

## LOCAL

# Spartanburg fights back to keep Oshkosh Defense postal fleet project. Here's what we know.

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A territorial war has erupted between South Carolina and Wisconsin over a \$155 million economic project that promises 1,000 jobs — a war that Spartanburg may have already won.

At issue is a 10-year, multi-billion-dollar contract awarded by the U.S. Postal Service last February to Wisconsin-based Oshkosh Defense to produce its Next Generation Delivery Vehicle (NGDV) fleet of up to 165,000 postal vehicles.

It involves politics, labor costs, climate concerns and whether a company can do business where it chooses, according to Spartanburg County Councilman David Britt, chairman of the county's economic development committee.

"This is more than just Spartanburg and these thousand jobs," Britt said. "This is about freedom and democracy."

## Oshkosh Defense picks Spartanburg

Last June, Oshkosh Defense chose Spartanburg where it would invest \$155 million and create more than 1,000 jobs at the former 900,000-square-foot Rite Aid distribution

center at Flatwood Industrial Park. Production is expected to begin in the summer of 2023.

**The full story:** Gloves off: Spartanburg fights to keep Oshkosh Defense postal fleet project, 1,000 jobs

Since then, there has been mounting pressure from Wisconsin officials and the union in Oshkosh to move the project from Spartanburg back to Wisconsin, home to Oshkosh for more than 100 years.

"We're not fighting to take jobs from anyone else; we're fighting to restore jobs that our community has lost," United Auto Workers Local 578 President Bob Lynk said. "Workers in Oshkosh built this company and its reputation over decades, and now we want the company to invest back in us."

## Fighting words

To fight back, Britt has enlisted the support of South Carolina leaders U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, Congressman William Timmons and Gov. Henry McMaster.

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"The governor has been in contact with Oshkosh leadership and has assured them that he will continue to support the company and their ongoing South Carolina project in any way he can," McMaster spokesman Brian Symmes said.

What really irked Britt was a statement by U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin of Wisconsin, who called South Carolina workers "inexperienced, likely non-union hires."

Britt said he fired off a tweet to Baldwin.

"I told her that obviously, she has no clue who Spartanburg, South Carolina is, and what we do," Britt said. "So we're in a big war right now. They ticked off the wrong state and

wrong county. When Oshkosh made that decision in June, they became part of the Spartanburg family and the South Carolina family."

## **Baldwin maintains stance**

Since then, Baldwin again urged Oshkosh Defense and the USPS "to further scrutinize the final production location in South Carolina based on the strength of our existing, experienced workforce in Wisconsin."

"To me, it's simple – I want Oshkosh Defense to manufacture trucks in Oshkosh with Wisconsin workers," she said in a statement sent Tuesday to the Herald-Journal.

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## **Company stands firm**

Meanwhile, Oshkosh Defense President John Bryant said nothing has been said to change the company's decision to select Spartanburg for the project.

He said preparations at the Flatwood Industrial Park site "are well underway to ensure Oshkosh will meet contractual deadlines for delivers to the postal service in 2023."

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