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**WEDC worked behind the scenes to save Kimberly-Clark jobs**

The state jobs agency was operating on a dual track with Kimberly-Clark to keep its options open for saving a Fox Valley plant, even as Gov. Scott Walker said a legislative incentive package was the only solution.

WEDC had Kimberly-Clark in mid-October file an application that opened the door to the agency negotiating what ultimately became a five-year deal worth up to $28 million to keep open a plant in the Fox Valley, obtained through the open records law show.

Wisconsin Economic Development Corp. CEO Mark Hogan told WisPolitics.com last month that company officials remained focused on the up to $115 million, 15-year incentive deal, even as Kimberly-Clark filed the application. But he began laying the groundwork for a fallback plan in case the legislation failed.

“You have to understand that this was my decision; this was the route we were going to take internally,” Hogan said in the interview.

But during that time, Walker was publicly adamant that AB 963, the bill that cleared the Assembly in February but failed in the Senate, was the only way to save the 388 jobs at the Cold Spring plant in Fox Crossing.

“There is no long-term solution other than the bill that will save these jobs,” he tweeted on Nov. 15, the day after the Joint Finance Committee held a public hearing on the legislation. “Leadership requires action and failure to act will lead to losing hundreds of really good paying jobs at Kimberly-Clark.”

WEDC spokesman Mark Maley said Hogan told Walker about the agency’s “parallel track” approach to Kimberly-Clark but didn’t inform legislators.

That includes Senate President Roger Roth, who co-authored the bill. A spokeswoman for Roth, whose district includes the plant, said the Appleton Republican was unaware of Kimberly-Clark’s Oct. 10 submission of application materials to WEDC.

Spokeswoman Angela Roidt said in late December Roth knew WEDC and Kimberly-Clark “had been in contact with each other through the entire process,” though he didn’t know “any particulars.”

The documents WisPolitics.com obtained show Kimberly-Clark formally submitted application materials for tax credits to WEDC on Oct. 10, about a week after Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald said he’d call for an extraordinary session on the incentive package after the election.

Hogan said he asked the company to submit its application materials, noting that Kimberly-Clark would need to submit the information to the agency regardless of whether the bill passed in order to draft a contract.

Still, he repeatedly stressed that Kimberly-Clark continued prioritizing the passage of the bill.

“That was my desire. It was not what the company asked for,” he said. “Even though I kept pushing it because I wanted to be able to put something in front of them, they continued to pursue the legislative route.”

Earlier in the interview, he said: “I had said to (Kimberly-Clark) sometime after Sept. 30 (that) I’m going to underwrite this both ways so if the Legislature doesn’t pass the bill for whatever reason, that we would put a statutory award in front of them.”

Conversations between the agency and the company, Hogan added, didn’t start to “ramp up” until after the Nov. 14 public hearing. That’s when GOP Sen. Luther Olsen asked a series of pointed questions that added to doubts about the bill’s prospects in the state Senate. Still, Hogan said the company continued to remain focused on the bill.

Kimberly-Clark spokesman Chris Wyse also stressed the company’s efforts were “fully behind” the legislative incentive package. And he agreed it wasn’t until later in the fall — “after it became abundantly clear” that AB 963 wouldn’t pass the Senate — that discussions with WEDC “got moving.”

Maley noted it’s rare for an agency-backed program to require legislation, adding that Foxconn and the Kimberly-Clark incentive package were the only projects that would have required special legislation in WEDC’s history.

That means, he said, there’s no “typical” time a potential receiving company waiting on a legislative deal submits application materials to WEDC.

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