

Senate approves Foxconn bill 20-13, with Cowles voting against it

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The state Senate Tuesday approved 20-13 an amended \$3 billion incentive package for the Taiwanese tech company Foxconn, with GOP Sen. Robert Cowles opposing it and Dem Bob Wirch voting for the proposal.

Democrats called it a corporate giveaway to a foreign company, slamming projections that the state wouldn't break even until fiscal year 2042-43 if Foxconn meets its promise to create 13,000 jobs, the vast majority filled by Wisconsin residents, and build its pledged \$10 billion facility in southeastern Wisconsin.

But Republicans hailed it as a "transformational" deal that would make Wisconsin a leader in high-tech manufacturing — with spillover effects across the state and job opportunities for Wisconsin residents.

In a statement, Gov. Scott Walker thanked the Senate for supporting the bill and "opening the door to 13,000 good-paying, family-supporting jobs."

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"This project will benefit our entire state with tens of thousands of direct, indirect and construction jobs," he said. "This bill is an amazing win for the people of Wisconsin!"

Foxconn also said in a statement that it "eagerly await[s] being able to take the next steps in this partnership and make Wisconsin a center of worldwide high-tech manufacturing."

Cowles had earlier voted against an amendment from Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald, R-Juneau, relating to the appeals process for any court decisions on Foxconn.

Cowles said in a statement that his decision wasn't easy, but the incentives for Foxconn "were too steep, both financially and statutorily" and that there were too many uncertainties for him to back the bill.

"I understand that more specific details will arise in contractual negotiations, and I trust that this administration and the Legislature will work vigorously to keep the Foxconn incentive payments accountable and transparent," he said. "Unfortunately at this time, I was unable to support this specific legislation."

Fitzgerald told reporters after the vote that Republicans were able to add an amendment from Cowles strengthening the oversight process over how WEDC verifies tax credits. Cowles is the co-chair of the Legislative Audit Committee.

But he also said Cowles had offered two other amendments that Senate Republicans declined to add.

Wirch, D-Somers, represents the southeast Wisconsin area, where Foxconn plans on building a \$10 billion facility. He told WisPolitics.com after the vote that he supported the amendments from his Dem colleagues to "improve the deal."

"But the bottom line was we needed those manufacturing jobs in Wisconsin and in particular southeastern Wisconsin," he said.

Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling, D-La Crosse, said Republicans are "siding with a foreign corporation vs. our hard-working Wisconsinites," noting that GOP lawmakers removed from the budget a proposed increase in sparsity aid for school districts.

"The contrast could not be more telling today," she said.

Fitzgerald acknowledged before the vote that there's "some risk" in approving the deal, but that the state's on a timeline to negotiate the contract with Foxconn. The MOU the Walker administration reached with the company called for the package to be through the Legislature and signed by Sept. 20. Fitzgerald said he didn't quite understand the magnitude of the deal at first, but quickly realized it would transform the southeast Wisconsin area.

"I'm glad this bill is before us," he said. "I think it's going to overwhelm all of us when we see the end product."

This post has been updated with more details.