for Outstanding Supporting Actor in a Drama Series . The episode was also nominated for " Outstanding Single @-@ Camera Picture Editing for a Series " and " Outstanding Sound Mixing for a Drama Series " . Cleveland and Sorkin also won the Writers Guild of America Award for best episodic drama at the February 2001 ceremony for " In Excelsis Deo " .