

Kenosha casino backers keep pressure on Walker

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Menominee Tribe Vice Chair Crystal Chapman-Chevalier joins with union workers and a bipartisan group of state lawmakers to urge Gov. Scott Walker to reconsider his rejection of a Kenosha casino on Thursday in Madison. (Photo: Scott Bauer/AP)

MADISON — Members of the Menominee Tribe, southeastern Wisconsin union workers and a bipartisan group of state lawmakers came together Thursday to urge Gov. Scott Walker to reconsider his rejection of a proposed new casino in Kenosha.

Walker turned down the tribe's proposal last week and reiterated on Wednesday that he would not change his mind. Even so, those who have worked years on the \$800 million casino project said are not willing to give up until the Feb. 19 deadline set by the U.S. Bureau of Indian Affairs for a decision.

"It is not too late," said Crystal Chapman-Chevalier, vice chair of the poverty-stricken Menominee Tribe. She said the opportunity to create more than 10,000 new jobs presented a "once-in-a-lifetime economic opportunity" for the tribe and the state that Walker couldn't walk away from in good faith.

But Walker, who is considering running for president in 2016 and faces a \$2 billion state budget shortfall, said approving the casino put Wisconsin at risk of losing hundreds of millions of dollars if the Forest County Potawatomi Tribe successfully withheld payments. That tribe vehemently opposed the project out of fears it would cut into profits of its lucrative Milwaukee casino, the state's largest, and last year withheld a \$25 million payment to the state when it appeared the Kenosha casino may be approved.

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"I can't in good faith look at the people of the state and say that I can put \$100 million out of the budget now and over the next few months and even more in the future," Walker said Wednesday.

Walker said after nearly a year and a half of working to reach a deal, he couldn't find one that wouldn't put hundreds of millions of dollars at risk.

But casino advocates renewed their argument Thursday that there was no risk of losing any money because the Menominee promised to cover any Potawatomi losses and even put up a \$250 million bond to protect the state. Chapman-Chevalier hinted that the tribe may file a lawsuit over Walker's decision, saying that it was exploring all of its legal options.

Rep. Samantha Kerkman, R-Salem, joined with four Democrats from the region to ask Walker to change his mind. Ten lawmakers, including Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, R-Rochester, sent Walker a letter this week urging approval of the project.

Local union workers who stood to work on building the casino and entertainment complex, which was to include a Hard Rock Cafe, joined with the politicians and tribal members at the news conference.

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