

# Katrina Shankland: Foxconn deal needs improvements to protect workers, taxpayers, and our natural resources

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The Foxconn announcement served as a recognition of what we all know: that Wisconsin workers are among the best in the nation, if not the world. We're proud to be a state of hard-working, humble people who are kind to our neighbors (unless it's Sunday and they're Bears fans).

With the State Assembly set to take up special legislation for Foxconn, it's important to weigh the risks and rewards. In exchange for up to 13,000 jobs and a \$10 billion investment in the new facility, Wisconsin taxpayers would make cash payments to the manufacturing company to the tune of nearly \$3 billion over 15 years. In those 15 years, the state would pay out \$1 billion more than we would gain from new construction, payroll, and economic activity.

That's a billion dollars that could go to our roads, schools, and healthcare. The state already has a \$1 billion transportation deficit, and the next budget is on track to add to that deficit. The nonpartisan Legislative Fiscal Bureau projects that the state will not break even on Foxconn until 2043 - assuming that Foxconn creates 13,000 jobs and all of those jobs go to Wisconsin workers. Can Foxconn guarantee that they'll create and retain those jobs and still be manufacturing LCD panels in 2043? We can't know for sure, because Foxconn didn't show up to the public hearing.

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New jobs are exciting, but we must be prudent, measured, and responsible as we weigh this decision. We still don't know where the Foxconn facility will be placed, but it's likely it will be near Kenosha or Racine. That's why it's especially important to ensure that the jobs go to Wisconsin workers – our taxpayers shouldn't be subsidizing Illinois workers. The Foxconn bill says that the state can recoup the money if the deal goes south, but clawbacks are not mandatory. The bill exempts Foxconn from an environmental impact statement and allows the company to bypass the permitting process for filling and redirecting waterways and wetlands. It does not require Foxconn to pay its workers a living wage.

If taxpayer money is going to be spent, then those jobs should go to Wisconsin workers first. If we're going to spend \$3 billion in state money on a foreign company, then there must be ironclad clawbacks in place so taxpayers aren't on the hook for outsourced or automated jobs. If a business is going to come here, then it should get the same permits and follow the same process that every other business in Wisconsin does. If we're using state resources, then we should hire veterans, ensure fair wages and labor protections, and require audits and oversight of your hard-earned tax dollars. These protections shouldn't be partisan – they're common sense.

But when the Assembly committee took up the Foxconn bill, every Democratic legislator voted for these amendments and every Republican voted against them. I want to work with my colleagues to protect workers, taxpayers, and our natural resources – this shouldn't be a zero sum game. But like so much in the legislature, it's deal or no deal, with no room for compromise. We can do better than this.

As a member of the budget committee, I've requested a second public hearing on the bill so we can best evaluate the fiscal impact of the Foxconn project and how it will affect our state budget for years to come. At a minimum, this legislation needs additional public scrutiny and more time for legislators to work together to improve the deal. Legislators and the governor should leave their splashy campaign ads at the door – this issue will affect our future so greatly, it's time to put politics aside.

— *Shankland, D-Stevens Point, represents the 71st Assembly District in Portage County and serves on the legislature's Joint Committee on Finance.*