

Statement of Congressman Danny K. Davis (*as prepared*)
During the Legislative Hearing of
the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands of
the Committee on Natural Resources

Chairwoman Haaland, Ranking Member Young, and Members of the Subcommittee. I am grateful for your consideration of H.R. 3250, the Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools Act of 2019. It is my strong hope that Congress will advance this bill to authorize a resource study to consider establishing national park sites to honor the incredible social and community impact of Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Schools.

Julius Rosenwald was an astute business executive, philanthropist, leader, and humanitarian who dedicated himself to the Jewish teaching of tzedakah that advocates treating every person with righteousness and justice. Many people do not know the tremendous contributions that Julius Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Schools made to the citizenry and culture of our country.

It is reported that President Lincoln used to quote Henry Peter Brougham by saying, “Education makes a people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave.” I know the importance of Mr. Rosenwald’s work to bring education to African Americans in the rural South, embodying the spirit of Lincoln’s words. Many of the small towns where African Americans lived during his time had no school at all, and, if they had one, it only went to the sixth or eighth grade. Although I did not attend a Rosenwald School, I know the impact of their presence for African Americans in the segregated south in the post-Reconstruction era. As one who has lived in and represents the area where Sears Roebuck was headquartered, I also understand the importance of Mr. Rosenwald’s influence on the cultural and economic development of Chicago and this nation.

Moved by Booker T. Washington’s autobiography *Up from Slavery* and friendship, Mr. Rosenwald committed his time and finances to improving the lives of African Americans. Working with Mr. Washington, Tuskegee Institute, and other leaders, Mr. Rosenwald established the Julius Rosenwald Fund that partnered with local communities to create over 5,300 schools serving almost 700,000 students in the south to increase educational opportunity for African Americans. Although the schools were modest to limit possible aggression by the White community, they adopted state-of-the-art architecture and quality standards that shaped school designs in the nation.

The Rosenwald Schools Initiative was not just one man. A key element of the Rosenwald Fund was developing partnerships to identify and underwrite the initiatives, recognizing that successful change required connecting a community in identifying and uniting to achieve its goals. Mr. Rosenwald did not assume that he had the answers to success. Rather, he humbly worked with key historical figures in American history - including Mr. Washington, Robert Taylor, and George Washington Carver – to use the wisdom of the many to craft solutions to make change on a wide scale. During the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, one-third of all African American children in the south were educated in Rosenwald Schools. A 2011 study by two Federal Reserve economists concluded that the schools played a significant role in narrowing the education gap between Black and White students in the south. In short, the collective scale and

the broad social impact of the Rosenwald Schools meet the National Historic Landmark requirement that park sites have national significance.

Mr. Rosenwald's impact on American life and culture exceeds that of his schools. To help African American communities, Mr. Rosenwald and the Rosenwald Fund: provided matching grants to construct YMCA's for African Americans during the Jim Crow era; supported the early NAACP cases that eventually led to the *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*; provided fellowships to African Americans in the arts and sciences; and supported a number of Historically Black Colleges and Universities, including Fisk, Dillard, and Howard. An examination of the recipients of the Rosenwald Fund fellowships over 20 years reflects an amazing list of Americans who have contributed greatly to our society – psychologists Kenneth B. and Mamie Phipps Clark, attorney Robert Lee Carter, economist Mabel Murphy Smythe, Lincoln University President Horace Mann Bond, academic John Hope Franklin, photographer Gordon Parks, painter Jacob Lawrence, sculptor Elizabeth Catlett, singer Marian Anderson, writer Zora Neale Hurston, author Langston Hughes, writer James Arthur Baldwin, fashion designer Mildred E. Blount – these are just a few of the fellowship recipients whose work shaped our country.

In addition, Mr. Rosenwald improved the lives of those in Chicago, with a special focus on vulnerable individuals including Jewish immigrants and the poor. He used his wealth to support: the Associated Jewish Charities to help the Jewish community with particular attention to Eastern European Jews; the Jane Addams's Hull House to provide critical social and recreational services for recent immigrants; multiple housing initiatives for immigrants and African Americans; multiple hospitals including the Chicago Michael Reese Hospital and the Charity Hospital; the Juvenile Court Committee to assist youth; higher education institutions like the University of Chicago and the Hebrew Union College; the creation of the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago; and the establishment of the Museum of Science and Industry.

Given the breadth of his influence across the nation, we hope that a future Rosenwald Historical Park would include multiple sites, including a visitor's center in Chicago to focus on Rosenwald's overall contributions as well as multiple restored schools in several states. Rosenwald used his organizational philanthropy to address the racial and socioeconomic inequalities in our society and to advance educational opportunity. A Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools National Historic Park would honor and educate our citizens about their role in shaping the history and culture of this nation.

I thank the Subcommittee and ask your leadership to advance this bill to authorize the special resource study of the sites associated with the life and legacy of American philanthropist and business executive, Julius Rosenwald, with a special focus on the Rosenwald Schools.