

Rep. Kitchens: Disappointed by DNR no-show

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MADISON, Wis. – Rep. Joel Kitchens (R-Sturgeon Bay) is disappointed that representatives from the Department of Natural Resources declined an invitation to testify at a public hearing regarding his bill that calls for the rehabilitation of the beloved and historic observation tower at Potawatomi State Park in Door County.

“Back in May, some of the top officials with the DNR told a group of us that they were committed to repairing the iconic tower,” Rep. Kitchens said. “Now, they are bringing up unfounded concerns that they didn’t have five months ago and are giving us mixed signals. My constituents drove three hours today to testify in favor of the repairs, but the DNR could not travel three blocks to respond to their concerns.”

Because the 90-year-old Potawatomi Tower is listed on both the State and National Register of Historic Places, the DNR – under state statute 44.41 – is legally obligated to submit a plan for the structure’s long-term preservation and to repair it if at all possible. So far, the DNR is ignoring that legal requirement.

Furthermore, the DNR had a deadline of Sept. 30 to draft a fiscal estimate for Rep. Kitchens’ bill. They turned it in one minute before the public hearing – almost three weeks after it was due.

“Repair of the tower has near unanimous support in my area,” Rep. Kitchens said. “It is discouraging for my constituents to see this issue being politicized by the administration.”

The DNR announced in April of 2018 that the tower would be shut down permanently and deconstructed due to safety concerns. That was after the DNR

found signs of decay and movement in the wooden structural support beams the previous year.

However, Dr. Dan Tingley, executive director of Wood Research and Development, has since determined that the tower's main supports can still be saved using a process he created and that the vast majority of the structure's components are in acceptable condition.