SpaceX to bid for rights to historic NASA launch pad

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Members of the media and specatators line the shore of a lake at dawn as they watch space shuttle Atlantis on the launchpad at the Kennedy Space Center July 8, 2011 in Cape Canaveral, Florida.

In a battle of technology titans for the right to lease a historic NASA launch pad in Florida, SpaceX has beat out competitor Blue Origin, the US space agency said Friday.

The California-based SpaceX is owned by PayPal co-founder Elon Musk, and Blue Origin is a venture of Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos.

"NASA will begin working with SpaceX to negotiate the terms of its lease for LC-39A," the space agency said in a statement, referring to the name of the launchpad.

"During those ongoing negotiations, NASA will not be able to discuss details of the pending lease agreement."

SpaceX became the first private company to send an unmanned cargo capsule to the International Space Station in 2012, and has a $1.6 billion contract with NASA for 12 ISS supply trips.

Blue Origin is working on a rocket-propelled vehicle designed to fly people just to the edge of space, in suborbit. It also has plans to develop a reusable booster rocket and a space vehicle that could reach orbit.

Blue Origin filed a protest with the Government Accountability Office that claimed NASA was unfairly favoring one proposed use of the launch pad at Kennedy Space Center over others.

The GAO denial of that protest means SpaceX can now move ahead with NASA negotiations to lease the Cape Canaveral launch pad from where the iconic Apollo moon missions and space shuttle flights both blasted off.

NASA will reserve its other key launch pad, 39B, for its own use as it develops a deep space launch system and multipurpose vehicle that will someday carry humans to an asteroid and even Mars, the space agency said.

The pad SpaceX will bid on, LC-39A, was the launch spot for the Apollo

11 on its first manned mission to land on the Moon in 1969, the first space shuttle mission in 1981 and the last shuttle mission in 2011.

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