

Sen. Jacque: Stall on preserving Potawatomi Tower continues

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MADISON... Gov. Evers continued his “stall and blame” strategy for his failure to repair, restore, and preserve the historic 90-year-old Potawatomi State Park Observation Tower, State Sen. André Jacque (R-De Pere) said today.

“The Governor could have greenlit an effective and relatively inexpensive repair today to instantly give peace of mind to Wisconsinites that the tower would be preserved for decades to come. Instead there is disappointment that the Governor has doubled down on a strategy that leaves demolition of the historically significant structure squarely on the table, and most likely at the center of the administration’s plans, given their past statements- dealing a huge blow to local tourism as well,” Sen. Jacque said. “There is absolutely nothing new in the Governor’s words today. This was just more of the same stall and blame to get past the election and avoid doing a historical preservation project that the Evers administration has demonstrated time and time again that it has no interest in doing.”

“We will feel that the Governor and his administration are supportive of historic preservation if we see in the immediate future funds to do the stabilization of the structure,” said Kelly Catarozoli, board member of the Sturgeon Bay Historical Society Foundation. “If not, historic preservation is not a priority for this project.”

Sen. Jacque said there is no reason to wait until the next state budget over a year from now.

“Money is not and never has been an issue,” said Sen. Jacque, a member of the State Building Commission. “The current state budget, which the Governor signed last summer, includes over \$200 million for maintenance projects for state facilities. They have the money right now to repair the Tower.”

Sen. Jacque said Gov. Evers also has sole authority over federal ARPA money.

“As he has made abundantly clear over and over, the Governor does not need legislative approval to spend these federal funds,” Sen. Jacque said. “But Gov. Evers has yet to include the Potawatomi Tower on his tour across the state distributing federal ARPA money, and he did not bring a check with him today to repair it.”

The iconic tower was targeted for demolition by the DNR in 2018 after the agency claimed that the structure, which is now listed on both state and federal historic registries, was unsafe and would require a costly rebuild, rather than a much less expensive repair. After repeated rejections of Sen. Jacque’s request to meet with DNR Secretary Preston Cole to discuss the tower and urge reconsideration, a meeting was finally allowed months later where the DNR indicated a willingness to support repair, instructing Sen. Jacque to submit the plans commissioned by the Sturgeon Bay Historical Society Foundation to Building Commission staff. However, the DNR subsequently withdrew its backing of the stamped architectural plans for Potawatomi Tower repair from a timber repair expert – plans consistent with the similar Mountain Park Watchtower repair authorized on Door County’s Washington Island by the town government just this past year.

Earlier this month, the administration announced a fifth study of the tower, the latest delay in Evers’ three-plus years of stalling the project.

“Actions speak louder than words,” Sen. Jacque said. “Instead of listening to the people of Door County and preserving the historic Tower, the Evers Administration has wasted over three years and counting shifting blame for its own failure to restore this iconic landmark.”