

Legislature to call extraordinary session on Kimberly-Clark bill after November election

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Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald announced Tuesday morning the Legislature will call an extraordinary session Nov. 12 for a public hearing in the Senate on an incentive package for Kimberly-Clark with plans for a floor vote later next month.

The package, which includes Foxconn-like incentives that would help keep open a plant in the Fox Valley, cleared the Assembly in February. But it has bogged down in the Senate amid concerns over the cost to taxpayers, as well as the precedent it would set to offer such significant incentives to retain jobs.

Fitzgerald's statement this morning didn't indicate whether he had the 17 votes needed to pass the package as currently drafted. Two members of his caucus have already publicly expressed opposition to the plan. With an 18-15 majority, that means Fitzgerald would need every remaining Republican and at least one Dem to pass the bill.

Senate Minority Leader Jennifer Shilling, D-La Crosse, has said in recent weeks GOP backers of the package have not asked her for Dem votes to support the bill. She said Tuesday if Republicans were serious about helping workers in the Fox Valley, they'd calling a hearing and vote now, not after the election.

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"Sen. (Roger) Roth already killed the Kimberly-Clark bill once. This latest delay tactic proves he's more focused on protecting his own job than the workers he is supposed to be representing," Shilling said, taking a swipe at the Appleton Republican who's the bill's main backer in the Senate.

Roth called the planned extraordinary session “great news,” while Gov. Scott Walker, who backs the package, called the development a “major step forward” in keeping the plant open.

“My message to Kimberly-Clark employees is simple: we are fighting for you. We are working together to keep your jobs in Wisconsin,” Walker said.

Kimberly-Clark officials had set a Sept. 30 deadline for lawmakers to act on the package as the company weighed a final decision on whether to keep open a plant in the Fox Valley. But state and company officials continued to meet through the weekend as some backers of the package urged the company to give lawmakers until after the Nov. 6 election to act.

The bill the Assembly passed included a boost in tax credits for job retention to 17 percent, up from the current 7 percent. Kimberly-Clark would also get refundable tax credits for 15 percent of capital expenditures, up from the typical 10 percent, over a five-year period. The company would also get a five-year sales tax exemption on those expenditures.

Fitzgerald’s office said the plan is to proceed on the bill in its current form.