

Assembly backs bill to help Plymouth-based cheese manufacturer expand

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The Assembly today unanimously passed a bill to help Plymouth-based Masters Gallery Foods Inc. build a \$30 million packaging and distribution facility in the village of Oostburg.

The cheese producer aims to create 120 jobs at the planned 150,000-square-foot facility within the next two to three years, with the possibility of adding more in the future.

The bill allows Oostburg to increase its tax incremental district limit from 12 percent of equalized property value to 15 percent.

While he supported the bill, Rep. Tod Ohnstad, D-Kenosha, called for the limit to be raised to 15 percent statewide.

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He noted a bill to do just that passed the Committee on Ways and Means last session, but was not brought up for a vote in the Assembly.

Ohnstad read a list of dozens of communities near the 12 percent limit and said economic development shouldn't be done on a "piecemeal basis."

Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, used the occasion to tout economic progress the state has made and the state's improved financial picture. Assembly Minority Leader Peter Barca, D-Kenosha, shot back that the state's economic picture isn't as "rosy" as Vos portrayed it and called on colleagues to pass Dem bills aimed at helping the middle class and boosting entrepreneurship in the state.

The Assembly shot down on a party-line vote a motion from Rep. Fred Kessler, D-Milwaukee, to withdraw from committee a resolution to prevent the Assembly Committee on Organization from hiring outside counsel in the state's legislative redistricting case.

Dems have objected to the GOP' plan to hire outside counsel because it does not include a cap on fees the attorneys can charge.

Because of Assembly rules, Kessler was not allowed to speak on the motion.

"So I am, today, the Elizabeth Warren of the State Assembly," Kessler said, referencing a U.S. Senate move to bar U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Warren from debating the nomination of U.S. Sen. Jeff Sessions for attorney general.

Warren was charged with violating U.S. Senate rules regarding impugning a fellow senator after she read a portion of civil rights icon Coretta Scott King's 1986 letter opposing Sessions's nomination for a federal judgeship.

The Assembly also voted to approve a series of rules changes, among them the elimination of a rule that allowed members to be considered present at committee meetings if they participated via phone or other two-way forms of audiovisual communication.

The measure passed with 88 votes, with nine Democrats in opposition and two members not present for the vote.

The only discussion on the resolution was when Gary Hebl, D-Sun Prairie, asked Vos to explain the need for the resolution in the interest of transparency.

Vos briefly explained the rule changes said they were agreed on by Dem leaders.