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Contact: Sen. André Jacque

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(608) 266-3512

SEN. JACQUE'S 'PRESERVE OUR WISCONSIN LEGACY ACT' CLEARS SENATE

Proposed legislation would protect state historical monuments and the ideals for which they stand

MADISON, WI ... Our rich Wisconsin historical legacy would receive stronger protections under tougher penalties approved by the State Senate today for defacing public monuments, according to State Sen. André Jacque (R-De Pere).

Sen. Jacque, who authored the measure with Rep. William Penterman, 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. “Defacing and destroying 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 in response to protests in June 2020. During the unrest, protesters destroyed 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.
- The Wisconsin Law Enforcement Memorial has been vandalized at least a half dozen times, as recently as last month. In 2020, sledgehammer damage required significant repair and replacement.

“This bill is not just about protecting physical structures,” Sen. Jacque said. “It is about protecting the ideals signified by these structures, which are priceless.”

Under current law, 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 would establish Class I felony penalties for damaging any historically significant monument.

Sen. Jacque said the Governor vetoed similar legislation last session despite bi-partisan support. 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, and the legislation has been formally supported by the Wisconsin District Attorneys’ Association and Wisconsin Professional Police Association.

“These structures, along with other statues across the state, serve as important reminders to our history,” Sen. Jacque said. “Giving license to destroy public properties that honor our ideals of democracy, equality, and human freedom fails the commonsense test.”

The Preserve Our Wisconsin Legacy Act ([Senate Bill 558](#)) now moves to the State Assembly and must be signed by the Governor to become law.

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.