

Statement of
Shalanda H. Baker
Nominee for the Position of Director
of the Office of Minority Economic Impact
Before the
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
United States Senate
June 8, 2021

Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso, and distinguished members of the Committee, I am honored to participate in this hearing. I want to acknowledge my partner, Tara Spann, who is with me today and who is my rock and source of support.

I am the daughter of two Black Americans. My father, Charles Lee Baker, was an extraordinary man. He grew up in Port Arthur, Texas, a low-income majority Black and Latinx community that forms part of the heart of our nation's petrochemical, oil, and gas industries. He and his brothers grew up in the Carver Terrace Housing Projects, separated from one of the largest oil refineries in the world, the Texaco (now Motiva) oil refinery, by a metal fence.

My father grew up in this community which, like so many environmental justice communities around this great country, routinely faced exposure to many of the environmental hazards, including exposure to air particulate matter, a contributor to asthma and heart disease, and benzene, a known carcinogen. Like his mother and his eldest brother, my father died way too young of heart disease. Like his father and brothers, and so many Americans, he made a good living in the energy industry. I stand before you in honor of his legacy and in recognition of the complex ways in which the energy system shapes American lives. If confirmed, I would be honored to help lead the Administration's transformative Justice40 Initiative, to ensure that communities like my father's, as well as those whom we have relied on for coal, oil, and gas production, have a future in the new, clean energy economy.

My mother, Constance Renea Grant, was also extraordinary. She raised me in a home that academics would call an energy insecure home. Like one in three American households, 52.2% of Black American households, and 61.5% of Native American households, we used the oven to warm our apartment in Austin, Texas, where I grew up. On nights when we could see our breath, we layered on blankets and clothing to keep safe from the cold, and to try to get a good night's sleep. In the summers, my sister and I spent days on end in the public library to keep cool.

Our struggle with energy insecurity was exacerbated by our energy burden—the amount of my mother's overall household income we used to pay for energy. My mother served this country as a civil servant, both for the State of Texas and the Federal government. Her government salary

disqualified her from meaningful access to public assistance, but it was too little to secure our home. Our household, like so many American households, was invisible to policymakers; we fell through the cracks.

It was my mother's service to our country that inspired me to serve. In 1994, I joined about 1,200 other first year cadets for bootcamp at the United States Air Force Academy. Around 200 of us were women; 10 of those women were Black. I graduated as a commissioned officer in 1998. At the Academy, our core values were "Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do." In 2000, with these three core values ingrained in my spirit, and my military career ahead of me, I made the difficult decision to come out as a lesbian. I had joined the military and served during the height of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. This policy put LGBTQ service members at risk, and in my own life, it meant that an abusive partner wielded a power over me that jeopardized my oath.

I left the military deeply committed to continued service on behalf of communities that lacked a voice, and that lacked power. I became a corporate and project finance lawyer in Boston and later in Japan, and eventually, an academic committed to exploring and exposing the injustices in our energy system. I have spent the past decade studying this energy transition, and my research has shown me that energy justice requires that we rethink and redesign the entirety of our energy system. Energy justice also requires that we recognize the tremendous sacrifices that communities like my father's have paid to ensure that the nation has access to reliable power.

If I am fortunate enough to be confirmed as the Director of the Office of Minority Economic Impact, I will work to advance three objectives. First, I will tackle the energy burden that plagues households and communities in this country. Second, I will bring clean technology parity to underserved communities that have currently been left behind in the energy transition. Third, I will pair public-sector and private-sector expertise to expand access to capital, create new businesses and jobs, and build wealth in communities that have persistently been underserved by Federal programs. I will use my lived experiences, coupled with the academic rigor and entrepreneurial streak I have honed over the past decade, will allow me to hit the ground running during one of the most challenging periods in our nation's history. Thank you. I look forward to your questions.