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Walker at bill signing says right-to-work shows Wisconsin 'open for business'

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BROWN DEER - Gov. Scott Walker touted right-to-work for sending a powerful message that "being open for business is more than just a slogan."

Walker's signature on the bill Monday made Wisconsin the 25th state to prohibit requiring employees pay union dues as a condition of employment. In doing so, Walker used a hypothetical example of who right-to-work would help, describing a family with the father working at a factory and the mother as a nurse in a local community hospital. With two kids, they're struggling to make ends meet, he said.

"This is one more tool helping us build the kind of economy that will help a family like that here and across the state of Wisconsin," Walker said.

Walker repeatedly said during last year's campaign that he did not want lawmakers to take up right-to-work this session. He also continued to argue earlier this year taking up the bill would be a distraction from his priorities, such as the budget and education reform. But he has embraced the bill in recent weeks, and Walker today gave credit for the bill to lawmakers.

"With Act 10, I led on this," Walker said, flanked by GOP lawmakers. "In this case, our leaders here led. They said, 'We have the votes' and then I said, 'Yes.'"

Walker did not take questions from reporters after the event, with an aide citing a "tight schedule."

During his speech, the gov said he would be "heading back to the state Capitol to do some things." A Walker spokeswoman said the gov did not have any other public events, but she did not respond to an email seeking details of his schedule.

Following the bill signing, Walker chatted with GOP lawmakers. After about 15 minutes, reporters called out asking if he would answer a few questions, but an aide said he was too busy.

Walker signed the bill at a Badger Meter plant that produces devices that measure and control the flow of liquids.

Company President and CEO Rich Meeusen has cited right-to-work as a key factor in deciding to add 30 to 50 jobs at the plant and said the positions will be posted shortly after new equipment is installed in August.

Meeusen told those gathered that his company has eight production facilities, four of which are in the U.S. He said all of the others are in right-to-work areas, and the Wisconsin plant now can add new jobs with right-to-work in place. He noted the company has sent much of its production during the past 10 years to other states and Mexico, but now that right-to-work is law, there is an opportunity "to reverse that trend."

He told reporters he doesn't talk to the unions currently representing Badger Meter employees but said he "assumes they're not happy about this bill." But Meeusen said he believes he will be better able to attract new employees now that they know they won't be forced to pay union dues, and he stressed that pay and benefits will not be reduced as a result of the new law.

Opponents continued to slam the legislation.

President Obama said in the statement late yesterday it is inexcusable that there has been a "sustained, coordinated assault on unions, led by powerful interests and their allies in government."

The Wisconsin AFL-CIO called the bill-signing part of Walker's "crusade on the hard-working, middle-class families of Wisconsin."

"From refusing to expand BadgerCare for the sick, to enacting tax cuts for the rich, gutting education and eroding collective bargaining rights -- Gov. Walker has shown a true disregard for Wisconsin families who work hard every day to put food on the table and a roof over their head," said Phil Neuenfeldt, president of the Wisconsin AFL-CIO. "How can anyone who isn't a special interest bankrolling politicians' campaigns get ahead in Scott Walker's Wisconsin?"

-- *By Kay Nolan*
For WisPolitics.com

Listen to Walker's speech: <http://wispolitics.com/1006/150309walkerRTW.mp3>

See more reaction in the press release section:
<http://www.wispolitics.com/index.html?Content=21>