

Boeing leasing shuttle hangar to build new capsule (Update)

October 31 2011, By MARCIA DUNN , AP Aerospace Writer

Boeing is taking over one of NASA's old space shuttle hangars to build a new capsule that the company hopes will lift astronauts to orbit in four or five years.

More than 100 Boeing, NASA and state and federal officials gathered in the massive empty hangar - Orbiting Processing Facility No. 3 - for the announcement of the first-of-its-kind agreement allowing a private company to take over the government property.

The aerospace company expects to create 550 high-tech jobs at Kennedy Space Center over the next four years, 140 of them by the end of next year. That's less than 10 percent of the approximately 6,000 shuttle jobs lost in Florida over the past several years, but Gov. Rick Scott and other lawmakers at the ceremony said they expect additional hirings by the commercial space industry.

NASA is counting on companies like Boeing, Space Exploration Technologies Corp. and others to ferry cargo and astronauts to and from the International Space Station in three to five years. Until then, the space agency will continue to shell out tens of millions of dollars per seat on Russian Soyuz spacecraft.

The Soyuz is the only way to get astronauts to and from the space station, ever since Atlantis returned from the final shuttle flight in July. A Soyuz rocket failure in August highlighted the risk of relying on just one type of craft.

During Monday's hourlong ceremony, lawmakers said the commercial industry is America's last hope, anytime soon, for U.S. astronauts to fly on U.S. spaceships from U.S. soil.

The Obama Administration requested \$850 million in NASA's 2012 budget for the commercial space effort. The House slashed that to \$312 million, but the Senate got it to \$500 million, a reasonable figure given the nation's current economic situation, said Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., a one-time space shuttle flier.

Boeing expects to start removing shuttle platforms and modifying the hangar to suit its own purposes in the next few months.

John Mulholland, vice president and program manager of commercial programs for Boeing, said it will be sad to see all the shuttle equipment go.

"The shuttle's such an iconic vehicle. These marvelous buildings have a lot of memory," said Mulholland, a former shuttle manager. "But you've always got to be looking forward. So while the shuttle is remarkable, we're looking forward to the next phase of space exploration."

Boeing wants to ferry astronauts not only to the International Space Station, but to a commercial scientific outpost planned for orbit by Bigelow Aerospace. Each capsule will hold seven people. A test flight is planned by 2015.

The agreement calls for Boeing to use the hangar for 15 years, with an option to renew for another five. Then it will be up to Boeing to demolish the building, on NASA's get-rid-of list. Boeing is not paying NASA any rent, officials stressed, but rather will cover all operation costs and utilities.

The hangar is 197 feet long, 1,650 feet wide and 95 feet high. It was last used to ready the shuttle Discovery for its final launch earlier this year.

NASA wants to turn the space center - long a government-only local - into a multi-user spaceport. Other buildings are also up for grabs. Space Florida, a state agency, is working on more deals.

Tourists, meanwhile, are about to gain entree into areas that were once strictly off limits.

On Tuesday, the Vehicle Assembly Building - where fuel tanks and booster rockets were attached to space shuttles - will open its doors to public bus tours for the first time since 1978.

Throughout the ceremony, NASA officials and others stressed that Kennedy Space Center is not going out of business.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the dream is alive," Nelson told the crowd.

NASA relinquished its shuttle fleet to concentrate on new rockets and spacecraft that will be able to carry astronauts beyond low Earth orbit. An asteroid is the first stop. Mars is the prize.

More information:

NASA: <http://www.nasa.gov/>

Boeing: <http://www.boeing.com/advertising/space>

©2011 The Associated Press. All rights reserved. This material may not be published, broadcast, rewritten or redistributed.

Citation: Boeing leasing shuttle hangar to build new capsule (Update) (2011, October 31)

retrieved 10 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2011-10-boeing-spacecraft-shuttle-hangar.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.