

Dangers of Big Isle spaceport outweigh negligible benefits

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ALTHOUGH a rocket-launching facility on the Big Island may be "cool" and exciting to Star-Bulletin writer Burt Burlingame ("My Turn," Aug. 14), thousands of Big Island residents are bitterly opposed to turning the rural area of Kau into a huge industrial complex. Opponents raise a number of objections:

■ **No economic justification** — There is no demonstrated market of paying commercial or military customers in sight despite six years of looking. The Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism's own reports acknowledge that existing worldwide facilities already greatly exceed any anticipated demand for commercial launches at least until the year 2000.

New technology has made the proposed facility obsolete. Miniaturization is reducing the size and weight of satellites. Any unit weighing less than 1,000 pounds can be placed in orbit by a vastly less costly "Pegasus" airplane launching vehicle.

Other economic disadvantages are the high cost of living and doing business in Hawaii, its great distance from suppliers and potential customers and services and the lack of a skilled labor pool.

No wonder that in six years, despite intensive lobbying that has cost \$7 million in tax money, the Office of Space Industries has been unable to secure even one penny of private investment in this scheme.

■ **Jobs for whom?** — The argument about "creating jobs" is a shibboleth. Nearly all the permanent jobs created by this rocket facility would go to off-island scientists and technicians, not local residents.

■ **Environmental disaster** — The state's draft Environmental Impact Statement reveals enormous risks to human, plant and fish life, both from the transportation of highly dangerous chemicals and fuels, and from rocket launches themselves.

Dr. Robert Bowman, space program director under Presidents Ford and Carter, has said launchings will be disastrous to the island ecology. The shoreline and reefs will be contaminated by tons of aluminum hydroxide and hydrogen chloride released above the site after every launch. "This becomes hydrochloric

acid on contact with the ocean water. Enormous fish kills will occur immediately after each launch. The life cycle of the reefs will come to an end . . . I am witness to this occurrence at Cape Canaveral."

Launchings would cause serious problems for observatories located atop Mauna Kea. Astronomers are "specifically concerned about light, pollution, radio frequency interference and the release of particulates and contaminants into the upper atmosphere," worries the director of the UH Institute for Astronomy.

■ **Human safety and health** — The operation of a launching facility poses significant risks to Hilo, Puna and Kau residents. Patricia Tummons, editor of Environment Hawaii, has concluded that "dire risk" is involved in transporting tanks of hazardous compounds used as rocket propellants from Hilo to Kau, a 70-mile journey. Should liquid fuels spill at the launch site, the "consequences can be deadly." Normal launches also spew out huge quantities of aluminum oxide and hydrogen chloride, which can severely affect nearby residents' health.

The site offers insufficient space for safe operation or expansion. It is only three miles to nearby communities. This location will force residents of Pahaia or Naalehu to abandon their homes if an accident occurs.

Is it any wonder that residents are incensed at the arrogance of state officials who are imposing this project top-down without citizen participation and despite intense opposition from the affected communities?

Kau's future lies in its clean air, diversified agriculture, fertile fishing grounds and tourism based on an unspoiled environment. Tourists come to Hawaii island for its natural beauty and open spaces, not to see huge industrial complexes. Will Hawaii continue to be known for its pristine vistas, its volcanic natural wonders, its white, green and black sand beaches, its small towns and wide open spaces, its aloha spirit?

Or will it become just another extension of the mainland, with familiar industrial complexes and imported businesses?

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