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Sen. Jacque: ‘Preserve our Wisconsin Legacy Act’ vetoed by governor

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MADISON, WI … Our rich Wisconsin historical legacy is at risk after Gov. Evers vetoed stronger protections for public monuments on Friday afternoon, according to State Sen. André Jacque (R-De Pere).

Sen. Jacque said this is common-sense, mainstream legislation that helps remind us – and future generations – of who we are as proud citizens of Wisconsin.

“Protecting our Wisconsin heritage should not be a partisan issue,” Sen. Jacque said. “Condoning the defacing and destroying of these shared symbols of our culture and history risks consigning our Wisconsin Story to the ash bin of history.”

Sen. Jacque said he introduced the legislation with Rep. William Penterman in response to protests in June 2020. During the unrest, protesters destroyed two historical monuments on the Wisconsin Capitol grounds:

- The Hans Christian Heg statue, erected in 1925, honors an immigrant and abolitionist leader who raised a regiment and fought for the Union in the Civil War and was fatally wounded in the Battle of Chickamauga in 1863.

- The Forward statue commemorates Wisconsin being the first state to give women the right to vote. It is a replica erected in 1996 to celebrate the 76th anniversary of the women’s suffrage movement.

“These two statues serve as important monuments to significant events in Wisconsin history, and I have heard from countless outraged constituents,” Sen. Jacque said. “Our shrines should be protected and honored as testaments of the past that provide important lessons for the present.”

The vetoed legislation would have mirrored the penalties already in place for damage to church properties and cemeteries. According to the Wisconsin Professional Police Association’s 2021 statewide survey, 87% of the public agrees that there should be stronger penalties for people that destroy property during protests.

Under current law, it is intended that damage or graffiti to state-owned historical property could be charged as a Class I felony. However, those penalties remain inaccessible due to the failure of the Department of Natural Resources to create a statutorily required registry to give them effect.

The Preserve Our Wisconsin Legacy Act (Assembly Bill 776) specifically defined as a Class I felony damage or graffiti to any structure, plaque, painting, or other commemorative or historically significant monument that is on public property or is maintained by any governing body.

“These structures, along with other statues across the State, serve as important reminders to our history,” Sen. Jacque said. “The Governor’s veto gives license to destroy public property that honors our ideals of democracy, equality, and human freedom.”

Senator André Jacque represents Northeast Wisconsin’s First Senate District, consisting of Door and Kewaunee Counties and portions of Brown, Calumet, Manitowoc, and Outagamie counties.