

WJHG-News Channel 7
August 28, 2009
Reported by Mark Vaughn

New Bay County Airport on Display

The Florida Great Northwest Aerospace Corridor tour is an effort to match defense contractors to the panhandle's established military assets.

When supporters proposed the new Bay County Airport, they claimed it would bring new industry and jobs to the area.

Today local state and federal officials invited the leaders from the aviation and aerospace industry to see what Bay County has to offer.

Defense contractors from around the country converged on the new Panama City-Bay County airport to learn more about its potential impact on the region.

Steve Baxley, a senior engineer with Applied Research Associates, said "It offers more potential for growth that wasn't here before. Before we were very involved with the military bases, but this offers new opportunity to bring new companies in that are focused on the Aerospace industry." Those opportunities will be created by having a new international airport in what is being called the aerospace corridor which runs from Mississippi to Tallahassee.

Airport Director Randy Curtis said "They're excited about what they're seeing and about the future opportunities for Bay County, and the surrounding Region."

Congressman Allen Boyd said "This new airport can be a hub for economic development which highlights all the great resources we have here."

The airport will be an economic engine for this area, but it could also be a vital part of the military's operations."

U.S. Senator Bill Nelson added "An airport like this with a 10-thousand square foot runway is going to open up the entire aerospace and defense industry even more than we have right now." Northwest Florida has a long standing relationship with the military, and the defense industry. While the new airport should strengthen that bond, Senator Nelson warns offshore oil drilling could pose a serious threat.

"That is an asset that we have to protect otherwise all of this aerospace and defense industry will be threatened," said Nelson.

The airport will also be the first built since the 9-11 attacks, making it a security model for future airports.

The people at today's tour are counting on this model being a success. The new airport is scheduled to open next May.