

Statement of the Honorable Robert G. Stanton
Former Senior Advisor to the Secretary of the U. S. Department of the Interior and
Former Director of the National Park Service
Before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
Committee on Natural Resources
United States House of Representatives

Concerning H.R. 3250

October 29, 2019

Madame Chair and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the views of the Campaign to Create the Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park (Campaign) on H.R. 3250, The Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools Study Act. I am the Vice President of the Campaign Board of Directors.

As a former director of the National Park Service, I know the tremendous power of places to move, to educate, to inform and to inspire the American public about the natural grandeur of our country and the dramatic and sometimes difficult stories of our national life.

I grew up in East Texas during the Jim Crow era. Although I did not attend a Rosenwald School, my parents and other community members had to fight to get better education for me and my contemporaries during the time of "separate but equal" education. I know first-hand the importance to African Americans of access to quality education to future achievements and contributions to our nation.

The Campaign strongly supports passage of H.R. 3250, as does the National Parks Conservation Association and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

This bill directs the Secretary of Interior to conduct a special resource study of the sites associated with the life and legacy of Julius Rosenwald with special emphasis on the Rosenwald Schools. This study is a crucial first step that would determine the national significance, suitability and feasibility of establishing a Julius Rosenwald and Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park as a unit of our great National Parks System.

The son of German Jewish immigrants, Julius Rosenwald used his extensive business skills to help make Sears Roebuck the retailing powerhouse of the early 20th century. In so doing he became fabulously rich and used his great wealth to promote the education and well-being of African Americans and other groups in need.

After becoming a Trustee of Tuskegee Institute, Rosenwald agreed to the request of Booker T. Washington to provide funds for a pilot program that enabled six rural African American communities in Alabama to build schoolhouses. Following through on Washington's vision, Rosenwald helped to fund, in conjunction with the communities and local governments, 5,357

Rosenwald Schools and related buildings between 1912 and 1932. Even in the face of poverty and severe discrimination, families contributed land, materials, labor and funds to offer education to their children.

The Rosenwald Schools helped give one-third of African-American children then in the Jim Crow south a chance at a better life. About 500 schools survive today and remain the focus of that pride and affection. Congressman John Lewis and writer Maya Angelou were among the many graduates of Rosenwald Schools.

In 1917 Rosenwald created the Julius Rosenwald Fund, which made other substantial contributions to improving African American life. The Fund supported early NAACP legal cases that eventually led to the *Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka* case in which the Supreme Court in 1954 outlawed "separate but equal" education. Importantly, starting in 1928, the Rosenwald Fund granted fellowships to talented African Americans in the arts and sciences. A number of Fellows, including historian John Hope Franklin and psychologists Kenneth and Mamie Clark, assisted Thurgood Marshall in preparing the second brief for the *Brown v. Board* case.

Other Rosenwald Fellows included the Nobel Peace Prize winner Ralph Bunche, physician Charles Drew, contralto Marian Anderson, artist Jacob Lawrence, writers Langston Hughes, Ralph Ellison and James Baldwin and historian W.E.B. DuBois. Each contributed in significant ways to the civil rights movement and to the larger American story.

Rosenwald donated to numerous other worthy causes, playing a pivotal role in the creation of the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago, supporting Jane Addams' Hull House and providing the founding donation for Chicago's Museum of Science and Industry.

Julius Rosenwald, and the people in whom he invested, made a powerful contribution to our country. That investment is still paying important dividends.

Creating this park will honor both Julius Rosenwald and the African American children and families who experienced the horrors of the Jim Crow South yet thirsted for education even in the face of formidable odds. It will also ensure that future generations do not forget what they went through and how Julius Rosenwald, in gratitude for his phenomenal success in America, provided crucial support to help them "make a way out of no way."

The vision for the Park is to have a visitor center in Chicago and a small number of Rosenwald Schools distributed among 14 southern states to be selected by the National Park Service.

Established in early 2017, the Campaign sent letters to the State Historic Preservation Officers appointed by the Governors in each of the 15 southern states in which Rosenwald Schools were built between 1912 and 1932, requesting that they submit recommendations of Rosenwald Schools for consideration for possible inclusion in a future National Park. All 15 states responded, with 14 recommending 55 schools and one teacher home. Only four schools were

built in Missouri; three no longer exist and the fourth is bad condition. To date Campaign representatives have visited 35 school facilities in 12 states gathering key information on each of the facilities, and will visit schools in the remaining two states by the end of the year.

Likewise, a Campaign representative has visited a number of sites in Chicago associated with the life and legacy of Julius Rosenwald. Early in 2020 the Campaign will prepare reports on the Rosenwald Schools and sites in Chicago and submit them to the National Park Service to aid in the conduct of the special resource study.

The Campaign also conducted a historic context study of the life and legacy of Julius Rosenwald. The October 2018 study report will also be given to the National Park Service to aid its evaluation process.

During my long career the National Parks System experienced a great deal of growth to include much more of the uniquely American story. The planned Park will be an important enhancement to the System. This story needs to be told, and the National Parks System is where it should be told.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. This concludes my prepared remarks. I will be happy to answer any questions that committee members may have.