

OPENING REMARKS OF SARA C. BRONIN

Biden Nominee to Chair the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation
Delivered to the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources

September 21, 2021

Good morning Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso, and the distinguished members of this committee:

It is my honor to be here today as President Biden's nominee to chair the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation.

Joining me today are my husband Luke, himself a public servant and a veteran who served in Afghanistan, and two of our three children. Our third child is watching with her grandparents in Connecticut, and my parents, two sisters, and two grandmothers, Romana and Oralia, are watching in Texas. My heart tells me my grandfathers are watching from above. I bring to this hearing table the lessons of my teachers at Duchesne Academy of the Sacred Heart, the University of Texas, Oxford, and Yale, and my students, and I am grateful to every one of them.

It is a special privilege to be speaking before this committee, whose members have demonstrated a longstanding, bipartisan commitment to historic preservation.

Senators, many of you are already familiar with the Advisory Council because of the process known as Section 106. Both the agency and the process were created by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 to ensure that historic resources are considered when federal agencies are undertaking certain programs and projects. In these reviews, the Advisory Council does not play a decision-making role, but one of a convenor, collaborator, and advisor. As chair, I would be honored to ensure that the agency continues to play this role with integrity and in keeping with Congressional direction.

The Advisory Council also has another key statutory role: to advise the President and Congress on historic preservation policy. As I prepared for this hearing today, I talked with some of you and your staff about ways the agency may strengthen its relationship with Congress through its advisory function. Members expressed an interest in better tailoring disaster recovery response to historic places, developing procedural efficiencies, supporting the 59 state and territorial historic preservation offices, 574 federally-recognized tribes (which include 204 tribal historic preservation offices) and Native Hawaiian organizations. And you also expressed enthusiasm for facilitating private investment in preservation, whether through leasing or transferring historic federal properties or through making the historic preservation tax credit – which has generated over \$173 billion in economic development – more accessible to rural, main street, and underserved communities. The Advisory Council has already made progress in some of these regards. If confirmed as its chair, I will gladly work with members of this committee and others in Congress to further improve the federal government's effectiveness in these areas.

My passion for preservation comes from the recognition that historic, tribal, and cultural resources benefit us in unique ways. They connect us with our past and give us a sense of continuity, identity, and belonging. They generate economic activity, both during rehabilitation projects and for many

years after. They offer us a chance to be more sustainable; as is often said, the greenest building is one that is already built. And perhaps most importantly, they guide our faith and center our spirits.

Throughout my work, I have tried to ensure that communities of all kinds can benefit from preservation. As an architect, attorney, professor, and public servant, I have written, critiqued, and implemented laws regarding historic preservation; I have both rehabilitated historic buildings and advocated for them. And by participating in organizations like Preservation Connecticut and Latinos in Heritage Conservation, I have found that there are many, many people who share our common commitment to protecting and celebrating the rich and complex stories that make us American.

With this multi-faceted experience, I hope to ensure the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation continues to take a leadership role in advancing and modernizing preservation practice nationally. From my ancestors' lands on the Texas-Mexico border to colonial Connecticut where I live today, from indigenous homelands to fragile archaeological resources, the Advisory Council urges protection of it all. It would be a deep honor and a tremendous joy to serve as its chair.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I look forward to your questions.