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*The Capitol Report for the Week of Sept. 6, 2018*

**Walker, WEDC criticize Evers' plan for jobs agency**

Even before Foxconn, the WEDC has been controversial.

Gov. Scott Walker and majority Republicans created the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation to replace the old Commerce Department. They pitched the new quasi-public agency as a more efficient way to spur economic development.

But WEDC in its early years was dogged by controversy. Things settled down under Mark Hogan, the current CEO, but then Foxconn and a huge public subsidy made WEDC a target once again.

The latest broadside comes from Democratic gubernatorial hopeful Tony Evers, who says he would eliminate WEDC and replace it with a new state jobs agency "that won't give away $4.5 billion to a foreign corporation without reading the fine print."

Evers in a statement Aug. 30 knocked the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation as an agency that's been a "black eye for Wisconsin," as he called for a replacement that is accountable to taxpayers and would invest in "Main Street" businesses and startups.

But the state schools superintendent's plan drew fire from Gov. Scott Walker's campaign and WEDC officials, who argued it lacks specifics and would hurt the state's economy.

Evers' comments came after the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel reported that Evers previously told the publication he would support having no state jobs agency and would instead leave economic development up to local and regional organizations.

His campaign's website as of midday Aug. 30 reflected that position. It made no mention of replacing the WEDC, and it says Evers as governor would disband the agency and "return the majority of economic development dollars to local communities and regional organizations."

Evers in his statement pledged to work with the Legislature and regional economic development agencies, as well as local businesses to replace WEDC. Still, he didn’t outline his vision for what a new state jobs agency would look like.

Walker campaign spokesman Austin Altenburg knocked Evers for "backpedaling" on his original plan.

"Within hours of touting a plan that would stifle economic development in Wisconsin, Tony Evers is once again backpedaling and failing to tell the truth about his radical ideas," he said. "Any plan to blow up an organization dedicated to job creation is foolish and would both have a chilling effect on our economy and hurt hard-working families."

But campaign spokesman Britt Cudaback said Evers' position hasn't changed.

"Tony has wanted to disband the WEDC," Cudaback said. "Tony's plan is and has always been to replace the WEDC with an economic development agency, and that he wants to prioritize funding to go to regional economic centers and development that will invest in Main Street businesses and startups."

Meanwhile, Democratic candidate for lieutenant governor Mandela Barnes said at a news conference he would support disbanding WEDC and bringing back the old Department of Commerce, which Walker got rid of after taking office in 2011.

"It's not like we want to do away with the department and do nothing," Barnes told reporters, though he noted he couldn't speak for Evers' position. "Of course we want to generate economic activity in the state, but it has to be done right."

Hogan, secretary and CEO of the economic development agency, said many of the problems are from its early years.

"And (the agency) didn't have the type of infrastructure that was required to move forward and really become a fully functioning, operating entity," Hogan said in other media reports.

Hogan said Evers' proposal also offers little details.

"He doesn't have an idea as to what could be done differently to make it better," Hogan said. "We look at it all the time. We have internal committees that look at things all the time as to ways that we can improve."

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