

# Sen. Jacque, Rep. Kitchens: Deliver another big win for Potawatomi Tower preservation

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MADISON... The Potawatomi State Park Observation Tower is a big step closer to reopening. The Legislature's budget committee last night approved the \$500,000 requested by two area lawmakers to preserve the existing Tower, after rejecting an expensive rebuild proposed by Gov. Evers that would have cost over ten times as much and virtually destroyed the historic structure.

State Sen. André Jacque and State Rep. Joel Kitchens said they hoped the Governor, who proposed a costly \$6 million reconstruction project, would not veto the Tower preservation initiative when the 2023-25 budget reaches his desk later this month.

"The Tower carries historic significance as the first purpose-built recreational observation tower constructed in a Wisconsin State Park, State Forest, or State Recreational Area," Sen. Jacque said. "Gov. Evers' over-priced and unnecessary rebuild would essentially tear down this beloved and historic structure."

"I am grateful the Finance Committee is listening to the will of the people," Kitchens said, "A recent study proved Potawatomi Tower is still repairable. Let's get it done."

Last March, in response to local pressure and a written request from Sen. Jacque and Rep. Kitchens, the Evers administration finally yielded to public opinion and agreed to an emergency stabilization project to preserve this treasured landmark for future generations. The Governor directed state officials to utilize the emergency repair funding under Wis. Stats. 16.855(16)(b)2 State Building Commission procedures already available for that purpose, for projects with expedited timelines up to a cost of up to \$500,000.

“Since taking office, the Evers administration had ignored pleas from local citizen groups and government officials to simply repair and stabilize the Tower before it succumbed to the elements and fell over,” Sen. Jacque said. “I’m glad the Governor switched course, but the years of willful neglect risked destroying a vital piece of our area’s livelihood and heritage.”

“It was long overdue, but I hope the emergency stabilization project signals a change of heart on the part of Gov. Evers to save this beloved and historic Tower,” Rep. Kitchens said, “Our budget proposal reflects the will of area residents, local organizations, and resolutions issued by local governments to make the Tower safe for people to enjoy as soon as possible.”

Ninety-four percent of 647 respondents wish to restore the historic Tower, according to a survey conducted earlier this year by the Sturgeon Bay Historical Society and Potawatomi Park Tower Alliance.

The Legislature’s Joint Finance Committee included a Jacque-Kitchens amendment allocating an additional \$500,000 in the 2023-25 state budget to complete repairs on the existing Tower. The budget must be approved by the Senate and Assembly and signed by the Governor to enact this Tower preservation project.