

**PULLMAN NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK CELEBRATION
CONGRESSWOMAN ROBIN KELLY REMARKS**

Good morning, everyone. Thank you so much for coming to celebrate this incredible achievement.

I am so grateful to be here to celebrate Illinois's newest National Historical Park – a designation that Pullman has long deserved. The ground we stand on right now holds so much of our national story.

The labor actions that built the middle class and launched our nation into a century of unprecedented prosperity began right here in Pullman. You likely know this remarkable story.

Almost a century and a half ago, George Pullman built his factory and worker housing side-by-side on Chicago's southside. The first factory town of its kind in the country. America was rapidly growing, and the railroad industry needed better rail cars for passengers who, for the first time ever, were travelling across the country by train.

For many years, Pullman set the standard by building state-of-the-art railcars for American travelers. But as business was booming, those production workers and craftsmen began getting shortchanged. Thus began one of the first major labor actions in American history. Pullman workers held out for fair wages and launched the American labor movement.

When these luxurious railcars needed a similar upgrade in their customer service, the Pullman porters came to prominence as exceptional service workers on the trains they staffed. Many of these workers were African American men who had come to Chicago as part of the great migration seeking opportunities and a better life. But the porters also faced unfair treatment, and when they organized for better conditions, they formed the first Black trade union in the country.

The International Brotherhood of Pullman Porters stood up for the rights of African American working men and woman across the country.

Pullman workers refused to waver in the struggle for civil rights. They stood strong in the face of deadly riots and ultimately forced Congress and the President to recognize the monumental contributions that working men and women were making every day. And the events in Pullman ultimately led to the creation of our Labor Day holiday, that we still celebrate to this day.

While practically everyone in this country celebrates Labor Day, Pullman is left out of our popular national story far too often. A few decades back, when many felt Pullman had outlived its usefulness, some Chicago leaders proposed bulldozing the entire town. But as its history reflects, Pullman community leaders and residents – descendants of railcar makers and porters alike – stood together, stood firm, and saved their neighborhood, their heritage, and this unique piece of American history.

That is why it was so important to continue the work of my predecessor, Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr., to properly recognize Pullman as a beacon of our national story.

As many of you know, the road to the National Park designation was long.

President Obama brought us closer to this reality when he designated Pullman as a National Monument in 2015. The history and the legacy of Pullman finally got the national recognition it deserved, but there was still work to be done.

Monument designations can be accomplished by Presidents alone, but that means that they can also be undone by Presidents alone. Only with the help of Congress can a National Park be created and give Pullman the pride of place among our nation's most precious historical sites.

Finally, the 117th Congress made our dreams come true. I was so proud to introduce this bill in the House of Representatives. Seeing this legislation come to life is one of the best parts of getting to serve you in

Congress. This remarkable achievement was made possible only through the cooperation and collaboration of leaders from the public and private sectors and the residents of the neighborhood.

This designation means that families from all over the country will come to Pullman to experience the richness of its history and the vibrancy of its community. Now, more than ever, we must protect and preserve Pullman's legacy.

Pullman exemplifies the rise of the middle class. The laborers that built the foundation of our country's economy fought to be included in the wealth that they created. What they built is the reason why we have the flourishing and prosperous country that we have today.

But just like when the Pullman workers were first fighting for their rights, we are still struggling against forces that seek to make the rich richer while the rest of us get left behind.

Pullman is a constant reminder of the power that we hold in our communities. And that nothing is impossible when we work together for what's right.

This National Historical Park designation will properly honor the historical and cultural significance of Pullman, so that generations to come can learn its important lessons.

There are too many community members who helped make this a reality to name individually but I am so grateful to each and every one of them for their hard work and dedication that made Pullman a National Park.

Finally, I want to personally thank everyone in this room, because everyone here has made meaningful and substantial contributions to Pullman National Park. And last but not least, I want to thank my hard-working staff, including Rick Bryant, who, a dozen years ago, said, "You know, Pullman really should be a national park."

I would especially like to thank my esteemed colleague, Senator Dick Durbin, who led the charge for Pullman in the Senate. I am so pleased that Senator Durbin is here with us today and it is my honor to hand the microphone to him now.