

# State to lend Patriots Point \$9.2M to save USS Laffey

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State Treasurer Converse Chellis announced today that the state will lend \$9.2 million to Patriots Point for repairs to the USS Laffey, a destroyer with significant rust damage that threatens to sink it.

Chellis announced the loan after touring the ship, including the rusted bottom, which he said felt like a sponge. The destroyer's hull has developed several holes since fall, and although they were patched, the ship remains closed to the public.

The Laffey repairs are among \$50 million in repairs needed for the historic ships at the Naval and Maritime Museum in Mount Pleasant, one of the state's high-profile tourist attractions. Patriots Point does not receive state or federal money for operations or maintenance, and officials have in recent months asked state and federal lawmakers for help.

Patriots Point officials are seeking \$20 million from next year's federal budget, which would allow them to repay the state loan, said Dick Trammell, interim executive director. U.S. Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., has submitted that request to Congress, Trammell said.

The \$9.2 million was budgeted for other state capital improvement projects but will not be needed until 2010, and Patriots Point is to have repaid the loan by then, Chellis said.

After spending about 45 minutes touring the Laffey and hearing stories about its glory days from former crew members, Chellis pulled out a



cell phone and called two other members of the state Budget and Control Board, Rep. Dan Cooper and Sen. Hugh Leatherman.

"I hope I can count on you at the Budget and Control Board meeting," Chellis told one lawmaker. "It's unbelievable what they're working with here."

Chellis said he had not seen the ship damage and wanted to view it for himself before signing off on the loan.

He said the two lawmakers pledged their votes. With Chellis' support, the measure has the three votes it needs to pass the five-member board, which is scheduled to meet next on June 29.

Chellis said he would call Gov. Mark Sanford and Comptroller Richard Eckstrom, the board's other two members, and seek their support as well.

Leatherman, who was not at Patriots Point today, said he does plan to support the measure. He supported the loan request when it came before the Joint Bond Review Committee, which he chairs, last week, he said.

Leatherman said his one condition was that Patriots Point not return at a later point asking that the loan be forgiven. He said Patriots Point agreed to that.

Cooper was not immediately available for comment.

Speaking to reporters, Chellis said the Laffey, known as "the ship that would not die," is more than just a ship. "It is a monument to a generation that defended liberty," he said.

The 65-year-old destroyer fought in World War II and the Korean War. It was decommissioned in 1975 and added to Patriots Point in 1981.

The Laffey would likely be moved to a dry dock for repairs in August or September, depending on when the loan is approved, Trammell said.

Funding for repairs is not the only challenge facing Patriots Point. The attraction has seen its visitor count wane in the past several years, and revenue along with it.

The Patriots Point Development Authority is in the process of developing a master plan to utilize additional acreage at the site, which could bring in new lease revenue.

Trammell said new revenue could be put into an interest-bearing fund to help pay for maintenance.

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I am so happy for Sonny Walker, President of the Laffey Association, and all others that served aboard this ship. They so desperately fought for our country and then a second time to save their ship!! Thanks SC State Treasure Chellis and thank you Governor Sanford!

Mary Travis-Ross

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An Article by the Charleston Regional Business Journal - Charleston, SC. – added June 14, 2009 by Jake Jaccard, Web Yeoman, USS Hancock CV/CVA-19 Memorial – [www.usshancockcv19.com](http://www.usshancockcv19.com)