

From Baltimore, 'Veep' holds a mirror to D.C.

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(Photo: Lacey Terrell, HBO)

OWINGS MILLS, Md. — Despite overcast skies and a freezing-rain forecast on this late winter day, sun is shining through the windows at the vice president's home, some 54 miles north of Washington, D.C.

The sunlight is fake — radiating from huge lamps attached to the bucket rising from a truck outside — and it streams into a re-created executive residence. Nothing slows down *Veep*, which returns for Season 2 on HBO Sunday at 10 p.m. ET/PT.

STORY: [Winning role for Louis-Dreyfus \(http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/tv/2013/04/09/julia-louis-dreyfus-veep-hbo/2054469/\)](http://www.usatoday.com/story/life/tv/2013/04/09/julia-louis-dreyfus-veep-hbo/2054469/)

Inside the suburban Baltimore mansion that stands in for the vice president's home, cast and crew get ready for a long day of shooting. Show creator and director Armando Iannucci has an ambitious goal: shooting 25 pages of script, almost unheard of in a typical day on a TV set, where eight to 12 pages might be the average.

Inside, Julia Louis-Dreyfus paces and recites lines of Vice President Selina Meyer. On set, someone shouts a reminder to "clear this hallway. This hallway is hot." The hall leads to the great room, where the first scene takes place.

At the other end of the hall, Iannucci, writer Tony Roche, executive producers Chris Godsick and Frank Rich, and at least a dozen more of the crew, cast and extras watch the monitors. On average, about 125 crewmembers are on set — many of whom also worked on the Netflix political drama *House of Cards*, which filmed nearby. "Maryland has a similarity in terms of architecture and the interiors to match Washington, so we can get a tremendous amount out of Maryland," Godsick says.

But how did *Veep* get here? Rich, a former *New York Times* columnist who now works at *New York* magazine, says he began as a consultant with HBO in 2008. There was a "continuing discussion of a smart Washington show," he says, but none of the pitches stood out.

Then Rich went to a screening of Iannucci's 2009 political satire *In the Loop*, a film about British and U.S. political power players and spin doctors seeking to start a war. "I called (HBO)," Rich says, "and said, 'This is the guy.'"

When approached by HBO, Iannucci, who had unsuccessfully tried to bring his British political comedy *The Thick of It* to ABC, said he'd be interested. Then he had to think about the story line and decided to focus on the office of the vice president. "You're so near and yet so far," says Iannucci, an admitted political junkie. "If you're a vice president, you have the contact with the world."

In Season 1, viewers saw Meyer deal with political appointments and a pregnancy scare. In one episode, she said something regrettable during a taping of a Sunday morning talk show. It was reminiscent of the slip Vice President Biden made when he prematurely mentioned the Obama administration's view on gay marriage.

The *Veep* and Biden episodes happened the same week, says Iannucci, who also is an executive producer. "I thought it was such a bizarre coincidence."

Season 2 has scenes that track current events as well. "We have a kind of dinner in one episode where she sings a song to the tune of *50 Ways to Leave Your Lover*. It was the week (of the) Gridiron Dinner," where politicians are often spoofed in song. ("This is not the set of *Glee*, I can assure you," says Louis-Dreyfus. "It's not quite polished.")

Also this season, "there will be things that go up in social media that are going to be very daunting and problematic for the office of the vice president," says Louis-Dreyfus.

"If you've done your research well, you'll do stuff that comes as no surprise," says Iannucci, "because that's how D.C. works."

Back at the mansion, Meyer is arguing with her ex-husband (David Pasquesi) about their recent sexual romp. Anna Chlumsky and Reid Scott, who play staffers in Meyer's office, overhear the exchange with TMI horror. Meyer's personal assistant, Gary Walsh (Tony Hale), is with them.

A loyal underling, Walsh accompanies Meyer everywhere, and was the one who purchased a pregnancy test kit and waited for the results while Meyer was visiting with schoolchildren in Season 1. "He so worships Selina," says Hale. "He doesn't see any faults. Her identity is his identity."

Three days later, the players ("Veeple" is what Sufe Bradshaw, who plays Meyer's "junkyard dog" scheduler Sue Wilson, calls them) have moved to the main set in an industrial area of Columbia, Md., closer to D.C.

Here the crew has built replicas of the offices in the Eisenhower Executive Office Building and the West Wing, and aboard Air Force 2. They have recovered from Tuesday's marathon shoot at the veep's house, which lasted from 10:30 a.m. until midnight.

Art again imitates life (which is never by design, say Veep producers): It's the Friday of the real-life sequestration deadline in Washington, and several scenes reference a government shutdown.

So much of the story line seems real, and Louis-Dreyfus seems so invested in playing Meyer and capturing the nuances of a politician. The path has been blazed by others: Would she consider running for office? The answer is a quick and short "No."

And she can't even begin to focus on what her next role might be. "I am so immersed in this part. I really can't," she says. "It's all about Selina right now. I've still got Selina in my head."