

Space Coast's new general spearheads more cooperation with private space companies

February 1 2024, by Richard Tribou, Orlando Sentinel



Credit: Pixabay from Pexels

Brig. Gen. Kristin Panzenhagen wants commercial companies to solve Space Force problems, but if the U.S. Space Force can help them, that's OK with her, too.

That's part of the message she delivered at the [Space Mobility Conference](#) at the Orange County Convention Center, bringing together a combination of military, civil and commercial players in the space game.

"We're really trying to focus in on what the warfighters need and take it one step farther," said Panzenhagen, who wears four hats for the Space Force, including commander of Space Launch Delta 45 based at Patrick Space Force Base in Brevard County.

Taking over the role last summer from Maj. Gen. Stephen Purdy, she's also director of the Eastern Range in charge of every launch out of Cape Canaveral Space Force Station and Kennedy Space Center and the director of launch and range operations for Space Systems Command, meaning she has a say in the launches from the Western Range out of Vandenberg Space Force Station as well.

The final, and debatably the biggest hat she wears, though, is as program executive officer for the Assured Access to Space organization within Space Systems Command. That job entails overseeing 22,000 government and contractor personnel and leading [national security](#) and other military launch programs with an annual budget of \$13.5 billion.

The Space Mobility Conference, now in its second year, is an outreach effort of Assured Access to Space.

"In 2020 the Space Force announced space mobility and logistics as one of its core competencies," she said. "That's where the focal point is right now for the Space Force—for developing these capabilities."

With a record 72 launches from the Space Coast in 2023 and close to 100 expected in 2024, she says launches remain an important focus of that mobility, but this week's conference focused on other aspects of the

military needs and just how commercial companies could help.

The day featured panels covering things such as refueling older satellites, partnering with other countries to share spaceports, and point-to-point rapid rocket delivery of supplies. Representatives for companies including SpaceX, Northrop Grumman, Sierra Space dressed in business casual fare mixed with military personnel in camouflage uniforms.

"We tried to bring together all the players for a very open conversation," she said. "We really want to hear unconstrained ideas ... We also really want to understand the realm of the possible not just technologically, but what makes a feasible business case for industry with some of these technologies."

Commercial companies already routinely work the military, but with competition from the likes of China, for instance, the need to keep up with innovation requires more reliance on commercial help than ever before, she said.

Panzenhagen said the U.S. is in a "Great Power competition" and the Space Force considers "China the pacing challenge. And because of that ... we know our number one priority is deterring a potential conflict. But then should conflict arise, we need to make sure that we're ready for it."

Space Force needs responsiveness built into its systems and hardware, tactically relevant timelines and supporting infrastructure "because those things are good for warfighting capabilities, which means they're good for deterrence," she said.

But the good news is American commercial endeavors are up to the task, she said.

"This is a fantastic era of innovation that we're seeing in the space industry. One of America's strengths has always been its ability to innovate. And the DoD [Department of Defense] as much as possible tries to capitalize on that innovation," she said.

That includes technology such as reusable rockets, but also things such as 3D printing and even processes that can cut down on response time. Rewarding commercial endeavors helps the country as well, she said.

"From a government standpoint, encouraging competition, bringing on more vendors is good for us. It improves resiliency, which again, good for space order of battle, good for deterrence," she said.

Panzenhagen said the day's discussion was invaluable.

"This was a lot today. That was an incredible amount of expertise. It was literally centuries of expertise that we had sitting up on stage so we could pick their brains," she said.

"I took probably about two pages of notes today, and it's split roughly 50-50. Half of it is things that I was like "Oh shoot, I need to go do this' and the other half was things I was like, "Oh shoot, I need to get smarter on this, so i can go do something."

2024 Orlando Sentinel. Distributed by Tribune Content Agency, LLC.

Citation: Space Coast's new general spearheads more cooperation with private space companies (2024, February 1) retrieved 29 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2024-02-space-coast-general-spearheads-cooperation.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.