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Spaceport Chief Seeks Help to Keep Industry in California

PALO ALTO, California (February 27, 2012) The man who manages the nation's first commercial spaceport called on state lawmakers Monday to help him keep the emerging commercial space industry in California.

Stuart Witt, CEO of the East Kern Airport District, which manages the Mojave Air and Space Port, said immediate action is needed to battle efforts by governors in several states to lure the new industry to their states.

Speaking at the NextGen Suborbital Research Conference in Palo Alto on Monday, Witt warned that "Virginia, Maryland, Texas, Florida, New Mexico, Colorado, and other states, with the support of their Governors, legislators and business communities, are visiting aerospace businesses at the Mojave Air and Space Port in an effort to recruit them and their highly-skilled jobs to their states."

"These states are serious about stealing jobs, revenue, and businesses from California while our state does nothing to stop them," Witt added. "Former New Mexico Governor Bill Richardson, who successfully lured Virgin Galactic to headquarter at his state's spaceport, told me on several occasions that "Your state makes my job easy!"

"California, we have a problem," Witt said. ""We are first in flight test, but we are in last place on the list of business-friendly states. Many of the young, innovative companies in this growing industry of commercial space launch are based in California, especially at Mojave Air & Space Port in Kern County. We want to keep them."

"To do that, California must compete."

"In Mojave, we have a thriving community of aerospace and high-technology companies attracted only by our local incentives, wide open spaces, and pioneer spirit," Witt said. "Today we call on our State representatives and Governor Brown to take one small step to encourage our growing commercial space industry to keep innovating and doing business in California."

The former Navy Top Gun pilot said California lawmakers need to enact legislation to support the emerging commercial space industry.

Witt said California should match incentives available in competing states, including: Legislation to limit liability as this new industry develops, "Zero G Zero Tax" zones to provide tax incentives for investing in companies involved in space-related activities, tax credits for aerospace job creation, cash incentives, taxpayer-financed infrastructure, and loans to attract and retain this industry.

"Florida, Texas and Virginia have already enacted legislation to encourage the booming business that got its start at Mojave; Colorado and New Mexico will soon follow," Witt told the meeting of space industry leaders.

"We need a state commitment to attract aerospace to California rather than letting it continue to erode as it has for the last 30 years," he said.

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