

Florida still in the running for Space Force Command headquarters

Rachael Joy, Florida Today Dec. 27, 2019



Reports of Florida's demise as the future command headquarters of the U.S. Space Force — the newest branch of America's military — it turns out, have been greatly exaggerated. According to state officials and lobbyists, Florida is still a contender to host the Space Force Command HQ.

"We're seeing a full court press in Florida among Florida's congressional delegation," aerospace consultant John Boyd told FLORIDA TODAY after President Trump signed the new branch into existence last week.

"Gov. Ron DeSantis, Sen. Rick Scott, who enjoy a very close relationship with the president, they are working to convince the president to do the Space Force headquarters in the sunshine state," Boyd added.

Earlier this year, when the U.S. Air Force, out of which the Space Force is being created, released a list of six locations it was considering as the seat of the new Space Command, Florida wasn't included.



President Donald Trump speaks during an event at Joint Base Andrews, Md., Dec. 20, 2019 before signing the National Defense Authorization Act of 2020 creating the Space Force. (Photo: Wayne Clark, Air Force)

Instead, the USAF said it was considering four Colorado bases — Buckley Air Force Base, Cheyenne Mountain Air Force Station, Peterson Air Force Base and Schriever Air Force Base — in addition to the Army's Redstone Arsenal in Alabama and Vandenberg Air Force Base in California as potential locations for the command.

The Air Force later said the list was just a draft and hadn't been finalized. Still, it left Florida aerospace advocates scratching their heads, but determined not to give up the fight.

Dale Ketcham, VP of Government Relations for Space Florida, the state's aerospace development body tasked by the Governor with leading the charge to secure the location of the Space Force Command, confirms they are workinghard to make that goal a reality.

"We're still a dark horse but having the Commander in Chief as now the first president from Florida doesn't hurt our case," Ketcham said.



A United Launch Alliance Delta IV rocket lifts off from Cape Canaveral Air Force Station Thursday, August 22, 2019. The rocket is carrying a GPS satellite for the US Air Force. (Photo: Craig Bailey/FLORIDA TODAY)

Along with the prestige of being named Space Force Command, it would be an economic boon to Florida. Boyd estimates the new HQ would add 1,200 high paying jobs to the state and roughly \$2 billion in direct Pentagon investment which typically results in corporate relocations to the area, new companies emerging and more jobs.

“This really is the most coveted economic development project out there today,” Boyd said.

Florida has some stiff competition from not only Colorado, California and Alabama, but Louisiana is also vying for the honors.

Ketcham said he has been meeting with leaders all over the state to assess the military capabilities locally in order to make the pitch that Florida is a viable strategic choice.

“Florida is just as capable of meeting national security interests as any state and we look forward to making our case,” Ketcham said.

Florida is the only state in the union that already has three combatant commands. The Central Command and the Special Operations Command are both in Tampa and the Southern Command in Miami.

Ketcham thinks there are several promising locations in Florida like Tampa where the Space Force could build synergy with the other existing combatant commands. Additionally, Pensacola is the location of the Navy's primary cyber warfare activities.

But Boyd said Orlando is a logical choice and points to the presence of a major commercial airport, affordable cost of living, absence of state personal income tax, and a diverse housing market.

More importantly, he says "It's a market well known to the military and aerospace community and has proximity to the Space Coast."

The Brevard County region has become a major force in the nation's nuclear deterrence triad. Lockheed Martin recently transitioned its fleet ballistic missiles headquarters to the area and Northrop Grumman's B-21 long range strike bomber is also designed in Melbourne.

Recently, Patrick Air Force Base in Brevard was just designated a Space Force base.

"Patrick's key thing is that 'Control of the Battlefield Begins Here' and that's true. We're not just a launch head anymore. We're actually building the rockets and the satellites and the capsules and that's bringing a whole different skill set here," Ketcham explained.

Major aerospace players are investing in the area as well like Blue Origin, Boeing and SpaceX. Richard Branson is building a high speed train that includes a stop in Brevard County.

"I think the Brightline's expansion into Orlando which will connect aerospace assets to the super region, to Central Florida, would be another part of the case that is being made to the President," Boyd said.

Ketcham points out that Orlando is the Department of Defense's primary location for simulation training which is critical to train warfighters to defend space because "you don't really train people in space, it would all be simulation training."

While Ketcham and his colleagues are preparing their arguments to sway the Pentagon, the decision could ultimately rest with one man who as Commander and Chief has the power to choose the location.

"You could just picture that being one of Trump's great economic development legacy achievement," Boyd said, "in the same way that LBJ steered NASA to Houston back in the 60s."