

Walker wants K-C deal to be his legacy, others knock deal

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Gov. Scott Walker says he wants the new deal with Kimberly-Clark — one of the last actions he'll take in the waning days of his administration — to be his legacy.

The gov Thursday joined Kimberly-Clark officials and state lawmakers to announce the up to \$28 million incentive package to keep open the Cold Spring facility in Fox Crossing. The news came nearly a year after the company initially announced the plant, as well as another in the area, would be closed.

Others today questioned directing taxpayer dollars to an international company that reported an operating profit of almost \$3.3 billion in 2017. Meanwhile, Gov.-elect Tony Evers didn't directly address the details of the incentive package. But he used the announcement to knock the extraordinary session bills Republicans approved last week and accused Republicans of playing "politics with the issue for months, leaving Kimberly-Clark workers and their families in the dark and uncertain about their futures."

But Walker, speaking at a news conference at the Fox Valley plant Thursday afternoon, described his efforts this way: to "protect these kind of jobs, not as a handout."

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"To me, if there was any talk about a legacy, I want this to be my legacy," he said.

The deal comes after a bill that would offer the company tax incentives to keep open the plant stalled in the Senate, after clearing the Assembly in February. In the days since, Walker has repeatedly stated his commitment to saving the 388 jobs remaining at the facility.

Referencing his pledge to keep the facility open, Walker noted he's told reporters this week he'll work til the end of his term to pull together an agreement.

"I don't care if it's the last thing they do," he said. "I don't care if they're dragging me down the hall, we're going to find some way to save the jobs at Kimberly-Clark, because it's just that important."

On the same day Walker joined others in announcing the Cold Spring plant will stay open, Kimberly-Clark told employees at a Conway, Ark., facility that that it will close no later than 2021. The plant, which now has 344 employees, made similar products to those produced at Cold Spring.

"This difficult decision was made after the company agreed to the terms of an incentive agreement through the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation that, as well as negotiated terms with the union, will enable the company's Cold Spring facility in Wisconsin to remain open," a Kimberly-Clark spokesman said.

The deal creates a new enterprise zone without legislative approval, an option that would be stripped from the gov under the extraordinary session bills now on Walker's desk.

Under current law, WEDC can designate up to 30 enterprise zones under its tax credit program, and it has designated 26, according to the Legislative Fiscal Bureau. The agency can now make those designations without review by any standing committee of the Legislature.

But one of the extraordinary session bills Republicans approved last week would require approval from Joint Finance for the creation of a new one. WEDC would first have to notify JFC that it planned to designate a new enterprise zone, and the designation would be submitted to the committee under the 14-day passive review process.

The bill also would eliminate the current limit of 30 enterprise zones.

Evers cited the new Kimberly-Clark deal in urging Walker to veto the lame-duck legislation, saying "the governor of our state shouldn't be hamstrung when it comes to economic development."

A WEDC spokesman said the agency's Board of Directors met Wednesday to approve the contract, clearing the way for WEDC to finalize negotiations later that

day. The final agreement was then signed by WEDC Secretary and CEO Mark Hogan as well as an official from the company. The deal, spokesman Mark Maley said, doesn't need additional approval from the Board of Directors, governor or Legislature to take effect.